

TO: Governor Carney
FROM: Group 2 Policy Analysis, Inc.
DATE: May 8th, 2019
SUBJECT: Policy Options & Recommendation for Improving DE Public Schools

Problem Framing

The public education system in Delaware is inadequate compared to the rest of the nation, with graduation rates as low as 65% in Newark High School in 2017 (“Public School Review”) compared to the national average of 84.6% across the same period (“Data: US Graduation Rates,” 2019). Low graduation rates reduce Delaware students’ chances of success, and an intervention is needed to ensure all of Delaware’s students have the opportunity to receive a high-quality education.

The causal model (Appendix B) shows that a lack of adequate funding from local sources for public schools and a lack of incentives for high-quality teachers to stay in underperforming schools have resulted in some schools having low-quality teachers, and therefore reduced graduation rates. The problem has primarily resulted in some parents choosing to send their students to public charter schools. This exodus of students, faculty, and funding from the district public schools further diminishes the quality of the underperforming schools, making the problem cyclical.

About 89% of Delaware students not attending private school attend the district public schools (“Public Education in Delaware”, n.d.). Research has shown that private school students are between 4 and 21% more likely to graduate (Foreman 2017, p. 12) and charter school students between 7 and 11% more likely (Flows 2017), meaning that students in district public schools are automatically at a disadvantage relative to their peers. Therefore, an intervention in the district public schools is necessary to ensure no student in Delaware is at a disadvantage due to the limited availability of alternative schools.

Base Case

Current education policies in Delaware focus on holding teachers to the same standards, observing the impact of charter schools, and establishing the Wilmington Education Advisory Panel.

To hold teachers to a set of standards, Delaware administers a statewide teacher evaluation called the DPAS-II (Delaware Performance Appraisal System). This is an annual evaluation created by the Department of Education, with the goal of fostering professional growth, providing quality educators, and helping students grow and succeed (Delaware Department of Education, 2018). While it is important to have a state-wide standard for teachers, this policy has not been effective because regardless of their score on the evaluation, teachers are rarely held accountable or provided resources to improve. When teachers are not held to a high standard, students are prevented from receiving a valuable and worthwhile education. As stated in our causal model, this is a significant contributing factor to the problem. As expanded upon later, our policy alternative “Elevate the Teachers” directly addresses this policy’s base case.

In addition, Title 14 of the Delaware code addresses the creation of the Wilmington Education Advisory Commission, and separately addresses the impact of charter schools, which states “The WEIC shall work with and across all governmental agencies, educational entities, and private and nonprofit institutions to promote and support the implementation of all recommended changes from the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee (WEAC)”. The creation of the WEIC has allowed

for more focus of the impact of schools and their performance on the community, particularly with addressing funding and local charter schools, which both impact graduation rates according to our causal model.

Another amendment to Title 14 is section 511(c) states, “No new charter schools shall be authorized to open in the City of Wilmington prior to June 30, 2018, or until the development of a needs assessment and strategic plan for specialized public educational opportunities throughout the State...” (Wilmington Education Improvement Commission, n.d.). This attempts to intervene in the problem, particularly in the areas of low funding and the impact of charter schools. As the creation of charter schools in the state of Delaware has added to the inequality divide, a significant effect on the problem, this is a very effective policy that will monitor the creation of charter schools in the future to ensure that they will not be disadvantaging district public schools.

While these policies have been helpful, they have not been effective in increasing the graduation rates in Delaware high schools, which is why policy alternatives are necessary. Our policy alternatives address how these current policies could be amended or reconceived to be more effective.

Policy Option 1 - Put Teachers First

Our first proposed alternative is to provide incentives and benefits for teachers whose students perform well. In short, the policy would ‘Put Teachers First.’ The quality of teachers is critical to student development and achievement. In the current system, the majority of high school teachers in New Castle County are not incentivized for the performance of their students. A policy was passed in September of 2018 with a similar goal but did not include high school teachers. To build off of this policy we would create an alternative that included similar incentives for high school teachers. Recent college graduates brought into the public school system would receive a \$4,000 signing bonus if they sign a four-year contract, tuition reimbursement, and money for supplies. Current teachers would be given money for supplies and a similar bonus. In the Smarter Balanced Assessments students are given, teachers would receive monetary bonuses for improvement within each grade of students, which would encourage all teachers to perform better as their bonus is contingent on the success of their fellow staff members. Teachers would also be given bonuses for student improvement on the Smarter Balanced Assessments, which would encourage teachers to work harder to improve student achievement.

