

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Redistricting Committee**  
Red Clay Consolidated School District Office, Board Room  
Meeting Minutes – November 4, 2015

**Dr. Joe Pika, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m.**

The Committee approved the minutes from the October 29, 2015 committee meeting.

**Dr. Pika asked for updates from each districts' school boards.**

- Colonial – No new updates since last week's committee meeting. The Dusty Blakey and Joseph T. Laws will be meeting with Tony Allen, Joe Pika, and Dan Rich on Friday November 6, 2015. The Colonial School Board meets next on Tuesday November 10, 2015.
- Brandywine – No updates since the last committee meeting. A town hall was held earlier in the week in the Brandywine School District, and board action is set for November 16, 2015 on a resolution.
- Christina – No update since last week's committee meeting.
- Red Clay – The school board met Monday November 2, 2015, and approved their district's interim framework by a vote of 4-1 (2 absent), which is contingent upon several considerations outlined in the plan.

**Dr. Pika reminded the committee what the process of approval of the plan is.**

Four public hearings will be held, one in each district, with the intent of accepting whatever testimony the public provides concerning the commission's plan.

Dr. Pika emphasized that the plan is a "rolling document" that is continually updated as pieces come in from different committees. He mentioned that the summary case for redistricting had been almost entirely rewritten based off of the feedback provided by the committee at the last meeting. The newest version provides research basis for how redistricting can improve student outcomes. Given that there are only a few other districts in the United States that have non-contiguous boundaries it was very difficult to find a identical scenario to the one that Christina would face if its city areas were integrated into the Red Clay Consolidated School District. The analogous argument is that alignment does make a big difference in districts, one that has been documented thoroughly as providing leadership that delivers clear objectives, consistent curriculum, appropriate professional development, etc. There is also an argument that this will help increase accountability. Currently in Wilmington there are so many responsible parties all working with just a small piece of the community, it is not clear who is responsible for overall student performance. Low-income students in Wilmington perform at lower rates than low-income students in other parts of the same school district, something that's true for all four districts though to different degrees. An additional argument for redistricting is that urban populations are more transient than their peers and moving within the city often means changing districts. The Christina School District has evidence that their city schools have much higher levels of transience than their suburban counterparts and Red Clay Consolidated School District has data that the bulk of the student who are transient in their district are from the Christina School District. Moving from district to district can present additional challenges to students when curricula and classes are not aligned.

Ralph Ackermann commented that a fragmented governance system would still remain; the current plan would only reduce the number of governing bodies by two. Has there been any thought to making the charter schools within the city all accountable to the Red Clay Consolidated School District?

Dr. Pika responded that with the Christina move, more than 50% of the students within the City of Wilmington would be attending the Red Clay Consolidated School District. So removing just that one governing body might have a larger effect than it would initially appear. 19% of Wilmington students last year were enrolled in charter schools, and it is projected that that proportion will increase. The Commission is looking for opportunities for collaboration between district and charter schools, but not for Red Clay to take over all of the charters in Wilmington. However, it is the hope of the Commission that due to their experience, Red Clay will be able to form relationships with the independent charters. The WEIC committee on Charter/District Collaboration is working to develop a plan.

Dr. Harper voiced his frustration concerning the current charter approval process and gave several examples of the pitfalls of the current charter legislation.

Merv Daugherty mentioned a previous task force that dealt with the application process for charters in Delaware. The task force brought in the national charter office that said that Delaware was completely wrong in how they authorize charters. Every other state authorizes charters at the LEA level, while Delaware authorizes them at the state level. There is not the same level of oversight in Delaware over charter schools, which has contributed to the financial difficulties and other issues that several charter schools have faced.

