

# Case Study No. 10

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

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## **Strategic Reinvention: The Rodel Foundation of Delaware's Journey to Catalyzing a System of World-Class Schools**

by LYNN JENKINS AND MICHELLE WISDOM

OCTOBER 2014

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

Discipline & Focus	Knowledge	Resources Linked to Results	Effective Grantees	Engaged Partners	Leverage, influence & Collaboration	Persistence	Innovation & Constant Learning
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>DEFINING THE VISION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>A CHANGING TIDE – AND A RACE</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>A MULTIPLICITY OF ROLES</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>ENGAGING THE PUBLIC IN PUBLIC EDUCATION</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>THE FOUNDATION RETHINKS ITS MISSION AND STRATEGY</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>PLAYING OUT THE NEW STRATEGY</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>TAKING STOCK – AND RELISHING THE MOMENTUM</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>THE STATE EMBARKS ON ITS NEW PLAN</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>TRANSLATING LESSONS FROM ABROAD</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>HEARING WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>REFLECTIONS</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>ATTACHMENTS AND EXHIBITS</b>	<b>28</b>

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Rodel Foundation  
of Delaware

## INTRODUCTION

*The U.S. electronics industry dominated the world for many years, but by the 1980s, other countries were making remarkable innovations and developing tools that were better than anything being made in this country. It was very troubling for me to see the competition building abroad. I had grown up in an America that dominated the world, but now that was no longer the case. It became clear to me that we had to figure out how to educate American kids to compete with their international peers.*

*William (Bill) D. Budinger, Founder of the Rodel Charitable Foundation of Delaware<sup>1</sup>*

As the summer of 2014 began, Paul Herdman, President and CEO of the Rodel Charitable Foundation of Delaware, paused to reflect on what the First State had accomplished over the past decade in the public education realm. Because the state had created a much stronger early learning infrastructure, thousands of children per year, particularly low-income children, were now participating in higher quality learning experiences. Academic standards had been raised across the K-12 system, and a new assessment system aligned to those standards was being rolled out. The state's data infrastructure was now one of the best in the country, and principals and teachers were using that information to rethink how they could better support students. There was better alignment in how the adults in the system – teachers as well as principals – were being trained, evaluated, and coached. New, highly selective pipelines for teachers and leaders were growing. The number of seats available in good schools in Delaware's highest need communities was on track to double over the next few years. And stronger bridges to college and careers were being built.

With these important building blocks in place, the state's education outcomes had been improving. While national assessment had plateaued in recent years, virtually all of the in-state metrics – from early learning quality seats to dropout and graduation rates to college matriculation – were moving in the right direction.

All in all, there was much to celebrate. Many other states had been struggling to keep their public education change efforts on track, but Delaware was still making steady progress. And although there had been some bumps along the way, the public-private partnership that had been leading the state's education improvements over the past decade was still intact. With an influx of federal and state funding and much help from the Rodel Foundation and other private and public sector leaders, Delaware's public education system had moved from "below average" to "good." The challenge now was how to move it from good to excellent. (See Attachment A for a snapshot of Delaware's education system.)

That was the challenge embodied in *A Vision for Education in Delaware in 2025 (ED25)*, the state's new 10-year education plan, currently being developed. Since the beginning of 2014, an array of stakeholders and experts, supported by consultants from the Parthenon consulting firm, had been synthesizing research, discussing, debating, and drafting goals and recommendations to build on what had already been accomplished due

<sup>1</sup> Interview with William (Bill) Budinger, July 25, 2014. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Mr. Budinger are from this interview.

to Delaware's Vision 2015 plan, the state's Race To The Top work, and other efforts. They had also been consulting with international advisors to learn about the inner workings of high-performing school systems around the world and to consider how to adapt their policies and practices to the Delaware context.

Herdman and his colleagues at the Rodel Foundation had been managing and supporting these efforts, in tandem with other partners, and were excited about the work underway. Nevertheless, they were anxious about the future. In about a year, with the hard work of implementation at its peak, the state's Race To The Top funding would come to an end. There was a major leadership transition on the horizon as well. At the end of 2016, two-term Governor Jack Markell would be leaving office due to term limits. His education goals had been closely aligned with the Foundation's, and there was no guarantee that the next governor would be as tenacious about education reform. With these and other unknowns on the horizon, sustainability was often on Paul Herdman's mind.

## OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Herdman had become President and CEO of the Rodel Charitable Foundation of Delaware a decade earlier, in 2004. The operating foundation was one of a small group of public and private foundations launched in 1999 by the Budinger family, whose specialty chemical firm Rodel, Inc. (short for "Rollers of Delaware") had originated in Wilmington in 1969. Soon after assuming his new position, Herdman launched a comprehensive study of Delaware's school system. A team of national experts – with input from education, business, government, and civic leaders – spent a year studying everything from student achievement and graduation rates to school funding, teacher quality, and more. The resulting report, *Opportunity Knocks*:<sup>2</sup>

*. . . provided an honest snapshot of the condition of education in the state, including its evident assets (notably its financial resources and small size), as well as an unflinching look at the alarming racial gaps in educational achievement, relatively low high school graduation and college enrollment rates, and a growing mismatch between the workforce skills required to fuel Delaware's economic growth and the performance of the state's education system. Perhaps most illuminating . . . was that Delaware ranked 8th in per pupil spending but 27th in student achievement.*<sup>3</sup>

The report intentionally did not include any recommendations, so that there could be agreement on how Delaware stacked up relative to the nation. Yet it left no doubt about the need for major changes. As its introduction stated, "Tinkering at the edges of reform will not move us to where we need to be."

The launch of the *Opportunity Knocks* report was broad-based, featuring Herdman, the Secretary of

<sup>2</sup> Rodel Foundation of Delaware, *Opportunity Knocks: Assessing Delaware's Education System*, July 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Alvord, *Persistence and Agility: The Rodel Foundation of Delaware's Efforts to Transform Delaware's Education System*, Grantmakers For Education, October 2012.

Education, the chair of the Business Roundtable, the Secretary of Labor, and the President of the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League. And in the months after its release, the report provided the impetus for Herdman and the Rodel Foundation Board of Directors to re-think the Foundation's strategy. In the past, Rodel's primary focus had been expanding the supply of charter schools and the demand among parents for high-performing schools, but Herdman and others realized that it was time to consider a broader approach and build a broader base of support. As founder Bill Budinger observed:

*Many people advised us early on that the education establishment is so huge that the only way we were going to make any difference would be to pick one element and focus all of our energy on that. But we felt that in order to lift everybody up, we needed to go after it holistically. In other words, attempting reform at the school or district level might yield positive results without changing the system itself.*

After much deliberation, the Foundation developed and adopted a new strategic plan that focused on three core areas. First, it would continue to invest in new schools and parent engagement activities such as the Delaware Parent Leadership Institute. Second, it would invest deeply in two or three districts that would serve as exemplars for innovation and change. And third, it would advance and support state-level policy changes in an effort to reshape the system as a whole. The overarching goal of the new strategy, said Herdman, was to provide “help, hope, and heat” to effect major changes in Delaware's schools. “Help is about making targeted investments in efforts that we think are high impact, scalable, and sustainable,” he explained. “Hope is about identifying national or international best practices – often focused on underserved students – and informing policy. And heat is about applying public or private pressure on the system to move, if the hope and help are not sufficient to lead to the appropriate changes.”<sup>4</sup>

## DEFINING THE VISION

*Opportunity Knocks* not only provided the impetus for refocusing the Foundation's efforts; it also provided a way to rally diverse stakeholders around the need for major changes in the state's education system. In 2005, in partnership with the Delaware Business Roundtable, Herdman and his team formed a steering committee of 28 leaders from across the state – carefully chosen to represent a range of perspectives from the education, business, advocacy, and government sectors – to develop a state education plan to address the challenges revealed in *Opportunity Knocks*. As the steering committee met, there were inevitable differences of opinion from time to time, both about the changes that needed to be made and the process by which they should occur. But the independent facilitators guiding the steering committee's work<sup>5</sup> kept the members focused on shared goals, providing the glue that kept the coalition from splintering.

In October 2006, after almost a year of meetings and focus groups, the Vision 2015 plan was complete. It contained 45 recommendations for improving Delaware's education system, aimed at advancing early

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Paul Herdman, July 10, 2014. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Mr. Herdman are from this interview.

<sup>5</sup> The facilitators were underwritten partly by the Rodel Foundation and partly by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation.

childhood education, raising academic standards, improving teacher quality, empowering principals, spurring innovation, and revamping school funding. All of the steering committee members ultimately endorsed the new plan, and with coordinating and financial support from the Rodel Foundation, the coalition of public and private leaders unveiled it at a series of public forums and “road show” events.

Because Vision 2015 was a high-quality plan grounded in research and because Rodel had invested significant resources in developing it, the plan’s successful execution was a high priority. If the Foundation could help leverage changes in public policy, Herdman and his team realized, there was the potential for a tremendous return on their investment, from a mission perspective. Knowing that comprehensive change efforts often falter due to piecemeal implementation, the Foundation’s leaders decided that the best way to capitalize on the work was to prepare omnibus legislation for the upcoming 2007 session. For months, they worked with analysts from Boston Consulting Group to cost out all of the Vision 2015 reforms. The estimated price tag totaled almost \$200 million.

When they tried to garner support for the package, however, they hit a wall. In particular, some members of the Vision 2015 Implementation Team – a subset of the steering committee that had been formed to move the plan’s recommendations forward – were not supportive of all the components of the proposed legislation. As an observer summarized, “The union hadn’t done enough leg work around the evaluation piece, superintendents were not ready to give principals more autonomy, and the Secretary of Education was not ready to change funding.”<sup>6</sup>

Herdman realized that he and others on the steering committee had significantly underestimated the amount of groundwork required to move the Vision 2015 plan from vision to implementation. The unexpected setbacks caused Rodel’s leadership team to reevaluate how best to support the Vision 2015 effort. Realizing that some of the changes called for in the plan did not depend on legislative action, and that many schools and districts were amenable to change without pressure from above, a subset of the implementation team proposed to form a new entity called the “Vision Network,” a coalition of schools that would be given more flexibility to redesign the system as well as be given the support from the various players around the table, from the state to the private sector to navigate around or through the roadblocks.