Within the causal model, the solution would intervene in the lack of adequate resources for public schools. The lack of resources causes teachers to leave, so by encouraging teacher retention through more resources, schools in New Castle County would be able to attract and retain the teachers they have to support student success.

Policy Option 2 - Elevate the Teachers

Our next proposed alternative is to institute a new professional development program for teachers in all public schools, in order to modernize teaching methods and improve the quality of teachers across the state. In essence - Elevate the Teachers. The policy will build off the existing framework

of the DPAS-II, to provide a “next step” for teachers that do not meet the standards set forth by the state. Presently, nothing happens to teachers who do poorly on an evaluation. Under the new policy, unsatisfactory teachers will attend paid professional development days run by the Department of Education. The programming would include workshops in each of the four DPAS-II components - Planning, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibility - with the participating teacher attending workshops in the components they need the most improvement in (Delaware Department of Education, 2018). This will intervene into the causal model directly, as several studies have shown that graduation rates increase as teacher quality increases (Koedel 2008). According to the causal model, the lack of educational resources currently available in Delaware public schools leads to poor public school work environments, causing the emigration of higher quality teachers from public schools, then leading to the existence of poorer quality teachers in these schools, and finally, yielding lower graduation rates in public schools. If teacher quality improves across the state, there will be an influx of higher quality teachers in public schools, graduation rates will improve, and the circumstances that initially lowered teacher quality will lose their influence. We believe that this will adequately solve the problem.

Policy Option 3 - Resource Task Force

Our last proposed alternative is to institute a state-supervised resource board in each public school district in order to determine how to best utilize resources to emulate the success of higher performing schools in the state. This can be referred to as the “Resource Task Force”. This task force will act as a branch of the district’s school board, one which focuses on utilizing existing resources in district public schools as they are being used in other high performing public schools. The introduction of a resource board would further regulate school budgets by creating another set of standards the schools must comply with. The benefit of further regulations is that they will close the gap in differences in state funding by school district by implementing a more efficient use of funds.

When looking into the difference between Newark Charter School and Newark High School, it became evident that the difference in graduation rates was not due to differences in amount of funding, but rather the way funding was utilized within the schools. High-performing schools often have more parent and community involvement aiming for better utilization of these resources. By creating a resource task force, this same supportive environment and active attention to how resources are used will be stimulated in all of the state’s public schools. Within the causal model, this addresses the need for better work environments in the school system, the lack of adequate educational resources and will stimulate teachers to work within the district due to higher more competitive standards.

Evaluative Criteria

Our goal through our policy is to maximize graduation rates, thus we will assess the policy on whether or not our policy is able to adequately do this, as well as being able to get passed. The criteria we will use to analyze our policy alternatives are political feasibility, equity of funding, and a four-year target to meet.

Political feasibility examines the actors involved in the policy process and measures the likeliness of these actors supporting certain policies. This is an important criteria because if our policy is unlikely to pass, there is no point in proposing it, and a proposal that successfully hits these criteria would be

one that is able to be passed. Success or failure of political feasibility can be measured through analyzing similar previously proposed and the composition of representatives when the policy was proposed. This data could be found from case studies from the Department of Education Delaware as well as the Delaware General Assembly website. Feasibility can also be judged based on the benefits and burdens of the main stakeholders of the policies, where are detailed in Appendix D.

Equity of Funding would mean our policy will not hinder other policies that are in place, as this is not feasible or equitable and would not likely be passed. Success and failure of this criteria would be measured by analyzing the operating budgets of other policies and determining if through our policy these would be hindered. Data for this can be found on the Delaware State website under 'Budgets'.

Our primary criteria is a shift from stagnant graduation rates to improving graduation rates within a four-year time period. If this initial goal is met, further years of implementation would bring graduation rates closer to and eventually above the national average of 84.6%. Specifically, this would be measured by obtaining information from schools within New Castle County after 4 years to see if this rate is achieved over time. Since future numbers can not be directly measured, predictions can be made based on the successes and failures of similar policies around the country.

Evaluation and Recommendations

Our first policy alternative, creating incentives for teachers not to leave, mostly fits within the three criteria. It is politically feasible, as the policy has already been established on a smaller scale in Delaware, so its implementation would be theoretically attainable. For equity of funding, the policy would fairly distribute funds within public schools based on which schools are in need. However, the alternative includes financial bonuses for teachers, which could potentially lead to an issue with funding for other policies which may make the policy inequitable. The policy could meet the four year target, but this would not be measurable until after it has been implemented. Data suggests the policy would produce better outcomes for graduation rates which would allow it to meet the four-year target for improvement. Thus, this policy adequately fulfills two of the three criteria.

