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March 9, 2016

Tony Allen, Ph.D.
Chairperson
Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

Dr. Allen:

Thank you for your continued commitment to improve educational opportunities for Wilmington schoolchildren. This process has not been an easy one, but the Commission's work represents the efforts and input of thousands of Delawareans who care deeply about urban education. It is the best opportunity Delaware has had in decades to improve the education of Wilmington schoolchildren by increasing district cohesiveness while not imposing any undue burden on participating districts and giving districts additional resources to serve children appropriately.

At its most recent meeting, the State Board of Education was adamant that WEIC's plan must not only provide for student success upon redistricting, but should also ensure that Wilmington schoolchildren today benefit from our efforts. To that end, the State Board conditioned its approval of WEIC's plan on the execution of an agreement between the Department of Education and the Christina School District to implement strong plans to improve outcomes at Christina's Priority Schools. I know that the Commission already has played a key role in facilitating such agreement and I am pleased to confirm that Secretary Godowsky and Acting Superintendent Bob Andrzejewski have now confirmed agreement to fund those plans. Thanks to their efforts and the work of the Commission and the State Board, the approved plans will ensure an additional \$1 million in funding annually for three Christina schools in the City of Wilmington.

The State Board of Education has also conditioned its approval on a wording change relating to the process for suspending the timetable for implementation of redistricting in the absence of "necessary and sufficient funding and transition supports." I recognize that the proposed change was not supported by the Commission.

In our discussions last week, we discussed alternative language for the redistricting resolution. The following alternative language under items #2 of the redistricting resolution removes the State Board from formal approval of suspension of the timetable and ensures that the Commission, after consulting with the affected districts, shall have the authority to suspend the timetable for implementation of the plan until such time as the necessary and sufficient resources and supports are provided.

If the necessary and sufficient funding and transition supports, as laid out in the compendium dated February 11, 2016, are not provided by the conclusion of each stage and in the manner proposed, the Commission, after consulting with the affected districts, shall suspend the timetable for implementation until the resources and supports are provided.

I am asking that you call a meeting of the Commission to review and vote on the proposed alternative language and resubmit the Commission's plan to the State Board for action at their March 17th meeting.

As outlined in your submission to the State Board last week, the Commission has agreed to meet with the State Board at every stage of the implementation process to discuss education improvement and resources, and to take no action without such discussions. The Commission has also agreed to meet semi-annually with the State Board on these subjects, and continue a high level of engagement on all of WEIC's work. Those commitments, coupled with the language change, address both parties' concerns.

I want to reaffirm my support for the work of the Commission. I was pleased to include funding for this work in my proposed Fiscal Year 2017 budget, and I look forward to continuing to work with the Commission, the State Board, the affected districts, the General Assembly and others to see that sufficient resources are dedicated to this plan.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the schoolchildren of Delaware, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and the members of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Jack A. Markell

CC: Dr. Steven H. Godowsky, Secretary of Education
Teri Gray, Ph. D., President, State Board of Education
Kenny Rivera, Chairperson, School Board of the Red Clay Consolidated School District
Harrie Ellen Minnehan, Chairperson, School Board of the Christina School District
Dan Rich, Ph. D., Policy Director, WEIC