

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Charter District Collaboration Committee Meeting
Community Education Building
March 9, 2017, 5-7 pm
Meeting Minutes**

Meeting called to order by Co-Chair Eve Buckley at 5:30 pm.

E. Buckley thanked Susan Haberstroh and David Blowman from the Delaware Department of Education for coming to present to the Committee.

Presentation on the Statewide Plan for Specialized Public Education Opportunities

S. Haberstroh and D. Blowman introduced themselves and noted that they co-staffed the committee on behalf of the department. They noted that they would discuss the background and the components of the strategic plan that was presented to the State Board of Education.

S. Haberstroh began by defining the term “specialized educational opportunities” as programs that are geared toward interests of students or attributes of students. She noted an increase in enrollment of students in public schools in Delaware over the past 20 years. Additionally, over a quarter of Delaware’s students exercise choice.

Next, S. Haberstroh discussed the timeline of the group’s work on the strategic plan. It started with the final report of the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee. WEAC, established by Governor Markell, called for a strategic plan around the establishment of new charters and the mix of vo-tech, charter, and traditional schools. The Governor then called for the Department and State Board to work together to conduct a needs assessment and charged the Department with coming up with a strategic plan. Additionally, passed legislation put a moratorium on charter schools until 2018 or until the completion of a needs assessment and a strategic plan. Haberstroh noted that PCG was awarded the contract to conduct an assessment which was completed in two reports. Additionally, a small group of stakeholders publicly convened to work on the strategic plan on specialized education opportunities which was completed in December 2016. Throughout that process, participants realized that there are many barriers to choice for some families and we must reduce some of those barriers to level the playing field for students. S. Haberstroh noted that the Department’s website has many resources on the reports completed and additional information used during the process.

David Blowman went on to talk about the overall goal of the strategic plan, to provide a much more cohesive system of specialized public educational opportunities. At the center of the plan are 5 efforts to overcome barriers. The objectives include the alignment of policy and regulations to maximize opportunities for families to participate in choice, minimize transportation barriers, strengthen data collection efforts, encourage and incentivize program development and collaboration to improve education programs and meet gaps in programming, and improve and increase outreach to at-risk communities and populations. Within all five areas are strategies that the Department has already begun to undertake, such as the compilation and alignment of state

laws and school enrollment timelines. To see the full presentation and strategies, please see the attached “meeting materials.”

The committee then transitioned into a discussion on the plan and posed questions to the presenters.

A question was asked about whether the plan’s objective of streamlining policy related to choice was a matter of Department of Education and State Board of Education procedure rather than policy.

D. Blowman replied saying that the objectives address issues in Delaware code.

A committee member noted that the plan does not include enough of a plan or definition for a path forward. The presenters were asked what they thought the optimal number of specialized education programs would be based on the strategic plan and their research on the issue of school choice. It was further expressed that traditional public schools cannot exclude certain children from enrolling in their programs, particularly students that require more resources and attention. Based on their personal experience, some committee members observed that public high schools in some areas of the state have essentially become a segregated, two-tiered system in which one set of schools serves high need students and another set does not.

D. Blowman responded by noting that DDOE tries to be agnostic about the provider of a specialized program. To the first point, he noted that LEAs are able to develop similar programs and that Specialized Education Opportunities exist to meet the demand for such programs.

A committee member commented that the discussion has two components: larger education structural issues and enrollment preference issues, noting that a bill will be proposed to address the latter. It was noted that both have to be addressed.

D. Blowman commented that people’s perceptions of charter schools are focused on applying preferences to certain populations. That perception does not apply to all charter schools, particularly schools that serve largely high-needs students.

The committee then discussed the objective around outreach. A question was asked about the outreach objective listed in the presented strategic plan and what happens when outreach fails to reach low-income or at-risk populations. It was mentioned that outreach is really easy to discuss but much more difficult to do effectively. The focus in the strategic plan is on the system-level, to figure out a way to build awareness within at-risk neighborhoods about programs for their students and reduce barriers that may limit those students’ enrollment.

The issue of demographic representation within a school was brought up as a point of contention. It was also noted that underrepresentation of certain demographics should not necessarily be viewed as the school doing something wrong. One member noted that schools that take on special need or at-risk populations, students underfunded in our state system, should be applauded. It was added, however, that schools that opt not to take on high-need students can have a negative impact that impacts many students.

A question about district responsibility to build more programs to attract students was posed to the committee. One member noted that there are many mechanisms that work against districts creating solutions for high-need students, noting the example of mid-year transient students. It was noted that alternative placements, which are meant to provide additional supports for high-need students, are not available for many charter schools. In many cases a collaborative partnership or relationship between public schools is necessary in order to find the best placement for students with significant needs.

The committee then reflected on the benefits of shared responsibility for all students among all schools and some of the barriers that need to be overcome to enable this. One committee member reflected on their positive experience sharing students with charter schools as they serve the same high-needs population of students. The bottom line is what we can do for these kids. Committee members were reminded that families play a big role in determining what schools their children attend.