Our next policy alternative is professional development for teachers. Against political feasibility, this alternative is likely feasible, as elevating teachers will improve the economy of surrounding communities, which is a benefit for all. It is also feasible in the sense that legislatures will be in greater support of policies that help the community, as this is projected to do. The training that is needed for professional development would likely be equitable with funding, as all teachers that do not meet the current standards would benefit, and the money would be taken from the current operating budget rather than from other policies. Lastly, the application of this policy option would not take a great deal of time to initiate, and data from similar policies suggests that within four year time frames the graduation rates would increase over time. Based on this, this policy does fulfill all three criteria.

The creation of resource boards would promote a better utilization of resources within schools. These boards, existing within the district school boards of lower performing schools, are a feasible option that would not be difficult to garner support or to execute from a policy perspective. Currently, the work being done in school districts by the school unions imitates the goal of the resource board. Therefore, it would be a simple incorporation within struggling districts who can

look to the out performing one's for guidance. Additionally, this alternative does not directly require funding, with the exception of salaries for members of the resource board. The main purpose of this policy is to reallocate funds instead of request for more. Lastly, the creation of resource boards is very doable within the next four years, and it is reasonable to expect shifts in school standards within that time frame. A present trade off would be between the local government and the school community. A compromise will have to be met in order to acquire the much needed support and need for this policy to be successful.

Considering comparisons between each policy option, the strongest similarity is that all three satisfy the four year target. This is not a predicted issue for any of the alternatives, so it is less of a deciding factor in the choosing of a single policy option. Each policy option is logistically feasible, however they vary in political feasibility, with resource boards being the most feasible and with professional development, the base case, and teacher incentives having the least potential feasibility. Additionally, of the three options, resource boards and professional development are more financially equitable than are the base case and the policy concerning teacher incentives. Our collective policy suggestion is to implement resource boards in public district school boards. This policy has the greatest chance of gaining political support, and has a high chance of being quickly implemented and of improving upon the current inequitably-funded system.

When evaluating the cost effectiveness of each policy what is evident through a cost-benefit analysis of the three alternatives, the most cost effective is the resource board(Appendix E). The main costs associated with implementing a resource board are funds to pay for those on the resource board as well as time spent analyzing the budgets within each school. The implementation of a resource board has the potential to drastically increase graduation rates. Moreover this policy is a low-cost approach as instead of looking at what schools need, the resource board analyzes what schools have and determines the best way to use what schools have to improve graduation rates. When evaluating the costs and benefits of the resource board, this policy alternative would be efficient as it has a benefit-cost ratio of 1.7, meaning the benefits outweigh the costs and thus the policy is efficient(Appendix E and F). Furthermore, this policy is equitable as the majority of stakeholders would not be negatively impacted by the policy and would see the resource board as equitably distributing resources. This policy is based on merit-based distribution of resources so the schools who need the resource board first will be the first to receive the benefits from it as they are in more need, which is an equitable way to ensure those who are in most need get help first. This policy should be implemented because it efficiently uses resources to meet the needs of the schools in a fair way to increase graduation rates.

We acknowledge that the Resource Task Force is a first-step. It quickly intervenes in the problem in a politically feasible way, but other longer-term solutions will need to be considered. Future policy making could use the “resource board” model to look at other self-defeating inefficiencies in the system, such as the fractured nature of some school districts. But in this current political climate, instituting the Resource Task Force will be the most cost-efficient, effective, and equitable policy option.