Leah Davis mentioned an article written by Dr. Rich that said the most dramatic cause of the fragmentation was the emergence of charter schools. Even at the Red Clay School Board Meeting that occurred earlier that week, the fact that Christina School District is non-contiguous was never discussed. That would lead one to believe that it isn't truly the driving force behind redistricting. She also asked if it would be possible to align curricula for all of the districts within the city instead of redistricting? She also questioned how governance affects student performance. She stated her belief that all of the districts hold individual buildings accountable, but even still less than half of Wilmington students are meeting proficiency. Moving can be a traumatic experience for a child, so perhaps instead of focusing on redistricting, we should be focused on providing supports for those students and families.

Dr. Pika responded that in theory, yes there are things that the districts could collaborate on in terms of alignment of curriculum and other items, but it has been forty years and no one has been willing to do so. The trauma surrounding moving would require supports outside of those that the schools provide.

Mark Holodick talked about how school choice has affected his school district. Although an advocate of school choice at the time of its adoption, he believes that there have been some unintended outcomes that need to be revisited, that the school environment in northern New Castle County has unintentionally become one that is not appealing to families with school-aged children. He provided an example of a neighborhood with one hundred students attending ten or more different schools, and that families are willing to live across the border in Pennsylvania and pay higher property taxes so that their children can attend what they view as neighborhood schools. The redistricting committee has an opportunity to provide recommendations to address the environment that has been created at the state and local level, and they need to take advantage of that opportunity.

Dr. Harper discussed why he was initially attracted to becoming a part of the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission. He feels that it was wrong to draw part of the Christina School District into Wilmington, and it happened because the superintendents of the eleven school districts that existed at the time were sitting around a similar table and could not agree on a path forward, so a federal judge stepped in. It was wrong to draw the lines how they did then, and although he wishes they could, it

would be similarly improper to completely redraw the lines today. This committee needs to figure out what it is they are willing to do and agree to make those changes.

Jeff Taschner illustrated his concerns over the assumption that Red Clay Consolidated School District is best suited to working with charter schools. The student populations enrolled in the schools that Red Clay currently oversees are distinctly different than those enrolled in other charters throughout the city. There was a committee several years ago that looked at collaboration between charter schools and districts, but they never even issued a report. The students are coming out of the same communities and share similar issues, so it might make sense to get teachers together from different districts and charter schools for professional development and other opportunities.

Charter and District Collaboration Committee Co-Chair Aretha Miller, who was in attendance, confirmed that the committee was working on developing a plan for this, among other things.

Merv Daugherty, a member of the previous committee looking at charter and district collaboration, said that the committee never issued a report because there was no agreement among the committee members.

Dr. Pika said that some of those issues could be brought up when the leadership team meets with the State Board the next day. He mentioned that he had voted both for and against charter schools during his tenure on the State Board, he had had them evaluated, and asked for a three-year study to be conducted. The evaluation showed that strong charters require strong oversight.

Joseph T. Laws asked if there was data that showed how many students enrolled in different charter schools in Wilmington resided in Wilmington.

Mark Holodick said that he would love to see the zip codes of all schools and the zip codes of the students who are attending both district and charter schools. It could drive a conversation about equity of schools and programs and the committee might glean some interesting data.

Jeff Taschner commented that the Department of Education used to do a report where they graphically mapped charter and choice enrollment. Each school had a separate map showing where their students came from, but they have discontinued the maps in the last couple of years.

Vicki Gehrt voiced a concern that one of the major reasons for redistricting is to establish a system of governance, but there will still be fragmentation. She also states that, in her opinion, the tone of the report is very provocative and based primarily on the authors' opinion, not facts, and does not know that she agrees with what the author has written. Redistricting will be very expensive, and the plan does not address many issues that will appear down the road, including issues involving high school students.

Dr. Pika clarified that the objective is to reduce fragmentation, and that it was never stated that the plan would completely eliminate the fractured nature of the school system.

Merv Daugherty explained that Red Clay is considering a number of different options for expanding opportunities for high school students in their district if the plan is approved. He gave a number of examples of theoretical opportunities, but stated that the district is not going to move forward any more until the State Board, General Assembly, and the Governor have approved the plan. After the

approval of the plan, Red Clay would have a year to figure out what to do with the funds they will receive , and at that point they will begin to take action on some of the ideas currently being generated.

