

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission  
Charter District Collaboration Committee  
May 11, 2017, 5:30-7pm  
Meeting Minutes

### **Approval of Minutes**

A quorum was not present so minutes could not be approved.

### **Approval of the Agenda**

The agenda was amended to include a presentation from Sarah Yatsko from the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE).

A. Miller noted that the situation in Wilmington and in Delaware is unique, but the committee hopes that Sarah Yatsko could help the group think more deeply about the proposed compact. A. Miller expressed her appreciation to S. Yatsko for agreeing to talk to the committee about this process.

### **Presentation on Charter District Compacts**

S. Yatsko began by discussing the draft compact proposal as prepared by the committee. She noted that Delaware has the benefit of embarking on this work late in the game, as other places have tried it and offer lessons based on their own successes and failures. Paying attention to collaborative work underway across the country will put the state at an advantage.

S. Yatsko then transitioned to evidence that there is a change in attitude toward collaboration. In some places, collaboration is becoming the new normal. The organization she works for, CRPE, has been tracking collaboration work across the nation. CRPE closely monitors the progress of this work in cities across the U.S. and provides technical assistance. She also noted the work of portfolio cities nationwide and how charter-district collaboration is evident in these cities as well.

Looking at collaborative efforts, CRPE has learned that collaboration is sometimes treated as a side project or a “forced marriage.” S. Yatsko noted that cities that have made and sustain progress understand the local constraints and make smart decisions about what to collaborate around. She noted that the charter sector now represents a sizeable fraction of schools in cities across the country. This helps to make the case for collaboration as traditional districts and charters need to learn how to interact productively together. The cost of continued contention and inaction are high and include the time and resources spent arguing and the opportunity costs of doing nothing. S. Yatsko stated that the potential payoffs for each sector involved include access to facilities, access to expertise, professional development, and reduced political tensions, along with many more. She notes that the true cost of continued contention, however, impacts the communities, families, and students in those cities.

S. Yatsko noted that collaboration happens in stages. Some cities have succeeded while others have made progress and then digressed. Buy-in has to be strong in order to sustain collaboration over time; a city cannot solely rely on school or district leadership. S. Yatsko then shared a matrix that breaks up collaboration areas based on effort and benefit. She noted that it is important to be aware of the effort and benefit involved in different forms of collaboration, since some are difficult to achieve while others offer early wins. It was emphasized that compacts that are just starting must focus on win-win collaborations that are easier to accomplish together. Cities that are able to do this create momentum for continued engagement in collaborative work. S. Yatsko stated that this matrix was created based on experiences of current collaborative cities.

She continued by noting that the broader the stakeholder involvement, the better the collaborative effort will be. She noted that some cities have created a governance structure, including a formal committee, to support the compact and collaborative work. A neutral third-party can help to move the work forward. S. Yatsko also mentioned the importance of “boundary-spanners,” meaning people who have worked in one sector and then work in another. They are critical partners for collaboration because they can help bridge the divide between the charter and traditional district players. To view the full presentation, see “meeting materials.”

### **Discussion on the Presentation**

The committee began by asking S. Yatsko about the committee’s proposal. A question was raised about any potential areas that the committee is missing in their compact proposal.

S. Yatsko replied by stating that one fear some cities have is the funding element and how to put resources and support behind this work. She noted that there is no easy answer but the committee should think through potential budget items for areas in the proposal. She also noted the importance of naming players and entities that can help support this work.

The committee continued by discussing the unique situation facing the city of Wilmington. Given the number of districts and charters serving Wilmington students, it is hard to find a model that fits that unique configuration. A question was asked about potential models that more closely align with the situation in Wilmington.

S. Yatsko noted that Delaware would be breaking ground by establishing a compact in such complex terrain, but the proposal could help the state head in a direction that other places need to move toward. She noted that there are many other cities that have multiple districts within city limits, such as Phoenix and Indianapolis. When those places attempt to start charter-district collaboration, it is typically one district that instigates the work. The question then becomes, how the work expands to other districts within the city? S. Yatsko noted Indianapolis is an example of this.

The committee then discussed efficiency in government and in education, specifically financial efficiency. The group considered whether this would be a persuasive argument to get buy-in for collaboration.

S. Yatsko noted that transportation is one area where efficiency is most often considered. She noted a broader efficiency argument in that it is not efficient to have poor performing schools.

The committee noted some issues around choice in Delaware, particularly regarding schools serving Wilmington. It was noted that terminology around school performance in Delaware can be problematic because some charter schools that are high performing are very selective in student admissions. It was also noted that politically speaking, Delaware has a recently elected Governor and a newly appointed Secretary of Education both of whom support and discuss collaboration as a priority. This was noted as a large environmental advantage.

The committee discussed the importance of charter law and authorization as it can influence collaboration. Massachusetts was cited as an example, where charter schools were created as laboratories for innovation. The committee discussed the importance of thinking about how the state department of education can play a role in furthering collaboration. The size of Delaware was noted as an advantage to help push the work forward and create buy-in across the state.

S. Yatsko mentioned a philosophical shift in cities, noting mayors and the philanthropic community coming forward to emphasize the importance of efficiency and collaboration. She provided the example of how the Mayor of Indianapolis citing tensions between the district and charter sector as a reason why businesses do not want to come to the city.

The committee also discussed the lack of an understanding about what is needed in terms of programs and schools in Delaware – specifically in relation to new charter schools. There was discussion about the moratorium on new charter schools in the city. It was mentioned that a statewide needs assessment still needs to be done.

A question was asked about the need for school board buy-in and the importance of institutionalizing collaborative work so that it doesn't die with leadership turnover.

S. Yatsko noted that having boundary-spanners helps to legitimize the importance of collaboration. Having people like this on school boards is helpful. She also mentioned the importance of community groups that can put external pressure on either the board or elected officials to commit to sustaining collaboration efforts. Further, S. Yatsko noted the influence Mayors can have on collaboration and setting education improvement as a priority. Having an active Mayor or someone influential in the Mayor's office can help champion this work.

Examples of collaboration on school-related legislation in Cleveland and Indianapolis were given as potential opportunities for Wilmington or Delaware. The committee also discussed access to the choice process and information on school performance as potential areas for cross-sector collaboration. The committee discussed the importance of having workable data that looks at student growth.

The committee thanked S. Yatsko for providing her national perspective and taking the time to talk to the committee.

E. Buckley noted that she and A. Miller will be presenting the compact idea and the work of the committee to the Commission at the next Commission meeting on May 23, 2017 from 5-7pm at the Sharp Conference Center.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission  
Charter District Collaboration Committee  
May 11, 2017, 5:30-7pm  
Meeting Attendance

**Committee Members**

Eve Buckley, Co-Chair  
Aretha Miller, Co-Chair  
Bill Doolittle  
Byron Murphy  
Harrie Ellen Minnehan  
David Davis

**Members of the Public**

Sarah Yatsko

**IPA Support Staff**

Kelsey Mensch