References

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Appendix

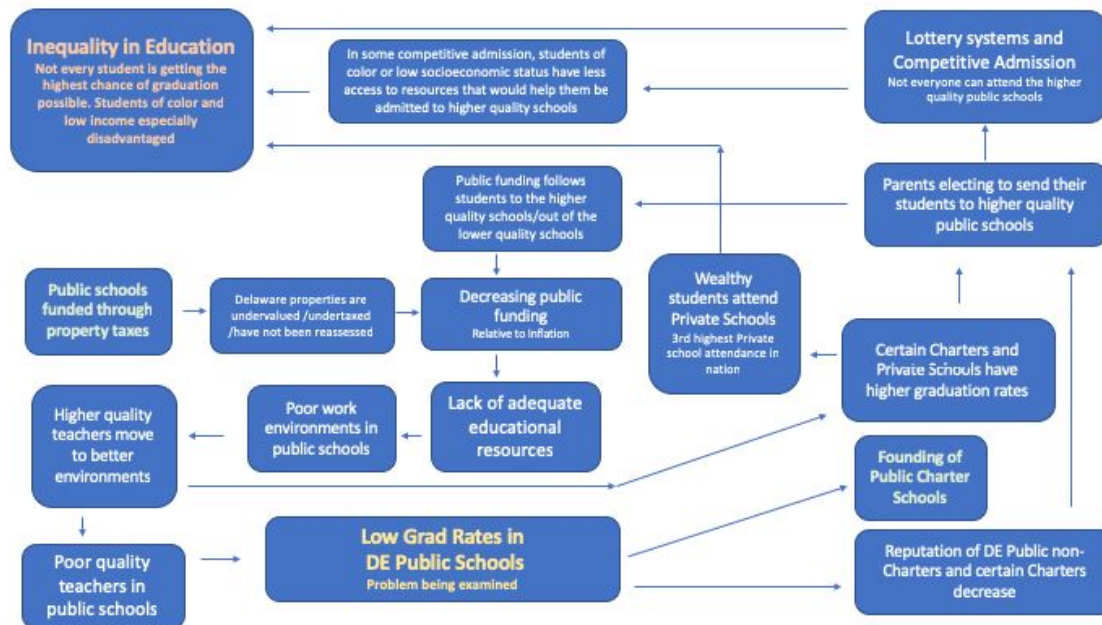
A. Analysis Outcome Matrix

Comparative Analysis Delaware, USA (4-Year Plan, 2020-2024)

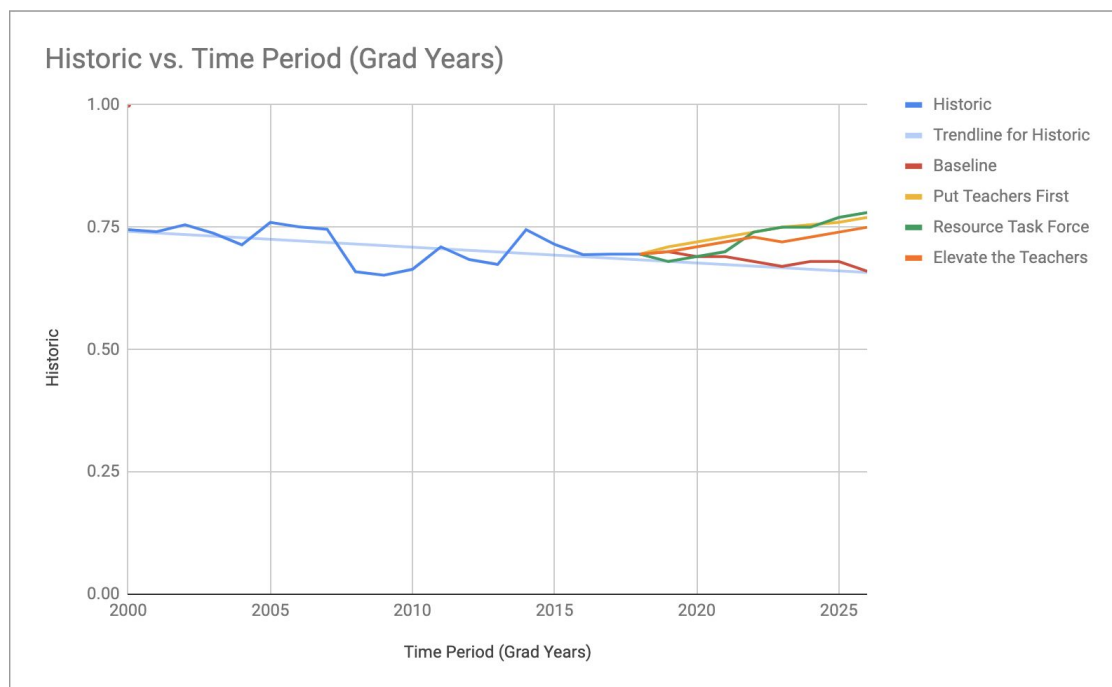
	Policy Scenario	Political Feasibility	Equity of Funding and Effects	Increases Graduation Rates within 4 years
Base Case - Current Policies	Title 14 - outline for charter schools and education board. Teacher Evaluations	While the policies have already been established, it is not feasible for no more policies to be implemented	\$14,700 spent per student in 2016; above the national average	By keeping things the same, unequal distribution of resources, declining graduation rates
Put Teachers First	Provide bonuses to teachers based, tuition reimbursement, and funding for supplies.	Mostly feasible-established policies already exist, however cost is a concern	Not financially equitable-disproportionally benefits teachers in underperforming schools	Will raise graduation rates by having better teacher retention, and improved teacher quality.
Create a Resource Task Force	A resource board that implements and promotes the utilization of school district funding.	Very feasible and will motivate ill-performing school districts to perform at a higher standard.	Financially equitable and the funding could come from preexisting allocation of federal funds as well as taxpayers.	Will stimulate educational environment and create a new competitive standard of learning that benefits the teachers and students.
Elevate the Teachers	All teachers undergo professional development throughout the school year.	Mostly Feasible - satisfies DSEA's position on tenure, and would not hurt Charter	Equitable - Everyone who pays will see some benefit, either as a parent, or as a	Should have an immediate effect on teacher quality, positively impacting quality