The Vision 2015 Implementation Team endorsed the idea. Schools could join the Vision Network if they pledged to implement Vision 2015 priorities such as using student data to improve instruction, empowering school leaders, and sharing best practices. They would receive training on how to develop a school-level plan to address a particular instructional focus area, and would also have access to networking opportunities, site visits to high performing systems, greater autonomy, and seed funding for innovations. To get the Network concept off the ground, Rodel staffed the effort pro bono until full-time staff could be hired.

At the same time, Rodel’s leaders had not given up on the need for state-level funding for other Vision 2015 recommendations. As Herdman noted, “The thought was that if there wasn’t new money, perhaps existing dollars could be reallocated.” With leverage from the Vision 2015 steering committee, then-Governor Minner

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Alvord, *Persistence and Agility*, page 11.

issued an executive order calling for an efficiency study of the state's education system. The intensive analysis, conducted by Boston Consulting Group with financial support from the Rodel Foundation and Delaware Business Roundtable, identified up to \$158 million in the state education budget that could be saved through improved efficiencies and redeployed.<sup>7</sup> Even so, support for the Vision 2015 recommendations remained limited in the 2008 legislative session due to a lack of leadership from both the Democratic and Republican parties, and the state's \$1.6 billion education budget that year included no funding to support the effort.

## A CHANGING TIDE – AND A RACE

As the months rolled by, Rodel's leaders kept trying to mobilize support to implement the Vision 2015 recommendations. Progress remained frustratingly slow. But 2008 was a big election year, and Herdman and his team saw the election season as an opportunity to focus voters' attention on education. In the early fall, the Foundation partnered with the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce and the *News Journal* to sponsor the state's first gubernatorial candidate debate on education. All of the gubernatorial candidates pledged their support for Vision 2015. And as the fall elections approached, gubernatorial candidate and former Rodel Advisory Council member Jack Markell issued a blueprint for education in Delaware that was consistent with many aspects of the Vision 2015 plan.

Markell's November victory provided the pivot that Herdman and his colleagues had been waiting for. In January 2009, Markell spoke boldly in his inaugural address about his commitment to transforming the state's education system. "We will spend smarter and demand accountability from top to bottom," he declared. "We will retain, recruit, and train the best teachers in America and reward them for carrying out the most valuable job in Delaware. We will demand the performance, promote the innovation, and provide the flexibility to make every school great."<sup>8</sup>

There was more fuel for Vision 2015 in the summer of 2009 when newly elected President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the new \$4.35 billion Race To The Top (RTTT) grant competition. RTTT would reward states that committed themselves to implementing rigorous academic standards, developing better data systems, implementing performance-based standards for teachers and principals, and pursuing bold strategies for turning around struggling schools. The competition spurred Delaware leaders into action. Within months, the General Assembly voted to join the national Common Core Standards Initiative<sup>9</sup> and adopt a new student assessment system. The State Board of Education also began working on new regulations to increase accountability and flexibility in the schools.

Governor Markell was determined to have Delaware submit a highly competitive application for Race To The Top funding, and Herdman and his staff worked closely with the Governor's office and a team of McKinsey consultants to draft it. The application made a strong case for why Delaware deserved to win. Unlike many

<sup>7</sup> Boston Consulting Group, *Cost Efficiency in Delaware Education: Final Report on Efficiency Opportunities*, January 10, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Governor Jack Markell, *Inaugural Address*, January 21, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Governor Markell was later named co-chair of the Common Core Standards Initiative.

other states, it already had a robust data system that linked student and teacher data. Moreover, Delaware was “small enough to make true statewide reform achievable.” As the application narrative explained, “Reform will be managed face-to-face, not via a remote bureaucracy, allowing the State to act quickly in response to challenges and opportunities. By proving that reform is possible with the same complex conditions that other states face (e.g. diverse stakeholders, limited funding, complex governance) . . . Delaware will become a laboratory for reform for the nation.”<sup>10</sup>

Herdman and other Delaware leaders were confident of the state’s application, but they were nonetheless surprised on March 29, 2010, when Secretary Duncan announced that Delaware was one of only two winners in the first round. The state would receive \$119 million over four years, split between the state and local districts, to support its plan. Not everyone was elated about the federal Race To The Top competition; some, like Rick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute, predicted that any early results would quickly dwindle due to the education system’s pervasive dysfunction. Yet Rodel’s leadership team saw Race To The Top as a golden opportunity. At last, the federal government’s, the Governor’s, and the Foundation’s priorities all appeared to be aligned.

## A MULTIPLICITY OF ROLES

It took longer than initially expected to get some of Delaware’s RTTT work off the ground, given the magnitude and complexity of the efforts underway.<sup>11</sup> But as time went on, an array of sweeping new policies and initiatives were set in motion. Herdman and his staff worked in a variety of roles to move the work forward. One of the Foundation’s most important roles was to be a convener, bringing leaders from different groups together to strategize or to work through challenges. Just as they had been instrumental in forging the public-private partnership that led to the Vision 2015 plan and Race To The Top win, for example, the Foundation also played a pivotal role in bringing stakeholders together in 2011 to increase state investments in early childhood education and to develop a winning Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (ELC) application, which secured another \$49 million from the federal government to fund priority initiatives.

The Foundation also played a key role as catalyst, spurring policy makers to embrace needed policy changes and urging decision makers to make the hard choices required. Herdman and his team were instrumental in efforts to revise the state’s teacher evaluation system, for example, and in paving the way for the expansion of alternative teacher training programs such as Teach For America to address the state’s urgent need for high-quality educators. Still, not all of the efforts went as far as they had hoped. The state’s policy work on turning around chronically low-performing schools was an example. As Herdman explained:

<sup>10</sup> *State of Delaware, Race To The Top Proposal, January 2010.*

<sup>11</sup> *For example, State Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery (2009-2012) had to request a one-year extension on implementing the state’s new teacher and principal evaluation system. Staff turnover within the DDOE also caused some project delays. For more information, see: U.S. Department of Education, Delaware Report: Year 3: School Year 2012– 2013, March 19, 2014.*

*There was a lot of political tension with so many reforms happening all at once, and as a result, the school turnaround regulations ended up not being as aggressive as they could have been. Early on, we predicted that political pressures would lead to turnaround strategies that were modest as a result of negotiation, and that is what happened. As a result, the state has spent millions of dollars trying to turn around a small number of schools, and the effort has not yielded the results that you would want to see.*

Herdman and his team therefore believed that an essential part of their role was to keep a close eye on implementation and provide the pressure and support needed for continuous improvement. In the case of school turnarounds, they decided that one way to help state leaders recognize the shortcomings of the existing strategy was to show them what success looked like. “We put state and local leaders on a plane and took them to places like the Academy for Urban School Leadership in Chicago and Mastery Charter Schools in Philadelphia, so they could see where turnarounds were working,” Herdman said. “That led to a much better understanding that the initial strategy was not strong enough.”

This was just one way in which the Foundation helped to support the state’s change efforts. Sometimes, support meant funding – for example, providing grants to schools or districts piloting innovative strategies. Other times, it meant staffing support. For example, through a partnership with Harvard University’s Strategic Data Project (SDP),<sup>12</sup> the Foundation paid the salary for a data fellow to work within the Delaware Department of Education to conduct research using the state’s longitudinal data system. As Secretary of Education Mark Murphy (2012-) explained, this type of assistance was valuable to the Department and to the state as a whole:

*In the case of the SDP work, Rodel’s role went well beyond paying the data fellow’s salary. They spearheaded the vision for using data to understand key issues. Based on the work, we ended up generating two research reports. One helped us really understand what was going on with human capital in Delaware. The other was a college-going study where we tracked a cohort of students over time to see what happened to them. We used the first to drive an overhaul of educator preparation through legislation and the second to drive a whole new college access strategy. In the last year, we have gotten more positive press on the latter than anything else we’ve done, and it has resulted in real, meaningful changes for kids.<sup>13</sup>*

As a result, Secretary Murphy believed that Rodel’s role in the state’s education improvement efforts was “massively important.” As he reflected:

<sup>12</sup> Part of the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University, the Strategic Data Project (SDP)’s mission is to transform the use of data in education to improve student achievement. Delaware’s partners in the SDP program included the Rodel and Longwood Foundations and the Delaware Department of Education.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Secretary of Education Mark Murphy, July 30, 2014. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Secretary Murphy are from this interview.

*They have been a critical component of the good work that's going on here, helping to move the education agenda forward in a variety of ways. Sometimes it's by convening people to facilitate a conversation or to plan. Sometimes it's bringing in experts from other places to inform a strategy we are putting together. Sometimes it's offering manpower to do work that we don't have capacity to do. I think you can make a fairly strong argument that Delaware would not have advanced many of the policies on behalf of kids that we are advancing right now – everything from early childhood education, to great data for educators, to college access – without Rodel.*

## **ENGAGING THE PUBLIC IN PUBLIC EDUCATION**

As time went on, and implementation of the Vision 2015 recommendations continued, the meaning of the phrase “the devil is in the details” was becoming increasingly apparent. In particular, Herdman and other Delaware leaders were frustrated that some of the state’s change efforts were being compromised at the district level. In April 2011, for example, the Christina School District Board of Education had voted not to enact some of the turnaround strategies it had committed to undertake in its failing schools. Then-Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery, with the governor’s support, had responded by freezing \$11 million of the district’s RTTT funding, beginning what would become an ongoing battle.

Knowing how much would be lost if the work underway fell apart in implementation, Herdman felt that it was time to take a more concerted approach to increasing local support for the change efforts. Back in 2008, Rodel and its business and community partners had identified the need for an education advocacy organization that would mobilize public will, and in response, the Foundation had helped launch a new entity called Education Voters of Delaware, an affiliate of a national organization. Its director had played a key role in helping get school boards and legislators to sign on to RTTT. But when the national Education Voters organization decided to narrow its focus to funding equity, the Delaware partners had decided that it was no longer the right fit, and the local chapter folded.

