

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Redistricting Committee
Red Clay Consolidated School District Office, Board Room
Meeting Minutes – November 12, 2015

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

Dr. Pika made a note that the agenda had been amended since it was first sent out to the committee based on requests from committee members recent meetings and presentations. The Committee then approved the minutes from the November 4, 2015 committee meeting.

Dr. Pika acknowledged the extended conversation on charter schools from the last committee meeting and the fact that significant fragmentation will continue in Wilmington even with the consolidation of the Red Clay and Christina Wilmington sections.

He has contacted Aretha Miller, co-chair of the WEIC Charter and District Collaboration committee, who was present at the last committee meeting to see if her committee would be interested in conducting a joint meeting. She stated that her committee would be interested. They are working to coordinate a date, most likely the meeting will take place in January. Although the interchange at the last meeting showed that there was a great divide in opinions, Dr. Pika stated that he thought that it was promising that the subject was being engaged.

Merv Daugherty mentioned that he did not believe that Aretha Miller was speaking on behalf of her committee when she commented during the last redistricting committee meeting.

Dr. Pika confirmed that there are many different points of view within the Charter and District Collaboration committee, and that Aretha Miller had been speaking for herself not the committee she co-chairs.

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

- Brandywine – No updates since the last committee meeting, but board action is set for November 16, 2015.
- Colonial – The school board met on Tuesday November 10, 2015. The board passed a resolution recognizing the commission and expressing their support for the ongoing work. The school board supports the merger of Red Clay and the Wilmington portion of the Christina School District, but Colonial wishes to retain their role in Wilmington.
 - Dr. Pika emphasized that it had been discussed within the committee and publicly that there were ongoing conversations between the WEIC leadership team and the Colonial School Board about Colonial School District's role in the redistricting plan.
 - Dr. Rich also clarified the order of events that led to the Colonial school board passing their resolution.

Dr. Pika provided an update on the presentation to the State Board of Education at their retreat on Thursday November 5, 2015.

The meeting lasted about three hours, and could be described as constructive although it did not go the way that the leadership team had anticipated. The State Board is very focused on taking action that improves student success, as is the commission. The State Board shares many of the same primary concerns and much of the conversation was centered on the best way to address those shared

concerns. The State Board asked about the current status of the Red Clay and Christina priority schools. Dr. Steve Godowsky was in attendance and provided his initial read on that situation.

The leadership team left the meeting feeling that the State Board is reassured that the commission has done its homework and in the redistricting committee has thought through how the transition would occur between Christina and Red Clay.

Dr. Pika mentioned that the State Board would still like more data and would like the commission to include and flesh out the discussion of measures of success as it moves forward. After the meeting the leadership team has a better idea of the measures they would like to focus on, and Dr. Pika stated that he thought it was a useful meeting for the team. He also noted that it was an open meeting, but there was not heavy attendance, only a few other members of the public were present.

Dr. Henry Harper mentioned that he was surprised that three members of the State Board were absent and unable to hear the commission's argument for the proposed plan. The State Board spoke for at least a half hour before the leadership team was able to begin its presentation. He emphasized his philosophy that individuals or groups need to create and set their own goals, an outside body cannot do it for them. But there are ways to support groups in creation of their own goals. In the United States, education is a local issue and it is written into the Constitution that way. Dr. Harper is willing to work with each district to help them create a plan to best suit their needs, but said that he can only work with competent and motivated people. He is encouraged by the work that is being done in the committee and believes that if the committee can come together on the things that everyone agrees with that this can be done.

Dr. Rich described the State Board presentation as two meetings that occurred in the same place. The first meeting outlined the State Board's basic concerns. The leadership team spent most of the time dispelling some misperceptions that the board has about what was going on. Not necessarily with the commission, but with the districts. The State Board said upfront that they were very confident with the Commission's work. The second meeting focused on another issue that the State Board identified, which was their difficulty connecting the redistricting effort with improvement in student outcomes. It was obvious to the leadership team that people who are not a part of the discourse might not be able to connect the pieces. Dr. Rich stated that he felt in the end it was constructive, and the Secretary of Education is very supportive.

Dr. Pika asked if there were any questions about the State Board presentation.

Dr. Pika asked Dr. Rich to provide a summary of the presentation to the Wilmington City Council.

Dr. Rich said that there were two presentations happening at the meeting, the other being a presentation from the Wilmington Education Think Tank. The meeting was broadcast on the Wilmington television channel. The Wilmington Education Think Tank made a very passionate statement about the inequity of funding, which was largely in line with the funding changes that WEIC is proposing. Additionally, they endorsed the proposals from the WEIC Funding Student Success committee. They propose that what WEIC is recommending is the next step, but not the final step. There were a lot of questions raised during the Wilmington Education Think Tank's presentation on public education funding. The City Council couldn't understand how the state could not have an allocation for low-income students or English Language Learners. Overall, Dr. Rich thought that it was a valuable experience.

