

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Responses to Questions from the State Board of Education
December 18, 2015

1. What are the funding requirements for redistricting, and when are those funds needed?

The Commission's highest funding priority is the initiation of weighted unit funding to address the needs of low-income students, English language learners, and basic special education K-3 students. Delaware is 1 of only 5 states without a specific allocation for English language learners and 1 of 15 states without a specific allocation for low-income students. This recurrent funding should begin with the districts impacted by redistricting with the long-term goal of expanding statewide.

In addition, one-time funding for a Wilmington Transition Fund is needed to complete a full-scale facilities assessment of the schools, develop new grade configurations, design transportation feeder patterns, and develop action plans to assure that redistricting takes place in a manner that is minimally disruptive to students, parents, and educators. The transition fund will support the identification and implementation of national best practices and new models for Red Clay and Christina schools with high concentrations of low-income students, English language learners, and basic special education K-3 students, in a process that includes community input.

Fiscal Year 2017: \$10.5 million in new funds -\$7.5 million recurrent and \$3 million one-time

- Low-income, English language learner, and special education unit for students in all Red Clay schools plus those in Christina's Wilmington schools: \$7.5 million recurrent based on the model illustrated in the Commission's plan (**Appendix D**).
- Wilmington Redistricting Transition Fund: \$3 million in one-time money to support the planning and development of new models and proposals on facilities.
- While not required for redistricting, the Commission strongly supports additional funding for early childhood education for low-income students.

Fiscal Year 2018: \$4.5 million in new funds-\$3.5 million recurrent and \$1 million one-time

- Low-income, English language learner, and special education unit applies to all Red Clay schools plus all Christina schools: additional \$3.5 million in recurrent funding (added to the 7.5 million for FY2017 for a total of \$11 million in FY2018). This is based on the model used for illustration in the Commission's plan (**Appendix D**).
- An additional increment to the Wilmington Redistricting Transition Fund: \$1 million.

Fiscal Year 2019: Additional funding needed is contingent on the extent of statewide roll-out.

- Low-income, English language learner, and special education unit expands for all northern New Castle County districts and then statewide as rapidly as possible. The statewide expansion extends beyond the scope of redistricting and the cost depends on the pace and extent of expansion. The Commission will prepare estimates of the cost of expansion for discussion with the Governor and General Assembly.

- Some short-term contingency funding to balance the impacts on the New Castle County tax district and capacity for local districts to make limited adjustments to meet operating expenses.

Other fiscal changes, such as the move to a new education funding allocation system and the initiation of property reassessment are under review by the Educational Funding Improvement Commission which is scheduled to release its report by the end of March 2016.

2. What happens if the needed funding is not provided?

The Redistricting Resolution (**page 10**) is explicit and specific about what will happen if the necessary and sufficient resources are not provided.

“If the necessary and sufficient funding and transition supports are not provided by the conclusion of each stage and in the manner proposed, the State Board, 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 Commission has been consistent that the residents of the Red Clay school district should not be expected to assume responsibility for an unfunded or underfunded mandate, and should not bear any undue tax burden as a result of redistricting.

3. Isn't the proposed funding for low-income students, English language learners and other students at risk independent of redistricting?

- The Commission has always stated that redistricting alone will not accomplish the needed improvements in student outcomes. All of the changes proposed in the Commission's framework (**see pages, 21-26**) must be carried out. In Wilmington, the two changes must go hand-in-hand: consolidating 50% of Wilmington's students into a single district and providing additional resources.
- Funding to districts engaged in redistricting is targeted to address the learning needs of low-income students, English language learners and other students at risk is essential to the educational success of redistricting.
- The Commission strongly supports the eventual expansion of this targeted funding statewide, but that expansion is not a requirement of redistricting. The Commission's broader recommendation is consistent with its mandate under HB148 to advise the Governor and General Assembly on “addressing the needs of all schools within the State with high concentrations of children living in poverty, English language learners, or both” (**page 32-33, and Appendix A**).

4. What responsibility does the State Board of Education have for ensuring that the needed funds are provided?

- The State Board of Education is **not responsible** for insuring that the needed funds are provided. The Governor and General Assembly are responsible for allocating the needed funds and the Commission will seek that funding beginning with the coming legislative session.
- The Commission is explicit (**pages 26-27**) that the “State Board's authority to approve the plan is separate and distinct from the authority to carry out the plan” and that the

“Governor, General Assembly and school districts must allocate the resources needed to support the redistricting transition and provide for the equitable and effective education of all students and for the support of schools with high concentrations of low-income student and English language learners.”

