



1.5 MILLION REASONS TO SMILE: PAGE 5

PHOTO:
JESSICA
BRATTON

Dropout rate hits 30-year low

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

As the state's high school graduation rate continues to climb, the dropout rate is falling just as appreciably—reaching a 30-year low.

The 2012-13 report, released by the Delaware Department of Education in February, shows 1,106 of the 38,613 students enrolled in grades 9-12 dropped out of school before graduation, a rate of 2.9 percent. That is a one-point decrease from the previous year's rate of 3.9 percent. The statewide graduation rate of 79.9

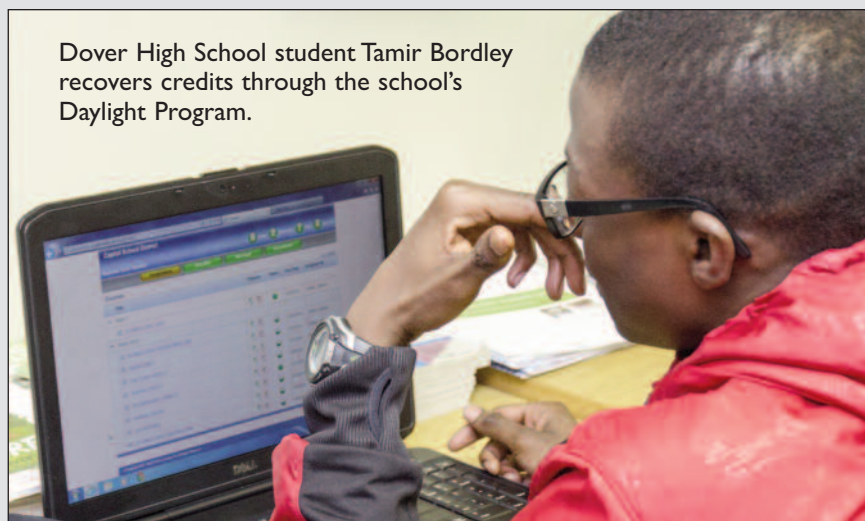
percent was up slightly from 79.6 percent the year prior.

"Educators across our state have been working hard to better identify students at risk and provide the intervention and supports that these children need to ensure they stay in school earlier," said Secretary of Education Mark Murphy.

At Dover High School in the Capital School District, last year's dropout rate of 2.4 percent is a decrease from the previous

See **DROPOUT RATE** Page 10

Dover High School student Tamir Bordley recovers credits through the school's Daylight Program.



Sharing best practices benefits schools



Mark Murphy

I was excited to hear teachers and building leaders share their local successes in Common Core implementation at the May 1 Common Ground Bright Spots convening in Dover. It is the hard work of educators at the classroom and school levels that is making a difference for our children. I look forward to seeing how this sharing

of best practices will result in more success in buildings across our state. I also am pleased that even more schools will be joining our Common Ground effort in its recently launched 2.0 version. Read more about that inside this issue.

All of us are on a tremendous journey to help students succeed. We are on a course of implementing college and career ready standards and supporting a system of effective educators and high performing schools. It doesn't take much to realize that the world is a more demanding place today than ever before. As colleges and employers expect more — and students are competing with their peers from around the world — we all have a responsibility in helping students master the knowledge and skills they need to succeed and compete.

It is exhilarating to hear about the tremendous — and hard — work happening in the classroom, school and district level to help our students succeed. The hard work put in by teachers, principals and superintendents have led to continued growth and it is more important than ever that we stay the course on behalf of our students.

One of the — if not the most — critical pieces of work underway in our state and country right now is the transition to

higher standards for our students. To ensure all students are prepared for success after graduation, the Common Core State Standards establish a set of clear, consistent guidelines for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in math and English Language Arts. The implementation of our new academic standards and the creation of high quality assessments provide an unprecedented opportunity to help all students while strengthening the state's long-term economy.

Other communities in the nation already are seeing the kind of student success we anticipate. In 2011, Kentucky became the first state to begin using the Common Core State Standards. The percentage of Kentucky high school graduates ready for college and career increased from 38 to 47 percent in a single year. A year later it jumped to 54 percent.

The District of Columbia began using the standards in the 2012-2013 school year. With an aggressive focus on curricular material and professional development, Washington DC achieved a feat that even most educators in the district hadn't considered possible: DC Public Schools student scores increased across the board in every tested subject area from 2012 to 2013, in every single grade, every ward, and all subgroups (ethnic, socioeconomic, etc.). Math was up 3.6 percent from 2012, reading was up 3.9 percent; science was up 1.8 percent; and composition, 4.6 percent.

These examples, as well as feedback directly from educators, demonstrate why there is support for the standards. In Delaware, 75 percent of teachers surveyed are enthusiastic about implementation in their classrooms while 84 percent agreed or strongly agreed that Common Core State Standards will increase student achievement. Nationally, among those

who said their state has implemented the Common Core, the majority said it will improve the quality of education.

As we look toward the new Smarter assessments beginning next year, we anticipate setting a realistic baseline that enables teachers, parents, and all of us to know where students stand on their path to success. Our move to the Smarter Balanced assessment system will mean replacing existing tests, and offer significant improvements over tests of the past. The assessments will provide an academic checkup by measuring real-world skills like critical thinking and problem solving. In addition, they will provide information during the year to give teachers and parents a better picture of where students are succeeding and where they need help.

If you haven't checked out the sample tests available online, please do so at smarterbalanced.org or DelExcels.org. DelExcels, launched this spring as a collaboration between the state, DSEA, DPTA and the Rodel Foundation, also includes helpful information and resources to help you and your students' parents understand the new standards and assessments. For example, you'll find a Principal's Toolkit with everything you need to host a parents' night, including handouts, PowerPoint slides, annotated agendas and more.

We know we will only get this work right if we are doing it together and stay the course. It is critical for the future success of our children that we do just that. Thanks to your work and willingness to push yourselves, your students, and our state, we will get to greatness together.

Mark Murphy is Delaware Secretary of Education.



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Mark Murphy
Secretary of Education

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SUBMIT STORY IDEAS TO:
Alison May

Public Information Officer
Delaware Dept. of Education
401 Federal Street, Suite 2
Dover, DE 19901
302-735-4000
alison.may@doe.k12.de.us

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Delaware's educators are using data

The Delaware Department of Education's EdInsight Dashboard development team released a new version on Feb. 27. Called "3.5," this version includes the long-awaited feature of Metric Summary. This row is shown at the top of the student list and totals how many students are meeting goal out of the total number of students selected to view. If a teacher selects 'Students from all sections' then the denominator will reflect the total number of students the teacher teaches. If a teacher selects a course, then the denominator will reflect only the students in that particular course.