Faced with an ongoing need for more grassroots support for education policy changes, the Foundation decided in 2011 to support the launch of a new 501(C)3 nonprofit called Voices 4 Delaware Education. One of its first priorities was to educate voters about the major change initiatives underway and motivate them to vote in the May 2012 school board elections. A 501(C)4 and Political Action Committee (PAC) affiliated with Voices were also created, with separate boards and funding streams, so that they could get more involved in specific campaigns. In April, the 501(C)4 partnered with local PTA affiliates on a survey that asked school board candidates where they stood on issues such as school choice, restructuring low-performing schools, and the Common Core. State Rep. John Kowalko wrote an angry letter to the national PTA organization denouncing the survey – in particular, a question pertaining to candidates’ views on teachers unions.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Letter from John Kowalko to the National PTA, April 27, 2012. The letter did not mention that the Delaware State Education Association’s political action committee was a major contributor to Kowalko’s political campaigns.

Matters grew more heated when the 501(C)4 advocacy organization<sup>15</sup> distributed fliers supporting specific school board candidates in three of the state's largest districts and the PAC began contributing to their campaigns. Some critics denounced these efforts to influence local political races, and 62 people signed a change.org petition calling for the Voices PAC to reveal its board members, donors, and expenditures.<sup>16</sup> Rep. Kowalko pressed for an investigation. In a letter to the elections commissioner, he wrote: "The fact that candidates in school board elections are aspiring to a difficult, unpaid and often thankless job of policy making on behalf of public education leaves no room for well-heeled special interests to impose their agendas and manipulate public perception."<sup>17</sup>

When the May 8, 2012 board election results came in, none of the candidates supported by the Voices 4 Delaware Education PAC had won. Each of the contested elections had higher-than-average turnout, but this had benefited the incumbents, not the challengers.<sup>18</sup>

As he reflected on the election results, Paul Herdman realized that even though Rodel had not supported or been involved with the political activities of the Voices 501(C)4 entity or the PAC, its involvement in the 501(C)3 of a similar name had raised concerns about the Foundation's role. Furthermore, the perception that the Foundation was involving itself in local politics could place its more important roles as a convener and catalyst at risk. As Herdman reflected, "Given the current context – in which the Foundation was so well aligned with the administration, and there was so much work to do in implementing Race To The Top – we felt that if we continued on the current path, we would have been too 'hot' to be at the table, and we would be forfeiting our ability to move public policy in the way that was crucial to our mission."

Herdman therefore decided to end the Foundation's support for the Voices 4 Delaware Education 501(C)3, and the entity folded for this and other reasons. Nevertheless, he and his colleagues continued to see the need for more "heat" – in other words, greater public pressure for systemic change.

## THE FOUNDATION RETHINKS ITS MISSION AND STRATEGY

Herdman's decision to rethink the Foundation's public engagement strategy was part of a broader strategic planning effort undertaken by the Foundation in 2012 with help from the Parthenon Group. Now that the state's reform efforts were well underway and the focus was shifting to implementation, it seemed to be a good time to take a step back to reflect on the Foundation's work. Just as the Vision 2015 effort years before had begun with an environmental scan, one of the first steps in Rodel's new strategic planning process was a series of interviews with stakeholders across the state to see how they viewed the Foundation and its role in the state's education agenda. The interviews conducted by the Parthenon consultants yielded an array of comments and observations regarding the Foundation's strengths as well as its challenges (Exhibit 1).

<sup>15</sup> A 501(C)3 organization cannot support or oppose anyone running for public office but can be involved in political campaigns via public forums, voter registration drives, etc. A 501(C)4 entity can engage in political campaign activity if it is consistent with the organization's purpose and is not its primary activity.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.change.org/petitions/transparency-in-delaware-school-board-elections>

<sup>17</sup> WGMD 92.7 – *The Talk of Delmarva*, "NCCo Officials Ask for Investigation Into Voices 4 Delaware Education Action Fund," May 2, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Voter turnout in school districts: Red Clay; 2,375 voters (+176 from prior election); Christina; 1,426 voters (+707); Appoquinimink; 1,294 voters (+536).

**Exhibit 1: Stakeholder Feedback on  
Rodel Foundation’s Strengths and Challenges, 2012**

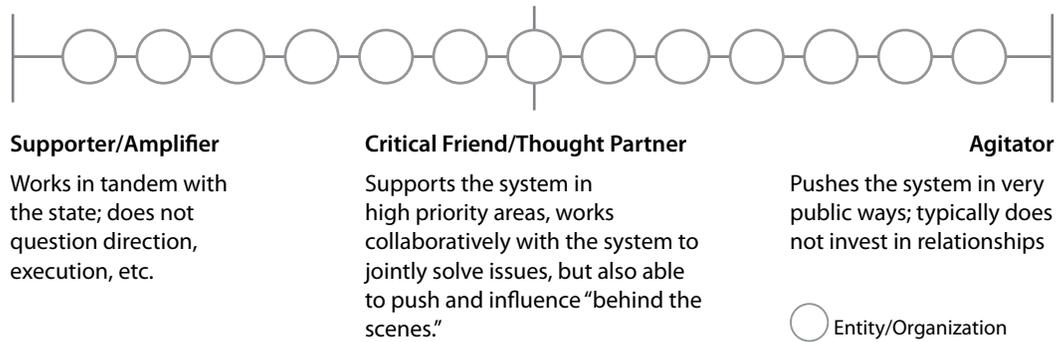
Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action-oriented stance</li> <li>• Good relationships at the state level</li> <li>• Use of data and evidence-based approaches</li> <li>• Success in leveraging the business community</li> <li>• Smart, talented staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundation’s voice has become blurred with that of the business community</li> <li>• Sometimes imposes solutions rather than engaging in joint problem-solving</li> <li>• Staff / resources are spread too thin as Foundation tries to be all things to all people</li> <li>• A perception that Foundation overreached into politics</li> <li>• Needs stronger relationships with legislature, union, and districts</li> </ul>

In addition to gathering input from stakeholders, the Parthenon team analyzed the context for education reform in Delaware. Specifically, their goal was to answer the questions: *What has changed over the years? And what impact do these changes have on the Foundation’s work?* Some of their findings were not surprising. For example, increasing globalization meant that it no longer made sense to focus on Delaware’s education system within a national frame of reference; it was important to situate it within an international context.

The Parthenon consultants also urged the Rodel team to think deeply about the roles they were currently filling vs. the roles that would be most productive for them to fill in the future. To guide this analysis, they used a “mode of engagement” continuum to depict the spectrum of roles that education foundations and other entities can fill, ranging from “Supporter/ Amplifier” at one end to “Agitator” at the other (see Exhibit 2). As the consultants explained, “Benchmarking against other states suggests that continued progress of education reform depends to a large extent on the presence of a healthy education ‘ecosystem’ with a wide range of voices across the Supporter/Agitator spectrum to simultaneously support and push the system.” They also explained that funders tend to stay near the middle of the spectrum, though many also invest in supportive and capacity-building organizations working at the left end of the continuum. Generally speaking, Foundations are less likely to occupy the right end of the spectrum.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Rodel Foundation Strategic Plan Draft, September 2012.

## Exhibit 2: Mode of Engagement Across the Education Ecosystem



Source: Rodel Foundation Strategic Plan Draft, September 2012.

As the Rodel staff analyzed Delaware’s education ecosystem, they saw that the Foundation had been playing a variety of roles across the continuum through its grantmaking, partnerships, and coalitions. For example, the Foundation’s investments in high-quality charter schools and innovative school models were at the “Supporter/Amplifier” end of the spectrum. Its role in the Vision 2015 effort was consistent with the “Critical Friend/Thought Partner” mode of engagement, near the center. But the Voices 4 Delaware Education work was near the “Agitator” end. As Paul Herdman observed, “We realized that we were all over the map, and it was causing confusion among stakeholders as to exactly who we were and what we were doing.”

Accordingly, Herdman and the Board decided that the Foundation needed to make some changes. The first step was to revise its mission statement. Only the last three words of the former mission statement (“to help make Delaware one of the finest public education systems in the nation by 2012”) were replaced, but their significance was profound: To help make Delaware one of the finest public education systems in the world by 2020. Achieving this mission would in turn require changes to the Foundation’s operating principles, content areas, strategies, and outcomes.

After weeks of analysis, planning, and refinement, the new strategic plan was finalized in the fall of 2012. It called for the Foundation to continue concentrating its efforts on the three main areas it had focused on in the past: Policy, Practice, and Public Will. But what it did within each of these areas would change. In the policy and practice realms, Rodel’s focus would be narrowed to a few content areas in which there was the greatest potential for moving the needle on student achievement: human capital (developing great teachers and leaders) and innovation and personalization of learning. The Foundation would also continue to devote some of its time and resources to providing thought partnership on other issues that state leaders identified as high priorities and that were core to Vision 2015 and RTTT. (See Attachment B for an overview of the new strategic plan.)

There would be an important shift in the Foundation’s public will efforts, too. Rodel would continue to try to build support and demand for changes to Delaware’s education system, but it would do so by expanding its role as a supporter and critical friend, rather than being an “agitator.” As Herdman explained, “We decided to double down on things like the Vision Network, which was widely appreciated and noncontroversial. We

doubled down on our work as a thought partner – for example, by doing more work with the Vision 2015 coalition and the Delaware Department of Education. We also decided to do more at the grass tops level, working with policymakers and influencers rather than grassroots audiences, while also trying to enhance other organizations’ capacity to carry out effective advocacy.”

