

**Public Comments to the State Board of Education on the Wilmington
Education Improvement Commission -- December 14, 2015**

Mike Matthews

Since the governor's announcement of six Priority Schools 15 months ago, the Red Clay Education Association has been fully engaged in ongoing talks and planning surrounding not only our three Priority Schools, but all city schools and how education reform in Wilmington could have impacts far beyond the city boundaries.

While our Association has not taken a formal position on the recommendations of the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission, I can say that we are in agreement that SHOULD these recommendations come to pass and the shift of Christina's city schools to Red Clay go through, our members believe that the current employees of Christina should be afforded the same opportunities to remain in their schools as Red Clay did with our Priority Schools last year. We believe WEIC and Red Clay should take a "do no harm" approach to the educators in Christina's city schools who, through no fault of their own, have been placed in a beyond stressful situation. Both districts and the state must work collaboratively to ensure the fairest, most equitable -- and dare I say "humane" -- process be identified to handle the potential transfer of staff between districts.

Aside from staffing concerns, RCEA has serious issues with the potential lack of funding -- not just for the redistricting of Wilmington city schools, but the long-term funding implications facing all of our schools, in particular our neediest schools wracked and ravaged by generational poverty. Educators in our highest-needs schools have been screaming for years for additional supports and resources, but they haven't come. Instead of supports, they get blame and shame from their elected leaders who choose to judge their performance based on a test score. Instead of resources, they're told they'll need to reapply for their jobs.

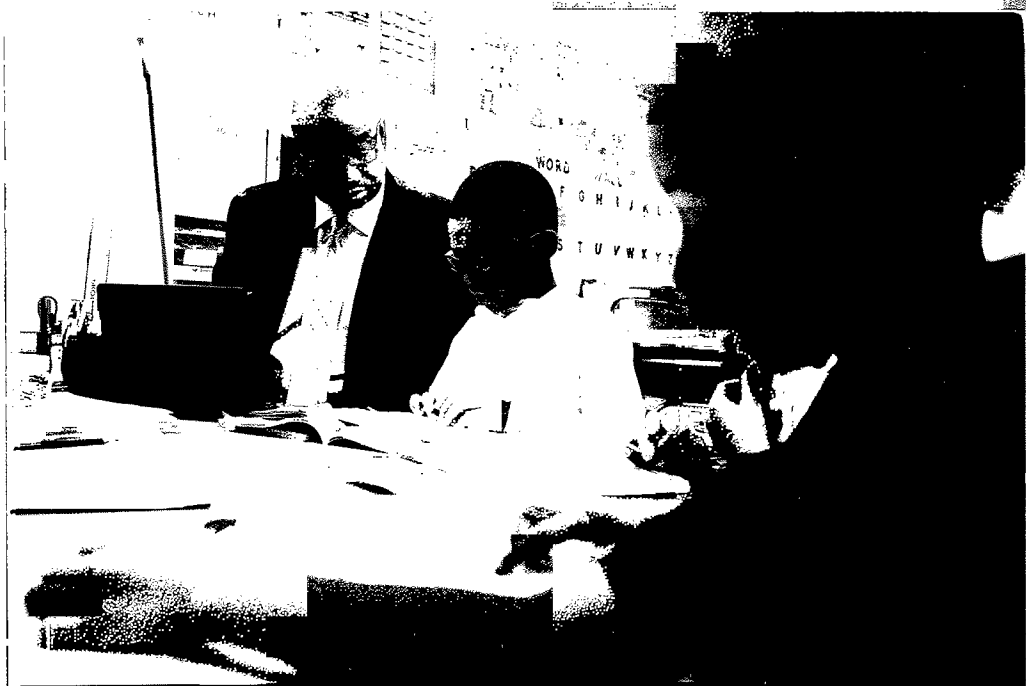
I've visited all of the schools in Red Clay in recent months. And I specifically ask my membership at each school what their thoughts are on WEIC. Aside from many people not having any clue what's going on, I can share with you that what I'm hearing remains consistent across sites.

- 1) More mental health and emotional supports -- Schools with a high number of students in poverty must be equipped with a full suite of mental health professionals to attempt to remediate the challenges our students bring to school every day. These professionals must serve as a bridge between home and school to fill the ever-widening emotional gap our students experience. They must be able to put boots on the ground and form the types of relationships that many of our classroom teachers don't often have time to do because district and state administrators are so concerned with test scores as opposed to serving the needs of the whole child.
- 2) Smaller Class Sizes -- Students in our high-poverty schools require more. Simple as that. Ability gaps in high-poverty schools are usually much greater than their more affluent counterparts. We need a better funding system that immediately provides schools with more poverty more teachers to be able to meet the needs of all students.

Many of our teachers believe elementary homerooms in high poverty schools should be well under 15 and under 20 in our secondary schools. Time to fund it.

- 3) Less Testing -- Teachers in city schools (and all schools) are tired of testing. Instead of focusing on a test score, they want to be able to offer their students more vibrant extracurricular and arts programming that many of the students in the suburbs receive. Not sure about other districts, but Red Clay has become so perversely focused on data gathering in our city schools in their endless quest to see higher test scores that the love of teaching and learning has been severely diminished. All high-poverty schools should be provided full-time unified arts teachers outside of the unit count system, as well as any necessary reading specialists, special education teachers, and gifted and talented teachers -- also outside of the archaic unit count system.

Our schools in Wilmington CAN be successful. And, if you want my opinion, there are successful things happening in every one of our city schools on a daily basis. I would ask members of the State Board, the Legislature and WEIC to visit our city schools -- and ALL of our schools -- and serve as ambassadors to the rest of the State to make all of Delaware aware of the great things going on in our schools. But please know our city schools can't continue to do more with less. Any WEIC plans approved by the State and the Legislature must provide for a more equitable funding stream for students in poverty, students with disabilities, and English language learners. This is non-negotiable. Thank you.



Wilmington Education Advisory Committee

**STRENGTHENING
WILMINGTON EDUCATION:**

AN ACTION AGENDA

FINAL REPORT | 2015



“For me, Education is a door to obtain this powerful weapon called knowledge, which can break all boundaries and change the world.”

KYRONE DAVIS

STUDENT, EASTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

“At this moment we can look back and perhaps agree that in the past we didn’t do everything we could to create different outcomes for our children. The recommendations in this report lend themselves to the possibility that when we look back on this time we will say that it is because of what we did that peace and prosperity have become synonymous with Wilmington’s children.”

AARON SELEKMAN

PRINCIPAL, H.B. DUPONT MIDDLE SCHOOL