

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Charter District Collaboration Committee Meeting
Community Education Building
February 6, 2017 5-7 pm
Meeting Minutes**

Co-Chair Aretha Miller called the meeting to order at 5:13 pm.

A. Miller began by welcoming everyone to meeting. She then moved to approval of meeting minutes. Since there was no quorum present, she asked committee members to review the meeting minutes from December and January before the next committee meeting.

The committee went on to discuss the “wins” of the committee over the past year. Last year was a great year for the committee to overcome some of barriers that need to be addressed but this year should include deliverables to share with the Commission.

Chairs Update

Next month (March), Susan Haberstroh and David Blowman will be at the meeting to present the Strategic Plan for Specialized Education Opportunities prepared by the Department of Education. A. Miller provided a brief overview on the creation of the plan starting from the legislation that resulted in the moratorium on charter schools. There were some concerns about the plan, such as: the lack of inclusion of parent voice and its viability as a “needs assessment.” All committee members were encouraged to read the plan and come with questions for the March committee meeting.

There was conversation about holding a joint meeting with the Meeting the Needs Committee. Details will be shared once a meeting is confirmed for the proposed April date.

A. Miller noted that Sarah Yatsko from the Center on Reinventing Public Education has agreed to skype in to a future committee meeting to talk about the work she does at the national level for collaboration.

Compact Proposal

At the last committee meeting, the committee discussed putting together a compact proposal for Wilmington between charters, vo-techs and districts. This would be a deliverable for the committee to present to the Commission by June. The proposal should contain what a compact in Wilmington could look like and include and outline of possible areas of collaboration. This could be based on other city’s compacts, particularly cities similar to Wilmington.

A. Miller noted that she and Eve could work with subcommittee members and the University of Delaware’s Institute for Public Administration to identify 3-5 city compacts that align with Wilmington to share with the committee. To identify compacts, the committee noted that it is important to:

- Keep the context of the city where each compact was created in mind as each city is unique in its practice and law;
- Understand that funding structures for education vary between states; and
- Look at compacts that use clear and consistent language.

The committee then discussed areas of collaboration and key factors for a successful compact. It was noted that at the national level, compacts that focus on improving instructional practice tend to not be successful. In contrast, compact that addressed issues such as transportation or teacher recruitment tend to be more successful. The compact should prioritize small wins first and then prioritize more complex areas of collaboration.

It is also important to consider scheduling meetings between district and school leaders as this can present a barrier. It is crucial to bring all key decision makers to the table and have input from these key decision makers (superintendent, principal & board members) in order for the compact to be successful.

Next, the committee discussed the unintended consequences of choice law and barriers to collaboration. It was noted that legislation has partly caused the competition not only between charters and districts but between district schools, between districts, and between charters. The committee also discussed the issue of movement of students between and districts and charters. It was noted that there must be honesty about each school's enrollment process to help reconcile this barrier. Additionally, in order for a compact to work, conversations must be honest and open. All stakeholders must be transparent to reach a sustainable long-term solution.

The committee also discussed the issue of the re-segregation of schools as an unintended consequence of choice, specifically in Delaware. The committee noted the difference in low-income and minority enrollment between all schools serving Wilmington students. A question arose about population growth within the City of Wilmington as a potential factor of competition between schools. Some members expressed concern that while some areas of the state are experiencing growth, Wilmington may not be one of them.

It was noted that it would be useful to keep these barriers and areas for collaboration in mind for the upcoming Commission meeting. Governor Carney and Secretary Bunting will be in attendance to talk about their path forward. Kelsey Mensch, University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration, noted that the meeting would be Tuesday, February 28th from 5-7 pm at the Thomas B. Sharp Center, Marshallton Education Building.

Political Strategy Discussion

Continuing from the last committee meeting, there is need to ensure that the work we do now on collaboration is sustainable over time, specifically between leadership changes. The committee considered the key players who would need to be involved in supporting collaboration. The committee must work with the Commission to advocate to identify and recruit to key players to participate in the collaboration work.

The committee considered changes in leadership as a barrier to sustainability. In addition, committee members discussed differences in community perceptions of charter schools and school collaboration as a barrier to sustaining the work overtime.

Key Barriers to Collaboration

The committee then transitioned into a discussion of key issues of collaboration that elected officials should be aware of. The barriers extend far beyond districts and charters but in some cases between charters and between districts.

- There is concern about the access to school choice and other programs.
 - o It was mentioned that students who have parents who understand the system have an advantage over those who do not know how to navigate it. It was noted that this inequity causes programs to be more accessible for predominately affluent students and less accessible for poor students. The difference between school choice and charter school choice was also mentioned as an area for further discussion.
- The committee discussed the issue of inequity of transportation for students.
 - o Committee members reflected on the number of buses that come into communities but leave with only 1 or 2 students. Many members noted that often they see full size buses with only a handful of students. A committee member noted that despite students going to schools located in the same buildings it is not a common practice to share buses; however, it is possible as it has been done. It was mentioned that Boston Public Schools addressed this issue and is currently saving \$1 million annually.
- The committee briefly discussed the teacher retention issue facing schools.
 - o It was noted that talent is needed in classrooms in order to improve student outcomes but teacher retention, recruitment, and supply is an issue statewide. The importance of teacher leadership was also emphasized in order to retain talent. This is a district and charter issue. The committee also thinks that it's important for everyone to consider ways to incentivize teachers to stay in schools and continue the important work of teaching our students, particularly those who are most at risk. It was mentioned that Delaware is piloting a leadership path for teachers.
- The committee also examined the role of central office at the district level within the context of district and school improvement efforts.
 - o It was mentioned that district leaders in Philadelphia realized that they would have to restructure central office in their efforts to bring about meaningful improvement to their struggling schools. It was also noted that there is a need to increase and expand professional development for district, school and charter leaders as well as create more opportunities for public-private partnerships to help build districts' capacity to support and facilitate school improvement.

Next Steps

Given the discussion, some members would like the entire committee to explore the possibility of revising the memo that was drafted in December to reflect these newly raised issues and concerns.

K. Mensch noted that Partnership for Public Education (PPE) at the University of Delaware has a policy brief series which addresses key topics on public education in DE. She mentioned that there is an opportunity for the committee to work with PPE to draft a policy brief on Charter District Collaboration. This would entail using the research on best practices already done for the committee and writing a brief that is followed by the compact proposal the committee will complete by June. We would use the policy brief to summarize and highlight the expanded conversations the committee has had about the lack of collaboration throughout the education system in Delaware, especially in Wilmington. The policy brief would also have recommendations for action. K. Mensch will follow up with the co-chairs to begin to create this document.

Lastly, the committee noted that in order for collaboration to work there has to be a shift in people's mindset. Given the committee's discussion about the implications of choice and charter law, it was mentioned that a timeline of charter schools and choice in Delaware would be useful to the committee's work. This timeline would provide context for the barriers to collaboration that many charter and district schools now face.

Public Comment

There was no public comment. The meeting concluded at 6:55 pm.

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Attendance**

Committee Members

Aretha Miller, Co-Chair
David Davis
Equetta Jones
Cora Scott
Harrie Ellen Minnehan
Bill Doolittle
Byron Murphy

Members of the Public

Institute for Public Administration Staff

Kelsey Mensch
Chester Holland