The new strategic plan also called for the Foundation to become clearer about the outcomes that its leaders and Board would use to evaluate the success of its investments and activities. Rodel’s leaders had always been quite rigorous about evaluating the Foundation’s work, but the processes and tools they used to do so had become more sophisticated over time. With the new strategic plan in place, Herdman and his team began providing the Board with a one-page “dashboard” before the start of each new fiscal year. It listed goals for the upcoming year, along with a draft budget aligned with the goals. Once the Board reviewed the dashboard and staff made any necessary refinements, the dashboard and budget were approved. Throughout the year, staff updated the dashboard each quarter, assigning color codes to indicate the appropriate status: green for targets that were on track, yellow for those in which progress was being made despite challenges, and red for those that were off-track or had been stopped. As the Board reviewed the dashboard, they focused in particular on what needed to be done to turn the yellow and red items to green. The goals in the dashboard were also cascaded down to each member of the staff, and both collective and individual evaluations were based evidence of their impact. (See Attachment C for the FY14 dashboard and aligned budget information.)

## PLAYING OUT THE NEW STRATEGY

The Foundation’s new strategy necessitated reevaluating the existing staffing to determine whether any new staff with specific skill sets needed to be added to the mix. When Herdman had joined the Foundation, its staff consisted of just five members. Now, there were 15 staff members, and they reflected a broad range of expertise in the areas that the Foundation had defined as priorities – for example, research, policy, and communications. (See Attachment D for the Foundation’s organizational chart.) Decisions about what kinds of people to add to the team had always been highly strategic. As Senior Director of Partnerships Sarah Grunewald explained:

*Every year, we take all the work we are doing and put it on our dashboard and look at the capacity we have. Sometimes, we take existing people and revise their [work] scopes so they can help multiple teams. We’ve also used the Gallup StrengthsFinders assessments to figure out where our individual strengths are and where we need to fill in. When we don’t have the capacity or strengths we assess to be necessary, we sometimes contract out, but if we feel like it’s a long-term need, we explore creating a new position. In evaluating candidates, we have tried to institutionalize our core values [see Attachment E] as part of the interviewing process, so hiring involves a combination of the skills, strengths, and the core values we are looking for.<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Sarah Grunewald, July 14, 2014. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Ms. Grunewald are from this interview.

As a result of the Foundation's new strategic plan, its activities and presence began to change. To develop a common vision, Rodel needed strong buy-in from the highest levels. Accordingly, the Foundation's leadership team began to routinize meetings with a variety of key public sector leaders, to provide more frequent opportunities for in-depth conversations. At the same time, Herdman and his staff began pursuing new ways to engage educators and community members, knowing that their input was valuable and that they would continue to play a vital role in the state's education improvement efforts over time. As Herdman explained, "It was important for educators and community members across the state to own the change efforts and be committed to supporting them over the long haul."

In September 2013, for example, the Foundation launched an entity called the Rodel Teacher Council, a committee of 16 teachers from across the state who would come together to discuss topics of shared concern and provide input into the development of plans to significantly expand personalized learning in Delaware's schools.<sup>21</sup> To give further voice to educators, Foundation staff also decided to revise the format of the fall Vision 2015 conference, an annual event that Rodel coordinated on behalf of the Vision 2015 coalition to highlight recent reform achievements and share best practices. In its early years, the conference had focused mostly on best practices elsewhere. As Grunewald described, "We flew in experts from other places to talk about what they were doing and tried to get people to try out these ideas." For the Fall 2013 event, the Foundation staff decided to feature many more Delaware teachers, principals, leaders, and researchers in the program, in addition to their peers and experts from around the country. "Having more local voices tell the stories has been very successful," Grunewald said, "because people are hungry for opportunities to talk to and learn from each other, and also because the great things happening here in Delaware are being acknowledged and celebrated."

After the conference, as the Rodel team reviewed data on who had attended, the numbers surprised them. "People had this notion that it was just about the business community coming and talking to each other," Grunewald said, "but they were actually the smallest group, under ten percent of the attendees. The percentage of principals and teachers was much higher, about 25 percent. So we played that information back to correct people's misperceptions about it just being a business event."

This was part of a broader effort underway at the Foundation to be much more strategic about its communications. One early step was to develop a new website that provided much more information about the Foundation's history, current work, and organizational priorities. Rodel staff also began using the Foundation's blog and social media to highlight positive news and share thoughts on various education topics, augmenting the face-to-face meetings that had been their primary communications vehicle in the past. Their goal was to reach an ever-expanding database of in-state people, as well as an extensive national database that included contacts and relationships developed over the years. For example, Foundation staff began sending dedicated, branded e-mails to national and local stakeholders providing perspectives on state news pertaining to public education.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *The Rodel Teacher Council members were selected through a competitive process. For more information, see: Matthew Korobkin, "Announcing the 16 Rodel Teacher Council Members," Rodel Foundation Blog, September 10, 2013.*

<sup>22</sup> *Staff also began monitoring their communications "reach" more closely. By 2013, the Foundation's website had 10,703 users with 57,875 pageviews; they also had a primary e-mail list of 2,067 subscribers; 2,075 "likes" on Facebook; and 1,895 Twitter followers.*

The core purpose of these efforts, explained Vice President of Policy Madeleine Bayard, was for the Foundation to define its brand rather than leaving it for others to define. “It’s not that we were out to take credit,” Bayard noted. “It’s that in being humble, it was not always clear to people what our role was.”<sup>23</sup> Sarah Grunewald agreed. “In the past, we had always stayed behind the scenes and said, ‘It’s not about us.’ But that created a vacuum, and people were filling that vacuum with their own assumptions. So we decided that we needed to be more transparent and proactive about the work we do, and do more intentional work with Rodel’s name on it. We took the time to define it, then said: ‘Now let’s go out there.’” In addition to the Rodel Teacher Council, the Foundation began launching other Rodel-branded initiatives, such as iEducate Delaware, which profiled and celebrated champions in the education space.

Collectively, these efforts seemed to be making a difference, not only in clarifying the Foundation’s identity but also in extending its impact. As Bayard observed, “Having a clearer brand has allowed us to do more to inform policy in the state. Being more transparent and clear about who we are has also better positioned us to convene people and to ask for support from many different groups. We’re now more able to inform the political conversations.”

Nevertheless, some remained cynical about Rodel and its activities. As a state leader commented, “I think there is still a perception among some stakeholder groups that Rodel is closely affiliated with the business community, and some have used that perception to say that if Rodel is supporting this position or initiative, it must be business-driven or anti-union. That’s nonsensical, but it is the narrative for some.” Given this undercurrent, policy makers were sometimes wary of revealing how the Foundation was helping them. “As a result of that,” one observer noted, “they aren’t always getting credit in the public space for all of the good work they are doing.”

## **TAKING STOCK – AND RELISHING THE MOMENTUM**

By the middle of 2014, Delaware was well down the path of implementing its Vision 2015 and Race To the Top initiatives, and the question on everyone’s mind was: Were all of these changes moving the needle on student achievement? In mid-July, the state released preliminary data from the statewide assessment, the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment (DCAS), which suggested that the answer was “yes, but . . .”

Science assessment scores had improved from 2013 to 2014, from 42% of students demonstrating proficiency in 2013 to 46% in 2014. Reading and mathematics scores had not changed, but taking a longer view, the percentage of students at the Proficient level had increased from 62% to 72% in reading between 2011 and 2014, and from 61% to 69% in math over the same period. Moreover, these changes had occurred within the context of rising academic standards and more difficult assessments.<sup>24</sup> As Delaware Department of Education Chief of Staff Mary Kate McLaughlin emphasized, “We continue to raise the bar for our students,

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Madeleine Bayard, July 14, 2014. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Ms. Bayard are from this interview.

<sup>24</sup> Delaware Department of Education; DCAS data at: <http://dstp.doe.k12.de.us/DCASOR/default.aspx>

especially with the implementation of Common Core, and with the sustained results we've seen over the last two to three years, we see students really rising to those higher expectations.”<sup>25</sup>

By this time, Delaware's achievements were garnering national attention. In February 2013, the state won the prestigious Frank Newman Award for State Innovation from the Education Commission of the States (ECS). The announcement highlighted initiatives in Delaware that “have broken new ground, are yielding results, are replicable, and are scalable.” These included having one of the best data infrastructures in the country and a statewide system to provide support and time for all educators to work in professional learning communities. Commenting on the award, ECS President Jeremy Anderson said, “Delaware has emerged as a national leader in comprehensive education reform. Their innovative ideas, tremendous student gains and focus on data collection systems have paid off.”<sup>26</sup> Later that year, Delaware received further acclaim when the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) announced that it was one of just two states in the nation that had fulfilled its “10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use,” a set of rigorous criteria for high-quality data collection and use by education stakeholders.<sup>27</sup>

National audiences were not only taking note of what Delaware had achieved but also focusing on how it had done so. As a Center for American Progress report on the Race To The Top effort stated, “While pushing for change, Delaware has largely managed to preserve the statewide unity that marked its application.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, when the PIE Network presented the Rodel Foundation with an Eddies Award in 2013 for its role in strengthening teacher preparation, it applauded the Foundation for “bringing together a diverse coalition of businesses, the teachers union, and other interests to move the conversation forward.”<sup>29</sup>

The Rodel Board and staff were justifiably pleased by the external recognition that Delaware and the Foundation itself were receiving. But as Paul Herdman reflected in a January 2014 blog entry on the Foundation's website, there were still “a lot of hard conversations to be had . . . and a lot of implementation work to do.”<sup>30</sup>

## THE STATE EMBARKS ON ITS NEW PLAN

By the end of 2013, the Rodel Foundation was gearing up for the development of the successor to the Vision 2015 plan. The leaders involved referred to the effort as ED25, short for *A Vision for Education in Delaware in 2025*. The year-long process would begin in January 2014 and conclude a year later with the release of the final plan.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> “State Scores Plateau, Individual Schools Stand Out in Latest Delaware DCAS Results,” *NewsWorks*, July 17, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> *State of Delaware*, “Delaware Receives National Award for Innovative Education Policy,” *News Release*, February 28, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> For more details, see the Data Quality Campaign website: [www.dataqualitycampaign.org](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org).

<sup>28</sup> Ulrich Boser, *Race To The Top: What Have We Learned from the States So Far?* Center for American Progress, March 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Jeff Bakken, “Congratulations to the 2013 Eddies! Award Winners,” *PIE Network*, September 19, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Herdman, “Looking Ahead to 2014,” *Rodel Foundation Blog*, January 8, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> The ED25 development process was as follows: January and February 2014 – form committees, gather information, and generate ideas; February through May – draft the vision and strategy; June through October – gather public input on the draft plan; October 2014 through early 2015 – finalize the plan, prepare for public release, and start implementation.