Following the Wilmington Education Think Tank's presentation, WEIC was able to present. The City Council was interested in the timetable and where it fits within their own agenda. They seemed quite

focused on their Education and Public Policy Office, and in both conversations there was talk about what that office might do. Dr. Rich said that they went through the elements of the WEIC plan, but not in great detail and the City Council had a lot of questions. There was broad support for the plan, including from members of the Wilmington Education Think Tank who were asked to comment. There was a discussion on the different initiatives that are currently in progress and how they might work together. He also said that Senator Margaret Rose Henry was at the meeting and she seemed fairly optimistic about the political will to get things accomplished. During the presentation, Dr. Rich told the city council that the Commission would appreciate if they would make a public comment on the plan. He believes that the Wilmington Education Think Tank will also make a public comment.

Dr. Rich mentioned that the district chiefs also had a meeting that night and asked Dr. Mark Holodick to make a comment. Dr. Holodick said that they had an hour long “town hall meeting,” but there were only 4-5 people in attendance other than the chiefs. However, he thought that it went well.

Dr. Pika asked if there were any other updates.

Dr. Pika returned to school district updates.

- Red Clay – Ted Amman expressed concern about some of the language in the plan regarding priority schools. He felt the phrase “priority choice” might confuse people.
- Christina – Bob Silber stated that he had sent a clarification to the leadership team on the Christina resolution.

Discussion then moved to the draft plan.

Dr. Rich reminded the committee where the commission is in terms of the overall timeline. He also reviewed the three ways that individuals or groups can provide public comment. He explained that the Commission meeting on November 17 would be dedicated to going over the plan and engaging members of the Commission who have not been as engaged in the work as members of the redistricting committee for the current plan. The Commission will meet again in December to vote on the plan. Dr. Rich also explained the procedure for the public hearings.

- Leah Davis asked how the Commission was informing the public about the public hearings. She also asked if there was a condensed version of the plan that would be available to families written in more accessible language.
 - Dr. Rich replied that the Commission needs the districts’ help to get the word out. They are also counting on the organizations represented on the committee to let their members know. The Commission is going to ask The News Journal to post a few times, and the radio stations as well. He emphasized that no one needs the Commission’s approval or permission to publicize any of the events and no one should be reluctant to do so. He also mentioned that the first draft of the Executive Summary of the plan would be available on Monday November 16. An interim draft will be released on Tuesday November 17, the day of the next Commission meeting. The writing team will continue working, but not release another draft until December 1. He also outlined a number of changes that the committee could expect to see in the November 17 draft.

Dr. Pika reminded the committee that they would hold a meeting on December 3, by which time they will have held 75% of the public hearings. At that meeting the committee will have the opportunity to talk about the feedback that the Commission has received at that point.

Dr. Rich took members of the committee through the draft they received that day and outlined the changes that had been made.

- Leah Davis asked about some of the data that had been included.
 - Merv Daugherty mentioned that the Governor frequently cites the dropout rate.
- Ralph Ackermann noted that on pages 4-5 there are a number of tables, but they do not all include the number of students.
 - Dr. Rich responded that if there were less than 15 students the number was not included for confidentiality reasons, but they would consider putting them back in.
- Rep. Kim Williams raised a concern that in the tables referenced by Ralph Ackermann, New Castle County Vo-Tech was included with the traditional districts. She thinks that it could be very misleading since their district is only 9-12 and they are able to select their students. How it is currently presented makes it appear as if their district is performing much better than the traditional districts.
- Dr. Rich highlighted that there was a consistent pattern for all schools, traditional and charter, in regards to achievement levels. The district-wide average was higher than the low-income average, and the low-income average was higher than the Wilmington low-income average.
- Dr. Pika and Dr. Rich explained the logic behind the new infographic.
- Michael Calhm asked how we can get communities more engaged, and if the communities that we are particularly trying to target have access to the Internet.
 - Dr. Rich repeated that the commission needs the help of all the committee members to get information about the plan out, particularly information about the public hearings. He acknowledged that it is sometimes harder to reach the parent in the low-income communities. Some town halls have been better attended than others. Each district knows what works best in their communities as far as dispersing information.
 - Dr. Harper mentioned that the Wilmington Education Think Tank was asked to also help get the word out to communities.
 - Dr. Rich mentioned that Councilman Nnamdi Cukwuocha has also been asked to assist.
 - Merv Daugherty noted that each of the districts want to get the word out and have employed all of their social media accounts to let people know.
- Bob Silber asked if during the public hearings there was an expectation that information will be presented, or if the attendees would need to come already informed.
 - Dr. Pika responded that the latter was true.
 - Bob Silber then stated that is very important to get the materials out to the community so that they would be able to come already informed.
 - Dr. Rich stated that he does not feel that it is the Commission's responsibility to reach out to each district, that each district should be responsible for the messaging as they see appropriate to their communities. The Commission is complementing the communication of the districts, but their communications are not a substitute.
 - Melissa Froemming mentioned that the framing is particularly important.
- Rep. Kim Williams asked if there would be a final town hall before the plan is submitted to the State Board.
 - Dr. Rich responded that there can be additional town hall meetings, but they will not be a part of the official public record.
- Rep. Williams asked for clarification of what will be provided to the public and when it will be provided.
- Dr. Harper asked if the goal was to get as many people out to one event in one location.

