

In The Matter Of:

ITMO: Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

*Public Hearing
December 14, 2015*

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IN THE MATTER OF:

WILMINGTON EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION
Redistricting In the City of Wilmington and
New Castle County: A Transition, Resource,
and Implementation Plan

PUBLIC HEARING

Wilmington City Council Chambers
Louis L. Redding City/County Building
800 N. French Street
Wilmington, Delaware

Monday, December 14, 2015
7:44 p.m.

BEFORE: JOE PIKA & HENRY HARPER,
Redistricting Committee

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1 MR. PIKA: Good evening. I'm Joe
2 Pika, and I've been selected to be the hearing
3 officer for tonight's public hearing. These
4 public hearings are an extension of the
5 process of soliciting public input.

6 In advance of the public
7 hearings, the commission has held nine town
8 hall meetings, including at least one in each
9 of the four school districts at schools in the
10 City of Wilmington as well as in New Castle
11 County.

12 All of the Wilmington Education
13 Improvement Commission meetings including
14 meetings of each of the five committees that
15 you've heard described have been open to the
16 public and posted on the commission and
17 district websites.

18 To get the word out about the
19 public meetings including the hearings,
20 postings have been made to the
21 solutionsfordelawareschools.com website, the
22 Solutions for Wilmington Schools Facebook
23 page, the district websites, district
24 robocalls, fliers have been dropped at



1 households throughout the city, and with
2 community organizations such as the YMCA. The
3 information was also shared by the members of
4 the commission and its committees with their
5 networks.

6 Just a few procedural items for
7 the record. I'll be reading from a script,
8 and later in the script I will explain how
9 public comments can be made.

10 Now to the script. Good evening.
11 I declare this public hearing to be open. My
12 name is Joe Pika. I am co-chair of the
13 redistricting committee of the Wilmington
14 Education Improvement Commission. I have been
15 appointed by the chair of the improvement
16 commission to conduct this public hearing.

17 The commission's interim
18 redistricting report was released on November
19 the 17th, and we are here tonight to gather
20 public comment. This phase of the meeting
21 tonight is not a question-and-answer session,
22 unlike the one that preceded it.

23 This hearing will provide the
24 improvement commission and the state board of



1 education with an opportunity to receive
2 public comment on the interim report.

3 We have a court reporter present
4 with us so that an accurate record of the
5 hearing can be maintained. I'm also joined by
6 my co-chair of the redistricting committee,
7 Henry Harper, and the two of us have presided
8 at the other four public hearings.

9 It will be necessary for each
10 speaker to clearly identify herself or himself
11 by name and affiliation before beginning to
12 speak so that the court reporter will be able
13 to note you in the transcript.

14 The record of this hearing and
15 the other four hearings will be provided to
16 the members of the state board of education
17 together with any written or electronic
18 comments received at this hearing or outside
19 of this hearing between the period of November
20 the 17th and January the 14th.

21 We will proceed in the following
22 manner: We'll take comments from anyone who
23 desires to speak. There are sign-up sheets at
24 the front of the room. Those wishing to offer



1 testimony during the time of the meeting must
2 sign up. We already have 11 names, and those
3 others who are present are welcome to add
4 their names.

5 We will have speakers speak in
6 the order in which they signed up. Each
7 individual will have three minutes to speak.
8 Each group will be allowed five minutes to
9 speak. Those giving testimony will be given a
10 30-second warning -- we have our timekeeper
11 here in the front -- and then a stop sign when
12 it's time to wind up their comments.

13 Anyone that has written testimony
14 that they would like to provide to the
15 commission and the state board should also
16 provide those comments at the time of your
17 testimony.

18 Our first speaker tonight is
19 Beatrice Dixon.

20 MS. DIXON: Good evening.

21 And good evening, Mr. Pika and
22 Dr. Harper.

23 Once again I find myself standing
24 here before a blue ribbon panel to once again



1 propose exactly what it is that's going to
2 make the educational outcomes for the children
3 in the City of Wilmington better.

4 We have no commitment that the
5 governance of the proposed board once merged
6 into the Red Clay School District will change
7 either its structure or its policies to allow
8 the residents of the City of Wilmington to
9 have a fair opportunity to input the
10 educational decisions.

11 Failure again will be the fault
12 of those who have been victimized for 30-some
13 years by the lack of local control. We want
14 parent input, but we don't welcome or provide
15 for parent activity in the decision-making
16 process. The future of the children is in the
17 hands of a structure which has historically
18 for 37 years failed them.

19 We have models in Wilmington
20 which have worked, and I beg you all to go and
21 look up the history of Howard High School. It
22 produced doctors, lawyers, and Indian chiefs.
23 That history has been totally erased since
24 we've gone into the desegregation process, and



1 we now fault the victims for their failure to
2 have either input or the ability to make a
3 change in what is happening.

4 I ask that if the general
5 assembly now wants to get itself involved in
6 the process of educating children in the City
7 of Wilmington, that we not fault them for
8 their economic status, that we understand that
9 in order for me to be an effective part of my
10 child's education, that I obviously have to
11 have some say in what happens.

12 We don't need blue ribbon panels
13 to come every two, every three, every four
14 years to tell us what's best for Wilmington.
15 When Wilmington was running its own schools,
16 it did a good job.

17 Wilmington can continue to do a
18 good job if parents and citizens of the City
19 of Wilmington, who are footing the tax bill
20 for this education -- when we went into deseg
21 we had the Radisson and the Alco building
22 downtown. Walk down Pennsylvania Avenue and
23 take a look at all of the new tax ratables in
24 the City of Wilmington.



1 Wilmington can afford its own
2 school district. And until there is a tacit
3 understanding that we can make a difference in
4 the education of our children if we're given
5 appropriate input, then we're going to
6 continue to meet here with another blue ribbon
7 panel every two, three, four years. Thank
8 you.