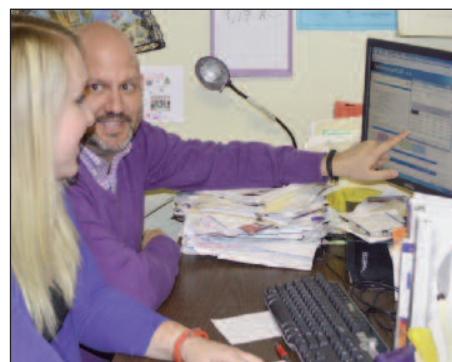
Currently, the Metric Summary is available on the Teacher Homepage and the 'My Student List' page when a school-level user creates a watch list of students. There are plans to implement this new functionality to all student lists located in the EdInsight Dashboard in a future release.

Training and support continues on The EdInsight Dashboard. Over the last few months, Kristi L. Lloyd has trained the following groups of people in the districts listed below.

- Smyrna District Office, Elementary Curriculum Specialists
- Indian River School District Parent Center, Sussex County School Counselors
- Eden Center, New Castle County School Counselors
- Lake Forest Central Office, Lake Forest School District Counselors

- Shue Medill Middle School, Christina School District High/Middle School Counselors
- Smyrna School District, Kent County School Counselors
- Gauger-Cobbs, Christina School District Educational Diagnosticians

If you are interested in training for your district, contact Kristi L. Lloyd at Kristi.Lloyd@doe.k12.de.us or call her at (302) 735-4206.



Teacher Holly Schnittger and former DDOE education associate Juan Carlos Morales plan the implementation of PerformancePLUS at McKean High.

Complementing the EdInsight Dashboard is PerformancePLUS. Educators around the state are using PerformancePLUS to access a vast item bank in the Content Library of ELA and Math resources linked to the Common Core

State Standards. From the Content Library educators are building assessments to use as formative or summative information to inform instruction. Additionally, educators and districts with assessments already constructed in many subject areas and aligned to standards are entering their own items into the AssessmentBUILDER module and glean rich, dynamic data from the more than 30 customizable reports available. This data is flowing back into the EdInsight Dashboard from PerformancePLUS as a standards mastery level view when students complete assessments.

A soon-to-be-released enhancement to PerformancePLUS comes out of our first joint state development opportunity with New Hampshire. The Individual Learning Plan module will allow educators to develop plans and set goals for students in any academic, social and behavioral area as well as to develop and monitor Response to Intervention plans. Educators will be able to create individual plans or group plans with assessment information at their fingertips.

Currently educators in 11 districts and two charters across the state have received training in various components of PerformancePLUS.

To receive training or to request a demonstration of PerformancePLUS please contact Brenda Dorrell at Brenda.Dorrell@doe.k12.de.us or (302) 735-4204.

William Penn High School chemistry students are developing critical-thinking skills thanks to new science standards.



PHOTOS: JESSICA BRATTON

Generating a passion for science

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

In Mark McKenzie's honors chemistry class at William Penn High School, students are challenged to take ownership of science and make it personal.

"They have to look at a problem and think 'What do I need to solve? How does it affect me?'" said McKenzie, who made the career switch to education after years of working in healthcare. He is in his first year at William Penn in the Colonial School District.

"It was a privilege to come here after hearing about the school's robust Advanced Placement program, the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) College and the facility here with a working lab," said McKenzie. "Technology is becoming the cornerstone of education, along with the critical- and creative-thinking skills that are being fostered by the new science standards."

In September, Delaware became the seventh state to adopt the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) with a unanimous 6-0 vote from the State Board of Education. The new standards, which better reflect the knowledge and skills students will need to be prepared for college and career, were developed by Delaware and 25 other lead state partners. They identify science and engineering content that all K-12 students should master.

State Board of Education President Teri Quinn Gray, a DuPont scientist, lauded NGSS. "They provide clear and consistent, researched-based standards that engage students in science instruction and prepare them to excel in the global society," she said.

Implementation of the standards is forcing teachers to concentrate as much on the "how" they teach as the "what."

"Next Generation is shifting the accountability back to our students," said McKenzie, who is also serving as a NGSS teacher leader, promoting and sustaining NGSS reform at the building and district levels. "It's inquiry-based, so we become the facilitators, preparing them for questions not answered and jobs not yet created."

McKenzie encourages his students to "ask three, then me" – referring them to their peers, books and notes before he will answer a question.

"I want to get them ready for the real world, in terms of investigation, research and teamwork," he said. "I've pushed them and they've stepped up to the rigor."

"Other teachers might hold your hand with procedures, but not here," said William Penn junior Felicity Diaz. "Between the lab work and the reports, I feel prepared for college."

Diaz hopes to pursue a major in biochemistry, go on to medical school and become a surgeon.

Chiason Tenkiang, also a junior, hopes to

pursue a career in biomedical engineering.

"Before, I never knew chemistry was such a big part of our lives," said Tenkiang. "You find it in everything, from what we wear to what we eat. It's so interesting, and Mr. McKenzie is a really good teacher who expects a lot, and pushes us more than any other teacher. It shows how much he cares."

Secretary of Education Mark Murphy said he is excited about the new direction, which was needed because of the changes in science and in the understanding of how students learn over the past few decades.

"Our previous standards didn't emphasize science and engineering practices and didn't promote the type of deeper and critical thinking skills students need to be successful after graduation," Murphy said. "These new performance expectations will increase opportunities for all students."

The Delaware Department of Education has worked with educators and key stakeholders to develop a multi-year implementation plan, providing teachers with the training and resources they will need to transition to NGSS in the coming years. Approximately 110 NGSS teacher leaders, such as McKenzie, are working collaboratively with the DDOE, Delaware Science Coalition leadership, district/charter school leadership and school principals to assist in planning professional development, curriculum implementation, assessment

development and monitoring student achievement. The first cohort launched this spring and by the end of the 2016-17 school year, through this teacher-led initiative, science instruction in all classrooms will demonstrate the blend of science and engineering practices, disciplinary core ideas and crosscutting concepts outlined in the framework.

In the Colonial School District, teachers have already participated in workshops and completed an additional 30 professional development hours this year to begin to master the new standards. The district also held a STEM showcase with students and families in March. NGSS emphasizes that K-12 science education should reflect the interconnections in science, which is why schools will be integrating and embedding STEM in every class.