Chairing the ED25 effort was Ernest J. Dianastasis, a Delaware business leader, chair of the Business Roundtable's Education Committee, and head of the Vision Coalition.<sup>32</sup> Dianastasis was committed to continuing the strong public-private partnership that had created Vision 2015 and using it to develop a strong new plan that built on the existing body of work. But there was a challenge to be dealt with first. The work of Voices had created some tension with the teachers union. Adding to that, the prior chair of the Vision 2015 leadership, Marvin "Skip" Schoenhals, had left some controversy in his wake. At a Chamber of Commerce dinner, Schoenhals had made pointed remarks about the challenges of improving schools, which were viewed as insulting to teachers. The teachers union head had responded in a blistering blog entry, and the union's relationship with Vision 2015 had become fractious as a result. The teachers union had been represented on the Vision 2015 leadership team since its inception, but as the ED25 effort began, it was not clear that they would continue to participate.

Ernest J. Dianastasis was committed to keeping the union leadership in the fold, however, and made diligent efforts to ease the tensions. As Herdman later described, "Ernie did a great job of sitting down with folks, including the union, to make sure they would continue to be involved in the work. He had a lot of conversations with different people, listening to their concerns and asking them, 'Where do we want to go from here?'" The strategy worked. Everyone came back to the table, and new members were also added to the leadership team to further broaden the group.

Dianastasis knew that leading the ED25 effort would be a balancing act, as it encompassed a wide spectrum of roles and views, including representatives from the teachers union, business community, early learning and K-12 systems, parents, school boards, higher education, and the nonprofit sector, among others. As he reflected:

*The challenge is staying together to make it work. I like to say in our meetings that we agree on 80 percent of what needs to be done. I really believe that. It's only 20 percent of the stuff we don't agree on, but often it's that 20 percent that causes things to unravel. So my goal is to keep everybody focused on what we agree on and keep asking, "Are we doing what is right for the kids?" That's our approach. And it's working.*<sup>33</sup>

To provide even broader input into the ED25 plan, a 21-member steering committee was formed. Its members included school teachers and leaders, a school board member, district administrators, and a judge, as well as a few nonprofit and corporate leaders (see Attachment F for information on the members of the Vision Coalition and steering committee). Another 100 people were involved through six working groups, each of which was made up of approximately 15 people whom the coalition had carefully chosen to represent the public and private sectors and a range of expertise. The designated topics for the working groups were: Personalized Learning; Early Learning; Postsecondary Success; Educator Support and Development; System

<sup>32</sup> The Vision 2015 leadership team was renamed the Vision Coalition in June 2014 to build on the legacy of Vision 2015 and demonstrate enduring leadership through the next evolution of the state's plan.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Ernest J. Dianastasis, July 15, 2014. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Mr. Dianastasis are from this interview.

Governance, Alignment, and Performance; and Fair and Efficient Funding. The working groups would be responsible for developing the initial draft goals and strategies that would constitute the core of the plan.

As with the Vision 2015 effort years before, the process began with listening to what the public had to say. In January 2014, the ED25 leadership team commissioned a survey asking Delawareans to share their ideas on “how to build on the progress that has been made, continue to adapt to our ever-changing world, and pursue new, innovative ideas that will keep our state at the forefront of educational leadership.” Most of the respondents rated Delaware’s public education system as either “good” or “fair.” They also perceived that the state had created the right conditions for success, but quality was uneven across districts and schools. Among the challenges identified were a lack of effective parental engagement and a school funding system that did not provide enough support for high-needs students. Moving forward, respondents said, there should be a stronger focus on developing students’ workforce skills and integrating more technology and innovation into teaching and learning.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the spring of 2014, the ED25 working groups met to delve into their assigned topics, evaluate what the state was currently doing, reflect on the public input, and start drafting goals and strategies for the coming decade.

## **TRANSLATING LESSONS FROM ABROAD**

A major component of ED25 – and indeed, the core of the Rodel Foundation’s new mission – was to integrate the best thinking not just from within Delaware or across the United States, but from around the world. This was not a new way of thinking for the Foundation. In fact, founder Bill Budinger had always been intently focused on the need to provide Delaware’s students with a world-class education. He reflected, “I’ve always been very impressed that the U.S. had the first general public education system in the world, and many credit that with our economic ascendancy. Today, however, American education no longer ranks first in the world. Our goal as a foundation is to equip our students with the education they need to compete with their peers internationally.”

Herdman too believed strongly in the importance of learning from abroad. Over the years, he had participated in numerous study tours to countries with the highest-performing school systems to see what Delaware could learn from them. In the fall of 2011, for example, as the state was wrestling with how to revise its teacher evaluation system, he had joined a delegation on a study trip to Shanghai and Singapore. The experience had a profound impact on him:

<sup>34</sup> Excerpted from Vision 2015 website (ED25 page).

*There, I got a glimpse of what a coherent teaching profession could look like, and how to put the revisions to our teacher evaluation system in context. . . . Our group contained a healthy mix of what some might call “reformers” and “traditionalists.” The reformers, like me, tend to focus on the rigor needed to improve the profession [while] the traditionalists tend to focus on support. What we saw in Asia, and in Singapore in particular, was that both rigor and support are essential to creating an inspired profession. For me, this was a wake-up call.<sup>35</sup>*

One of the other participants in the Fall 2011 study tour was Joanne Weiss, Chief of Staff to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Like Budinger and Herdman, Weiss strongly believed that there was much to be learned from the best school systems abroad. During the study trips they both attended, she and Herdman spoke frequently about the ramifications for their work in the U.S. As Weiss said, “We talked about the fact that many of the things we were learning from other countries were more applicable at the state level here, rather than the national level. Most high-performing countries have very centralized systems and controls, similar to the levers that states have here – for example, around teacher preparation and licensure, or around standards and curriculum.”<sup>36</sup> Weiss also noticed that Herdman often brought a delegation with him, and that the people he brought were broadly representative: teachers, superintendents, leaders from the State Department of Education and State Board of Education, business people, and others. Few other foundation leaders on the trips had done so.

When Weiss left the U.S. Department of Education in 2013, Herdman was the first person to call, and he asked if she would help with a new Rodel effort called the International Advisory Group (IAG). The IAG would be a small committee of international experts who would share their knowledge and expertise with Rodel, as well as Delaware’s education leaders and stakeholders. The experts were chosen as a result of a deliberative process. As Weiss explained, “We created a spreadsheet with a list of the specific expertise that Delaware needed to tap into for their planning, and matched that to what experts from various countries had to offer. Based on this, we chose the five who were the best fit.”

Plans for when and how the IAG would be involved were also carefully thought through so that their involvement would be meaningful rather than symbolic. As Weiss explained, “The IAG meetings were strategically timed to provide input at the front end of developing the new 10-year education plan. We wanted expert voices – people who really knew the practices and policies of high-performing systems around the world – to be involved in debating real stuff.”

After learning about state’s education system, the Vision 2015 and RTTT plans and progress, and the current ED25 efforts underway, the IAG members began providing input on the topics being addressed by the ED25 working groups. In April, the IAG members traveled to Delaware, where they met with the ED25 leaders

<sup>35</sup>Paul Herdman, “Singapore: A North Star in the Great Teacher Debate,” Rodel Foundation Blog, December 19, 2011. Also on the trip were State Board of Education chair Teri Quinn Gray, Vision Network Executive Director Mark Murphy, and an array of government, union, philanthropic, and organizational leaders from across the U.S.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Joanne Weiss, July 7, 2014. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Ms. Weiss are from this interview.

and working group chairs, offering their thoughts on the “big picture” taking shape. They also participated in a public event hosted by Rodel titled “International Lessons for Delaware,” where IAG member Andreas Schleicher – an internationally renowned education policy expert – described high-performing education systems around the world. Weiss then facilitated a panel discussion with the IAG members, attended by an array of Delaware leaders, educators, business people, and others.

The IAG members cautioned those they met in Delaware to avoid the temptation to chase “the next big thing.” As Weiss explained, “What they said very clearly was there is no next big thing. It’s all about deep implementation of the work that has already begun. They made it clear that Delaware has the right focus and building blocks in place, and its primary emphasis should be on high-quality implementation. They also helped us unpack exactly what that means.”

In the ensuing months, the IAG members continued to give guidance to ED25 leaders on how to translate lessons from abroad to the American context. “One of the major challenges in translating international lessons to the U.S. has to do with how decentralized our educational system is,” said Weiss. “The U.S. has a highly fragmented system; it’s not like in other countries where there is a Ministry to whom district or school leaders report. As a result, many of the conversations here have been around the role of the state education agency. And even at the state level, lessons can’t be adopted wholesale; they always need to be adapted to the unique context.” Herdman and other Rodel staff were also part of the translation process, as they were participating in most of the ED25 meetings. “In addition to asking important questions of the IAG about the work,” Weiss said, “they’re also connecting the work of the different groups together.” Everyone agreed that this was vital. In fact, the IAG members had cautioned that the six working groups seemed to be siloed and emphasized the need for an “umbrella” to unite their work.