9 MR. PIKA: Thank you, Ms. Dixon.
10 Jea Street.

11 MR. STREET: I'm Jea Street. I'm
12 county councilman for the 10th district. I
13 want to make sure that everybody knows that my
14 remarks my mine, mine alone, and not related
15 to any agency or organization that I have or
16 that I do represent.

17 I'd like to place in the record a
18 copy of the January 2001 Neighborhood Schools
19 Committee report, a copy of the March 2001
20 City of Wilmington report known as the River
21 Plan, a copy of the April 2008 Wilmington
22 Education Task Force report, and a copy of
23 your report.

24 I'm doing this for the record,



1 which I think is very important to note that
2 the first three documents and -- those four
3 documents are all similar in nature in two
4 critical ways. One, they call for a reduction
5 in the number of districts in the city, and,
6 second, they call for weighted funding.

7 In my opinion what we've done,
8 what we have is 15 years of bad faith on the
9 part of the State of Delaware. We've known
10 for a 15-year period that children in the City
11 of Wilmington in these high-poverty,
12 segregated schools cannot be appropriately
13 educated with the same resources everybody
14 else has.

15 Now, end of the day, this bad
16 faith can't continue. The situation cries out
17 for relief. And the Declaration of
18 Independence says that when certain rights are
19 denied by a system of government over a long
20 period of time, it is your duty to destroy or
21 abolish that system of government in an
22 instant matter.

23 The system has failed over a long
24 period of time. There is resistance from two



1 of the four districts. Those four districts
2 need to be abolished. We need to have a
3 metropolitan school district. We need to have
4 the same resources, the same tax base for
5 everybody else, and all this foolishness needs
6 to cease.

7 I believe that the Neighborhood
8 Schools Act, the Choice School Act, the
9 Charter School Act, are all unconstitutional
10 and have a segregated effect, violates the
11 Equal Protection Clause.

12 The state and the districts can't
13 have it both ways. They can't have the
14 Neighborhood Schools Act on one hand and then
15 claim that it's not necessary on the other.

16 My better judgment tells me that
17 consistent with the only progress that's ever
18 been made, only until a judge or judges
19 compels the State of Delaware to do something
20 will action be taken. In that regard, I'm not
21 begging, I'm not pleading anymore. You all do
22 what you want to do. I'm going to do what I
23 have to do.

24 MR. PIKA: Thank you, Mr. Street.



1 Mary Pickering.

2 MS. PICKERING: Good evening. My
3 name is Mary Pickering, and I'm a PACE leader.
4 PICE is a Parent Advocacy Council for
5 Education, and our mission is to raise
6 awareness among parents and people who care
7 about the need to improve public education for
8 students living in the City of Wilmington.

9 Obtaining a quality education is
10 the right of every American, and a quality
11 education is one that fosters critical
12 thinking, problem solving, and cultural
13 awareness. And this is critical for students
14 to succeed both academically and personally,
15 and we in the City of Wilmington need to
16 create and foster an environment that empowers
17 students to achieve that success.

18 Many of the children in the City
19 of Wilmington have been or will be exposed to
20 adverse childhood experiences such as abuse,
21 neglect, homelessness, domestic violence, and
22 other street crimes.

23 Traumatic stress from adverse
24 childhood experiences undermine the ability of



1 children to form relationships, regulate their
2 emotions, and learn the cognitive skills
3 necessary to succeed academically. After all,
4 can we expect students to concentrate on their
5 schoolwork and behave normally while rivetted
6 by emotions so horrific they're beyond words?

7 These students need and deserve
8 compassionate support. After Hurricane
9 Katrina, students didn't -- schools didn't
10 expect students who survived to return to
11 academics without some accommodation for the
12 trauma they experienced.

13 So how could it be that when it
14 comes to these other forms of trauma we expect
15 our students to succeed academically while we
16 ignore the chaotic realities of their lives
17 outside of school? How children absorb
18 information and the issues surrounding their
19 ability to learn must be resolved in order to
20 provide quality education effectively.

21 So as you're looking at models of
22 best practice to deal with students who have
23 experienced trauma and other social or
24 emotional challenges, I urge you to consider



1 the Compassionate School models.

2 Compassionate Schools are open to students who
3 have experienced trauma or live in crisis.

4 They respond to trauma by
5 providing an environment where healing can
6 occur. A trauma-sensitive approach is
7 embedded in the school culture, and this
8 enables children to feel academically,
9 socially, emotionally, and physically safe
10 wherever they are in the school. And when
11 children feel safe, they can calm down and
12 learn.

13 I get only three minutes?

14 MR. PIKA: She's representing a
15 group.

16 MS. PICKERING: Both Washington
17 State and Massachusetts have adopted this
18 model. Both states cited research
19 breakthroughs to help their decision in
20 adopting a Compassionate School model.

21 One was the CDC's Adverse
22 Childhood Experiences Study, which found a
23 correlation between childhood trauma and
24 chronic disease as adults. And the second was



1 the discovery by a group of neuroscientists
2 and pediatricians that childhood trauma has
3 long-term consequences.

4 Both Washington and Massachusetts
5 took a district-wide approach to transform
6 their schools and were very successful in
7 reducing suspensions and expulsions. For
8 example, one elementary school with 826
9 students from kindergarten to grade five,
10 86 percent of which were minorities, saw a
11 40 percent drop in suspensions.

12 For the City of Wilmington
13 accessibility to quality education will depend
14 on the ability of educational leaders to
15 transform our current education system to one
16 that is trauma sensitive. The Compassionate
17 School model will help achieve this goal, so I
18 urge you again to consider adopting the
19 Compassionate School model.

