

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Charter and District Collaboration Committee
Bayard Middle School Auditorium
Meeting Minutes – October 28, 2015

The Co-chairs, Eve Buckley and Aretha Miller called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m. and welcomed everyone. They then asked each of the committee members to introduce themselves, as there were several new members.

The Co-chairs introduced their two invited guests, Jim Taylor and Ron Russo, to discuss the history of charter law.

The minutes from the meeting on September 23 were approved.

The Co-chairs discussed the following items regarding the agenda and meeting objectives:

- There is no charter sector representation on the Redistricting or Funding Committees, so it was requested that they add an agenda item to discuss a statement around charter schools that could be included in the Redistricting plan.
- A glossary of terms should be presented from this committee to the larger Commission to ensure that everyone is using the same terms. For example, what does the committee mean by “collaboration.”

Ron Russo explained the intent of charter law, presenting a handout that gives some historical context. That handout is included at the end of the minutes.

Russo made the following points about the genesis of the charter law:

- It was economically oriented: if people live and work here, where will they send their children to school?
- Charter schools were not supposed to proliferate and become a parallel school system. The intention was to have them improve overall public K-12 education.
- There has always remained a disconnect between charter and district schools.

Jim Taylor, of Saul Ewing, LLP, represents many of the charter schools in Delaware. He discussed the charter school segment of the Delaware Code. The following major points were made:

- The charter law was created to allow schools to have both greater autonomy and accountability.
- The original law intended to have charter schools utilize extra space in existing traditional schools. There is no capital funding for charter schools because if a charter was successful, the intent was for there to be space in a traditional school for its students.
- The original intention was not to have two parallel systems, but one system that works together.
- The authorization process:

- How to get a charter? Red Clay is the only district that currently authorizes authorize charter schools, the rest are state authorized. The charter applicant must demonstrate that they have a sound educational program, organizational structure, are financially viable, and have an adequate safety plan.
- How to admit students? There is a section in the code that deals with preferences and requirements for holding a lottery. The only preferences that can be given include sibling, parent and founders' preference, specific interest preference, students from the district where the school is located, and the "5 mile radius" preference. After these preferences, there is a lottery if applications exceed available spots.
- While some schools have a lottery, many are challenged to meet minimum enrollment numbers.

There was a discussion about the enrollment preferences at the Charter School of Wilmington. Henry Clampitt, in the audience, was asked to explain the Charter School of Wilmington enrollment practices. He explained that the Charter School of Wilmington has two ways of determining the special interest preference: the qualifying rubric and an interview. He emphasized that neither the rubric nor the interview is the preferred admission determination; students can be admitted through either process.

Several comments were made about the importance of every child having an advocate, particularly to navigate the choice process. The Committee discussed the concern that students often have difficulty navigating the choice process for all public schools.

- The point was made that the state of Delaware has put a lot of effort into simplifying the ways people can apply to charter schools.

A comment was made about making sure to follow best practices in all schools. Encouraging parent involvement was emphasized as a best practice in some schools that needs to be scaled up to all schools.

A clarification was made about charter schools having a specific mission and key design elements which have to be communicated clearly to students and families so as to ensure that they understand what they would be agreeing to once they get admitted to the school. More specifically, having this understanding will enable families and schools to help students choose the school with the program that best meets their needs/preference.

Several concerns were addressed about the accountability of charter schools. The guest speakers highlighted that charters are held to more stringent accountability requirements than traditional district schools for increased autonomy.

The Co-chairs allowed for the first round of public comment.

A concern was raised about the location of the meeting being posted on the calendar. This concern was addressed as a technical oversight, and that will be improved in the future.

A comment was made about best practices: there are not necessarily best practices for running charter schools, only for authorizing them. Additionally, it was stated that charter school preferences are the only opportunity for a child to have a say in their educational options.

The Co-chairs resumed the discussion.

A comment was made not to ignore the importance of parental and other supports. In order for preference to be shown, and for decisions to be made that are in the best interest of the child, it is important that each child has an advocate. It was also raised that the system currently is set up so that students in poverty cannot access some opportunities.

A request was made to have a presentation at a future meeting on federal discrimination law and federal choice law.

Two sets of information were shared with the committee: the Community Center for Research and Service report, *Overview of Poverty in Delaware*, and a few charter school data sets. The Co-chairs split the committee into three groups to discuss questions relating to each of the school levels (high school, middle school, elementary school).

Several data questions were raised through this exercise which will continue to be discussed by the committee. Some of the questions raised were:

- What are the feeder patterns for the schools and children?
- Are there schools who are doing well with subgroups that ideas could be replicated?
- Is there a way to show data on students who fall into multiple risk groups?

The committee requested to have the data broken down to be able to see the overlap and compounding factors among risk groups. A request was made that as part of the data collection, the team includes a narrative that describes the programming available at each school. This request was made in an effort to start identifying those practices that maybe having a positive impact on student achievement data. The Committee will begin to select a few schools to start looking at this data using this particular framework. Through this process committee members will begin to engage in rigorous analysis and respectful conversations about opportunities for collaboration across schools. The goal is to eventually draft recommendations on ways in which charters, district and vo-tech schools can work collaboratively to improve student outcome that will be presented to the larger commission for review. Committee members acknowledged that recommendations for collaboration should not be mandated by the state or the Commission.

The Co-chairs allowed for final public comment.

A suggestion was made to address the issue of identifiable data and ways to respect confidentiality when studying students in subgroups with small numbers.

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Charter and District Collaboration Committee
Attendance at the 10/28 Meeting

Eve Buckley, Co-chair
Aretha Miller, Co-chair
Dusty Blakey
Bill Doolittle
Shannon Griffin
Equetta Jones
Margie Lopez Waite
Byron Murphy
Jennifer Nagourney
Haneef Salaam
Michele Savage
Vicki Seifred