"We're trying to show how science connects from subject to subject," said Colonial K-12 instructional coach Kim Garrick, citing how even in physical education classes students are learning the science and math behind basketball.

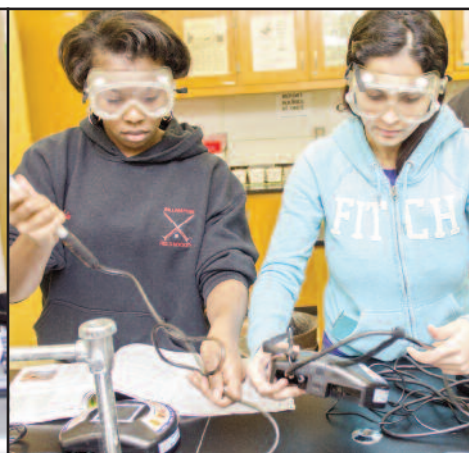
"The thread runs through," said Dr. Nicholas Baker, Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction for the district. "All of our teachers are embracing the standards, making STEM applicable beyond the classroom setting and preparing students to be globally competitive in any field they pursue."



Arianna Coleman and Nick Jensen



Ashley Myers



Tasia Dennis and Kiran Bal



Teah Matthews

Students make way for ducklings

Agriculture exploratory program grows in Sussex County

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

With nearly half of the land in Sussex County devoted to farming, it is only natural that the county's youngest residents are educated in agricultural science.

Earlier this year, Millsboro Middle School in the Indian River School District introduced a new agriculture exploratory program, with courses available to all students in grades 6-8. Susan Mitchell, a 2006 graduate of Sussex Central High School, is teaching two courses for each grade level, with each course running for up to 12 weeks. Mitchell earned her bachelor's degree in animal science and agricultural education from the University of Delaware and began teaching at Sussex Central High before moving to the middle-school level.

"Both of our high schools have huge agriculture programs, especially Sussex," said Mitchell. "It's so important to give our younger students a foundation."

Millsboro is the only middle school in the district to add agriculture, thus far. Mitchell is hoping her students will become more agriculturally literate, know where their food comes from and understand the science of food and agriculture.

At the sixth-grade level, students are learning about food science, participating in a variety of hands-on activities such as making pretzels from yeast. In grade 7, students are studying poultry. Given that Sussex County produces more chickens than any other county in the United States, it is an essential introductory course. This spring, focusing on ducks, each student was assigned an egg with a number on it that he or she had to incubate, candle to see if it was fertilized and create a hypothesis to predict how the weight of the egg would change during incubation. They are tracking the growth of the ducklings for the rest of the school year.

"Before, they were just regular eggs, but we got to see the development of their veins and eyes," said student Kailee Daisy. "That was pretty cool."

"It was the first time we really got to see eggs hatch," said student Azayah Garrison. "It's fun being able to hold them and play with them."

The eighth-graders have been studying dairy and learning how to milk an animal.

Partnering with the Center for the Inland Bays, the school also constructed a rain garden this year, teaching students about plant life and maintenance. Students took an active role in the planting day in April.



Millsboro Middle School student Gavin Alexander studies ducklings as part of the school's new agriculture exploratory program.

PHOTO: JESSICA BRATTON

Assistant principal wins national honor

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

She's simply the best of the best.

Out of a pool of more than 50 nominees nationwide, Dr. Courtney Voshell of Dover High School was named the 2014 National Assistant Principal of the Year by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). The designation comes with a \$5,000 award to be used for school improvement or professional development.

"The assistant principal has many critical roles to play as a school leader," said JoAnn Bartoletti, NASSP executive director. "Courtney is a model of an excellent school leader who goes beyond the traditional roles of handling discipline and data and has become an expert in curriculum and instruction."

Described as a tireless, determined and supportive leader, Voshell began teaching at Dover High in 2004 and was named assistant principal in 2010. She is a 1999 graduate of the school.

"I always knew I wanted to go into teaching, and this was home," said Voshell. "The best thing about the award is that it puts Dover High on the map."

Her transition from the role of teacher to administrator was one she took on with careful consideration, and she continues to draw on her own teaching experience and insight as she makes leadership decisions.

"I started to see the things I could influence when I became a teacher leader," said Voshell. "For me, it was always about the kids, but in this role, I knew I'd be able to



Courtney Voshell of Dover High was named the 2014 National Assistant Principal of the Year.

touch more lives and be a bigger voice in the school."

As assistant principal, Voshell has helped the school get back on track and meet all student targets on both state assessment and graduation cohort. She has been an advocate for students, encouraging them to take advantage of credit-

recovery options, as well as open enrollment for Advanced Placement classes. As part of her strong belief in the power of personalization in schools, she makes sure to connect with everyone in the building during weekly walkthroughs, where she provides instructional feedback to teachers and interacts and works with students on their classroom activities.

Voshell has also led the implementation of professional learning communities at the school to help teachers collaborate and organize data to make data-driven decisions.

"It's a way to share best practices and give instructional feedback," said Voshell. "We can all get together and try to figure out what the big ideas are."

Voshell was nominated for the NASSP award by Dr. Darren Guido, supervisor of instruction for the Capital School District, and Dr. Evelyn Edney, principal of Dover High. NASSP and school furniture manufacturer Virco Inc. annually honor an assistant principal from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity schools. Selection criteria are built around collaborative leadership; curriculum, instruction and assessment; and school personalization—the core areas of the NASSP Breaking Ranks Framework. The three finalists were selected from the pool of state winners and interviewed.

Joining all of the state winners at a three-day event in Washington, D.C. in April, Voshell was able to network and meet with legislators on Capitol Hill. The event culminated with a black-tie gala to recognize the achievements of Voshell and each of the state honorees.

Thanks a million...(and a half)

Thanks to a \$1.5 million grant from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Delaware educators will have access to more information to help young people succeed.

The grant is the result of a joint effort between Delaware's Department of Education and the state's Office of Early Learning and will expand its K-12 Education Data Warehouse and Insight Dashboard to include birth through pre-kindergarten data.

"We share the foundation's goal of expanding educator access to high-quality data tools," said Secretary of Education Mark Murphy. "This generous grant will be critical in helping us to further our work, allowing us to provide more valuable tools to our educators who are working hard to support our students' learning from birth through graduation."

"It will help early childhood educators develop individualized approaches and learning plans for their students that will ultimately lead to improved outcomes as they transition between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten," said Jennifer Ranji, secretary of the Delaware Department of Services for Children Youth and Their Families, which together with the Governor's Office supports the Office of Early Learning.