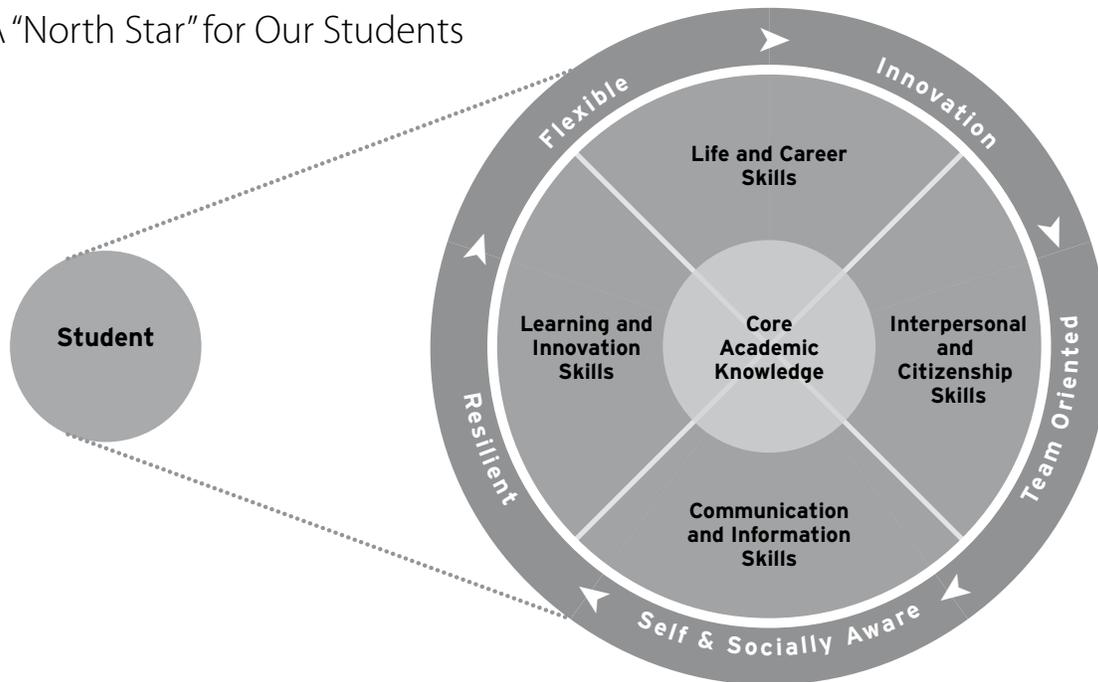
## HEARING WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS

In mid-June 2014, a 58-page draft document entitled *A Vision for Education in Delaware in 2025* (ED25) was released to the public for input, along with a more condensed version. It began by recapping the state’s progress to date. Over the past eight years, Delaware had come far: student achievement had improved on a more rigorous set of state assessments, more kids were going to college, dropout rates had been reduced, families had better access to quality early learning options, educators now had more career and leadership opportunities, and more. But, the document stressed, “We have more work to do.”

In response to the IAG members’ advice to provide a unifying framework for the ED25 plan, the draft contained a graphic developed by the Steering Committee, conveying their vision of what it means to be an “educated Delawarean.” They called it the “North Star” (see Exhibit 3). The draft plan went on to describe the themes that had emerged from the working groups’ discussions, as well as the “ideal states” and strategies that each of the groups had articulated for its specific area (see Attachment G).

### Exhibit 3: Draft “North Star” Graphic (Summer 2014)

A “North Star” for Our Students



Source: Draft ED25 Plan, June 2014

Unlike the Vision 2015 plan – which had been shared publicly only in its final form, the ED25 draft plan was very much a work in progress, leaving extensive room for input. As Madeleine Bayard described, “With Vision 2015, hundreds of people were engaged in focus groups and input sessions, and their ideas were filtered by the 28 steering committee members who crafted the recommendations. This time, more than 100 people participated in actually crafting the initial draft recommendations. As a result, I think stakeholders will see more of themselves in the plan.”

The draft plan ended with an invitation to the public to provide input either at one of the upcoming community meetings being held across the state, by email, via an online platform called ED25.MindMixer.com, or by participating in one of 2,025 “live or virtual cups of coffee” over the next few months. Just as it had with Vision 2015, Rodel was also coordinating the various public engagement and communications activities on behalf of the Vision Coalition for the ED25 effort.

## REFLECTIONS

As the ED25 community conversations were getting underway in the summer of 2014, Paul Herdman was marking his tenth anniversary as the Foundation's President and CEO. The occasion prompted him to reflect on the Foundation's role in Delaware's reform journey over the past decade. He was not the only one reflecting. One day in June 2014, Herdman received an email from Rodel co-founder Don Budinger asking what he thought were the main reasons for the Foundation's achievements. In his reply, Herdman shared his belief that the Foundation's successes in Delaware could be attributed to five processes:

1. Building on what works;
2. Thinking big;
3. Taking the long view;
4. Investing in people; and
5. Using data and focusing on policy rather than simply investing in programs.

Herdman was sure that far less would have been accomplished in the effort to improve Delaware's public education system had the Foundation not been bold enough to "think big." In his reply to Don Budinger, he emphasized:

*We didn't focus on incremental gains to get to "fair." We set our sights on being great. When the research in 2006 said that doing it right would cost over \$200 million, many suggested that we modify our goals so as not to embarrass ourselves in the legislature. In year one, we embarrassed ourselves and got no money. But eight years later, the state has secured more than \$200 million for the Vision 2015 initiatives, mostly from federal and private sources, and we've moved on more than 75 percent of the policies and programs we envisioned.<sup>37</sup>*

From Herdman's point of view, "taking the long view" had also been crucial. Too often, he observed, "philanthropy wants to see changes fast, so we pick something on the edges so that we can see movement." Mindful of this risk, Rodel's leadership team had tried hard over the past decade to keep the end goals in mind – and to be patient. "Changing the core of the system takes pressure over time," Herdman said. "Through a combination of building coalitions and strategically exerting pressure over time, the big ideas have a chance to build and the positions that were once frozen begin to thaw. Five years ago, for example, including student performance as part of a teacher's evaluation was anathema. Today, it's close to being a given."

<sup>37</sup> Excerpts from Paul Herdman correspondence with Rodel Foundation co-founder Don Budinger, June 2014.

From Joanne Weiss’s perspective, the Rodel Foundation’s willingness to take the long view had been instrumental in keeping Delaware’s change efforts on track through the vicissitudes of the political cycle:

*Because politics are so fickle, having political leaders in charge of education policy is often a prescription for inconsistency. Having a foundation or third party play the role that Rodel plays makes meaningful changes more likely because they can ensure continuity. They continue to be there, pushing the work, asking the hard questions, and building support from people across sectors. They have stuck with this work for a really long time and have built a network that includes all of the stakeholders in the state – and that is such a critical role.*

“I really do believe that it takes a lot of people coming together to create lasting change,” Weiss added. “When you have a coalition of voices across the state, it’s really hard to change course. I wish there were more ecosystems like the one that Delaware has built, in large part due to Rodel.”

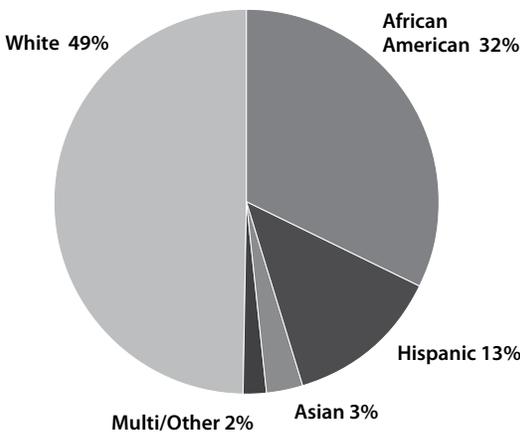
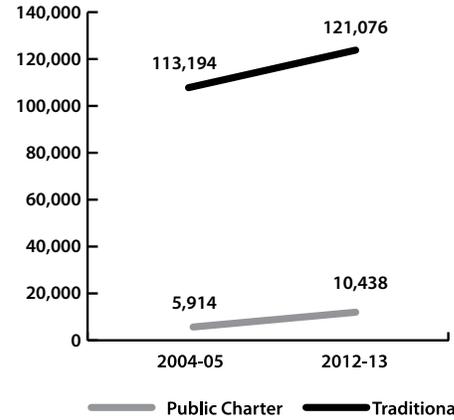
For all of their satisfaction in seeing what had been achieved over the past decade, however, Herdman and his team knew there was much hard work ahead. For one, there would be ongoing challenges in trying to translate policies and practices from the best education systems around the world to the Delaware context. As Herdman noted, “We are really wrestling with how to bring the coherence and alignment of systems like Singapore and Finland into a highly decentralized system like ours.”

He also anticipated challenges with prioritizing the multitude of elements that diverse stakeholders wanted in the ED25 plan. Over the next few months, the various ED25 entities – the working groups, steering committee, and Vision Coalition – would continue to deliberate as they tried to create a cohesive plan. That process would undoubtedly require some hard conversations and negotiations. In the interest of cultivating broad buy-in and support for the new plan, the ED25 effort had been broadly inclusive, involving hundreds of stakeholders. The risk, from Herdman’s perspective, was that the resulting plan would be so broad that it would lack the “edge” needed to change the system to its core. “I think the biggest question has to do with the tension between boldness and buy-in,” he said. “Will we be able to strike the right balance between the two? That remains to be seen.”

It was impossible to predict what the future might hold, so Herdman knew that he and his team at the Rodel Foundation would need to be willing to keep evolving in response to whatever changing circumstances might require, as they always had. “When the work of creating a common vision required building our research capacity, we did that,” Herdman said. “As we turned the corner on vision to implementation, we helped build a broader base of support on the ground so that educators not only owned that vision but were co-developing it.”

“As we move into the next phase of this work,” he reflected, “it’s unclear what it will demand of us. But we will maintain a focus on our North Star – a world-class system of public schools – and continue to learn and adapt.”