Lastly, it was mentioned that the state transportation system for students is very inefficient. Committee members questioned if there was intent to move toward a uniform transportation system, or one that is more collaborative. The committee discussed tradeoffs surrounding collaboration on transportation such as the potential of jeopardizing individual school culture.

E. Buckley thanked both S. Haberstroh and D. Blowman for their presentation and their time.

Introduction of Eric Anderson, Vice President, Charter School of Wilmington

E. Buckley introduced the newest member of the committee, Eric Anderson. E. Anderson went on to introduce himself citing his excitement to be a part of the group. He noted his teaching experience at both charter and district schools, including serving on the Christina School Board. He is currently on the Board of the Delaware Charter Schools Network.

Approval of Minutes

E. Buckley motioned to approve the minutes from December 2016, January 2017, and February 2017. The motion was seconded; minutes from December, January, and February were approved.

Chair Update

E. Buckley provided a quick recap of February's Commission meeting, starting by highlighting the presentation by Dr. Joe Pika and Chris Kelly, noting the reported predictions for the cost of redistricting, which are higher than previously anticipated. She also noted that the findings were preliminary, and that a final report is coming.

She also talked about remarks from Governor Carney and Secretary Bunting respectively. E. Buckley noted that the Governor holds a different opinion about the Commission's weighted student funding plan. She added that the Governor talked about his team proposing an alternative plan, but such a plan has not been made available for consideration. E. Buckley went on to discuss Secretary Susan Bunting's comments on collaboration between charter and traditional district schools, saying that the Secretary views collaboration favorably. The rationale for the Secretary's position, according to Dr. Buckley, is that the state's funding issues will require

creative solutions to improve the existing structure using resources currently available. E. Buckley emphasized the Governor's expressed commitment to efficiency and effectiveness with the goal of not adding more resources to any public sector.

E. Buckley shifted to discussing the ongoing work of the committee, noting that there is a forthcoming policy brief from the UD team on the potential impact of charter and district collaboration. Kelsey Mensch, University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration, reported that a draft of the brief should be available ahead of the next committee meeting, as drafts are currently being circulated and edited. The brief would combine committee discussion over the past year and research on best practices in collaboration. She concluded by saying that the end of the brief features a call to action that serves as the foundation for the compact proposal from the committee.

E. Buckley mentioned that the second agenda item for the committee is the development of a compact proposal. She noted that this would not involve the committee creating such a compact, but rather providing a set of guidelines about what such a compact would look like. The goal is to have the proposal submitted to the Commission for review in May and to generate stakeholder support for a compact to be created by the appropriate stakeholders. E. Buckley said that a subcommittee is slated to review existing compacts in other cities across the country. The subcommittee will meet twice between now and April. Committee members briefly discussed incentives to make a compact feasible and presented the value of having one in Delaware.

Public Comment

Kendall Massett noted that work on charter and district collaboration has already been done citing a previous district charter collaboration taskforce that created a report on compacts. She noted that at the time, there was hope for getting support from the Gates Foundation but we were not one of the areas the foundation was interested in funding. K. Massett noted that The Center for Reinventing Public Education has also done a great deal of work on this. She expressed concern that we continue to say that our districts and charters are not collaborating, because they are. She hopes that the committee is careful to avoid repeating what has already been done. While she applauds the committee for talking about these issues, she said that the committee should reach out to others who have worked on, or are working on, the same issues.

E. Buckley asked what else could be done to streamline these efforts, as Charter Network members had been invited to join and participate in the Charter/District Collaboration Committee meetings and efforts.

K. Massett responded that the committee should reach out to her when ideas, like these, are generated from the committee.

E. Buckley asked if the committee could receive a copy of the original report submitted to the Gates foundation. Margie Lopez-Waite similarly asked if the report from the previous taskforce would be available, as members of the previous committee have said that no such document was written.

K. Massett responded that the plan was part of the district/charter Collaboration Taskforce report, citing Brian Townsend as a contact person. She clarified that no final report was issued but there is a public document available for review. K. Massett said that Paul O'Neill was a point person in drafting the report.

B. Doolittle noted that the ability to act on the Special Education Opportunity Strategic Plan is still an open question, based on whether or not this met the standard in the legislation. Committee members noted that they thought the plan presented would be more actionable and questioned whether the plan meets the intent of the legislation that called for its creation. B. Doolittle believes that new legislation is likely to follow.

Meeting adjourned at 6:53pm

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Meeting Attendance**

Committee Members

Eve Buckley, Co-Chair
Margie Lopez Waite
David Davis
Eric Anderson
Byron Murphy
Harrie Ellen Minnehan
Bill Doolittle
Equetta Jones

Members of the Public

Kendall Massett
Meghan Wallace
David Blowman
Susan Haberstroh

IPA Support Staff

Kelsey Mensch
Chester Holland
Kelly Sherretz