

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
November 28, 2017
Delaware State University, Wilmington Campus
Meeting Minutes**

Co-Chair, Tizzy Lockman called the meeting to order 5:07 p.m.

Tizzy Lockman asked the Commission members to introduce themselves followed by introductions from members of the public.

Chair Announcements

Tizzy Lockman announced that the minutes from today will not be published because the meeting notice did not get out to the public early enough.

Discussion of Wilmington Education Priorities and Path Forward

Mayor Purzycki, Mayor of Wilmington, explained that he wrote a letter to the Governor in 2014 about his frustration with the Delaware school system at large. He said the letter went on to talk about the impacts of bussing and city schools; how many children were attending charters, privates, and traditional public schools and versus opting to attend school in PA. He emphasized that 18,500 families live in Chester yet file Pennsylvania returns.

Mayor Purzycki questioned why we were perpetuating a system like this. He stated that nobody wants to resegregate our schools yet as time goes on, we see that we have done just that. He stated our kids are living under burdens which most people cannot fathom. He refers to a time when he was door knocking attempting to do pre-rental inspections. He stated there are fourteen thousand rental units in the city, of which 100 declined to do the inspection. He stated that ninety-five allowed him in and of those inspected, only two or three passed the inspection. He stated this posed the question of how many people are living in subpar housing. Mayor Purzycki stated two-thirds of the men have been imprisoned, which does not include the federal system and the majority of them will be readmitted into the system.

Mayor Purzycki stated that in the 19801 zip code the labor participation rate is 35%, which means one out of every three people work. He says the greatest thing you can do for education is the best thing that you can do for crime because crime is a symptom of underlying problems. He talked about a time he visited HB DuPont Middle and was astonished at how well run it seemed however right across the street is Bayard which has many different results but it just does not work as well and the demographics are very different. He explained that if we look at the charter schools, they are not "hitting the ball out the park when it comes to performance" either. Purzycki suggests that we over resource these schools and begin to hold teachers to a standard that is challenging. He says that the people who say that you have to start with the kids are wrong. He stated you have to start with the adults and to discuss difficult issues, not only the police issues, but also the difficult issues of poverty, crime and race. He stated, using the police as an example, he questioned how we deal with these difficult issues as guardians rather than gladiators.

Mayor Purzycki reassured that he talked to the governor about his plans and he will be supportive. He stated his intent is to build up communities and give aspiration to children. He stated that some people say that children do not have any hope because there is nothing to hope for. He noted that some children have not even been to the Riverfront. He ended with the thought that we should be clear about how we support kids instead of who has the best formula.

The floor was open for discussion at 5:27pm

Dr. Allen referred back to the Commission's original proposal to open an Office of Public Policy and Education. Dr. Allen asked the Mayor what role the city government would have in that office. He also asked how closely connected the Mayor is to what the Governor is working on with Christina.

Mayor Purzycki responded that if an individual could play a constructive role he would consider having someone serve in that capacity; however, he stated he is reluctant to open another office. In regards to the Governor's work with Christina, he stated he has been talking with the Governor frequently and he does not intend to get into a fight with him. He affirmed that the Governor has a strategy towards looking at kids who are doing poorly and he stated it is best addressed when we are working together. Mayor Purzycki emphasized that too many schools are underutilized.

D. Rich asked the Mayor what he is trying to accomplish with as it pertains to creating safe havens.

Mayor Purzycki replied that he wants to create alternative uses for the underutilized schools. He said that there is a lack of places for kids to go to recreate at the end of the school day, but there is underutilization of the existing organizations. He stated students are not coming to an organization, like the Boys and Girls Club, anymore and we want to encourage them to come and create healthy safe havens for children.

Dr. Allen asked if this new plan could be an opportunity for that.

Mayor Purzycki stated that there are two places that would be perfect for it.

Devon Brown, a member of the public, expressed that the responsibility of raising the child and proper etiquette starts at home. He refers back to his upbringing stating that he was not the greatest student living on the west side of Wilmington. He stated that he was terrified of doing certain things such as cursing at a teacher or disrespecting an adult. He explained that the reason he was here was that of his mom; it was not a teacher or a community member.

Mayor Purzycki affirmed that Brown is lucky to have had parental guidance; however, most kids do not. He used this as an opportunity to mention the adult resource center that the Governor is proposing in order to remind parents what resources are available to them.

Shannon Griffin, member of the public, asked the Mayor if he has gotten to the point of discussing budgets and resources as it pertains to the governor's proposal. She asked where the money is coming from to make sure that the ideas can be implemented.

Mayor Purzycki said that a budget has not been discussed yet. He stated that he has faith that the governor would not create an unaffordable alternative.