Launched in 2012, the state's K-12 Insight Dashboard allows educators to make data-driven decisions that improve instruction and learning for Delaware's students. Funded with part of the state's \$119 million federal Race to the Top grant, the project includes web-based "dashboards" that provide educators access to timely and actionable information on all students. That information helps them to manage academic performance and anticipate issues that could arise throughout the year at district-, school-, classroom- and student-levels. By expanding and extending the

current tool to include important early childhood data, educators will be able to better identify the needs of the state's youngest children—which supports Delaware's long-term, strategic plan to strengthen and sustain the state's early childhood system. Announced last year, the plan focuses on whole-child development, family engagement and community collaboration.

"There is a need for an integrated early childhood data system, and this funding, combined with financial resources from the Office of Early Learning, will move the state forward with concrete steps," said Harriet Dichter, director for the Office of Early Learning. "We're excited to continue Delaware's forward momentum in this area."



Students enjoy activities at Christina Early Learning Center in Newark, including, from top, Sebastian, Jamee with paraprofessional Betsy Suddler, and students Leslie and Gabriella. In the future, early childhood students will benefit from the expansion of the state's K-12 Insight Dashboard to include birth through pre-kindergarten data.

PHOTOS: JESSICA BRATTON

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Delaware
educators
share best
practices to
implement
standards

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

To ensure all students are prepared for success after graduation, the Common Core State Standards establish a set of clear, consistent guidelines for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in math and English language arts. The implementation of the new academic standards and the creation of high-quality assessments provide an unprecedented opportunity to help all students across Delaware.

In addition to Delaware, teachers in 44 other states throughout the country are transitioning from their original state standards to the Common Core State Standards.

It is critical that educators receive support and training to implement the new standards. Delaware educators from across the state have been participating in an 18-month project called Common Ground for the Common Core, which is providing intense support to a team of teachers who can then take that knowledge and work with peers in their buildings. The project is helping bring the state's educators up to speed on what the standards are, its implications for their day-to-day classroom instruction, and changes that are necessary to ensure they successfully rollout and benefit students. Guiding teams were asked to submit school implementation plans by June 30 of last year, refine the plans over the summer and put them into action during this school year.

"It's a lot of work to switch over but our district has been really proactive," said Woodbridge Elementary School third-grade teacher Jennifer Guido, who is in her third year at the school. "It's a change of mindset—for us and the kids. In math, we've been pushing students more and more to

Student Gabriel Jones answers a question with a microphone.

Above, students gather around teacher Jennifer Guido to solve a problem.

At Woodbridge Elementary, collaborative structures, including

explain their reasoning. The other day, we taught one problem during an entire lesson. We want them understand that it's about the amount of work you're doing with one and not how many problems you're able to get through quickly."

Dr. Donna Hall, Director of Instruction for Woodbridge School District, has been instrumental in working with guiding teams in the district to roll out Common Core.

"We're trying to get our teachers focused and having a strong grasp of the changes," said Hall. "It's been an all-year effort, and it will continue to be an all-year effort next year."

Week-to-week, during their 90-minute planning sessions with colleagues and data coaches, teachers have been prepping and rebuilding lessons within the standards.

"Donna has done a tremendous job, working with our professional learning communities (PLCs) and preparing workshops to make sure everyone's on the same page," said Woodbridge Elementary Principal John Kramer. "And the workshops have been strategically planned so teachers can build on ideas in between each one."

Hall said continued collaboration among teachers is what will ultimately make the implementation successful. "Some of the best professional development has come from using our own teachers as resources," she said.

team teaching, have been in place for some time.

"We're constantly bouncing ideas off of each other," said third-grade teacher Devon Noble, who is team teaching with Guido.

With technology embedded into the Common Core, it is no surprise that classrooms such as Noble's and Guido's are seeing an increased presence of advanced, new tools. Their third graders have access to SMART Boards, traveling microphones, iPads and Nearpod, an all-in-one solution for the synchronized use of iPads.

"Technology is an important component of Common Core now and teachers are seeing just how important it is to be able to get data back quickly or to know instantly what kids are thinking and how they're doing," said Melissa Bleile, instructional technology specialist for Woodbridge School District. "And the kids love it. Since they've had the devices, they've been trying harder, wanting to get the right answers and wanting to share those answers."

On May 1, guiding teams from nearly 100 Delaware schools gathered in Dover to share replicable, innovative, results-driven and solutions-focused examples of best practices and lessons learned during their first year in Common Ground for the Common Core. They were joined by their superintendents, local school board presidents, PTA representatives, State Board of Education members and legislators.

"As we learn from one another through shared successes and challenges, we can find ways to replicate what is working and course-correct what is not so that more of our schools realize these successes," Secretary of Education Mark Murphy said.

The state recently announced it will expand the initiative next year with more schools in Common Ground 2.0. *Learn more about the Common Core and assessments at DelExels.org.*