**Attachment A:  
Snapshot of Delaware Public Education Context (2013)**

<p><b>Number of Students:</b> 130,610</p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 49% Low-Income</li> <li>• 13.6% Special Education</li> <li>• 5.3% English Language Learners</li> </ul> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Racial/Ethnic Characteristics of Students:</b></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <caption>Racial/Ethnic Characteristics of Students</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Race/Ethnicity</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>White</td> <td>49%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>African American</td> <td>32%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hispanic</td> <td>13%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Asian</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Multi/Other</td> <td>2%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Delaware Per-Pupil Funding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$14,280 per student (ranks #13 nationally)</li> <li>• Range in per-pupil funding across districts: \$9,745 (lowest) to \$18,532 (highest)*</li> </ul> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Per-Pupil Funding by Source:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State revenue: 59%</li> <li>• Local revenue: 30%</li> <li>• Federal revenue: 11%</li> </ul>	Race/Ethnicity	Percentage	White	49%	African American	32%	Hispanic	13%	Asian	3%	Multi/Other	2%	<p><b>Number of Schools:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional Public Schools: 168</li> <li>• Public Charter Schools: 22</li> <li>• Magnet Schools: 3</li> <li>• Vocational-Technical Schools: 6</li> <li>• Special, Alternative, and Other Schools: 34</li> </ul> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Student Enrollment Trends:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional: 7% enrollment increase;</li> <li>• Public Charter: 77% increase.</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: center;">  <table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <caption>Student Enrollment Trends</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Traditional</th> <th>Public Charter</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2004-05</td> <td>113,194</td> <td>5,914</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2012-13</td> <td>121,076</td> <td>10,438</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <p>.....</p> <p><b>Graduation Rates:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 79% of Delaware students graduate from high school within four years (average across schools).</li> <li>• 60% of Delaware high school graduates enroll in a two-year or four-year college within four years of graduation.</li> </ul>	Year	Traditional	Public Charter	2004-05	113,194	5,914	2012-13	121,076	10,438
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage																					
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2004-05	113,194	5,914																				
2012-13	121,076	10,438																				

*\*Districts/schools at higher end are technical*

For more information on public education in Delaware, see the Rodel Foundation's annual publication: *Delaware Public Education at a Glance* (<http://www.rodelfoundationde.org/resources/delaware-at-a-glance/>).

**Attachment B:  
Rodel Foundation Strategic Planning Process, 2012  
Strategy Overview**

<b>Mission</b>	<b>To help make Delaware’s public education system one of the finest in the world by 2020</b>			
<b>Focus Areas (The “What”)</b>	Given the size of Rodel’s investments compared to total education spending in DE, Rodel aims to effect change by making small but catalytic investments in a limited number of programmatic areas (Human Capital and Innovation / Personalization)			
	<b>Human Capital</b> (50-60%)		<b>Innovation</b> (20-30%)	<b>Other Critical Issues</b> (20%)
	Practice (Grant/ Funding) Focus: Alternative Pipelines	Policy Focus: Broader (e.g., raising the bar for entry, career pathways, etc.)	Focus on creating conditions for Personalization	E.g., Early Childhood Education, College Access, Common Core
	Implementation of Current Reforms vs. Looking Ahead (80/20 across all areas)			
<b>Strategies (The “How”)</b>	<b>Rodel engages with partners across the education system as a critical friend and thought partner: aims to engage with the system in a way that is respectful, collaborative, and impactful</b>			
	<b>Policy</b> Informing and supporting policy changes needed to create the conditions for success	<b>Practice</b> Identifying, replicating and scaling best practices for advancing student achievement	<b>Public Will</b> Building support and demand for changes to Delaware’s education system	

Source: Rodel Foundation Strategic Plan Draft, Fall 2012

**Attachment C:  
A Sampling of Rodel Foundation Dashboard, FY2014**

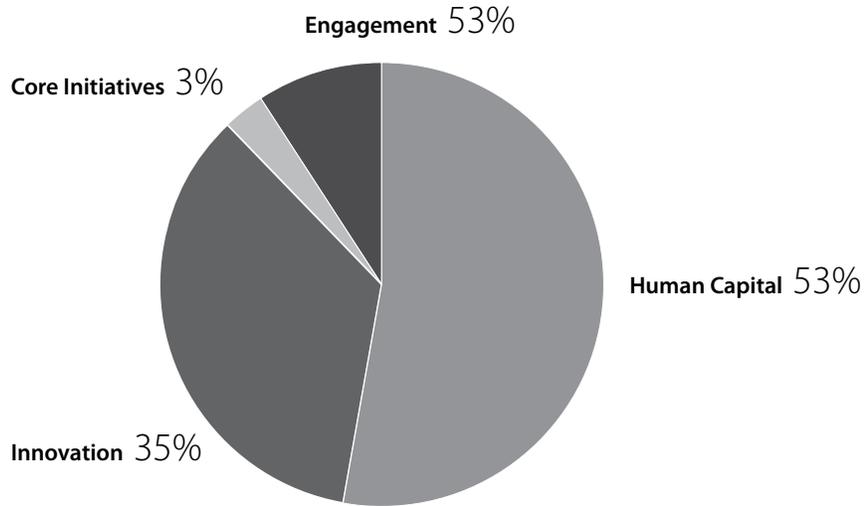
	Metric	Quarter			
		1	2	3	4
Human Capital	Strong, new, teacher and leader pipelines established and substantially sustained on public rather than private funds.				
	Policies developed to revamp teacher training across existing schools of education.				
	Alternate teacher evaluations systems developed improvements to state-wide evaluation system adopted for 2014-15 school year.				
	Human capital strategic plan launched, including plan to rethink teacher career paths and compensation based on performance/need				
Innovation	Policies and long term strategy developed to facilitate the adoption of personalization statewide.				
	Leading-edge, personalized learning strategies piloted in districts across the state.				
Core Initiatives	Common Core State Standards (CCSS) implemented with quality; Vision Network supported in identifying demonstration sites and providing CCSS professional				
	Aligning early learning with K-12 strategy.				
Engagement	Rodel partners supported in developing impactful and sustainable grass tops and grassroots advocacy for a strong education ecosystem.				
	Voice of educators leveraged to drive engagement (Rodel Teacher Council and iEducate).				
	Direction for Vision 2015 set with a focus on college and career readiness and innovation.				
Org Excellence	Updated core values embedded in day-to-day activities and reflected in implementing our strategic plan.				
	Staff engagement measured by the annual survey increased by 10%.				

**Legend:**

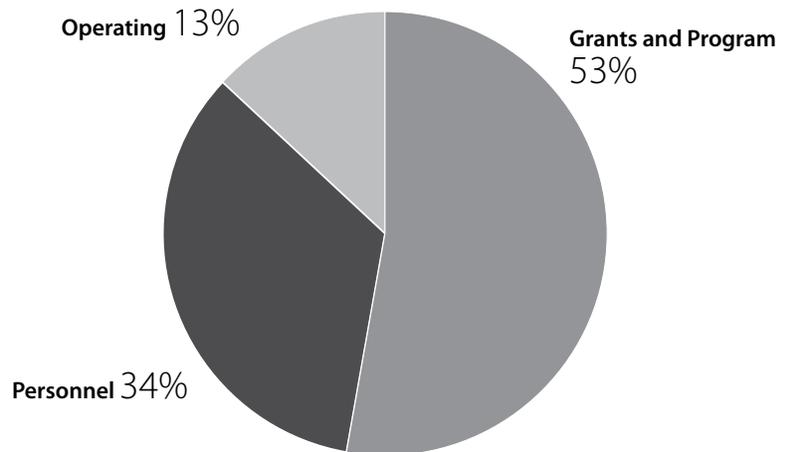
- On Track/No Major Issues**
- Moving forward, however, potential issues**
- Off Track/Process Stopped**

**Attachment C (continued):  
Rodel Foundation Grants by Dashboard Area  
and Expenses by Category, FY2014**

.....  
**Total 14 Grants = \$1.3m**



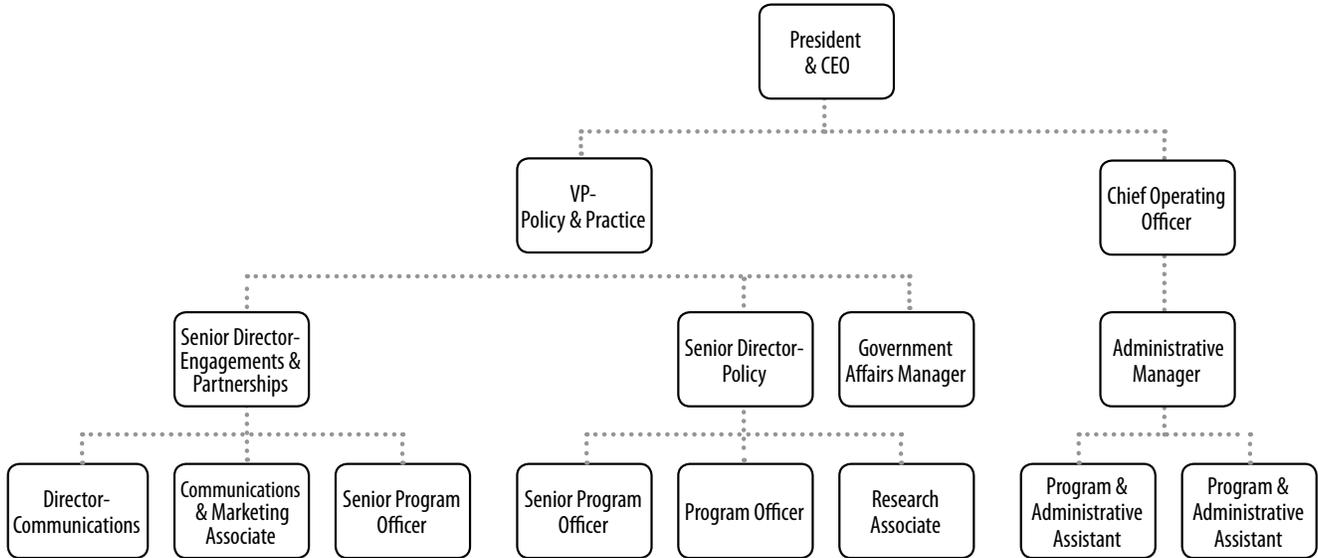
.....  
**FY14 Expenses by Category**



*Note: Excludes program income offsetting expenses*

*Source: Rodel Foundation of Delaware, 2014.*

**Attachment D:  
Rodel Foundation Organizational Chart, 2014**



*Source: Rodel Foundation of Delaware, 2014.*

**Attachment E:  
Rodel Foundation Core Values, 2014**



# Core Values

## Mission Driven

We believe that Delaware can create one of the best systems of public schools in the world by 2020. Our passion and dedication reflects the urgency of this mission and the impact it will have for students and communities across Delaware and the nation. Our legacy will not be defined by specific initiatives, but by the long-term, sustainable performance of our public schools.

