

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Charter and District Collaboration Committee

Bayard Middle School Auditorium

Meeting Minutes – December 16, 2015

The Committee Co-chairs called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m.

The Co-chairs announced that the Commission voted to submit the Redistricting Plan to the State Board of Education. They welcomed guest speaker, Senator Bryan Townsend.

The Committee engaged in an open discussion about the Promoting Charter-District Collaboration Task Force, on which Sen. Townsend served. The Task Force was created in 2013 primarily as a response to some concerns surrounding HB165, also introduced in 2013 as a charter school reform bill. The Task Force included several other legislators and members of the education community, and it was chaired by a member of the Delaware Department of Education. Senator Townsend gave the Committee some background about the task force, and the contention around the charter school bill that led to the formation of the task force.

- The Committee discussed the challenge in Delaware, as in many places, that discussions about charter schools are often very divided between people who are adamantly pro charter school or anti charter school, which makes it difficult to make any progress.
- The Committee also addressed the need for strong relationships, which is the best way to foster collaboration. Many concerns were raised about forcing or mandating collaboration, emphasizing that the best collaboration would be incentivized and facilitated rather than mandated.
 - It was also noted that in order to facilitate successful collaboration, we must build the infrastructure to support it as well as work to remove the barriers, such as inequities in funding, to collaboration.
 - Giving the State Board of Education the ability to consider the systemic impact of school choice is an important way to change the way the current system works – to make one coherent school system rather than multiple parallel systems.
- There was general acknowledgement that lumping all charters together and all districts together is counterproductive. Not all charter schools are “good” or “bad,” by any standard of assessment. The same goes for districts.

The Co-chairs opened the discussion for public comment.

A member of the public explained that she does a lot of work in the City of Wilmington, primarily in business consulting with an interest in political engagement. She wanted to know what successful collaboration would look like. Additionally, she asked if there was a place a parent can go to analyze and assess the portfolio of public school options available to them. Committee members:

- Explained that a lot of the school profile information is handled by DOE. One of the problems is that a lot of people only look at test scores, but there need to be multiple indicators of school quality. One problem with test scores is that growth is not typically demonstrated, and schools serving higher-needs students tend to have lower average test scores than schools serving less needy populations. The average test score does not in itself indicate a poor quality school.
- Suggested that meeting with principals is the best way to understand school culture.
- Explained that there used to be a system where schools could submit more information for inclusion in their public profile, but this option was not rolled out well. It might be time to re-examine how school choices are presented to families.
- Explained that there *is* currently a way to see annual surveys completed by parents and students, to get a qualitative sense of the school environment.
- Agreed that it is necessary to change the narrative about public schools in Delaware. Public schools need to begin to work collaboratively to tell a different story about the system as a whole so people do not continue to hear only negative things about a fractured system.

Next steps for the Committee:

- The committee will continue to meet on the fourth Wednesday of each month.
- There will be joint meeting with the Redistricting Committee soon.
- The Committee agreed to discuss the organization of a conference for teachers to come together and show the good work they are doing, as a forum for collaboration.

Ron Russo, member of the public, wished everyone a happy holiday season.

The meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Charter and District
Collaboration Committee**
Attendance – December 16, 2015

Committee Members

Dusty Blakey
Eve Buckley
Ariadna Castaneda
Bill Doolittle

Gloria Grantham
Aretha Miller
Jennifer Nagourney
Cora Scott

Members of the Public

Ron Russo
Adria Buchanan

Institute for Public Administration Staff

Kelly Sherretz
Elizabeth Burland