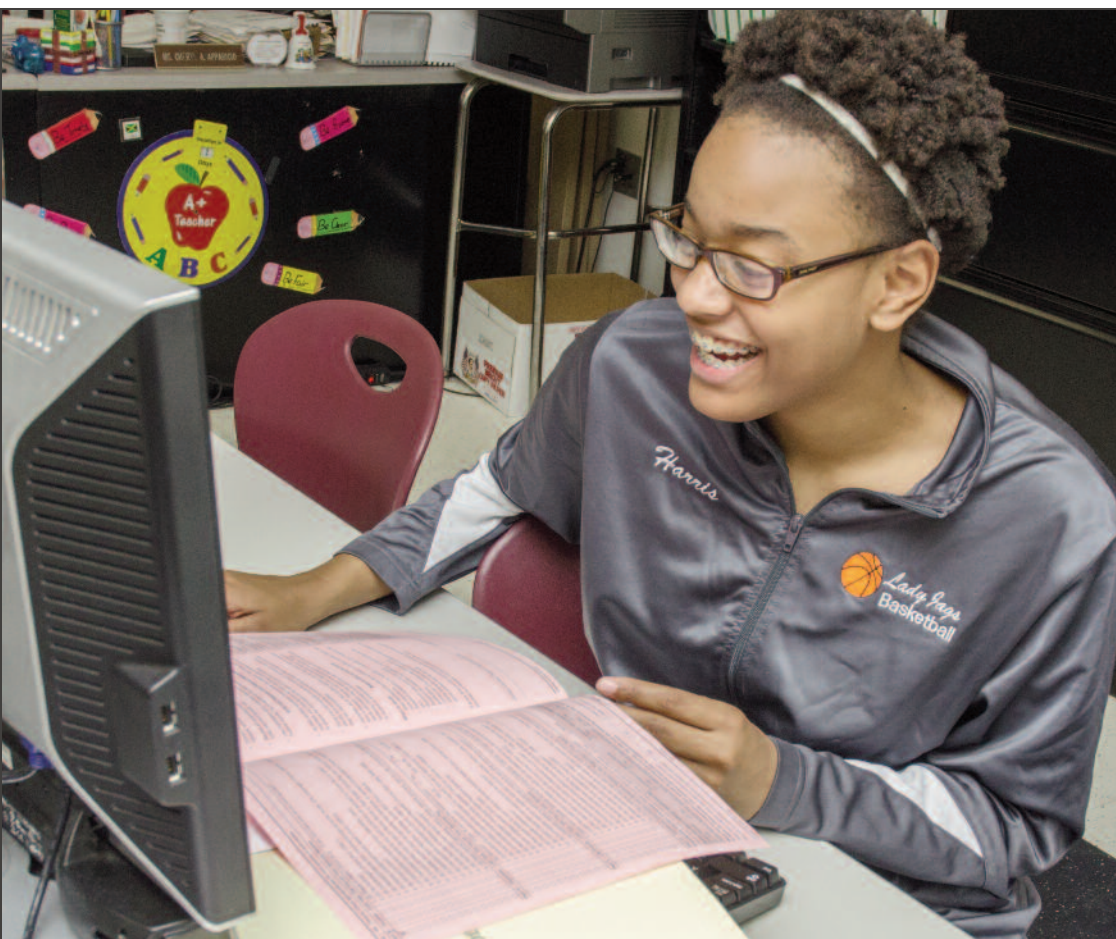
Student Maniya Smith uses technology in the classroom.

PHOTOS:
Jessica Bratton

Above, Sarah Gillie is all smiles.

Left, teacher Devon Noble high-fives a group of students.

Woodbridge Elementary School teacher Devon Noble works with third grader Ben Lewis.



ReVITAlizing the community



Appoquinimink High School students Brea Harris, top, and Dnasia Faison and Taylor Hutchinson, above, spent many afternoons after school preparing taxes for the community as part of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

PHOTOS: JESSICA BRATTON

Appoquinimink High students volunteer to prepare tax returns

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

It's not often that a person sits down with a certified income tax preparer and comes face-to-face with a high school student.

Yet at Appoquinimink High School in Middletown, three students in the accounting pathway have stepped into the role quite seamlessly. They are among the youngest members of a national corps of IRS certified tax volunteers who received training to offer free tax preparation for middle-income community members through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. They are also certified to provide help to seniors who have questions about pensions and retirement-related issues through the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program.

This was the first year Appoquinimink High stepped up to become a certified VITA/TCE site. Three juniors—Dnasia Faison, Brea Harris and Taylor Hutchinson—completed and passed the online certification course and exam in February and, using TaxWise software, started preparing returns twice a week after school from mid February through the close of tax season. They are certified to handle basic returns. Business teacher Cheryl Apparicio and VITA volunteer Craig Sparacino performed quality review checks on all the returns. The students received ethics training as well, and all work was entirely confidential.

"We really had to know our information for the exam, but I feel completely prepared now," said Harris, who hopes to pursue accounting as a career. "It gives you a sense of accomplishment, putting in the hours and being able to do someone's taxes, when it seemed so daunting before."

"It was a long process, but a great experience," said Hutchinson.

The students volunteered for three hours each Tuesday and Thursday and accumulated more than 100 hours of service. Apparicio was pleased with the amount of appointments and walk-ins this year, but hopes to be able to expand in 2015 and offer more advanced services.

"We've had an influx of students bringing theirs in, and others coming in by word-of-mouth," said Apparicio. "The biggest thing right now is that these students are building on what they've learned in the classroom and gaining real-world experience with client interactions and communication."

Maisha Thoms, tax campaign director for the Nehemiah Gateway Community Development Corp., echoed the benefits.

"They're getting education in taxes, building customer-service skills and giving back to their own community," said Thoms, who was instrumental in getting the program up and running at Appoquinimink.

"Our main goal is that they become comfortable with taxes and engaged in the process," said Nehemiah Gateway CDC Executive Director Joan Chandler.

Chandler has seen many volunteers at the college level, but rarely at the high-school level. Appoquinimink High is just the second high school in the state to offer the program. The first was Dover High School.

"This is the type of experience that helps them to build expertise and hopefully advance their careers," said Chandler.

"I'll be able to use it in my future references—applying to colleges and eventually jobs," said Faison, who plans to pursue a major in finance and a minor in accounting. "I also want to make this part of my senior project and stress to other students the importance of doing your taxes."

DELAWARE WINNING RACE TO THE TOP

Calling the progress in Delaware “extraordinary,” U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan visited the First State on April 9 to highlight the accomplishments of educators and students since the state received the first federal Race to the Top grant four years ago.

“By any measure, this is a state that’s helping demonstrate to the nation what’s possible with tenacity, courage and a willingness to challenge the status quo,” Duncan said.

Joined by Gov. Jack Markell and Delaware Secretary of Education Mark Murphy, Duncan began his day at EastSide Charter School in Wilmington, where he visited a pre-kindergarten classroom and participated in a roundtable discussion with Delaware Talent Cooperative teachers and leaders from EastSide, Kuumba Academy and Howard High School of Technology. Duncan also visited Mount Pleasant High School in the Brandywine School District, where he visited an AVID classroom, talked to seniors about college access issues, participated in a RTTT anniversary town hall with students, educators and community leaders, and met with business leaders.

Throughout his visit, Duncan praised Delaware for the progress it has made, recognized the work ahead and urged the state to stay the course through the challenges ahead.

“Making such big, systemic change is hard. And we certainly aren’t here to say ‘Mission Accomplished,’ because there is a lot of hard work left to do,” he said. “But I think Delaware has a remarkable story to tell, and I want to make sure people know it.”

Earlier in the week, Markell detailed the impact of the state’s efforts in front of the P-20 Council, an organization designed to align Delaware’s education efforts across all grade levels from early childhood through higher education.

“Four years later, because of [our Race to the Top] plan, we’re making progress,” he said. “Delaware’s teachers and students are getting support to address our challenges now, and we have a built a foundation that allows our schools to continue to improve for the next generation.”