20 And local leaders at both the
21 city and district level could be the champions
22 for this because the absence of a positive
23 learning environment creates barriers to
24 students accessing the quality education and



1 contributes to their falling behind and
2 ultimately dropping out of school.

3 MR. PIKA: Thank you.

4 Raye Avery here to represent
5 WESTT.

6 MS. AVERY: Good evening. My
7 name is Raye, R-a-y-e, Jones Avery, and I am
8 speaking on behalf of the Wilmington Education
9 Strategy Think Tank, WESTT, the acronym.

10 Dr. Allen and members of the
11 Wilmington Education Improvement Commission,
12 we, the members of the Wilmington Education
13 Strategy Think Tank, WESTT, appreciate the
14 depth of the work that has been put into the
15 commission's interim plan.

16 There's a latest iteration of a
17 group of concerned citizens. We have been
18 working since 2013 to develop, prioritize, and
19 advance specific goals for the benefit of
20 Wilmington students, including, one, the
21 reduction of districts that serve the city,
22 two, the development of an equitable, weighted
23 funding formula addressing student need, and,
24 three, the establishment of an authoritative



1 role for Wilmington in the continuous
2 improvement of the public education of its
3 residents.

4 We were pleased to see these
5 priorities were reflected in the WEAC
6 recommendations earlier this year, and in
7 endorsing WEAC's Action Agenda, we are
8 committed to supporting viable action steps
9 that are resourced properly. The ideas
10 presented here and our ongoing work are
11 evidence of that commitment.

12 WESTT supports the commission's
13 plan with conditions. We believe there are
14 several key principles that must be the
15 foundation of the ongoing work of the
16 commission, state, and the general assembly
17 for any plan to succeed. Our continued
18 support will be based on evidence that these
19 are accepted and pursued.

20 Resources first. The
21 transformation of the structure of school
22 funding to be weighted towards student need is
23 critical, and achieving this must take
24 precedence in the governor's recommended



1 budget and in the decision-making during the
2 2016 legislative session.

3 Address concentrated poverty.

4 The proliferation and the maintenance of
5 schools with highly concentrated poverty and
6 inequitable distributions of resources is
7 unacceptable.

8 Commitment to equity. Policies
9 to ensure equity must be central to any
10 process moving forward at every level,
11 district and state.

12 No opting out. Colonial and
13 Brandywine School Districts' status quo
14 positions are unacceptable.

15 Get the metro district right. A
16 consolidated metropolitan city/county school
17 district is highly desirable, but we feel that
18 further deliberation is needed regarding its
19 ideal configuration to ensure the above
20 priorities are pursued.

21 We have written submission, and
22 on page 3 in a table there is further
23 explanation of these positions. And we also
24 have attached a report. WESTT commissioned an



1 independent study to take a look at how public
2 schools are financed.

3 And when we say that there's an
4 average of 10,000 or so dollars spent per
5 pupil, this report points out very clearly
6 that schools have gross disparities between
7 the schools that our children in the City of
8 Wilmington attend and other schools throughout
9 the city -- I mean other schools throughout
10 this county and this state.

11 So in closing I would like to let
12 you know that we take seriously our
13 responsibility to facilitate the best possible
14 opportunities for our babies to succeed. We
15 thank the members of the commission for doing
16 the same and seeing the value in our
17 expertise. We look forward to working and
18 continuing to work together towards these
19 ends.

20 I would like to recognize the
21 membership of the Wilmington Education
22 Strategy Think Tank: Nnamdi Chukwuocha,
23 Wilmington City Councilperson and chair of the
24 Education, Youth & Families Committee;



1 Theopalis K. Gregory, Sr., President,
2 Wilmington City Council; Shannon Griffin,
3 Community Organizer, ACLU of Delaware; Lynne
4 Howard, Consultant, Christina Cultural Arts
5 Center; Dr. Jacqueline Jenkins, Chief Strategy
6 Advisor, Office of the Mayor of the City of
7 Wilmington; Kathleen MacRae, Executive
8 Director, ACLU of Delaware; Rourke Moore,
9 Special Projects, Office of the Mayor of the
10 City of Wilmington; Maurice Pritchett, Chief
11 Executive Officer, Pritchett Associates; Jea
12 P. Street, New Castle County Councilman.

13 Thank you.

14 MR. PIKA: Thank you. Did you
15 have some materials that you wanted to also
16 submit?

17 THE WITNESS: I do. Who do I
18 submit them to?

19 MR. PIKA: You can give them to
20 me. That will be fine. Thank you.

21 Donald Farrell.

22 MR. FARRELL: I'm Don Farrell.
23 I'm an east side resident, and I'm just here
24 speaking as an individual, concerned



1 individual.

2 I hope the comment -- excuse me.
3 I hope the committee will consider creating an
4 alternative to the zero tolerance-based
5 policies currently used that pushes children
6 out of the classroom. This tends to increase
7 truancy and leads to delinquency, which
8 creates an opportunity for youth to offend.
9 It also creates a path to the juvenile and
10 criminal justice system.

11 It seems that the current model
12 of test-based accountability creates
13 incentives and opportunities to expel
14 low-performing students to boost overall test
15 scores. Failing public schools seem to
16 unwittingly prioritize incarceration over
17 education by engaging in this practice.

18 Students then face the same
19 barriers to reentry that incarcerated
20 individuals face when attempting to reenter
21 society. They're still unprepared,
22 permanently behind, and many of the students
23 may not graduate high school.

24 In closing, it is my hope that



1 more funds are reallocated from the criminal
2 justice system to hire more counselors and
3 provide special education services to identify
4 these students early on and make them a
5 future-driven student that is patient, treats
6 others with respect, and strives to be a good
7 citizen. Thank you.