		community. Cost is a concern.	member of a growing community	of education and graduation rates.
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B. Causal Model



C. Projections Graph



D. Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder	Influence	Benefit	Burden(Cost)	Equity Concern Y/N
Charter School Faculty	low	Public school teachers would reap the same benefits as all public school teachers in these policies; just not as much as the policy targets underperforming non-charters	Higher quality teachers in the state could mean less job security	N. Benefits are about equal with potential costs.
Charter School Students	low	All public school students will benefit from this policy	Resources may exit the district to go to another where the resources are needed more, so they could be adversely affected	N. Benefits outweigh costs of the policy alternative.
Charter School Parents	medium	Students would receive a potentially higher quality education.	Resources may leave district of student which could potentially hinder the student success.	Y. The burden of this policy as resources will likely leave charter schools will outweigh the potential benefit on students under this policy.
Delaware State Education Association	high	Potential to increase teacher quality could attract more teachers which may encourage more teachers to join the Delaware teacher union, more teachers would allow for more bargaining power.	The board may have trouble advocating for the needs of a potentially larger group of professionals.	N. Potential benefits for the DSEA outweigh the potential costs of discourse.
Residents of Christina School District	medium	Better performing schools would attract more businesses and	Tax dollars could go up to fund the policy	N. The potential benefit of new consumers moving in

		professionals to come to the area and settle in.		outweighs the slight potential of taxes rising.
Christina Public School Faculty	low	Public school teachers would benefit from the increase and availability of resources to help them	Their may be more oversight to ensure resources are being used as intended.	N. The cost of having more management in schools will be outweighed by the benefits of better resources
Christina School District Students	low	Students would benefit from the availability of better resources in school to aid in their learning.	More students may be in their school as the resource board could close down school for efficiency purposes.	N. A better education can lead to better outcomes in the future which is more beneficial than the potential for bigger class sizes.
Parents of Students in Christina School District	high	Students can receive a better education with more resources to help aid in their education	Not all students will receive the same resources across the district depending on what schools need.	N. The resources will not be equal, but the ability for students to have a better education outweighs this.

E. Rating the Benefits of the Resource Board

Benefit	Rating	Justification
Increased high school graduation rates	+10	The goal of the policy is to increase the education of schools to increase graduation rates, so a policy able to do this would be the greatest benefit achievable and therefore deserves the highest rating.
Resources will be used more efficiently	+6	Using resources efficiently helps to ensure money is not being spent on frivolous items, but the impact of this is not direct on graduation rates so this benefit is only a 6 as efficient use of

		resources can mean money is not being spent somewhere else that could be controversial.
Schools will absorb new resources to strengthen their programs	+8	The ability to receive resources from other schools will improve the underprivileged schools with lower graduation rates and strengthen their existing programs to create better programs which will improve the graduation rates.

F. Rating the Costs of the Resource Board

Cost	Rating	Justification
Money to pay salaries of those on resource board	-7	This cost would require money be taken from somewhere else or the potential tax increase to pay the salaries, and this may be expensive which is why this takes a toll and deserves a low rating for the impact of the cost.
Time spent working on this board takes time away from working on other policies	-2	Research has shown this policy has the potential to be incredibly effective, so although lost time is a consideration it does not appear time could be spent researching other as effective alternatives.
Resources are moved out of schools	-5	This cost has the potential to anger parents which may cause them to move their child to another district which will impact the school itself. Moving resources has the potential to be burdensome which is why this cost has a mid level rating as it does need to be considered, but ultimately this cost would be for the greater good so it's not a <i>bad</i> cost.