Among the trends showing recent improvements in Delaware’s schools, Markell noted that:

- ♦ The state’s dropout rate hit a 30-year low at 2.9 percent.
- ♦ More top teachers are staying in Delaware and remaining in schools with a high proportion of high-need students.
- ♦ More struggling schools are showing improvement, with about one in five making double-digit gains in the percentage of students reaching their growth targets.
- ♦ More students are taking AP courses and passing tests.
- ♦ And more students are applying to college, including many who would not have considered the possibility of college in the past, despite their qualifications.



U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan talks with students at Mount Pleasant High School during his April visit to Delaware to highlight the state's progress since receiving Race to the Top grant funding. Below, he visits a pre-K class at EastSide Charter School.



Delaware has received more than \$100 million in federal grant funding as a result of the high quality plan the state submitted to U.S. Department of Education detailing ways to address key challenges. The initiatives directly supported by Race to the Top have been complemented by additional state and federal grant funding to increase access to quality early childhood programs and create world language immersion programs, while the Administration has worked with the General Assembly to pass legislation to improve teacher preparation programs.

Markell outlined ways in which teachers and students are receiving more support now than four years ago and described

foundation changes to the education system that will make a difference for decades to come.

Highlights of Investments in Teachers

- ♦ Better insight into the performance of their students through the development of a world-class data system.
- ♦ Training for educators and administrators to help them use data most effectively.
- ♦ Summer institutes programs focused on supporting teachers with Advanced Placement curriculums.
- ♦ Support for state’s transition to Common Core Standards
- ♦ Increased feedback through upgrades teacher evaluation system.

Highlights of Investments in Students

- ♦ Overhauled statewide assessment to better measure progress toward college and career readiness.
- ♦ Academic “interventionists” and “deans” used by Districts to provide targeted counseling to students struggling with academic and life issues that are interfering with their success in school.
- ♦ Increased opportunities in STEM education, like in the Brandywine School District, which has renovated lab spaces.
- ♦ Special programs for freshman to help them adjust to the academic and cultural rigors of high school before integrating with older students.
- ♦ Improved access to college through free statewide schoolday SAT and help with application process.

Moving forward, Markell said effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards would be the most significant immediate work to improve opportunities for students. He said he also hoped to provide schools more flexibility to use state funding for innovative ideas and reiterated his proposal to make changes to the teacher compensation system to raise starting salaries, while rewarding educators for showing leadership, particularly in high need schools.

“Many have asked what will happen when states no longer can count on an infusion of millions of federal dollars to carry out a grand plan,” said Markell. “But that view misses the point of what this work has been all about. We have created lasting change because now that we’ve strengthened the foundation of our system, we can maintain our progress at a fraction of the cost.”

“It is almost impossible to imagine how we would have given our schools the resources and opportunities to meet the increasing challenges of our world without the foundational changes that resulted from the efforts of the past four years — all driven in some way by the plan that won the Race to the Top competition,” he continued. “Without this work, we’d still be a generation behind.”

Calling all educators: Delaware wants you

Since its launch last spring, JoinDelawareSchools.org has attracted more than 25,000 visitors and 2,500 applicants—all with an invested interest in the state’s schools.

The goal of the website is to communicate Delaware’s K-12 vision, culture and achievements; provide easy access to all vacancies in Delaware’s public education system; and simplify the application process so that educators who identify with the vision are compelled to join Delaware schools.

“We’re seeing not only a higher quantity of

applicants, but a higher quality,” said Tasha Cannon, deputy officer of the Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Unit.

By July 2015, all Delaware local education agencies will be required to utilize this central hiring website, enabling prospective job candidates to use a common application and specify where they wish to pursue employment. Currently, 15 districts and 18 charter schools are participating.

In addition to perusing through job openings, visitors to the site can read the stories and

listen to videos of some of the state’s current educators, including iEducate Delaware honorees. The site also provides detailed information about the professional development opportunities and support systems available to prospective educators, as well as easy-to-navigate maps of the schools by district.

JoinDelawareSchools.org is part of a broader recruitment marketing campaign, which aims to attract the caliber of workforce necessary to realize Delaware’s vision of a world-class education system.



Finding a smarter way to test students

The Common Core is being put to the test as the Delaware Department of Education prepares to make the switch from Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS) to Smarter Balanced student assessments next year.

More than three million students nationwide participated in a Smarter Balanced field test this spring to ensure that test questions would be accurate and fair, and Delaware students were among them. Delaware is one of 23 states across the country adopting the new assessments, which will go beyond multiple-choice questions to include extended response and technology-enhanced items, as well as performance tasks that allow students to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Performance tasks challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to complex real-world problems and measure capacities such as depth of understanding, writing and research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with traditional assessment questions.

“While DCAS was the right decision for the state where Delaware was three years ago, we are at a different place today and this is a better fit for our students, teachers and system,” said Brian Touchette, director of the Office of Assessment. “This move provides the opportunity to replace and reduce the amount of tests that students take, as well as measure students’ progress towards college- and career-readiness throughout the K-12 experience.”

Developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, with ongoing feedback from Delaware and other states, the assessments are aligned to the Common Core State Standards in English language arts/literacy and mathematics for grades 3-8 and 11. The system includes both summative assessments for accountability purposes and optional interim assessments for instructional use. Like DCAS, the assessments will use computer adaptive testing technologies. This will provide meaningful feedback and actionable data that teachers and other educators can use to help students succeed.

The mandatory summative assessments, consisting of both the computer adaptive test and performance tasks, will be administered during the last 12 weeks of the school year. The performance tasks will be taken on a computer, but will not be computer adaptive. The results will provide valid, reliable and fair measures of students’ progress.

The optional interim assessments will be administered at determined intervals, starting in either the fall or winter. These assessments will provide educators with actionable information about student progress throughout the year. Like the summative assessment, the interim assessments will be computer adaptive and includes performance tasks. They will help teachers, students and parents understand whether students are on track, and identify strengths and limitations in relation to the Common Core.



WEBSITE EXPLAINS NEW STANDARDS

A public-private partnership has launched a new education-focused website to inform Delawareans about the state’s new standards and assessments.

The site, www.DelExcls.org, was created through a partnership of the Delaware Department of Education, Delaware State Education Association, Delaware PTA and the Rodel Foundation of Delaware.

“What we’ve heard from voices around Delaware is – we want to be better informed about what is happening specific to Delaware. This site aims to be a resource for anyone who is looking to learn more about Delaware’s implementation of the Common Core and transition to the Smarter assessments, which will replace the current DCAS test in the 2014-2015 school year,” Secretary of Education Mark Murphy said.

