

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

REDISTRICTING IN THE CITY OF WILMINGTON
AND NEW CASTLE COUNTY:
A TRANSITION, RESOURCE, AND
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

December 15, 2015

Submitted to the
Delaware State Board of Education

Executive Summary

Legislation approved in 2015 authorizes the State Board of Education to change or alter the boundaries of school districts in northern New Castle County in a manner consistent with some or all of the redistricting recommendations made in the final report of the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee, provided that the General Assembly passes, and the Governor signs, a Joint Resolution supporting the proposed changes. In its decision the State Board of Education shall adopt a transition, resource, and implementation plan developed by the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission. This plan fulfills that mandate.

The Case for Redistricting

- Twenty-three separate governing units, including 17 located in the City of Wilmington, now are responsible for delivering public education to 11,500 Wilmington children with no unified plan, little collaboration, and no requirements for coordination.
- The district arrangement imposed by court order in 1976 to improve the education of black students in Wilmington has failed to achieve its purpose.
- Accelerating learning for all students requires a coherent and responsive governance arrangement.

The Action Agenda for Improved Wilmington Student Outcomes

Redistricting is part of a multi-step action agenda for the improved outcomes depicted on the final page of the Executive Summary.

Three streams of action are required: creating responsive governance, funding student success, and meeting Wilmington student needs.

Creating Coherent and Responsive Governance of Wilmington Public Education

Streamlining traditional districts responsible for Wilmington public education is a key part of the process needed to focus responsibility and leadership for the education of Wilmington students. The Commission's recommendations will consolidate more than 50 percent of Wilmington's students in a single school district, thereby enhancing both accountability and alignment of instructional programs. It is not the only part, however. Collaboration among charters, among districts, and among charters and districts must be improved and sustained. A complementary part of the Commission's mandate is to actively promote and support such collaboration, so that the sum of the public education assets represented by the diversity of Wilmington schools can benefit more students in more ways than at any time in the past or present.

Funding Student Success

Strengthening the overall education finance structure is of fundamental importance to public education across Delaware. While Delaware spends a great deal on public

education, the expenditure of those funds must focus more effectively on meeting the needs of Wilmington students—and other students at risk throughout Delaware. Actions are needed to ensure a sufficient and reliable revenue base at both the state and local levels and also to ensure that funds are allocated in ways that most directly and effectively address the diverse and often complex needs of students at risk.

Meeting the Needs of Wilmington Students, Most Especially Students in Poverty

Addressing the challenges of students in poverty¹ requires a developmental approach that focuses on alignment of needed supports and services starting in early childhood and extending through entry into a career or higher education. This stream of action requires coordinated efforts from all sectors, including more effective integration of state services and the alignment and mobilization of cross-sector initiatives and partnerships. It also requires greater parent and community engagement in Wilmington schools and in support of the continuous improvement of Wilmington public education. The combination and synergy of all of these changes are essential to increasing in-school and out-of-school supports, from early childhood until the transition to work or higher education. A key dimension of meeting the needs of all Delaware students is an investment in culturally competent educators.

Progress on all three streams together is needed to improve student outcomes and the Commission's redistricting plan establishes a path for progress along each stream.

Under the enabling legislation, the State Board must act on the plan in its entirety, recognizing that implementation requires actions by many institutions over four years.

The implementation of redistricting should be contingent upon the provision of the resources needed to improve student outcomes.

Redistricting Recommendations

- Effective July 1, 2018, the boundaries of the Christina School District should be altered so that it no longer serves the City of Wilmington and should focus on serving the students in the western portion of the current district. The Christina Board of Education reviewed and approved by a vote of 5–1–1 the framework for planning developed by the Christina administrative staff in collaboration with the staff of the Red Clay Consolidated School District (Appendix B).
- Effective July 1, 2018, the boundaries of the Red Clay Consolidated School District should be altered to include the portion of the City of Wilmington now served by the Christina School District. The Red Clay Board of Education has voted 6–0 to support this change pending the allocation of funding needed for the effective education of its students, their continued engagement in the process, and an appropriate timeline for implementation. By a vote of 4–1, the Red Clay Consolidated School District Board

¹ Poverty is a societal condition that the Commission is working to address. Schools use the term "low income" as a proxy measure for poverty. For this reason, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this plan.

of Education approved the interim framework for planning to be part of the Commission's plan to be submitted to the State Board of Education. That plan and the accompanying transmittal letter are included as Appendix C.

