

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Redistricting Committee
Red Clay Consolidated School District Office, Board Room
Meeting Minutes – October 29, 2015

Dr. Joe Pika, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m.

The Committee approved the minutes from the October 8, 2015 committee meeting.

Dr. Pika announced an additional meeting for the committee.

The additional meeting will be held on Wednesday November 4, 2015 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the Red Clay Consolidated School District Board Room. Additional drafts of the report will be available to the committee at that time. The meeting will also focus on the financial ramifications of the redistricting plan.

Dr. Pika confirmed that the meetings scheduled for November 12th and November 19th will remain on the schedule as well.

Dr. Pika asked for an update from the representatives from the Colonial School District.

Ted Laws, from the Colonial School District, stated their belief that they are providing the best possible opportunities to low-income students, and it is the opinion of the board that they should retain their Wilmington students. This decision was based on data provided to the Board showing the success of the district in serving low-income students. He cautioned against comparing test scores for the City of Wilmington students, as the small size of the population in the Colonial School District can be easily skewed by poor results for a few students. The argument for Christina School District leaving Wilmington is that their borders are non-contiguous, however this is not the case with the Colonial School District.

Dr. Pika and Dr. Dan Rich have sent a letter to the Colonial School Board in response, which outlines the concerns they have about the Colonial School District remaining in the City of Wilmington. Both Dr. Pika and Dr. Rich confirmed that conversations will continue, and that they are hoping to be able to come to an agreement with the Colonial School District about what the best path forward is.

Dr. Rich reminded the committee that the recommendations for redistricting in the final WEAC report were unrelated to test scores. They were based on a number of factors including governance and what was believed to be needed to provide a cohesive educational environment for all Wilmington students. Data was used to support their recommendations, but that data did not include student test scores. The Colonial School district serves only a small number of students and has no schools within six miles of where their students live, that was the basis of their recommendation.

Dr. Pika asked for an update from the Brandywine School Board.

Ralph Ackerman stated that the Brandywine position is unchanged. They would like to continue to serve their students from the City of Wilmington without changing their boundaries. At the next board meeting, which will be held on November 16, 2015, they will draft a resolution stating such. They would like to emphasize that they generally support the work being done by the committee.

Dr. Pika asked the representatives from the Red Clay and Christina School Districts to provide an update to the committee on their transition plans that had been distributed to committee members.

Kelli Racca, from the Christina School District, announced that the plan has been introduced to their board and they plan on acting on the plan at their board meeting next Monday.

Kenny Rivera, President of the Red Clay Board, stated that at their last board meeting they passed an affirmation resolution stating that they still support the transition plan as long as conditions they outlined were met including the timeline including an extra year for preparation and adequate funding.

- There was a question of what “funding” would mean long-term.
 - The response was that the resolution contains language to the effect that “no undue burden be placed on Red Clay residents.” They are looking at some of the considerations of the funding committee to address that stipulation.

Dr. Pika announced that in addition to the transition plan created jointly by the Red Clay and Christina School Districts, Christina has also created a post-WEIC plan.

Kelli Racca noted the importance to the board of knowing what Christina would look like if the WEIC recommendations were implemented. The Board has already approved this additional plan. They also noted that these plans are viewed as the framework from which additional planning will continue. Not every question that will need to be answered has been addressed, but they hope to identify all of the central issues so that there is an expectation of what types of conversations will continue to be held as the process moves forward.

Dr. Rich noted that both the transition plan and the Christina post-WEIC plan would be included as appendices in the final WEIC report. The Commission’s recommendations for a transition plan included in the body of the report would be based off of the plan constructed by the districts, but less detailed.

Dr. Pika asked for comments or concerns from the committee or commission in regards to either plan.

- Rosa Colon-Kowalko, a member of the Commission, noted that the Christina document was very thorough, but the need for more interpreters in the school buildings for English Language Learners was not addressed, and is a significant issue in many schools, particularly in Wilmington.
 - Representative from Christina reiterated that the issues provided in the document were largely ones raised by the employees in the schools within the city, in the case that they do become part of the Red Clay Consolidated School District. They noted that the commission member made an excellent point.
 - A commission member asked for the term “equitably” to be more clearly defined on page 13 of the Christina plan.
- Rosa Colon-Kowalko pointed out that there is no mention of adding cultural competency resources or additional training in this area for educators.
 - Response from Christina was that this is a major concern for all of our district teachers and administrators, but particularly for the city schools.
- It was brought up student study skills and whether or not enough is being done to foster basic, strong study skills in all students, and if it is an issue for students, not addressing it is doing them a great disservice.
- Jeff Taschner brought up that during the conversations with the General Assembly while crafting the legislation last spring to allow redistricting, there was never a point that it was mentioned that redistricting could result in staff members losing jobs through a process of job fairs and interviewing. The committee member shared their ideas for how the process could be completed so that all staff members would be treated fairly and equitably. Given the long lead

time before implementing the turnover of schools in fall 2018, there would be enough time to identify staff who would be asked to remain long before the spring of 2018.