DPTA President Terri Hodges added, “The primary idea behind the website was to provide an easy way for the partners to share information with a broader audience about the work underway in Delaware. It’s a great example of collaboration to create a resource that contains a wealth of information on the new standards and assessments for Delaware parents, teachers and citizens.”

The site features answers to common questions, video, presentations and links to a variety of resources, including practice tests for the Smarter Balanced Assessment. The site will continue to be built out in the coming months to add more information and resources.

The website was funded through a grant from the Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) Network, a national nonpartisan network of education advocacy organizations working to improve K-12 education.

State dropout rate reaches 30-year low

DROPOUT RATE: from Page 1

year’s 4.9 percent. The graduation rate also went from 74.1 to 80.3 percent. Principal Evelyn Edney credits the progress to multiple strategies.

“We are really trying to track the students,” said Edney. “Our counseling team has been instrumental in helping to review the data with the administrative team and help to track the students’ progress in classes to indicate interventions that need to be put in place to help the student to become more successful.”

Interventions include extra help sessions with teachers, double courses in English language arts and math and the creation of the Daylight Program to complement the school’s existing Twilight Program. The Daylight and Twilight programs provide an online, credit-recovery avenue to students at-risk for not graduating with

their peers.

“The kids are in this credit predicament, but with Daylight, they can see the light at the end of the tunnel,” said program administrator James Bailey. “Some would have aged out or not wanted to go back to a class they failed out of, but this gives them a second chance.”

“Without this program, I probably wouldn’t make it,” said Tamir Bordley, a senior. “I wanted to graduate on time and that wouldn’t have been possible before. I’ve able to make up three classes in here, and take two classes outside of this.”

“I like it because you can work at your own pace,” said student Rodrigo Rangel.

For some, it may be a particular trouble area that leads them to Daylight. Student Kristina Fortney is making up credits in math, while still keeping up with the rest of her academic schedule.

“It’s a good program if you’re not doing well in certain classes,” said Fortney. “You

have more time to work out the problems, and you can get individual help in here.”

“The staff does a superb job of preparing them,” said Bailey, referring to the teachers who come in to assist the students in particular areas. “We have a lot of bright kids who are here for a variety of reasons. We get to know them and their parents. They know we’re going to support them.”

In the Appoquinimink School District, credit recovery programs also have been key to keeping students from dropping out. The district’s rate went from 2.1 percent in 2011-12 to 0.7 in 2012-13.

“It starts by monitoring the data, so we know who the kids are that are at-risk of dropping out,” Middletown High Assistant Principal Voni Perrine said. “Once we identify a student, they receive a high level of attention from a team of staff members.”

Middletown’s Twilight program is a

self-paced, computer-based program that’s supported by teaching staff.

“Students move quickly through concepts they understand and spend as much time as they need in areas where they are weaker. When they’re ready, they can rejoin their classmates and graduate on time – which is an important feature of the program,” Perrine said.

The district also offers students the option to take classes with the Groves Adult Education Program, supplementing their daily schedule. Parents also are key partners.

“We meet with the family to establish a relationship, identify the challenges the teen is facing, and help that young person set goals to get back on track,” said Perrine. “Students meet with members of the team on a regular basis to review their coursework, celebrate progress, identify challenges and maintain a positive focus on long-range goals and objectives.”

AROUND DELAWARE SCHOOLS

Evan McCoy from Mount Pleasant High School and Parker Kurlander from Caesar Rodney High School will represent Delaware at the 2014 National Youth Science Camp. The National Youth Science Camp (NYSC) is a residential science education program for young scientists the summer after they graduate from high school. Students from around the country are challenged academically in exciting lectures and hands-on studies, and have voluntary opportunities to participate in an outdoor adventure program, gain a new and deep appreciation for the great outdoors, and establish friendships that last a lifetime.

Mary Murrian, math and science teacher at Capital School District's Henry Middle School in Dover was one of 25 new Teachers at Sea selected to participate in the 2014 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Field Season. The program provides teachers hands-on, real-world research experience working at sea with world-renowned NOAA scientists, thereby giving them unique insight into oceanic and atmospheric research crucial to the nation. Kindergarten through college-level teachers get the chance to sail aboard NOAA research ships to work under the tutelage of scientists and crew.

The Graphic Design and Production III class at Appoquinimink School District's Appoquinimink High School in Middletown partnered with local

charities for the Westtown Movie Charity nights. Students in the course work hand-in-hand with the Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition, Middletown's Our Daily Bread, the Appoquinimink Foundation, and the MOT Senior Center to develop advertisement slides for charity nights at the Westtown Movie theater in Middletown. Selected student work is displayed on the movie screen during the charity nights to bring awareness of the organizations to the community.

Seven Delaware high schools were recognized this spring for their dedication to academic excellence. Each of the schools has opened access to Advanced Placement courses while maintaining high levels of student success in those courses. Secretary of Education Mark Murphy was joined by Trevor Packer, College Board's senior vice president, Advanced Placement, at a ceremony in Dover to congratulate the schools. This year's honored schools include: Appoquinimink School District's Appoquinimink High School; Appoquinimink School District's Middletown High School; Delmar School District's Delmar High School; Red Clay Consolidated School District's Cab Calloway School of the Arts; Red Clay Consolidated School District's Charter School of Wilmington; Red Clay Consolidated School District's Conrad Schools of Science; and Sussex Technical School District's Sussex Technical High School.

Citing evidence that the opportunity to take a college-level class in high school helps students succeed in higher education, Governor Jack Markell this spring visited Caesar Rodney School District's Caesar Rodney High School to outline his proposal to ensure every senior with college potential has that chance before they graduate. Markell joined Secretary of Education Mark Murphy to announce details of a scholarship fund that makes college courses accessible to all high school seniors who have demonstrated college readiness, no matter their financial circumstances. The department will work with districts to identify college-ready students who would benefit from taking a dual enrollment course through one of our state's higher education institutions. Dual enrollment courses will enable students to receive credit both on their high school transcript and college credit. By focusing on general education courses such as math, English, history, and science, students will receive college credit that is highly transferrable. Students can then enroll in college having accumulated credits without any financial burden, thus making college more affordable and increasing the likelihood they will graduate on time.

The state will reimburse districts to offer dual enrollment courses in their schools or support individual students taking a class at an institute of higher education. Funding will be prioritized for students from families of low economic status. The Governor's proposed budget includes

\$300,000 to ensure this opportunity is available to every college-ready student who may not be able to afford the cost.