Dr. Harper added that he hopes that, as a result of conversations in this committee and others, the Delaware Department of Education and State Board of Education will be forced to collect and disseminate data that they should be collecting. He could not believe that when the State Board was asked how many females were enrolled in advanced math classes, the State Board said that there was not enough room in their questionnaire, so they just assumed half of the students were female. When the Commission asked them to confirm the boundaries of the New Castle County school districts, they could not do it. The State Board used to take the lead on professional development and ensured it was happening statewide, but it no longer does so. Conversations like this could cause something like it to happen in the future.

Leah Davis mentioned that in the Red Clay Consolidated School District, there is already a magnet school and a charter school sharing a building and that there may already be enough seats in the city for high school students.

Vicki Gehrt shared that while reading the report it is difficult to distinguish between recommendations from the Commission committees and the WEAC report particularly in terms of the funding recommendations.

Bob Silber and Jason Hale, members of the Funding Student Success committee, gave a summary of the funding committee discussions and clarified which recommendations had come from them versus the final WEAC report.

Dr. Pika clarified that not all of the funding being requested by the committee would need to come at once, that the funds would be distributed over the course of a few years and some would be sustained.

Jeff Taschner asked what would happen if the plan is approved, the borders change, but the later funding does not come through.

Merv Daugherty explained that the plan includes a provision so that if the funding does not come through, the plan is dissolved. There is a two-year window between the district boundary changes being approved and then actually going into effect.

Jeff Taschner restated his concern that the State Board only has permission to alter the district lines during a certain time frame. After that window closes this spring, there is no mechanism to reverting the district lines back in the event that the funding does not come through. So language should be included in the Resolution that the boundary change does not take legal effect until all of the funding is approved.

Dr. Pika summarized the previous conversation for Dr. Rich who had just arrived.

Dr. Rich agreed that the current draft of the resolution was missing a contingency plan, it is just a placeholder until the plan is finalized.

Leah Davis asked about an inconsistency within the resolution draft.

Dr. Rich clarified that the resolution is just a form based off legal counsel's advice, it is not the resolution itself. It was drafted prior to the development of the plan, so ideas for language are needed and appreciated.

Dr. Rich stated that he thought it would be quite appropriate for the two committees (Charter and District Collaboration Committee and Redistricting Committee) to have a joint meeting.

Dr. Pika reminded the committee that the commission is in operation for five years, so not everything needs to be done in this plan. Other committees are on different timelines for their deliverables.

Dr. Rich pointed out the new charts on charter enrollment in the most recent draft. The projections in the chart are based off of charter schools that have already been authorized by the State Board of Education.

Jeff Taschner commented that not all charter schools are at capacity, and asked if there was data available that projected the number of students that would actually enroll in the new charter schools. He said that he believes the charter school law needs to be rewritten so that the State Board is not automatically obligated to approve any charter school that meets the state's requirements.

Dr. Pika stated that he thinks this initiative is the next version of that battle, and that everyone agrees that fragmentation will remain and remain excessively in Wilmington even with the recommended changes.

Dr. Rich commented that there were taskforces that were supposed to release reports, but they have not issued a single one. There is active resistance to making changes to the charter school law, and the Representative Potter's bill last session calling for a moratorium came largely from the frustration surrounding the current law. It does not matter if you are for charter schools or against them, but finding a configuration of schools that optimizes outcomes for students should be everyone's main objective.

Joseph T. Laws reminded the committee that the original intent of the law was to offer something that was not being offered in the traditional district schools and that charters would be authorized by the district and not the state.

**Dr. Pika asked if there was anything else that the committee would like to discuss before opening to public comment.**

Jeff Taschner asked if there was an indication of how many low-income students are in the charter schools, and if they are equally dispersed.