## Global Excellence

Because we aspire to catalyze changes in Delaware that will result in world-class education, we strive for organizational excellence and global leadership in all that we do. To achieve this we: hold ourselves to the highest standards, are data-driven, are resilient in the face of setbacks, and complete our work with quality and consistency.

## Ingenuity

We have an ambitious mission to solve complex problems. We not only need to understand the best thinking internationally, but build on the best ideas and think differently to develop solutions that leverage Delaware's unique assets. We are entrepreneurial, and willing to take risks on powerful ideas that will lead to transformational student-outcomes.

## Integrity

Our goal is the success of all students, not furthering an agenda or seeking credit. We support solutions that work—regardless of where, or from whom, they come; and we seek to build on what's working for students with leaders on the ground. To this end, we put utmost value on honesty, transparency and respect in all our interactions both within our team and within the broader community.

## Team

To achieve our mission, we must work collaboratively—both internally and externally. None of us has all the answers. The trust and respect we build within our team and among our partners, both locally and globally, are foundational. We value and listen to one another; we acknowledge and support team members' successes; and we understand that the impact of our work outside our office is a direct reflection of the culture we create within it.

*Source: Rodel Foundation of Delaware, 2014.*

**Attachment F:  
Vision Coalition & ED25 Leadership**

**Vision Coalition Leadership Team**

- Ernest J. Dianastasis, Managing Director, CAI (Computer Aid, Inc.), Chair
- H. Raye Jones Avery, Executive Director, Christina Cultural Arts Center
- Susan Bunting, Superintendent, Indian River School District
- Paul A. Herdman, President and CEO, Rodel Foundation of Delaware
- Mark Holodick, Superintendent, Brandywine School District
- Frederika Jenner, President, Delaware State Education Association
- Kurt Landgraf, former President and CEO, ETS
- Mark Murphy, Secretary, Delaware Department of Education
- Daniel Rich, Professor of Public Policy, University of Delaware
- John H. Taylor, Jr., Executive Director, Delaware Public Policy Institute

**ED25 Steering Committee Composition**

- 1 teacher
- 2 principals (1 elementary, 1 high school)
- 1 dean of instruction at a technical/community college
- 1 charter school leader
- 1 administrator from the state's Office of Early Learning
- 1 foundation president
- 1 Teach For America leader
- 1 corporate foundation giving executive
- 3 corporate executives
- 1 corporate manager
- 1 head of United Way Delaware
- 1 state PTA leader
- 1 judge
- 1 independent school head
- 1 Latino community center leader
- 1 policy advisor to the Governor
- 1 state teachers union leader
- 1 education consultant\*
- 1 school board member
- 1 member of State Board of Education

*\* Joanne Weiss was a member of the ED25 steering committee, both to provide her expertise on reform planning and implementation and to ensure integration with the work of Rodel's International Advisory Group (IAG).*

For full committee and working group lists, see: <http://www.vision2015delaware.org/about-vision-2015/leadership/steering-committee/> and <http://www.vision2015delaware.org/about-vision-2015/leadership/working-groups/>

**Attachment G:  
ED25 Working Group “Ideal State” Vision Statements (Draft)**

## Delaware Education in 2025: Our Strategies

Each of the six working groups developed a description of the ideal state in their topic area and recommended strategies to achieve this ideal state

<p align="center"><b>Working Group 1: Personalized Learning</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>Working Group 2: Early Learning</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>Working Group 3: Ensuring Post-Secondary Success</b></p>
<p>Every student owns his or her learning progression through personalized options that incorporate both academic and non-cognitive skills in order to obtain a world class education that utilizes technology and allows for flexibility in place, time, and pace of learning</p>	<p>Every family in Delaware can access at least one high quality early learning option for their child(ren); early learning experiences prepare all children and families for engagement in the next stage of education</p>	<p>All students engage in rigorous learning opportunities, civic engagement activities, and workforce development experiences that allow them to thrive beyond high school and contribute to the economy and civic life</p>
<p align="center"><b>Working Group 4: Educator Support and Development</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>Working Group 5: System Governance, Alignment, and Performance</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>Working Group 6: Fair and Efficient Funding</b></p>
<p>All students have access to highly effective educators, every building is led by an exceptional team of leaders, and all educators and students are supported in their growth towards excellence</p>	<p>An innovative school system that sets a high bar for student success and enables collaboration and innovation by striking the right balance of autonomy and accountability</p>	<p>A funding system designed to support the needs of all students and aligned to the overall education system's goals</p>

In the following pages, we share working group findings on the current state, visions for the ideal state, and strategic recommendations for reaching this ideal state

We have included the full list of strategies to provide the breadth of working group findings, recognizing that there may be overlap across groups; the final document will include a synthesized list of the recommended strategies

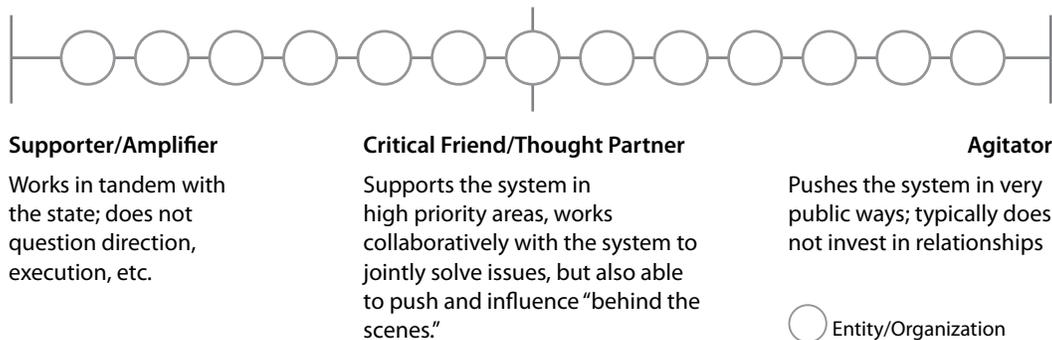
*Source: Draft ED25 Plan, June 2014*

The full draft of the ED25 plan is available at: <http://content.mindmixer.com/Live/Projects/Vision2015/files/149716/ED25%20FULL%20Draft%20Strategy%20Document%20as%20of%206-13-14.pdf?635400093499200000>)

**Questions to consider while reading this case about effective education grantmaking:**

1. How would you describe the state of Delaware’s public education system in 2004? What did the Opportunity Knocks study reveal?
2. How would you assess the initial steps that Herdman and his Rodel team took to try to advance the recommendations in the Vision 2015 plan? Should they have done anything differently?
3. How did the Foundation deploy different roles (convener, catalyst, supporter, driver of increasing public engagement in education) to achieve the reform goals? How did each of these roles provide “hope, help, and heat”? How successful were the various roles they played in achieving their objectives?
4. During the Foundation’s strategic planning process in 2012, one of the early steps that Parthenon took was to ask Rodel’s partners and stakeholders what they thought of the foundation.
5. On the whole, where does your organization exist along the “Mode of Engagement” continuum that Rodel used in its strategic planning process? (Think about your organization’s primary programs and activities in making this determination.)

**Exhibit 2: Mode of Engagement Across the Education Ecosystem**



6. Think about how the Rodel Foundation operates in 2014 compared to how it operated back in the mid-2000s. What's changed?
7. How would you critique your organization's communications and branding efforts?
8. Does your organization set annual goals? If so, is your budget closely aligned with these goals? Your staffing? Do you use a dashboard or some other type of mechanisms to track progress against goals? What happens if you don't meet them?
9. Going into 2014, as Rodel and its partners continue down the path of developing the ED25 plan, what are the most important assets the Foundation can draw upon? What are the biggest obstacles to achieving its goals?
10. What do you think about the Foundation setting its sights on ensuring that all Delaware students get a "world-class education"? Is this realistic? Does it make sense? Why not just aim to be one of the best in the U.S.?



## PRINCIPLES FOR

# Effective Education Grantmaking

- principle  
no. 1

### Discipline and Focus

In education, where public dollars dwarf private investments, a funder has greater impact when grantmaking is carefully planned and targeted.
- principle  
no. 2

### Knowledge

Information, ideas and advice from diverse sources, as well as openness to criticism and feedback, can help a funder make wise choices.
- principle  
no. 3

### Resources Linked to Results

A logic-driven “theory of change” helps a grantmaker think clearly about how specific actions will lead to desired outcomes, thus linking resources with results.
- principle  
no. 4

### Effective Grantees

A grantmaker is effective only when its grantees are effective. Especially in education, schools and systems lack capacity and grantees (both inside and outside the system) may require deeper support.
- principle  
no. 5

### Engaged Partners

A funder succeeds by actively engaging its partners – the individuals, institutions and communities connected with an issue – to ensure “ownership” of education problems and their solutions.
- principle  
no. 6

### Leverage, Influence and Collaboration

The depth and range of problems in education make it difficult to achieve meaningful change in isolation or by funding programs without changing public policies or opinions. A grantmaker is more effective when working with others to mobilize and deploy as many resources as possible in order to advance solutions.
- principle  
no. 7

### Persistence

The most important problems in education are often the most complex and intractable, and will take time to solve.
- principle  
no. 8

### Innovation and Constant Learning

Even while acting on the best available information – as in Principle #2 – a grantmaker can create new knowledge about ways to promote educational success. Tracking outcomes, understanding costs and identifying what works—and what doesn’t—are essential to helping grantmakers and their partners achieve results.

Grantmakers for Education (GFE) is a national network of hundreds of education philanthropies, united by a passion and commitment to improve public education and learning for all students of all ages, cradle to career. GFE is a force multiplier, harnessing the collective power of education grantmakers to increase momentum, impact, and outcomes for this nation's learners. We are proud to promote a culture of learning among education funders and provide a forum for interaction and engagement that builds upon and deepens the impact of our member's individual investments. Grantmakers for Education and its members believe in the power of what we can all achieve when we work together and learn from each other's successes and challenges.

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