

**March 1, 2016**

Dr. Gray and members of the Delaware State Board of Education,

The Wilmington Education Improvement Commission met on Wednesday, February 24, 2016, to consider the two conditions stipulated by the State Board in its approval of the Commission's Redistricting plan, "Redistricting in the City of Wilmington and New Castle County: A Transition, Resource and Implementation Plan." In your letter of February 23, 2016, you outlined those two conditions:

- Approval by the Delaware Department of Education of priority school plans submitted by the Christina School District.
- Change of the word "shall" to "may" in item #2 of the resolution within the plan.

On February 24, the Redistricting Committee of the Commission and the Commission itself reviewed these conditions in detail. We were fortunate to have Dr. Gray and Secretary Godowsky at the Commission meeting, both whom offered comments and fielded questions prior to the Commission's deliberations. Dr. Gray in particular was quite forthcoming and candid about the State Board position on the aforementioned conditions and the desire to work with the Commission to move this plan to the General Assembly. We are grateful to both of them for their presence. A summary of the discussion surrounding the conditions are as follows:

***Condition #1: Approval by the Delaware Department of Education of priority school plans submitted by the Christina School District***

Harrie Ellen Minnehan, President of the Christina School Board, confirmed that the memorandum of understanding regarding priority schools remains active and ready for Secretary Godowsky's signature. That MOU was negotiated by the Delaware Department Education, the Governor's Office and the Christina School District. To put a fine point on its commitment on Tuesday, February 23, the Christina School Board voted (7-0) to submit sub-grant proposals to implement the priority schools plans. At the Commission meeting, Secretary Godowsky indicated that he plans to meet with Christina School District officials to consider any modifications needed; once satisfied, Secretary Godowsky will then approve and sign the plans. As such, we believe that the Commission's responsibility with respect to this condition has been fulfilled.

***Condition #2: Change of the word "shall" to "may" in item #2 of the resolution within the plan.***

Prior to the Commission meeting, the Redistricting Committee met to discuss this condition. The Redistricting Committee, which includes the presidents and the superintendents of the four traditional schools districts, found this condition unacceptable since it would contravene the accords reached after months of deliberations on how best to insure that redistricting would not become an unfunded mandate. The members of the Redistricting Committee were unanimous in their judgement that the change of the word "shall" to "may" opens the possibility that redistricting will proceed even if the necessary and sufficient funds to support its success are not provided, thereby putting the entire process at risk. The Redistricting Committee voted 12-0, with one abstention to recommend to the Commission that it not accept this condition and resubmit the Commission's plan for State Board approval without this condition.

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After hearing the presentation from State Board President Gray and engaging in a brief discussion with her and Secretary Godowsky, the Commission members deliberated about the implications of accepting the second condition stipulated by the State Board. The Commission voted, 15 yes, 6 no, 2 absent, not to accept this condition and to resubmit to the State Board, the Redistricting Plan in its entirety. This includes the plan and appendices submitted on December 17, 2015, the addendum submitted to the State Board of Education on February 11, 2016, question and answer communications, and the complete public record including six public hearings, every Wilmington Education Improvement Commission meeting since its inception and State Board of Education meetings on December 17, 2015, January 21, 2016, and February 18, 2016.

In taking this action and resubmitting the plan as previously submitted, the Commission recognizes that the State Board “has absolutely no desire or intent for redistricting to become an unfunded mandate” and that “the ultimate decision rests with WEIC in consultation with the affected districts regarding the expiration of the plan.” Both were clearly communicated in your February 23<sup>rd</sup> letter and Dr. Gray’s presentation. However, we firmly believe that the requested change of the word “shall” to “may” would give the State Board and future State Boards the option of continuing with the redistricting plan timetable even if the Commission and the affected districts confirmed that the necessary and sufficient resources have not been provided.

In addressing the Commission, Dr. Gray affirmed that the State Board and the Commission share a common purpose and that we should proceed as partners. **To be clear and unequivocal, we strongly agree.** In our view, those shared commitments include the following:

- Improve the educational success of Wilmington students;
- Strengthen the quality of schools serving Wilmington students;
- Provide the resources and supports to enable Wilmington students to fully achieve their academic potential.
- Apply measures of success to track student progress and hold ourselves accountable; and
- Advance student improvements at the most rapid pace possible.

There was also considerable discussion with Dr. Gray about the need to rebuild trust between the State Board and the Wilmington education community. To strengthen that trust and enhance our partnership, we reaffirm the following steps.

- The Commission’s leadership is committed to meet with the State Board of Education **at every stage of the implementation process** to evaluate educational improvements and to discuss whether the necessary and sufficient resources have been provided to support implementation. The Commission will take no action without such discussion.
- The Commission maintains an open invitation for the State Board to attend and participate in the meetings of the Commission and its’ committees. The Commission will accept all invitations from the State Board to discuss any matters related to the implementation of the redistricting plan and the improvement of education for Wilmington students.

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- The Commission will update the State Board semi-annually on the progress of the Commission's efforts to meet student needs, build and sustain community supports, and expand charter/district collaboration.
- The Commission will provide an annual analysis of the ***state of Wilmington education*** based on data collected by the Delaware Department of Education and other sources sanctioned by DDOE, and discuss this analysis with the State Board of Education and the Secretary of Education.

We all know that the time for action is running short. In that spirit, we are asking that the State Board schedule a special meeting in the City of Wilmington to reconsider our final submission. Our recommendation is that the meeting be held Council Chambers of the City of Wilmington which would enable attendance by Wilmington parents, students and community leaders.

**If there are any other considerations that the State Board would like the Commission to consider prior to the special meeting of the Board, please inform us in writing. If needed, I will consider convening the Commission as promptly as possible.**

For your review, the link to the plan and the full record can be found at [www.solutionsfordelawareschools.com](http://www.solutionsfordelawareschools.com). We respectfully request that you approve unconditionally and without further delay.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Allen', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Tony Allen, Ph.D.  
Chairman

cc: Wilmington Education Improvement Commission  
Dan Rich, Ph.D., Policy Director  
Steven Godowsky, Ed.D. Secretary of Education