**Dr. Pika asked for comments from the members of the public.**

- Mike Matthews asked for the board to reconsider their recommendation that all of the teachers in the Christina School District's Wilmington schools would have to reapply for their jobs during the transition process.
  - Dr. Pika asked him to look at the language released in that day's draft, and if he still had concerns to share it with the committee.

- Aretha Miller expressed her disappointment in the content and tone of the committee’s conversation which amounted to “charter bashing.” There were a number of key issues that were glossed over during the discussion and the tone was very anti-charter and choice. Much of the conversation revolved around choice, and she believes that parents should have the chance to decide what is best for each of their children.
  - Dr. Rich asked if she would be open to having a joint meeting between her committee and the redistricting committee. She said that she would.
- Henry Clampitt stated that he would also like the tone of the conversation to change. The conversation that had occurred assumed that districts have the first say. There are some great interactions that already occur between traditional and charter schools. As an example, committee member Leah Davis came to the Charter School of Wilmington to observe how the school prepares students for college. He emphasized that the State Board does have a lot of say in approving charter schools or not approving them. They are not required to do so as the conversation tonight insinuated. There are many conditions that a school must meet in order to be approved.

Ralph Ackermann responded to the comments explaining his belief that charter schools and school choice are fragmenting and re-segregating the system. Parents are leaving traditional public schools and sending their children to charter schools rather than fighting for better traditional schools for all children. The state needs to look at whether or not it is going to keep putting money into buildings and facilities to allow for more and more charter schools.

Jeff Taschner also responded to the public comments by first stating that DSEA has been on the record since 1995 in support of charter schools, but the current “shall” language in the charter school law often leaves no choice for the State Board except to approve the charters. It is a public sector market place with finite resources, and the problem is the state is not currently maximizing resources.

- Aretha Miller stated that it is the responsibility of the committee member to look at the facts and bring a level of objectivity to each discussion. Some of the opinions expressed in the meeting are not supported by the data. While it may not have been the intent of the committee members, conversations so overtly anti-charter are not conducive for future conversations and working relationships.

Jeff Taschner responded that he did not agree with the characterization of the discussion and that there is data to support that charter schools serve a population with a statistically significant different socioeconomic status than the surrounding area. His organization paid for the charter debate transcriptions to be put online. During the debate, the Red Clay School Board President stated that the Charter School of Wilmington was open to everyone regardless of their abilities in math and science and that remediation would be provided to students who needed it. Yet, there is only one student from the Christina School District’s section of Wilmington that attends the Charter School of Wilmington.

- Aretha Miller responded that she is the President of a building that houses three different charter schools, and all of her students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Those three schools give students consistency even if they have to move, they are still able to attend the school. She is looking at Wilmington and what can be done to improve the public school education portfolio, not looking at charters on a statewide basis.

Dr. Rich closed the debate by saying that Delaware did two things differently from all other states when it introduced the charter law. First, it allowed the state to authorize charter schools outside of the district. Second, it promoted charter schools as magnet schools. Finally he reminded everyone that the

first person to propose charter schools was the President of the American Federation of Teachers. He asked the committee members to continue sending feedback on the draft.

**The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.**

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission  
Redistricting Committee  
Attendance at the 11/4 Meeting**

**Redistricting Committee Members**

Joe Pika, Co-Chair  
Henry Harper, Co-Chair  
Ralph Ackerman  
Ted Ammann  
Dusty Blakey  
Michael Calhum  
Merv Daugherty  
Leah Davis

Vicki Gehrt  
Mark Holodick  
Joseph T. Laws  
Harrie Ellen Minnehan  
Kenny Rivera  
Bob Silber  
Jeff Taschner

**Members of the Public**

Hugh Broomall  
Melissa Foemming  
Ty Jones  
John Laznik

Mike Matthews  
Aretha Miller  
Laura Nash

**Institute for Public Administration Staff**

Dan Rich  
Elizabeth Burland

Annie Gould