8 MR. PIKA: Thank you,
9 Mr. Farrell.

10 Jerry Velazquez.

11 MR. VELAZQUEZ: Thank you. Good
12 evening, everyone. My name is Jerry
13 Velazquez. I've come to this meeting as a
14 resident of Wilmington, as I was and still am
15 very much concerned about public education in
16 this city.

17 I remember when my three children
18 were young and I was looking to enter them
19 into public school here in Wilmington, there
20 wasn't a local neighborhood school for me to
21 put them all in. But I also come to this
22 meeting as a board member of the Thomas Edison
23 Charter School.

24 I'm still very concerned about



1 giving children of Wilmington the chance to
2 receive the best education possible in
3 neighborhood public schools here in their own
4 city of Wilmington.

5 But I've also come here to
6 express my deep concern about how we're going
7 to go about to try to improve the delivery of
8 educational services to the City of
9 Wilmington.

10 So with that I ask, just like on
11 December the 2nd, how City Council put out a
12 press release asking the citizens of
13 Wilmington to become educated about the WEIC
14 report, I too would like to also give kudos to
15 Dr. Allen and his report.

16 But I'm also looking at City
17 Council members also, and I'm going to ask
18 that City Council also take a lead in
19 understanding that this is something that's
20 impacting your constituents, your parents,
21 your voters.

22 And so you need to look at the
23 situation that you clearly all understand,
24 that having a plan without resources is a plan



1 that's destined to failure.

2 So I would hope that the City of
3 Wilmington City Council is going to rise in
4 unison and also address what this report says
5 and how it can be best effectuated here in
6 this particular city so that we can achieve
7 the maximum effect for our low economic
8 struggling children here in the City of
9 Wilmington. Thank you.

10 MR. PIKA: Thank you,
11 Mr. Velazquez.

12 Timothy Crawl-Bey. He's gone.
13 Shuan Bellamy.

14 MR. BELLAMY: Good evening.
15 Shuan Bellamy, Hope Academy. I'm not
16 representing a political branch. I'm not
17 representing a Ph.D. branch. I'm not
18 representing a circle of classmates who grew
19 up in the City of Wilmington.

20 I'm representing those babies
21 right there that are representing from every
22 school district in New Castle County, Red
23 Clay, Brandywine, Christina, the vo-techs as
24 well.



1 It seems like all of these
2 reports over all of these years never took
3 into consideration what these babies are going
4 through in these schools before you're
5 submitting these reports.

6 We're dealing with teacher
7 problems from Brandywine, Red Clay,
8 vocational. I'm dealing with the problems
9 that you're not addressing in this WEIC
10 committee. I have been in all these meetings
11 over and over and over again.

12 You all have not come to us yet
13 to speak to the babies to see what their
14 input, what would make their education run
15 smoothly. It ain't that they're failing their
16 own self. The teachers are failing them.

17 Just today I'm dealing with a
18 teacher who called a young lady bald headed
19 and said, "I would snatch you by the hair but
20 you ain't got none." And it was recorded by
21 other students in the school. I'm at Bayard
22 School every week. These things are not being
23 attacked in these WEIC reports.

24 It sounds good, but it's the same



1 reports over and over and over again. But
2 when are you going to talk to the babies to
3 find out why they're dropping out, why they
4 don't want to go to school, why they're not
5 functioning in the morning.

6 We talk about low income. All
7 them babies are low income. They're doing
8 hell of a good in school. So we've got to
9 stop classifying our people as low income.
10 Low income ain't got nothing to do with peace,
11 properly educating all children equally.
12 That's not happening.

13 As a school student they receive
14 maybe \$13,000. But I commit a crime and I've
15 got 32,000 as an inmate with free lunch, hot
16 water. It's talking about dollar value. The
17 money is there, but it's not being
18 appropriated the way it's supposed to be.
19 We've got too many political ties.

20 And these babies are not doing
21 right in school. We're going to classify
22 them, ADHD them. You can't classify ADHD
23 going on in their household.

24 Then we've got these single



1 mothers who go to school, and you've got 15
2 Ph.D. people. Is he hardheaded? Oh, he's
3 ADHD. No, he ain't. He's a young man. He's
4 having fun. But the mom don't know that she's
5 being intimidated for placement of a child to
6 get an extra paycheck for the school. We got
7 to do better.

8 Stop classifying us as low-income
9 people like we can't do nothing. These kids
10 went to Elsmere yesterday to the parade and
11 won first place against children who came from
12 private schools and St. Elizabeth's, and
13 they're good. But ask these babies what's
14 going on in your reports.

15 MR. PIKA: Thank you Mr. Bellamy.
16 Sariyah Whittington.

17 MS. WHITTINGTON: Hi. My name is
18 Sariyah. We talk about education. We're
19 always talking about what needs be done on a
20 big level. What needs to be done in the
21 classroom, that's what we're not addressing.
22 These kids are not being -- they're not being
23 taken care of. They don't have the resources
24 they need. They don't have -- some of them



1 don't even have school textbooks.

2 You talk about redistricting.

3 For what? They don't simply have textbooks.

4 They're walking around with pamphlets. You're

5 talking about redistricting, and the kids are

6 worried about where their meal is coming from.

7 You talk about redistricting, and the parents

8 aren't even being treated humanely in the

9 child's school.

10 That's what you need to address.

11 The change is going to come from accepting

12 each other for who they are. It's just that

13 simple. It doesn't matter your background,

14 your Ph.D., your master's, your bachelor's.

15 None of that matters because at the end of the

16 day we all bleed red. We're all people. We

17 all go through trials and tribulations, and

18 that's the part we're forgetting.

19 So redistricting, it might work.

20 It's not going to work, though, if you don't

21 remember that those kids are human. Those

22 parents go through things. They're human.