- A representative from the Red Clay Consolidated School District stated that it should not be assumed that all of the current Christina staff members in Wilmington schools would have jobs in Red Clay. It would be against the philosophy of the district to simply keep all of the staff in their current positions if they did not have a strong commitment to the schools. The district has reached out to the Christina Education Association and they are working together to try and develop a fair process.
- Dr. Rich interjected that this was one of the primary reasons why a year was added to the timeline initially proposed in the final WEAC report. The Commission is concerned with what is best not only for the students, but the educators as well.
- Kelli Racca stated that they were initially surprised by the Red Clay staffing plans, as well, but have been working through the problem and she stressed that no Christina School District employee should be worried about losing their job because of redistricting. A two-year window has been intentionally established for the transition, and their goal is to allow teachers to stay focused on their current roles.
- Bob Silber noted that one of the actively discussed parts of the funding model is additional units from low-income students. As Christina School District has areas of high poverty outside of Wilmington, the additional funds could create new openings in other areas throughout the district, so the district would not have to depend exclusively on retirements or teachers leaving for other reasons to create vacancies. Students in town hall meetings have asked about what will happen to their teachers, so what happens to the staff is of great concern to the students as well and the funding committee is very aware of that.
- Dr. Pika thought the district's estimate that fifty percent of teachers would remain in their school after the transition is a very conservative estimate.
- Dr. Rich stated that the funding committee has met and voted on all of the items to present to the Commission with the exception of one, which was determined to be worded poorly and will be rewritten and voted upon at the next funding committee meeting. He also stated that the funding committee has dealt with transition costs broadly, but has not yet looked specifically at employee reassignment transition costs. The districts were asked by the Commission to use a template when creating their transition plans that were developed following conversations with the state board.
- Dusty Blakey asked about the definition of "sustainable funding" and what that meant for districts. Specifically for additional teachers brought on as a result of an increase of units for low-income students.
 - The response was the local share of their salary would still depend on local funds. But districts would not be required to hire the maximum number of staff if their local tax base could not support it.

Dr. Pika reiterated that the original timeline from the WEAC final report had been adjusted, and that the changes were reflected in the draft of the WEIC plan released for review.

Pushing the transition back one year would allow for more time for planning and the resolution of many of the discussions that are currently taking place. At some point, the districts will need to create a Memo of Understanding with the Christina and Red Clay teachers unions, but they do not need to do so at this point in time.

The conversation returned to potential staffing issues that could arise.

- Jeff Taschner, DSEA, raised the point that students will have the right to finish at the school they are enrolled in when the transition begins. This could have tremendous implications for districts in terms of staffing. Questions that were raised related to:
 - The timeline of when students and families would need to make a decision as to whether they would remain at their school or follow their new feeder pattern.
 - If students would have one opportunity to decide and then be committed to that decision, or if they would be able to change their mind at any point.
- Dr. Rich emphasized that nothing the Commission is doing removes the choice option for students, nor is the framework of the Commission preemptive of any choice options. The Commission has been engaging with students and families so that they are aware of their rights and are able to make the best decision for them when the time comes. He also reminded the committee that statistically, low-income parents have a more difficult time exercising choice.
- Jeff Taschner pointed out that since students are guaranteed a spot in their current school should they wish to stay, it would make sense for that process to occur prior to the choice process, so that districts knew how many spots were available in their schools. There again could be tremendous staffing concerns based on how many children elect to stay in their current school.

Dr. Pika asked Dr. Rich to explain the organization of the draft of the WEIC report and then asked for reactions from the committee.

- A question was asked about what exactly would be released for public comment.
 - The response was the plan in its entirety would be released.
- A question was asked about the date of the first public comment session.
 - The interim draft will be released following the November Commission meeting. After it is released, there will be one public hearing in each district beginning on November 30. In addition, any direct communications or comments on the WEIC website will be considered part of the public record. That could begin the moment the document is released.
- A question was asked about how the average family was expected to be able to digest all of the information in an amount of time that would allow them to provide their input prior to the Commission presenting the report to the state board.
 - The response was that this was precisely the reason why the Commission has been working to engage families throughout the process. There will be an executive summary, which will highlight the most crucial aspects of the plan. But it will certainly be difficult. The draft presented to the committee tonight is also available to the public, any changes that the committee makes will also be made available as soon as it is possible to do so.
- Leah Davis raised a concern about the first sentence of the draft referring to “redistricting”, when it should probably state “redistricting with proper funding.” Throughout the report it is emphasized that redistricting alone will not solve the current problems, so the first sentence should not suggest that that is the opinion of the group.
- A question was asked about racial integration and how this plan would support it.
 - The response was that it doesn’t.
- Vicki Gehrt requested data to support the idea that redistricting would guarantee improved student outcomes.
- A concern was raised that many of the important issues are not made clear enough in the first few pages of the report. Given the density of the material, it is critical that the first few pages clearly identify the priorities of the Commission.

- A question was asked about the comprehensive plan that the state has been tasked with creating, and how it would fit into the Commission's plan. Governance is the one of the main issues, but if even more charter schools are allowed to enter the city the governance will still be divided.
- It was raised that the original charter legislation required charters to get the approval of the district they hoped to enter into and that charters have never had to demonstrate how they would improve the educational landscape as they are also required to do as part of the legislation.
- A comment was made that a needs assessment for charter schools should be conducted.

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

- Bill Doolittle, a member of the public, expressed his confidence in the committee and the Commission as a whole. He also stressed that the committee's focus should be on what is in the best interest of the children and not on whether or not there will be money in the budget to make it happen.

The meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

**Redistricting Committee
Attendance at the 10/29 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
Kelli Racca
Kenny Rivera
Jeff Taschner

Members of the Commission

Rosa Colon-Kowalko

Margie Lopez Waite

Members of the Public

Bill Doolittle
Mike Matthews
Laura Nash

Bob Silber
Rep. Kim Williams

Institute for Public Administration Staff

Dan Rich
Elizabeth Burland

Annie Gould