5. When will the Commission and the affected districts begin to address the teaching and learning needs of Wilmington students?

- This work on best practices for addressing the developmental learning needs of students is already underway. A research team from the University of Delaware is identifying best practices in support of improved teaching and learning in schools with high concentrations of low-income students, English language learners and other students at risk.
- The application of this work can begin as soon as the districts can adopt changes and this work will intensify during the next school year and beyond with ongoing support of the Commission and its committees through a community-engaged process.
- This is essential to carrying out the Commission’s full action agenda (**see pages 21-26**) and it will engage the work of all the Commission’s committees, primarily the committees on Charter-District Collaboration, Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty, and Parent, Educator and Community Engagement. Key facets of this work and the initial cross-sector partnerships already supporting this work are described in **Part VI** of the Commission’s plan (**pages 102-119**).

6. Are the Christina and Red Clay plans in the Commission’s report specifically focused on redistricting or are these plans the same as the priority schools plans proposed earlier?

- No, they are not the priority schools plans. The Christina and Red Clay plans that are included in the Commission’s report (**Appendix B and C**) are new plans that were developed specifically as frameworks for planning the implementation of redistricting.
- The administrative staff of the two districts worked together and with the Commission to be sure that the plans are aligned and mutually reinforcing.
- The district plans are labeled interim because, immediately upon approval of the Commission’s submitted redistricting plan, the two districts will proceed with stage two of the process and produce further detailed planning for implementation, including the new configurations of schools, feeder patterns and new programs to better support teaching and learning.
- The Commission’s plan (**Part VII, pages 120-137**) builds upon the detailed plans of the two districts and also adds dimensions of particular importance to the overall success of the implementation process, such as clear guidelines for the assignment of educators impacted by redistricting (**pages 126-129**) and the continuation and extension of choice options for students (**pages 133-137**).

7. What makes redistricting so critical to changing student outcomes?

- Redistricting will streamline the governance of Wilmington public education and focus primary responsibility for student outcomes in the Red Clay School District, which then will enroll more than half of the public school students living in the City of Wilmington.
- Many of the other improvements in Wilmington public education will be more effectively supported with redistricting. Our belief is without approval of redistricting,

the momentum for needed changes will dissipate and the broad-based community support for the needed changes will be difficult to sustain. The inaction over 40 years is evidence of what can be expected.

8. Why was the Commission's recommendation on the Colonial district changed from what was earlier proposed?

- The Colonial School District voted to continue to serve its Wilmington students, with the expectation that it can be effective in the education of those students and it has submitted the initial outline for a plan to do so.
- After much discussion with leaders of the Colonial School District, the Commission's leadership team concluded that we were not willing to risk support for the full plan based on the Colonial decision to continue to serve the fewer than 200 Wilmington students now in its schools. We so recommended to the Commission which supported this judgement, as reflected in the final plan submitted to the State Board of Education.
- While some members of the Commission have concerns about the district's role in the education of Wilmington students, we are prepared to work with the district to consider how to strengthen education for those Wilmington students it continues to serve. We also will explore the possibility of a greater role for the Colonial School District in collaboration with other districts and charters to help to overcome the adverse impacts of the fragmentation of responsibilities.
- The Commission will report annually on these efforts as well as those of all other districts, and also on the learning outcomes for all Wilmington students.

9. What is the evaluative methodology and on what dimensions will you determine success?

- The Commission's evaluation plan includes a stipulation of the milestones and measures of success for evaluating progress and outcomes (**see Part IX, pages 167-182**).
- One distinctive feature of this evaluation plan is that it includes an analysis of Wilmington students that previously has been absent. This analysis will be continued annually and reported to the State Board of Education and others.
- The Commission's evaluation plan includes milestones and measures of success that align with all the facets of the Commission's action agenda and also align with research on key student developmental needs and outcomes, especially for low-income students and students at risk.
- The Commission will add to the initial set of indicators as the process moves forward and will respond to requests from the State Board of Education and the participating districts for additional analysis of outcomes and impacts.
- The Commission will submit to the State Board of Education an annual evaluation of progress in achieving milestones and improving the success of City of Wilmington students.