23 And when they walk into the school, they need

24 to be accepted. They need to be welcomed.



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1 Every parent when they walk into
2 the school, they should come in and be
3 welcome. You should want them to speak on
4 their child and what they're going through.
5 How many parents can literally say that
6 they're not welcome in their child's school?

7 You should not look at me and the
8 fact that I look like I might be 12 and think
9 that I'm not educated and I can't do
10 automatically. That's the problem. It's
11 simple humanity, the ability to change.

12 Multicultural training is
13 definitely needed because these kids are not
14 going to be educated properly until they're
15 treated like humans. It's just that simple.
16 There's no reason to have big meetings or big
17 discussions. It's humanity. That's it.

18 That's the simple -- it's always
19 something simple that you all make this
20 complex problem. It's not that complex. It
21 really isn't. Treat them like humans. They
22 can tell you what's going on in their life.
23 They can tell you what's wrong. Listen to
24 them. That's who you need to listen to.



1 You don't even need to listen to
2 me. Listen to them. That's who you really
3 need up here speaking. You need them because
4 they're the ones that are in school. And by
5 the time you all implement all these changes,
6 they'll be out. They'll be the parent.
7 They'll be -- they will have graduated.

8 So it's the generation that's in
9 front of them that's not going to get what
10 they need because you're all behind the ball.
11 You're all behind the eight ball.

12 MR. PIKA: Thank you,
13 Ms. Whittington.

14 Marsha Carter.

15 MS. CARTER: Hi. My name is
16 Marsha Carter. I'm also a PACE leader, but
17 these are my personal opinions.

18 Dear Dr. Tony Allen and WEAC/WEIC
19 members, all information has been obtained
20 from Delaware Department of Education School
21 Profiles. Information reflects 2014/2015
22 school year except where noted.

23 Let me first state that adopting
24 the WEAC/WEIC recommendations should



1 automatically include one to two additional
2 board member seats for residents in the City
3 of Wilmington as a prerequisite. So that
4 should be a requirement.

5 Red Clay School District serves
6 15 elementary schools, whereas 47 percent do
7 not meet annual yearly progress, AYP. Compare
8 this to Christina School District where 19
9 elementary schools -- where they have 19
10 elementary schools and 21 percent did not meet
11 the AYP. About half of the elementary schools
12 in Red Clay that did not meet AYP are in the
13 City of Wilmington compared to three quarters
14 for Christina.

15 The middle and high schools have
16 a different trend. However, it appears that
17 the charters within Red Clay help change the
18 game. For example, three out of five high
19 schools in Red Clay met AYP, yet two of them
20 were charters. In essence when looking
21 outside the charter population, Red Clay only
22 had one high school meeting AYP while
23 Christina had none. Clearly there is a
24 concern. Clearly both districts are actually



1 failing the students.

2 So why would we take schools from
3 Christina and place them with Red Clay?

4 Although impossible to prove, I personally
5 wonder if this plan is about privatizing
6 education, particularly in Wilmington, by your
7 decision to choose a district that is amenable
8 to the charter market. Red Clay has
9 demonstrated that they are unable to bridge
10 the education gap for current students.

11 Instead, your plan should include a criterion
12 to ensure administrators that have
13 historically failed our students are asked to
14 resign or not be rehired.

15 Furthermore, the possibility of
16 reassessing property homes or raising property
17 taxes may leave an undue hardship to families
18 that we says that we're trying to assist.

19 Lastly, we have yet to discuss
20 specific variables that may directly impact a
21 student's academic performance. That's
22 particularly those variables that are inside
23 the classroom. Also discrepancies in school
24 discipline, curriculum and instruction, design



1 of the school day, teacher dynamics, diversity
2 in the schools, so forth and so on.

3 These specific variables, which
4 can aid in bridging the education gap, have
5 been left out of the conversation.

6 Consequently, I say we should oppose
7 implementing these changes until a more
8 comprehensive plan outlining how Red Clay
9 proposes to directly improve student
10 performance and outcomes for both current and
11 proposed students to be reassigned as
12 recommended by WEIC.

13 MR. PIKA: Thank you, Ms. Carter.
14 Alethea Smith-Tucker.

15 MS. SMITH-TUCKER: Good evening
16 again. My name is Alethea Smith-Tucker. I
17 too am a PACE leader; however, I am speaking
18 individually.

19 I do have to echo Marsha's
20 concerns about the strategic plan. When
21 Dr. Allen mentioned that there is a potential
22 or a possibility for 65 percent of the student
23 body to be a part of the charter schools, that
24 gives me great pause because the entire



1 emphasis is to strengthen our public schools.
2 And taking those funds away without
3 accountability in a lot of cases wouldn't be
4 fortuitous for our city.

5 However, I do want to speak on
6 some specific things that I think regardless
7 of whether we continue going forward in this
8 fashion or other fashions because we're in
9 front of a body of Wilmington interested
10 individuals.

11 First and foremost we need to
12 create a pipeline to increase the African
13 American representation within our educational
14 system. We need people who are willing to
15 identify and pour into our children in a way
16 that shows them the possibilities, and we're
17 having too many problems bridging that gap
18 currently.

19 Also I would like to see greater
20 fiscal responsibility and transparency within
21 all schools at the school level. And what I
22 mean by that is that I would like to go to
23 each school individually and see how funds are
24 being specifically spent in that school.



1 I want to -- I don't want it to
2 be buried in levels of web pages that's hard
3 to find and hard to understand. It needs to
4 be included on a third grade level so I know
5 my credits and my debits simply.

6 In order for us to gain and have
7 trust in this process going forward, we need
8 to understand how money is being spent, which
9 states our priorities. So therefore if we're
10 able to see exactly how each school within our
11 county spends their money, we'll be able to
12 actually suss out exactly our priorities
13 within our school.