- Effective July 1, 2018, the schools and students currently served by Christina School District in the City of Wilmington should be assigned to the Red Clay Consolidated School District.
- All students can choose to remain in their current schools as of the end of the 2017–2018 school year until their programs are complete.
- The Christina and Red Clay Consolidated School Districts will continue to collaborate on the interim frameworks for implementation already approved by each of their Boards of Education. This collaboration will ensure the smooth, minimally disruptive transition of students, staff, and facilities.
- The Colonial and Brandywine School Boards of Education both voted to affirm their commitment to continue to serve students in the City of Wilmington within their current boundaries.
- The Commission is confident the Colonial School District can be a leader in expanding collaborations and new programs that will strengthen opportunities and support for Wilmington students. The district could expand upon existing collaborations, establish new partnerships that take advantage of existing choice patterns for its Wilmington students and, work with the Commission and other partners to provide families with information about the full range of options for meeting the needs of their children within the Colonial School District and in other nearby districts and charters. Comparable initiatives to expand collaborations and provide families with information about choice options should be undertaken by all districts and charters operating in Wilmington, and the Commission will support these efforts.

Funding Student Success

The enabling legislation stipulates that the Commission's plan will identify the state, district, and local resources that will be required to support the redistricting transition and provide for the effective ongoing education of all the affected students, and for the support of schools with high concentrations of low-income² students and English language learners.

The Commission's recommendations address the key priorities identified in the final report of the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee, as summarized below.

1. An allocation formula for public school operating funds that responds to the added resource needs of schools with high percentages of low-income students, English language learners, and other students at risk.

² Poverty is a societal condition that the Commission is working to address. Schools use the term "low income" as a proxy measure for poverty. For this reason, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this plan.

2. An array of transition and capital resources needed to effectively implement the proposed district realignment.
3. A sufficient revenue base to support the overall rising costs of the public education system.
4. An allocation of funding for the additional programs and services, such as high-quality early childhood programs, required to meet the needs of students in poverty.

The Funding Student Success Committee considered these and other factors that are critical to the effectiveness of redistricting in strengthening student learning.

The Commission reaffirms the position of the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee that redistricting must be accompanied by the resources needed to better serve students and, specifically, the resources needed to fully address the needs of low-income students, English language learners, and other students at risk.

The Commission also reaffirms the commitment that there should be no undue burden on taxpayers in the affected districts as a result of the process of redistricting.

Pending approval during the next legislative session, the funding requirements to support redistricting must be implemented at each stage of the process, beginning with fiscal year 2017.

- Fiscal Year 2017 Planning Stage
- Fiscal Year 2018 Transition Stage
- Fiscal Year 2019 Implementation Stage

Fiscal Year 2017: Planning Stage

1. Establish weighted unit funding to address the needs of low-income students, English language learners, and basic special education units for grades K-3. This recurrent funding should begin with support for low-income students, English language learners, and basic special education units for grades K-3 in Red Clay Consolidated School District and the current Christina School District schools in the City of Wilmington—the schools impacted by redistricting—thereby providing the necessary and sufficient funding to proceed with redistricting. This recurrent funding should be expanded to include all City of Wilmington students and then statewide as rapidly as possible. A Wilmington Redistricting Transition Fund should be established with non-recurrent funds to support the planning and development of new models and proposals on facilities.
2. Epilogue language or legislation should designate the expansion of the low-income/ELL/special education unit over three years as described in fiscal years 2018 and 2019 below, leading to eventual statewide coverage.
3. Invest to sustain and accelerate improvements in early childhood education.

4. The Commission endorses House Bill 30 (see Appendix A) to target funding for basic special education units for grades K-3.

