

P-20 Council Notes  
February 4, 2005

After a brief introduction, Dr. Pika and Sec. Woodruff recapped the Data Subcommittee Meeting from January 25<sup>th</sup>. There was discussion about the connectedness of data and how to track students from preschool to college or the workplace.

Sec. Woodruff then proceeded to explain basic elements of the Achieve report that was just released. The report states that the skills needed to succeed at college and work are similar and that Delaware needs to update its standards to reflect new thinking in the field. Among the points to consider are creating more specific standards, raising student expectations, and shifting aspects of the current curricula to lower grades.

Achieve's review of Delaware's content standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics was supported by a similar study from MCREL which yielded almost identical results.

Committee members heard a presentation by Mike Cohen from Achieve about the specifics of the report, which also included a comparison of Delaware's graduation (credit) requirements with the American Diploma Project. After some brief background information on the American Diploma Project, Cohen detailed the strengths and weaknesses of Delaware's current standards for both Math and English.

Math strengths:

- An emphasis on problem-solving skills and mathematical understanding
- A favorable comparison on certain math topics with the benchmark standards

Math weaknesses:

- A lack of specificity
- The need for more rigor and a downshift of certain concepts to lower grades.
- No expectations for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades

English strengths:

- A thoughtful response to the task of elaborating what students should know up to the end of Grade 10.

English weaknesses:

- A need to increase the level of specificity
- Delaware needs to increase the rigor of the present standards
- No expectations for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades

Cohen then compared the high school standards with admission requirements for Delaware's postsecondary institutions. He noted several gaps between the two and an even bigger discrepancy when analyzing students who perform well in college.

In a recent national survey, 40% of high school graduates say they are not prepared for college or the workplace. 39% of employers and 70% of college professors agree. Of

those students who think they are prepared, most went to high schools with high standards, took at least Algebra II, and were required to write frequently.

Questions were raised by the panel about exit exams. Cohen stated that they could be effective as long as the exams measure the correct information and there is consistency among classes.

The council then focused on the implementation of Achieve's ideas. Arkansas and Indiana were held up as possible models of change. A discussion took place on encouraging a core curriculum and linking it to financial aid at Delaware's colleges (an Indiana idea). Using college placement or other similar assessment tests in Grade 11 were also discussed. They have the advantage of sending high school students a message about their future as well as giving high schools a level of accountability.

There was some concern within the council about the willingness of teachers to raise the current standards and the belief that students just can't meet those standards. There was also discussion of timing—whether Delaware has the luxury of a decade-long process (Indiana) or needs to move more aggressively. Cohen added that not all improvements need to be legislated, that often sending signals to students and parents about what they need to do can be just as effective.

Attachments:

Achieve Report:

Sec. Woodruff's Memo: