

PAUL S. BAUMBACH
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
23rd District



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE OF DELAWARE
411 LEGISLATIVE AVENUE
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

April 17, 2015

Dear Colleague:

The real education of our young citizens is of major concern. They will be valuable contributors to the fabric of Delaware's health and economy, or they will be a drag on the progress of our fair state to the tune of a greater prison population, unemployment and a tax burden on an already overloaded system. Keeping our young people in school and moving forward to a productive adulthood is a serious matter and should be our goal. To risk any other outcome is not acceptable.

There are three reasons to read the attached HR 23 School Retention and Social Promotion Task Force Report:

- 1.) It is barely over three pages in length
- 2.) The Recommendations to Legislators Section is just barely over a half page
- 3.) To save time, I am providing those recommendations here:

Recommendations for Legislators

Therefore, the task force members make the following recommendations to legislators for consideration in addressing social promotion and student retention.

Overall, it is suggested that legislators consider using or identifying current funding or other possible funding streams to support the following recommendations per school level:

Elementary

- Expand/sustain funding of existing early education programs such as Readiness Teams, quality pre-school programs, Early Childhood Education Programs (ECAP), Parents as Teachers, additional Family Crisis Therapists) in order to get greatest benefit for money spent, as it is at this point in life that there would be the most impact per dollar on a young person's life
- Fund extra time programming including transportation, both during the school year and summer.

Secondary (Middle School)

- Fund after school activities (clubs, sports, music, academic catch up)
- Establish funds for exploratory CTE programming at middle school level, which exposes students early to careers and educational opportunities, ultimately providing them a trajectory.

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Secondary (High School)

-Create more vocational pathways for grades 9-12 and continue to support CTE program expansion.

-Regarding CTE, perform needs analysis, supply and demand for middle skill vocational slots in addition to consideration of employer demand.

-Mental Health Continuum – engage outside entity to conduct and utilize needs analysis for mental health services as needed by student population; statewide vs. district level, and to study social service coordination; potential of including additional jobs; use this needs analysis to drive funding decision at all grade levels in schools.

Thank you very much for your work in our General Assembly.

Sincerely,



Paul Baumbach
State Representative, 23rd RD



Donald Blakey
State Representative, 34th RD, Retired

HR 23 School Retention and Social Promotion

The Task Force's Mission

House Resolution 23 established a task force to study and provide alternative solutions to school retention and social promotion. The resolution noted that “social promotion, established to keep failing students on grade level socially, is often viewed as severely crippling in later years”; and “grade retention, established to provide affected students a review of missed or failed subject matter, is often viewed as ineffective as a positive educational tool.” Both practices “severely negatively affect minority and poor students” and “the end result is the loss of valuable manpower for the American workforce and a significant negative presence in the criminal justice system.” The task force was ultimately tasked with “providing educationally appropriate and manageable alternative solutions,” and for reporting its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor by March 1, 2015. House Resolution 6 which passed the House on March 17, 2015, extended the deadline for the task force’s final report to the General Assembly and the Governor to April 21, 2015. This is the report of the HR 23 School Retention and Social Promotion Task Force.

Members of the School Retention and Social Promotion Task Force

Representative Paul Baumbach	Chair, Representative of House of Representatives
Tina Shockley	Policy Advisor/Facilitator, Department of Education
Susan Haberstroh	Department of Education Representative
Patricia Anderson	Representative of State Senate
Alton Irvin	Representative of State Senate
Donald Blakey	Representative of House of Representatives
Michele Marinucci	Delaware Association of School Administrators
Phyllis Kohel	Representative of Chief School Officers Association (Kent)
Dolan Blakey	Representative of Chief School Officers Association (New Castle)
Robert Fulton	Representative of Chief School Officers Association (Sussex)
Dana Kelley	Teacher appointed by Delaware State Education Association
Victoria Seifred	Teacher appointed by Delaware State Education Association
Dr. Terry Whitaker	Representative of Delaware State Board of Education
Donna Johnson	Representative of Delaware State Board of Education
Joe Brumskill	Representative of Delaware School Boards Association
John Skrobot	Representative of Delaware School Boards Association
Kendall Massett	Representative of Charter Schools Network

Current Status

The Task Force met for a total of seven meetings, with various research and discussion occurring at each meeting. Our first step was to determine where we currently were in terms of statistics.

With regard to social promotion, we found this occurs most at elementary school level. We do have a state statute that requires all students in grades 1-8 to pass at least 50% of their four core content areas, including English Language Arts. It was also noted that the statewide retention percentage is 3%. It was noted ethnicity has little to do with it, as the percentages were about the same for Caucasians and African-Americans, and slightly less for other ethnicities. It was noted that males are more likely to be retained than females, 62% versus 38%.

With regard to dropout data, it was noted that Delaware currently has its lowest dropout rate in 30 years. The statewide dropout rate is currently 2.1%. It was noted that ninth grade is a precarious year for students

to drop out of school. Therefore, we must work to keep students in school during the transition from middle school to high school.

We also researched the four-year graduation rate and found it to be 84.4%, based on current 2013-14 data. Our research showed that as a state we are doing many things well in terms of addressing social promotion and student retention, but we still have been challenged to continue to make this a priority in our education system and to do more and find new ways to address this issue.

Research

Task force members researched national studies, data, research and legislation via the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) and Council of State Governments (CSG). Ultimately it was noted that states, including Delaware, should focus on:

- Creating sustained urgency around high school graduation
- Strengthening resolve for reading literacy by 3rd grade.
- Providing incentives for collaboration
- Providing options and pathways to engage all students (including career and technical education opportunities)
- Creating and maintaining connections from school work to life after public school
- Providing personalized learning opportunities
- Insisting on high expectations for students
- Putting excellent teachers, principals and other caring adults in schools
- Identifying and supporting struggling students
- Strengthening drop out recovery programs
- Identifying and providing vocational pathways opportunities, as these have been shown to increase graduation rates and decrease drop out rates.

While we already do many of these things, we should focus on particular gaps in service, programs, etc. which exist.

Gaps/What's Needed

The task force identified several areas where gaps exist and more focus needs to be given. They include:

- More funding to provide additional services for students at risk of drop out or retention
- Additional Mental Health Counselors (also known as Family Crisis Therapists or Behavior Specialists) in our schools
- After school activities and/or summer school catch up opportunities
- Enrichment activities, such as music, sports, clubs, etc.
- Student's voice/viewpoint of their needs
- Summer programs at elementary level help to address regression and allow students to catch up or stay on course.

Recommendations for Legislators

Therefore, the task force members make the following recommendations to legislators for consideration in addressing social promotion and student retention.

Overall, it is suggested that legislators consider using or identifying current funding or other possible funding streams to support the following recommendations per school level:

Elementary

- Expand/sustain funding of existing early education programs such as Readiness Teams, quality pre-school programs, Early Childhood Education Programs (ECAP), Parents as Teachers, additional Family Crisis Therapists) in order to get greatest benefit for money spent, as it is at this point in life that there would be the most impact per dollar on a young person's life
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- Create more vocational pathways for grades 9-12 and continue to support CTE program expansion.
- Regarding CTE, perform needs analysis, supply and demand for middle skill vocational slots in addition to consideration of employer demand.
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Recommendations for Department of Education/Local Education Agencies

The task force believes it is important to identify recommendations for both the Department of Education and local education agencies to work together to create opportunities to keep students in school and help those students who are in danger of retention. These include:

- Create a clearinghouse of strategies for sharing ideas across all local education agencies (e.g., statewide professional development day to share best practices)
- Differentiated Learning – promoting Response to Intervention (RtI)
- Promote/implement programs with no to low additional cost (e.g., in house mentoring, advisor-advisee, Ed Insight)
- Repurpose existing funding at district level (e.g., repurpose existing positions, examine current funding to identify how different streams can be used more efficiently, use Title I funds to hire social workers, etc.)
- Identify programs that have been successful, and pilot them in other local education agencies; ensuring the collection of before and after data
- Encourage all local education agencies to use Ed Insight Dashboard in order to improve student outcomes, as it includes a drop out indicator (DEWS), it helps teachers better understand student's challenges, it can be used in IEP meetings and parent/teacher conferences and is flexible.
- Review iTracker system, which can also be used to identify academic index re: attendance, classwork and discipline; consider identifying information that can be pulled from iTracker to Ed Insight Dashboard
- Consider streamlining Apex/Edmentum to be purchased in bulk at the state level vs. district level, which would decrease cost to local education agency.

- Consider alternatives to retention at elementary level, including, but not limited to, positive behavior system, deterrence of retention, alternate means of education (such as online courses and Twilight and Daylight programs), etc.
- Focus on early intervention by identifying children (younger than 5 years old) through Readiness Teams, Parents as Teachers, kindergarten screenings, Child Find, etc. to provide necessary supports to younger non-school aged siblings who have the potential to be at risk of future retention and/or social promotion