Fiscal Year 2018: Transition Stage

1. Recurrent funding of the low-income/ELL/special education unit is expanded to all Christina School District schools and continued for all Red Clay Consolidated School District schools.
2. Additional non-recurrent funds will be needed in the Wilmington Redistricting Transition Fund to support continued planning and development of new educational and program models as well as facilities configurations.
3. Capital funding for the reconfiguration of the Red Clay Consolidated and Christina School District schools located in the City of Wilmington and possible planning funds for a new Wilmington high school.
4. Initiate property tax reassessment process.
5. Authorization for impacted districts to make limited tax rate adjustments effective for fiscal year 2019 to meet operating expenses.

Fiscal Year 2019: Implementation Stage

1. Recurrent funding of the low-income/ELL/special education unit expands beyond the Red Clay Consolidated School District and Christina School District schools to include Brandywine School District, Colonial School District, and all charter schools in the City of Wilmington and continues for all Red Clay Consolidated School District and Christina School District schools. Recurrent funding should expand to all schools statewide as rapidly as possible.
2. Capital funding for a new Wilmington high school or repurposed school configuration, to be determined during planning phase in fiscal year 2017.
3. Contingency funding for the adjustments needed in the New Castle County tax pool.
4. Impacted districts to make limited tax rate adjustments to meet operating expenses.

Longer-term recommendations focus on strengthening the revenue base supporting public education at both the state and local levels, including property reassessment, and adjustments in the public education allocation system to fully address the needs of low-income students, English language learners and other students at risk.

Mobilizing Cross-Sector Resources

The Commission is committed to the alignment of supports and services through a strong partnership between the community and its schools. All sectors of the community should be mobilized including community-based partners, such as the Metropolitan Wilmington

Urban League, FAME, Inc., One Village Alliance, Education Voices, Inc., Delaware libraries, the Latin American Community Center, the Delaware Hispanic Commission, the Vision Coalition of Delaware, the Interdenominational Ministers Action Council, and many others engaged directly with improvement of education. In addition, community institutions that provide significant opportunities and supports for students and families must be mobilized, including the YMCA, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Delaware, providers of after-school and outside-of-school services for children and families as well as cultural and sports institutions.

The Commission's plan is aligned with key initiatives already underway, including:

- Delaware's early childhood education strategic plan and strategies;
- Student Success 2025;
- Education Funding Improvement Commission;
- Wilmington Education Strategy Think Tank;
- Statewide Review of Education Opportunities and Strategic Plan; and
- Access to Justice Commission.

The Commission will mobilize cross-sector engagement and support including:

- More effective coordination of state programs and services;
- Enhanced alignment of nonprofit and community support led by the United Way;
- Wilmington Office of Education and Public Policy;
- University of Delaware Partnership for Public Education;
- Enhanced charter and district collaboration;
- Increased parent, educator, and community engagement; and
- Active engagement with the full range of community institutions and partners from all sectors that support improved student learning.

Red Clay Consolidated and Christina School Districts Transition, Resource, and Implementation Plan

The Commission, in collaboration with the districts, has developed a transition, resource, and implementation plan that follows a four-year timeline for final implementation:

- December 17, 2015 to June 30, 2016 Approval Stage
- July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017 Planning Stage
- July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 Transition Stage
- July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019 Implementation Stage

The plan addresses the following considerations.

- Orderly and minimally disruptive reassignment of students affected by the boundary changes and the reassignment of governance responsibilities;
- Implications for educators, administrators, and other personnel that may lead to equitable adjustments to local collective bargaining agreements;
- Distribution of capital assets;
- Student transportation;
- Engagement of educators, staff, parents, district personnel, and community members;
- Plans for special schools and programs;
- Choice options and policies;
- Alignment of technology;
- Child nutrition services; and
- Alignment of curricular materials.

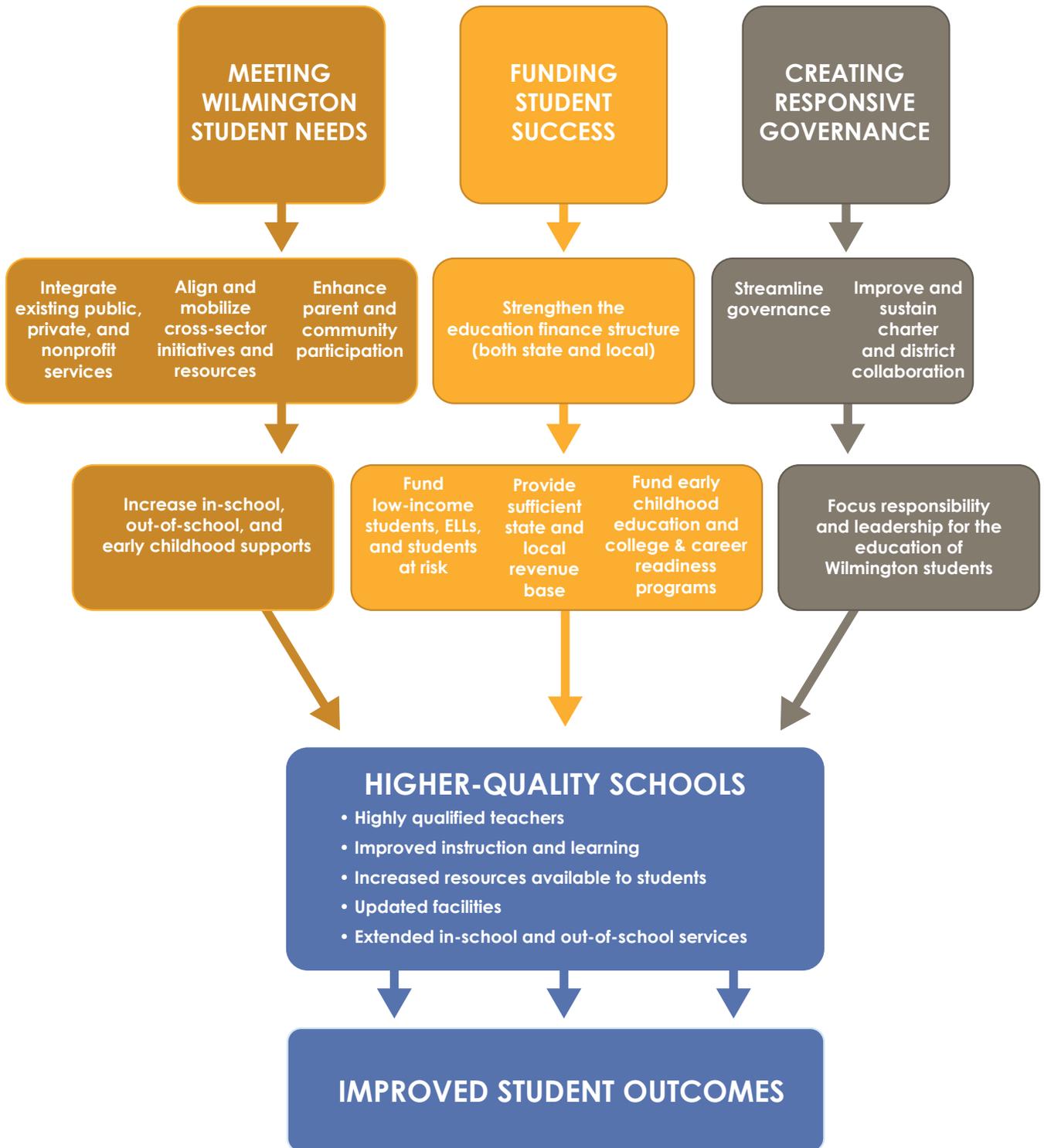
Confirming District Boundaries

- The existing boundaries of New Castle County school districts are confirmed as defined in Part VIII of this plan.
- The State Board should confirm the altered boundaries of New Castle County school districts, effective July 1, 2018, as defined in Part VIII of this plan.

Milestones and Measures of Success

- The Commission will submit an annual evaluation of progress to the State Board, Governor, and General Assembly that will focus on milestones and measures of success for improved student outcomes.
- Interim outcomes include: increased attendance, persistence, and engagement rates; reduced student trauma and disciplinary incident rates; and growing participation in high-quality early childhood education programs and other in-school and out-of-school programs that support enhanced developmental progress and learning.
- Long-term outcomes include: increased graduation rates; reduced achievement gaps in standardized tests; improved college and workforce readiness; reduced youth incarceration and recidivism rates; and greater access to opportunities that result in productive and rewarding lives.

Action Agenda for Improved Wilmington Student Outcomes



Redistricting Resolution

WHEREAS, 14 Del. C. § 1026(d) authorizes the Board of Education of the State of Delaware (the "Board of Education") to alter school district boundaries in New Castle County "in a manner consistent with some or all of the redistricting recommendations made by the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee in the report issued March 31, 2015 (the 'Report')" and based on adoption of a transition, resource, and implementation plan developed by the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission ("Commission"); and

WHEREAS, the Commission's plan, herein submitted, addresses all provisions identified in the enabling legislation and also describes the ways in which redistricting combined with other actions will lead to higher-quality schools and improved student outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education has reviewed the plan for redistricting of the school districts located in New Castle County ("the Plan") proposed by the Commission, and provided comments and suggestions on the Plan; and

WHEREAS, such public hearings regarding the Plan, as required by 14 Del. C. § 1026(d) (2) have been held; and

WHEREAS, the Christina School District Board of Education has approved by a vote of 5–1–1 the framework for planning developed by the Christina administrative staff in collaboration with the administrative staff of the Red Clay Consolidated School District; and

WHEREAS, the Red Clay Consolidated School District Board of Education (the "Red Clay Board of Education") voted 6–0 to support this change pending the allocation of resources needed for the effective education of its students, their continued engagement in the process, and an appropriate timeline for implementation. By a vote of 4–1, the Red Clay Consolidated School District Board of Education also approved the interim framework for planning to be part of the Commission's plan to be submitted to the Board of Education;

WHEREAS, the Colonial School District Board of Education has voted 4–2 to affirm its commitment to continue to serve students who reside in the City of Wilmington within its current boundaries; and

WHEREAS, the Brandywine School District Board of Education has voted 5–2 to affirm its commitment to continue to serve students who reside in the City of Wilmington within its current boundaries; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education has found that the Plan is in the best interests of the students served by the districts in New Castle County, and the timetable for implementation and the proposed resources are consistent with the objective of improving student outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education understands that the plan must be approved and implemented as a package, that there are milestones to be achieved prior to the alteration of

district boundaries, and that necessary and sufficient funding is required for implementation to proceed.

BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Education, after careful consideration that:

1. The full and complete Plan as specified in all sections of this document is hereby approved. The full and complete Plan is attached hereto.
2. Upon passage of the Joint Resolution by the General Assembly, and signature by the Governor, the Plan, with stipulated milestones at each stage shall be carried out according to the timetable specified if the necessary and sufficient funding, recommended action, and related transition supports are provided in the timeframe and manner proposed, as confirmed by the Commission in consultation with the affected school districts. If the necessary and sufficient funding and transition supports are not provided by the conclusion of each stage and in the manner proposed, the Board of Education, at the request of the Commission after consulting with the affected districts, shall suspend the timetable for implementation until the resources and supports are provided. If the necessary and sufficient funding and transition supports are not confirmed by the Commission in consultation with the affected districts by July 2018, the plan will expire.

The stages included in the attached plan are:

- December 17, 2015 to June 30, 2016 Approval Stage
- July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017 Planning Stage
- July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 Transition Stage
- July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019 Implementation Stage
(altered district boundaries)

3. Upon Board of Education approval, the Plan shall be submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly for the passage of a joint resolution confirming the Board of Education's action.
4. If the above requirements are met, the boundaries of the school districts in New Castle County shall be as described in the Plan, with the approved changes being effective July 1, 2018.
5. The Commission will provide an annual evaluation of the progress on the implementation of redistricting to the Board of Education that will include an assessment of milestones and measures of success as specified in the Plan, in particular the Commission will provide progress reports for the affected schools which is intended to show higher achievements and improved student outcomes.
6. The Commission's annual evaluation to the Board of Education will be incorporated in the annual report on the Commission's work presented to the Governor and General Assembly.