14 And finally I want to speak to
15 the possibility and the vision for Wilmington.
16 Wilmington is an awesome, awesome place to
17 live, and I think all too often we forget
18 about the wonderful residents that live here
19 and who are creating great communities. And
20 I'm proud to be a Wilmingtonian, and I'm proud
21 to be working with others in that fashion.

22 I think if we have a vision for
23 our schools in addition to magnet schools, not
24 necessarily charter schools, which are still



1 governed by the public system body, we'll have
2 a better opportunity to advance and specialize
3 in certain of areas of technology, culture,
4 arts, math, and engineering. Thank you.

5 MR. PIKA: Thank you,
6 Ms. Smith-Tucker.

7 Mike Matthews, Red Clay Education
8 Association.

9 MR. MATTHEWS: Good evening. My
10 name is Mike Matthews. I'm president of the
11 Red Clay Education Association.

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

20 While our association has not
21 taken a formal position on the recommendations
22 of the Wilmington Education Improvement
23 Commission, I can say that we are in agreement
24 that should these recommendations come to pass



1 and the shift of Christina's city schools to
2 Red Clay go through, our members believe that
3 the current employees of Christina should be
4 afforded the same opportunities to remain in
5 their city schools as Red Clay did with our
6 Priority Schools last year.

7 We believe WEIC and Red Clay
8 should take a do-no-harm approach to the
9 educators in Christina's city schools, who,
10 through no fault of their own, have been
11 placed in a beyond stressful situation and who
12 have shown a commitment to remain in their
13 schools to service their students.

14 Both districts and the state must
15 work collaboratively to ensure the fairest,
16 most equitable, and dare I say humane process
17 be identified to handle the potential transfer
18 of staff between districts so some semblance
19 of consistency can be afforded their students.

20 Aside from staffing concerns,
21 RCEA has serious issues with the potential
22 lack of funding, not just for the
23 redistricting of Wilmington city schools, but
24 the long-term funding implications facing all



1 of our schools, in particular our neediest
2 schools wracked and ravaged by generational
3 poverty.

4 Educators in our highest-needs
5 schools have been screaming for years for
6 additional supports and resources, but they
7 haven't come. Instead of supports, they get
8 blame and shame from their elected leaders,
9 who choose to judge their performance based on
10 a test score. Instead of resources, they're
11 told they'll need to reapply for their jobs.

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

19 One, more mental health and
20 emotional supports. Schools with a high
21 number of students in poverty must be equipped
22 with a full suite of mental health
23 professionals to attempt to remediate the
24 challenges our students bring to school every



1 day that are often informed by a great deal of
2 trauma in their neighborhood.

3 These professionals must serve as
4 a bridge between home and school to fill the
5 ever-widening emotional gap our students
6 experience. They must be able to put boots on
7 the ground and form the types of relationships
8 that many of our classroom teachers don't
9 often have time to do because district and
10 state administrators are so concerned with
11 test scores as opposed to serving the needs of
12 the whole child.

13 Smaller class sizes. Students in
14 our high-poverty schools require more support.
15 Simple as that. Ability gaps in high-poverty
16 schools are usually much greater than their
17 more affluent counterparts. We need a better
18 funding system that immediately provides
19 schools with more teachers to be able to meet
20 the needs of all students.

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



1 Less testing. Teachers in city
2 schools and all schools are tired of testing.
3 Instead of focusing on a test score, they want
4 to be able to offer their students more
5 vibrant extracurricular and arts programming
6 that many of the students in the suburbs
7 receive.

8 Not sure about other districts,
9 but Red Clay has become so perversely focused
10 on data gathering in our city schools in their
11 endless quest to see higher test scores that
12 the love of teaching and learning has been
13 severely diminished.

14 All high-poverty schools should
15 be provided full-time unified arts teachers
16 outside of the unit count system, as well as
17 any necessary reading specialists, special
18 education teachers, and gifted and talented
19 teachers, also outside of the archaic unit
20 count system.

21 Our schools in Wilmington can be
22 successful. And, if you want my opinion,
23 there are many successful things happening in
24 every one of our city schools on a daily



1 basis. I would ask members of the state
2 board, the legislature, and WEIC to visit our
3 city schools, and all of our schools, and
4 serve as ambassadors to the rest of the state
5 to make all of Delaware aware of the great
6 things going on in our schools.

7 But please know our city schools
8 can't continue to do more with less. Any WEIC
9 plans approved by the state and the
10 legislature must provide for a more equitable
11 funding stream for students in poverty,
12 students with disabilities, and English
13 language learners. This is nonnegotiable.
14 Thank you.

15 MR. PIKA: Thank you,
16 Mr. Matthews.

17 Bill Dunn.

18 MR. DUNN: Some excellent
19 comments this evening.

20 I'm Bill Dunn. In the late '90s
21 I spent time on the Red Clay school board when
22 Mr. Pika was head of the state school board, I
23 believe. And then through the early 2000s I
24 was following all the public education systems



1 pretty closely, especially Red Clay, and took
2 a great deal of involvement and interest in
3 it. More recently I've been more involved in
4 county government.

5 But, having said that, I was on
6 Red Clay in the early days of choice and
7 charter when they were first getting
8 implemented and watched the change in how the
9 schools were operating and how the suburban
10 students looked for every opportunity they
11 could get outside the city for elementary
12 programs more specifically as well as the Red
13 Clay School District constantly looking at new
14 charter schools.

15 As a matter of fact, when I came
16 on we were considering a Montessori school at
17 the Shortlidge School down off Market Street
18 there.