The Delaware Department of Education has awarded two grants totaling more than \$1.3 million over two years to fund partnerships with Delaware universities that will provide professional development to K-12 science and math educators. Funded with federal Title II Part B money under the U.S. Department of Education's Math and Science Partnership Program, the grants aim to increase the subject matter knowledge and teaching skills of K-12 mathematics and/or science teachers by bringing together teachers with higher education mathematicians, scientists, and/or engineers. The following programs received grants:

- ♦ \$230,040 over two years for a partnership project between the University of Delaware and 12 Delaware high schools titled "Practicing the STEM Practices in an Interdisciplinary Laboratory Setting" with state option to extend for third year
- ♦ \$1.1 million over two years for a partnership project between the Delaware Math Coalition and the University of Delaware titled "Delaware K-12 Mathematics Partnership Project" with state option to extend for third year

Concord High team designs award-winning technology

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Earlier this year, Concord High School seniors Domenic Lutz and Christian Orellana knew little about assembly-line production—and even less about what it means to do the job with an impairment. Yet by February, they had designed an award-winning device that empowers individuals with disabilities to become more efficient in the workplace.

Lutz and Orellana were among the top five finalists in the national AbilityOne Design Challenge, an annual competition that encourages students to develop assistive technologies that can transform the lives of those using it. The duo, enrolled in Jordan Estock's level-four engineering design lab class at Concord High in the Brandywine School District, worked with employees at ServiceSource in Wilmington to brainstorm and develop a device that would assist workers in successfully packaging magnets. Contracted by another company to produce the magnets, ServiceSource employees turn out as many as 100,000 of them a month. The technology Lutz and Orellana came up with has helped to decrease the finger strength and dexterity required of the employees, thereby increasing production

rates and accuracy of the packaged magnets.

Learning about the competition for the first time, Estock brought his entire design lab class to tour ServiceSource in September. With program sites in Wilmington and Dover, the organization offers a wide range of services designed to assist individuals with disabilities and others with significant barriers to employment to gain or regain the skills and the confidence they need to launch or resume a career.

"We saw the everyday struggles of those working with vision impairment or strength or dexterity problems," said Estock. "I think everyone was moved by the premise of the competition and wanted to participate in hopes of making a difference."

"All of the employees were eager to help and went out of their way to accommodate us," said Orellana.

"They were not only kind, but had a genuine interest in working with us," said Lutz.

The classmates split up into four teams to design devices based on the needs of the employees at varying work stations. In addition to the magnet-assembly device, the other projects included a platform for a worker stacking flower pots; a red-light,



Pierre Wright of ServiceSource, left, congratulates students Domenic Lutz and Christian Orellana and teacher Jordan Estock on their design.

green-light device to signal when to move on to another job; and an electromagnetic pen to help pick up slivers of metal.

The students made a return trip to the site to put the devices in the hands of the employees, taking feedback before returning to design their final prototypes. They also recorded data to show the gains in both time and productivity once their devices were employed.

Out of the four teams, Lutz and Orellana moved on to the AbilityOne national competition in Arlington, Va. in late February. The duo placed fourth overall. The winning team from Wethersfield, Conn. created a device that allowed employees with limited or no use of their hands to package chains.

"The overall experience of getting to compete with teams that were ranked top in the nation was a very surreal and inspiring thing," said Lutz.

The experience has also solidified the students' commitment to pursuing engineering as a career.

"I've always loved problem-solving and working with technology," said Orellana. "This experience has helped me realize that engineering is something that I really enjoy and would love to pursue a career in."

"Engineering can be applied to so many different aspects of life and society," said Lutz. "Now the term causes my mind to fill with ideas and concepts that could improve something tangible."



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PRINCIPAL GAINS AT EASTSIDE CHARTER

EastSide Charter School Principal Dr. Lamont Browne visits with pre-kindergarten student Jarilyng Ingles.

PHOTO: JESSICA BRATTON

School, leader strive for continuous improvement

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

At EastSide Charter School in Wilmington, every child is encouraged to “strive, succeed and soar.” Those expectations extend to the administrative level as well, where Dr. Lamont W. Browne, head of school and principal, strives everyday for continuous improvement.

Browne was one of 12 Delaware principals to participate in the Relay GSE Master National Principals Academy Fellowship (NPAF), a selective national instructional school leadership program. It is designed for passionate and reflective sitting principals who will not stop until they have achieved academic and character success for their students.

Led by a faculty of nationally-recognized leaders, superintendents and education experts, the program consisted of a 12-day session in New York City last summer, where participants learned actionable tools and set strategic goals to be implemented in their schools. They also attended three

weekend intersessions in New York City during the school year and will attend their last one in June. The program has required the use of video as evidence of implementation in their schools, and to use as the basis for reflection, feedback and targeted practice.

“It’s been a tremendous opportunity to learn outside of our own schools and outside of our state,” said Browne.

Other Delaware principals to participate in NPAF included Elizabeth Fleetwood of McCullough Middle School, Kenneth Garvey of Dover High School, Harold Ingram of Bancroft Elementary, John Kennedy of Stanton Middle School, Sally Maldonado of Kuumba Academy Charter School, Jack Perry of Prestige Academy, Ige Purnell of the Wallace Wallin School, Kalia Reynolds of Eisenberg Elementary School, Stacie Ruiz of Wilmington Manor Elementary School, Laura Schneider of Showell Elementary School and Mike Rees of Castle Hills Elementary.

Three of them—Browne, Maldonado and Perry, as well as Salome Thomas-EL head of school at Thomas Edison Charter—have since partnered to create and implement the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which was approved by the Delaware Department of Education as an alternative instructional evaluation tool to replace DPAS II. Central to

TEF are unannounced classroom observations, in which administrators and instructional leadership teams provide valuable, frequent, evidenced- based feedback to help teachers learn and grow.

“The shift from an evaluative to coaching model not only helps us improve the quality of our teachers, but also accomplish a more broad, and impactful goal – to dramatically improve staff investment in the culture of continuous growth,” said Browne. “By opening our teachers’ doors on a frequent basis, the stigma of limited and planned observations has been removed. Students are improving and teachers are responding. The rubric is clearer and a lot more rigorous. It’s less about the score and more about what we can do to improve.”

Browne has had an enormous impact on EastSide since becoming principal in 2011. His students’ DCAS math scores have risen 20 percentage points and ELA scores have risen 26 percentage points over the past two testing years—the highest growth rate of any charter school in Delaware. In October, Browne was presented with the Impact Award from the Delaware Charter Schools Network and in February, he was honored by the State Board of Education as one of five school leaders of the year.