

VISION 2015

IMAGINE

the best schools in the world for every student in Delaware.

December 2, 2008



Podcast from Edmonton

Jim Comegys, principal of Alfred G. Waters Middle School in the Appoquinimink School District, produced two short [podcasts](#) while he was in Edmonton to allow his students a sneak-peak into a school system considered to be one of the best in the world.

VISION-aries

Vision Network Leaders Visit Top-Performing School District

Thirty Vision Network educators traveled to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada in mid-November to learn about a public school district that is widely considered one of the best in the world.

[Edmonton's school system](#) was a primary model for the Vision 2015 plan and is comparable in size to Delaware (in the number of schools and students). In fact, Edmonton's per student spending is about the same or less than ours in Delaware, yet its students are among the top five in the world when it comes to academic performance (the United States is not in the top ten on any of these international measures).

So, what are they doing that we can learn from?

During the three-day visit to Edmonton, Delaware educators studied the best practices that have made Edmonton a world leader, including weighted student funding, decentralization, school choice, and accountability:

--**Funding:** In Edmonton, funds are allocated to schools through weighted student funding—a foundation or base amount for each child, with additional weights for varying levels of special education, English as a Second Language (ESL) support, and other student needs that require additional resources. Vision 2015 recommends a weighted funding system for Delaware, and the LEAD Committee will release a report this week that recommends implementing such a system.

"The trip to Edmonton generated excitement about the establishment of schools' instructional focus through the communication and implementation of Focus on Results. We will be working with principals toward spending more time in the classrooms and on instructional activities."

-- Marion Proffitt, Assistant Superintendent, Appoquinimink School District, speaking about how the trip to Edmonton aligned with her district's participation in the Vision Network.

Read more [reflections](#) from Edmonton participants.

"Charter schools are still seen by some as stealing kids from public schools. That shows us that we're early in this innovative programming. We still struggle with antagonism and distrust.... Instead of fragmenting the community of students, we need to do more of what Edmonton is doing, and that is building a community that supports all learning."

--Michael Stetter, director of curriculum development for the Delaware Department of Education, in *The News Journal* article, "[Learning from Canada's school system](#)," November 27, 2008.

Did You Know?

- In 2008, Edmonton's district averages for student performance were higher than world averages for every [International](#)

--**Autonomy/Decentralization:** Principals in Edmonton are given broad management responsibility and accountability: they control 92 percent of their schools' budgets, make hiring and firing decisions, run their buildings' operations, and control their schools' payrolls. Vision 2015 recommends empowering principals and is helping to instill in Vision Network schools and districts the knowledge, authority, and flexibility to get results.

--**School Choice:** Edmonton provides a range of learning options so that each student can select the one that best meets his or her specific learning needs. Students can choose from school programs that are bilingual, religious, cultural, subject-specific, pedagogical, or single-gender. While Vision 2015 does not address religious schools, it recommends creating more innovative options and more flexible schools to meet the diverse set of student needs.

--**Accountability:** Increased local autonomy is coupled with a clear commitment to results. Data on student performance is readily available at all schools and serves as the foundation of their budget processes. At the student level, students must pass a 12th grade exit exam in all core subjects in order to earn a diploma. And, at the school level, if a school's performance is strong, it is given more flexibility; if it is not, district oversight becomes more prescriptive.

Edmonton Public Schools worked with the education consulting firm [Focus on Results](#) for more than six years to implement a professional development plan for educators; reorient central office support; and use coaching to support the development of principals as instructional leaders. Today, Focus on Results (FOR) is doing similar work in Delaware. FOR, in concert with the University of Delaware, supports the Vision Network by providing professional development training and coaching to school and district leadership teams.

View recent media coverage of the site visit:

["Learning from Canada's school system,"](#) *The News Journal*, November 28, 2008

["Educators to visit schools in Canada,"](#) *The News Journal*, November 15, 2008

Read background on Edmonton's successes:

["An Edmonton Journey,"](#) *Education Week*, January 25, 2005

["Clever red-necks: It's not just the economy that is booming; schools are too,"](#) *The Economist*, September 21, 2006

[Baccalaureate](#) examination except history.

- In 2008, Edmonton's average Advanced Placement scores were higher than world averages for five of seven courses.
- Edmonton's graduation rate went from 64.2% to 72% in 5 years (02-07).

Source: [Edmonton Public Schools](#)

Research

- More than 90% of Edmonton's 12th grade students met the standards in the following diploma examination courses: English, Social Studies, Math (Pure), Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and General).
- The province of Alberta, if ranked a country, would rank 2nd in the world in science, 3rd in reading, and 5th in math, according to PISA. (As a point of comparison, the U.S. did not rank in the top 15 on the science or math assessments.)

Sources:

[Edmonton Public District Results](#)

["Alberta's 15-year olds place among world's best on international tests"](#)

Spotlight: Central Services, Edmonton Public Schools

In 1994, the central office of the Edmonton public school district in Alberta, Canada was renamed Central Services and redesigned to act as a data-driven service provider to the system instead of performing a traditional bureaucratic role. At the same time, schools were given much wider powers over their budgets, including the ability to select from various services and providers.

With over 78% of budgetary control now in the hands of school administrations, Central Services provides services such as teacher professional development and student assessment tools to educational leaders, teachers and staff, and students. Schools can choose to buy services from either this office or from outside vendors, which means Central Services must constantly stay on its toes to remain competitive in cost and quality and to focus on teaching and learning.

Read [more](#).

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View [photos](#) from the Vision Network educators' visit.

involved with Vision 2015, please visit our web site, <http://www.vision2015delaware.org/>, or e-mail us at info@vision2015delaware.org.

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