19 Having said that, I listen to
20 this, and I haven't dug deeply into the
21 details that exist to this point, but I have
22 reviewed some of them. And one of the things
23 that stands out to me is that more recently
24 Red Clay has not performed for the lower



1 socioeconomic students, be it minority or
2 otherwise, especially within the City of
3 Wilmington, the way they had once done.

4 If you go back and look at early
5 '90s data on city students performing in
6 Warner School, which was a third, fourth, and
7 fifth grade program, those students
8 outperformed most lower socioeconomic schools
9 across the state and were closely tied to what
10 Brandywine's performance were for similar-type
11 students in school environments.

12 In the early 2000s the
13 Neighborhood Schools Act came in, and all the
14 different districts were obligated to meet the
15 requirements or they had to argue hardship,
16 which Mr. Pika or Dr. Pika would remember, in
17 which they made a substantive argument, the
18 Brandywine School District, that they should
19 be granted hardship and essentially continue
20 the integrated process that they had in place
21 at the time and obviously convince the state
22 school board to allow the exception in the
23 circumstances.

24 What I see in the data that I've



1 reviewed most recently, although Christina has
2 done horrendously poorly for the inner city
3 lower socioeconomic students, Colonial and Red
4 Clay have not done very well either.

5 And the best performing programs
6 that exist right now are coming out of the
7 Brandywine School District as to lifting the
8 lower socioeconomic student closer to a higher
9 level of educational performance.

10 Taking that into mind, two of the
11 things that I think WEIC needs to seriously
12 reconsider, regardless of what comments might
13 come out of Brandywine, is to consider moving
14 the boundaries between Brandywine and Red Clay
15 School District.

16 Make the Brandywine River the
17 dividing line, maybe give the east side here
18 to Brandywine and Red Clay take the rest and
19 split it some way because I don't think Red
20 Clay is presently prepared or performing at a
21 level that would benefit those students at
22 this time.

23 Secondly, I would also request
24 Red Clay produce a plan as to how they will



1 improve their academic performance for city
2 and lower socioeconomic students. One of the
3 things that they've continued to use is the
4 waiver process for the K to 3 program.

5 Since I left the school board --
6 the last year I was on the school board in '99
7 we wrote waivers for 29 classrooms district
8 wide. Since then Red Clay has built two brand
9 new elementary schools yet continues to ask
10 for waivers, and I think some of them are in
11 the city.

12 There is no reason why they can't
13 meet student size requirements, and not only
14 should they meet it, they should fall below
15 the maximum number of students that they're
16 permitted to have so that they can do a better
17 job of giving individual attention to
18 individual students. Thank you.

19 MR. PIKA: Thank you, Mr. Dunn.

20 Alvin Figueroa.

21 MR. FIGUEROA: Good evening. My
22 name is Alvin Figueroa. I'm a pastor. I
23 represent Association of Pastors United here
24 in Delaware, which most of the members of the



1 association, it's normally in New Castle
2 County, and more than those in New Castle
3 County live here in the City of Wilmington.

4 I'm also Latino, but not only
5 because of that I want to speak of Latinos, I
6 want to speak about that you guys to focus on
7 the ones that you call minority or high
8 poverty groups. Those students, they are very
9 good students, and I know they want to try
10 their best. Don't close the doors on them.

11 We as pastors have worked with
12 them, and we see the need that -- they need to
13 have that preparation. So I just want to give
14 you advice or an opinion. Let's get out of
15 the offices. Let's get out of the seats. Go
16 out to the communities and speak to these
17 students and see what the needs they really
18 need, how the Department of Education can help
19 them out.

20 I know changing these boundaries
21 has things that are maybe there that other
22 people, maybe Latinos, don't see and it's just
23 about test scores and all this stuff. But
24 truly said, don't abandon these kids. Try as



1 much as you can. And I know us as parents and
2 pastors, we're going to try as best as we can
3 to support the Department of Education.

4 But please do not close the doors
5 on these children. Do not close the door on
6 the public school. I was in a public school
7 all my life, and I came out a good guy, and I
8 know they will come out as a good person too.
9 So look at them as humans, that they got heart
10 the same way as you guys have, and let's try
11 the best for them. Thank you.

12 MR. PIKA: Thank you, Pastor
13 Figueroa.

14 We have now run through all of
15 the names of people who have signed up to
16 speak. Is there anyone else who would like to
17 provide testimony this evening?

18 Could you sign up?

19 MS. SHABAZZ: Good evening,
20 everyone. My name is a Hanifa Shabazz. I'm a
21 city council representative for the 4th
22 district in the City of Wilmington, but I'm
23 speaking as a long-time Wilmingtonian,
24 grandmother, great-grandmother, and one who



1 has been and seen all the many changes that
2 have gone through the educational system here
3 in the City of Wilmington.

4 We are not only dealing with just
5 an inequitable education system that the WEIC
6 plan is addressing and all the other plans
7 have addressed and many of the comments that
8 everyone else said, but we all say that
9 education is the foundation of a civilization.

10 As you all know, the Centers for
11 Disease Control came into the City of
12 Wilmington and did an investigation about the
13 horrific violence that's plaguing our
14 system -- plaguing our community.

15 And when you looked at the final
16 report -- and they did a very extensive
17 report, 549 individuals who committed a crime,
18 they tracked their lives from the day they
19 were born to the time they either pulled the
20 gun or they were killed by the gun.

21 And you could see the many
22 numerous tremendous amount of interventions
23 that took place throughout the various systems
24 throughout the state. Mainly I'll talk about



1 the one dealing with education. The graph was
2 so -- it had a dot for every intervention or
3 engagement that that individual had with the
4 education system.

5 It was a solid picture. It was
6 that many centennial events, they said, that
7 the student had with the educational system,
8 whether it was expulsion, expulsion, or
9 whatever the engagement was.

