

Pool our resources to improve our schools

Education series: Chandlee Johnson Kuhn, Jackie Jenkins and Michelle Taylor 6:33 p.m. EST December 17, 2015



(Photo: Supplied)

Editor's note: This week, The News Journal opinion pages are featuring a series of essays written by members of the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission. Read the series at www.delawareonline.com/opinion. Submit your view to letters@delawareonline.com.

We are working to help prepare our students to succeed in life by providing them with the knowledge and skills to live and work in the city that we all love. Instead of worrying about what happens if they don't get the resources, education, and support that they deserve—a narrative that too many accept as a reason to do nothing at all — we choose to be active in supporting our students to become great citizens and thereby make our city and state stronger.



DELAWAREONLINE

'Those kids' deserve a chance at a successful future, too.

[\(http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/12/15/perspective-classroom-those-kids/77357978/\)](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/12/15/perspective-classroom-those-kids/77357978/)

As the work of the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (WEIC) continues, we have identified and are confronting a number of issues. While education has long been recognized as a pathway out of poverty, the playing field in the Wilmington is not level. Seventy percent of students in the City of Wilmington come from low-income families, and over a third of these (34 percent) qualify as children living in poverty. While child poverty is widespread throughout Delaware, the greatest concentration remains in Wilmington. The unique needs of these young learners pose distinct challenges for schools with concentrated and often-rising numbers of low-income students. These students require resources—not just financial—that are far beyond what is typically required for more prosperous students. Yet, Delaware is one of only 15 states that does not provide additional resources for low-income students, and it is one of only a handful of states that does not provide additional funding for English language learners. Gaps also remain in the funding for special education students.

We must change our educational funding and delivery system to provide targeted resources to meet the needs of these students. The recent investments in early learning in Delaware demonstrate the impact that targeted funding can make. Four years ago, Gov. Markell and the General Assembly increased investments in early learning programs to better address the needs of low-income children. As a result, the access for low-income children to higher-quality programs has increased dramatically, from 5 percent then to 58 percent today, with thousands more children in high-quality programs. Indeed, continuing to increase the investment in early learning is critical to the overall success of Delaware's low-income students and to enabling a smooth transition for children from these early learning programs to the K-12 public education system.



DELAWAREONLINE

Rethink the chaos of school districts in Wilmington

[\(http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/12/16/rethink-chaos-school-districts-wilmington/77419758/\)](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/12/16/rethink-chaos-school-districts-wilmington/77419758/)

Several immediate actions can improve resource support for low-income students as long-term, systemic changes are developed and implemented. A realistic first step is to align the existing supports and services through solid, collaborative partnerships between the community, nonprofit organizations, youth and family service providers and the schools. The alignment of these services will provide a greater opportunity to maximize existing financial resources currently being provided by public and private sources. We also need to break down the silos that currently fragment efforts and resolve “turf issues” that stand in the way of mobilizing all of our community's capacity.

When you have organizations like United Way of Delaware or Boys & Girls Clubs of Delaware already connected and engaged with the local community, there is no need to “reinvent the wheel.” United Way, with hundreds of affiliate organizations and a clear mission, has played a central role in the transformation of early learning in Delaware. The Boys & Girls Club can help support in-school learning by providing quality out-of-school and after-school programs that are directly connected to what's happening in the classroom and designed to meet the needs of low-income families.

Another important step is to develop a strategy to inform, support, and engage parents and care-givers in the improvement process.

It is clear to us that the status quo will not work. Nelson Mandela said, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." What we need most is the collective will to improve the education of all Delaware children. We need to level the playing field for those low-income students and other students at risk who currently do not have access to the educational opportunities that can and should transform their lives and enrich our community. The future of Wilmington and our state depends upon it.

Chandlee Johnson Kuhn is the former chief judge of the Family Court. Jackie Jenkins is the Educational Policy Advisor for Wilmington Mayor Dennis P. Williams. Michelle Taylor is the president and chief executive officer of the United Way of Delaware. All are Co-Chairs of the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission's Committee on the Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty.



DELAWAREONLINE

The importance of a citizen voice in education reform

(<http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/12/14/importance-citizen-voice-education-reform/77292300/>)

Read or Share this story: <http://delonline.us/1YnrNWk>

TOP VIDEOS



Opinion: Arizona isn't crazy enough to target gay kids

00:55

(</videos/opinion/2893001742001/2628571628>)

MORE STORIES



Make YOUR voice heard

([/story/opinion/2015/11/09/make-](/story/opinion/2015/11/09/make-your-voice-heard/75465762/)

[your-voice-heard/75465762/](/story/opinion/2015/11/09/make-your-voice-heard/75465762/))

(</story/opinion/2015/11/09/make-your-voice-heard/75465762/>)

Nov. 9, 2015, 2:01 p.m.



For military women, equal opportunity, equal obligation: Our view

([/story/opinion/2015/12/20/women-](/story/opinion/2015/12/20/women-military-combat-)

[military-combat-](/story/opinion/2015/12/20/women-military-combat-)

[discrimination-](#)

[editorials-](#)

[debates/77453424/](#)

[\(/story/opinion/2015/12/20/women-military-combat-discrimination-editorials-debates/77453424/\)](#)

Dec. 20, 2015, 4:34 p.m.



[Christmas doesn't have to be controversial in public schools: Column](#)

[\(/story/opinion/2015/12/20/christmas-public-schools-](#)

[controversy-](#)

[separation-](#)

[church-state-](#)

[column/76993068/\)](#)

[\(/story/opinion/2015/12/20/christmas-public-schools-controversy-separation-church-state-column/76993068/\)](#)

Dec. 20, 2015, 6:05 a.m.