- Ted Amman stated that in Red Clay the best way to get to parents is to hold an event in every school, similarly to how they pass their referendum.
- Leah Davis pointed out that the language is still not accessible to the “Average Joe.”
 - Dr. Rich said that the staff could work with the CIOs in each district to create a template that could be customized for each district, similar to the fact sheets that were created at the beginning of the process.
- Melissa Froemming stated that given the number of meetings that have already taken place, the grassroots level would be the best way to spend the group’s resources now.
- Bob Silber mentioned that all parents have a very simple question, “What will happen to my child next year?”
 - Dr. Rich responded that that is a very easy question to answer. For the next two years there will be no change. What the parents are really asking is what will happen to their children in September 2018 and that he believes that the commission has an answer to that as well.
 - Bob Silber said that he does not think that the commission is answering their true question.
 - Dr. Rich said that he wanted to confirm that the feeder patterns are the responsibility of each district, and that the commission has no responsibility or authority over that.
 - Kenny Rivera said he believes the answer to parents is that the education will be better and that is what we need to focus on. That if the plan is accepted there will be additional resources available.
 - Jeff Taschner stated that he did not believe that anyone can promise that to parents, because if the boundaries change according to the resolution, but the additional funding doesn’t come through things will not be better.

Dr. Pika used that opportunity to transition to a discussion of the resolution.

Dr. Rich mentioned that the question came up with the State Board that confirmed that their understanding of the action item is the same as the Commission’s understanding of the action item. The plan will be approved in its entirety or not at all. He stated that there will be contingencies that are put into the resolution.

- Jeff Taschner restated his concern of telling parents that things will be better because the commission will not know the outcome of some decisions for years.
- Merv Daugherty asked if the committee would have the resolution for next week’s meeting.
 - Dr. Rich responded that the staff could work on it, but was still waiting on agreement on the form.
- Ralph Ackermann asked if the form could be expected for the Commission meeting on November 17.
 - Dr. Rich said that he hadn’t prepared to present the resolution to the Commission until all of the “whereas” clauses from each district were completed. He believes that is what the State Board will be looking for.
 - Ralph Ackermann said that he would just like to see the language about the contingency clauses, so that members of the Commission could feel certain that they are in there. Maybe not all of them, but at least the important ones.
 - Dr. Rich noted that the contingency on funding is the most important one.
 - Kenny Rivera stated that the Red Clay board outlined their three contingencies at their last board meeting.

- Dr. Rich expressed his concern in restating all 146 or so of the contingencies included in the plan in the resolution, he does not think that that level of detail will be helpful to the cause.
- Ted Laws commented that the Commission must to be able to vote on the wording of the resolution. That the Commission should agree on a definition of “sustainable funding” and how it will be understood in the resolution.
- Dr. Rich commented that parallel to the plan there would be a legislative action agenda, which would outline the specific legislation needed.

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

- Bill Doolittle provided a report to the committee members. He attended the presentation to the State Board of Education last week and was disappointed to see that there was no substance about what “meeting the needs of students” really means. He also stated that there is nothing in the current draft report on that topic, and that is what the State Board wants to see. He also discussed ways to engage parents. Mr. Doolittle said that the town halls are great, but that is not how parents collaborate. He reaffirmed that he thinks all of the committee’s points are good and the State Board agrees with the Commission that the funding requirement must be fulfilled or nothing moves forward.
- Mike Matthews repeated his comments from the last Funding Student Success committee’s meeting. He does not think that there is an interest from all the districts to really work towards funding the Wilmington schools. Districts need to understand that we all need to invest in the City of Wilmington. He stated that what the Colonial school board has been saying about serving students in poverty better than the other districts is false. He concluded that every district in New Castle County owes it to the city and the children of Wilmington to play a big part and invest in the schools in the districts.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Redistricting Committee
Attendance at the 11/12 Meeting**

Redistricting Committee Members

Joe Pika, Co-Chair
Jason Hale (In for Vicki Gehrt)
Ralph Ackerman
Ted Ammann
Dusty Blakey
Michael Calhm
Merv Daugherty
Leah Davis

Henry Harper, Co-Chair
Mark Holodick
Joseph Laws
Harrie Ellen Minnehan
Bob Silber
Kenny Rivera
Jeff Taschner

Members of the Public

Bill Doolittle
Melissa Foemming
Rep. Kim Williams

Laura Nash
Mike Matthews

Institute for Public Administration Staff

Dan Rich
Elizabeth Burland

Annie Gould