10 Then it continued to go on to
11 from the issues they had with school to the
12 criminal justice system to public health to
13 maltreatment, whether they were going to the
14 hospital or -- and also the fact how many of
15 them dropped out of school.

16 Education being the foundation
17 for every civilization, it's essential that in
18 order to reverse the pandemic that our
19 community is under, that we have got to get
20 education straight.

21 And when I've been to many
22 meetings talking about the prevention and the
23 cures and the public services that the
24 state -- that is given to the individuals,



1 that the small percentage was for prevention
2 and a large percent was for treatment.

3 So we talk about we don't have
4 money. We do have enough money because I
5 think the Delaware Department of State Health
6 and Social Services budget is 1.5 billion. So
7 we do have the monies. It's just
8 reappropriation of the monies.

9 We're in a pandemic state of
10 mental illness that's been brought upon the
11 community, not the nature of the community.
12 So we, the powers to be, have created an
13 environment that's resulted in the toxic
14 mental illness and dysfunction that's in our
15 community. We must get the educational system
16 straight.

17 I would love the timeline to be
18 less because we've already got four
19 generations that are already plagued with
20 this. So we all must come together and do as
21 necessary, look at all the facts, all the
22 data, remove the politics, and do what's
23 better to save our children. Thank you.

24 MR. PIKA: Thank you,



1 Councilwoman Shabazz.

2 Darlene Battle.

3 And let me make one last call if
4 there's anyone else in the room who wishes to
5 give testimony to sign up.

6 MS. BATTLE: Good evening. I
7 just have to read this first. "I had the
8 audacity to believe that people everywhere can
9 have three meals a day for their bodies,
10 education and culture for their minds, and
11 dignity and quality and freedom for their
12 spirit."

13 And this was written by -- excuse
14 me. This was written in Norway, Dr. Martin
15 Luther King, in 1964, and it seems like we're
16 still arguing about the same thing, giving our
17 kids equal education, good education.

18 Back in 2008 Annenberg Institute
19 had pretty much wrote and predicted where we
20 are now. And we tried on the federal level to
21 say this is what we want, small class sizes.
22 We need community schools because our teachers
23 will know the kids, that the parents can go to
24 after school programs, go to the kids'



1 activities, go to the meetings, and be more
2 involved.

3 And I've been in Delaware for now
4 14 years, and I still have a problem that
5 these kids are being bused all over the place.

6 I run a nonprofit organization,
7 Delaware Alliance for Community Advancement.
8 I had since I started over a thousand young
9 people from Sarah Pyle, and I want to ask
10 what's going to happen to Sarah Pyle. They
11 come in and do a lot of volunteering at my
12 organization.

13 These kids, I have to have food
14 on my job so they can eat because they get up
15 so early in the morning to catch the bus to go
16 to school. And it seems like I'm just picking
17 up where my mother dropped off because she did
18 the same thing. And it's not the fault of the
19 child, but they have to go to school. They
20 have to catch that bus, like, 6:00 o'clock,
21 7:00 o'clock in the morning, so I welcome to
22 have food so they can eat.

23 And then we provide free tax
24 service. And this is important. We provide



1 free tax services. So the kids come to my
2 office for five days, 10:00 to 3:00, and they
3 learn tax laws. And I'm proud to say, even
4 though these kids are being bused in, I'm
5 proud to say out of 15 of those kids, five of
6 them have passed the IRS tax law, and they're
7 going to volunteer and do taxes.

8 But what I would like to see and
9 I've been asking over and over again, how come
10 the City of Wilmington doesn't have its own
11 school district? And they said, well, they
12 don't pay enough taxes. We got businesses
13 here that is profiting off of us, so let them
14 pay the taxes. Stop giving them tax breaks
15 and make them invest in our children's school.
16 Thank you.

17 MR. PIKA: Thank you, Ms. Battle.

18 Lee Fisher.

19 One last call for anyone else
20 here in the audience who would like to speak.
21 Please sign up.

22 MR. FISHER: Good evening. I'm a
23 resident of Wilmington, Delaware, and my
24 concern is this: In the inner city part of



1 Wilmington where the crime seems to be a
2 serious problem and education is lacking, and
3 perhaps that is one of the contributing
4 factors, what can the educational system do to
5 neutralize the interests our youth seem to
6 have for the street lifestyle?

7 There's one thing I can say. And
8 I would like to compliment the young
9 generation that is here today. I would like
10 to not only compliment you for being here, but
11 I would like to challenge you, if I may.

12 Out of all of you young brothers
13 and sisters there, can we find a Harriet
14 Tubman among you? A Malcolm X among you? A
15 Marcus Garvey? Because that is what your
16 generation is in dire need for.

17 And for you to be a leader, you
18 must get the knowledge that will enable you to
19 guide others. Our education system must be
20 set up to provide them with that kind of
21 education.

22 MR. PIKA: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

23 Anyone else who wishes to speak?

24 Our official time limit was 8:30.



1 We've gone beyond that considerably, and so at
2 this point I declare the hearing closed. I
3 want to thank you all for coming this evening
4 and participating. All comments made today or
5 submitted between November the 17th and
6 December the 15th will be shared with the
7 State Board of Education. Thank you very
8 much.

9 (Hearing concluded at 8:49 p.m.)

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1 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

2
3 I, SUSAN ARNOLD YODER, Registered
4 Professional Reporter and Notary Public, do
5 hereby certify that the foregoing record,
6 pages 1 through 54 inclusive, is a true and
7 accurate transcript of my stenographic notes
8 taken on December 14, 2015, in the
9 above-captioned matter.

10 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set
11 my hand and seal this 16th day of December,
12 2015, at Wilmington.

13
14
15
16 *Susan A. Yoder*
17

SUSAN ARNOLD YODER, RPR

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