Maria Maza, a Commission Member, stated that she is a new member of the Commission and is a student at William Penn. She spoke about her experience when she came from Venezuela to the United States and the importance of making the best decisions. She suggested that others try to understand why students act the way they do, what students are interested in and engage them. She stated students sometimes behave poorly because they do not see the negative consequences. She provided the example that unlike schools in Venezuela, students can walk out of the schools as they please. She ended her remarks on the note that students do not see greater value in utilizing the resources that are available to them.

Mayor Purzycki thanked Ms. Maza for her comments. He stated that he recognized it is difficult to understand human behavior and social behavior. He recalled the exemplary organizations 'Homeboys Initiative,' based in Los Angeles that hires men out of prison and Bryan Stevenson's Equal Justice Initiative. He stated it is a great story of the importance of kinship with the marginalized and despised. The premise was that it was better to be in kinship than of service because in service, there is always a benefactor and a transaction that leaves one party indebtedness and it creates an uneven society.

Dr. Allen asked in regards to the work that Margie and Eve are working on with the Governor supported Charter District Collaboration. He noted the proposed Charter District Collaboration Compact is all volunteer, not mandated, with purposes of rallying behind common interest. Dr. Allen wanted to know the Mayor's general views on the importance of this initiative and would like to know if the Commission has his support.

Mayor Purzycki supported the Compact by reminding the group that charter schools were originally experiments to share knowledge and resources.

Karen Eller, a Commission member, began her comment with a quote made by Dorrell Green at the last meeting and that was "A child in trauma is a family in trauma." She stated the idea for community centers to be a place where our students and families can go is very important. She thanked the Mayor for showing support of educators in the city as they are doing so much with not enough resources. She indicated that children have experienced trauma that some people cannot imagine. She asked if there has been any discussion about mental health, counseling, and trauma-informed practices within the community centers.

Mayor Purzycki assured K. Eller that he is sincere and steadfast in his support. He stated the high point of his day is to go to an elementary school because they are still reachable. He stated there has been an array of options discussed in regards to mental health, but there is a difficult

point of deciding who is going to pay for the resources. He referenced his position as the CEO of the Riverfront for twenty years and while there he invested in the Riverfront and has since seen a return on the investment. He is a believer in the necessity of investing; there is an urgency in investing and that is the mindset we have to have. He stated we are in a cheapskate mindset and that we could not even raise a gas tax.

Dr. Allen thanked the Mayor for his time at 5:49 p.m. and the Mayor departed. The meeting turned to the regular business of the night.

Dr. Allen welcomed Maria Maza as the youngest and now the most vocal commissioner and allowed her to introduce herself.

M. Maza stated she came here a year ago from Venezuela because she wanted a future for herself that she could not obtain in Venezuela. She stated she currently lives with her Aunt and Uncle and attends William Penn High School. She stated that her current goal is to show Americans the value of what they have and to go back home in Venezuela and help her community.

Dr. Allen stated that we were originally going to take a vote on the Governor's proposal; however, because the meeting notice was not published in enough time the vote will be postponed until the next Commission meeting. In the meantime, Dr. Allen stated he would provide a narrative of the Governor's proposal and send it out to Commission members. Dr. Allen stated he hopes to receive feedback from everyone on the Governor's proposal.

Dr. Rich presented an analysis of the five-point vision for the improvement of the schools from the perspective of the Commission. He stated there were several aspects to mention. First, the goal was to find what is needed and what are the strengths and weaknesses of the vision. Second, he stated there is some alignment, how that might materialize and the opportunity for greater alignment. Third, he stated there are some items that are not addressed.

Dr. Rich stated there is some alignment at the core of the proposal; however, they are pursued differently. Overall, the proposal addressed the challenges of those living in the Christina School District. The approach to engagement in those schools is to build a partnership between DOE and the District. Dr. Rich stated it is only possible through collaboration. Dr. Rich reminded everyone that WEIC collaborated with each of the districts and this should be the process moving forward. Dr. Rich stated that there should be a different approach, not just structural change, with a developmental approach to trauma-informed practices to support the holistic emotional and social well-being of every student. He stated if it is not a developmental approach, it would not succeed.

Dr. Rich asked the Department of Education to show prioritization to engage Wilmington education by creating the Office of Innovation and now moving forward to see how this prioritization is carried out in execution. He stated that WEIC also made the argument to recreate the Family Council to have an integrative approach to support the needs of children

and their families. He stated these have been positive and critical pieces in moving forward. He stated to consider other models, such as in Springfield, Massachusetts and who has taken responsibility for those models and how those models have evolved.

Dr. Rich stated the second piece of the vision plan of seeing where there could be greater alignment. He stated there should be a broader partnership than the initial partners to work with the Department of Education, such as including Christina school teachers. He stated in order to mobilize the capacity of the entire community from the nonprofit sector there is the asset mapping project is underway. He stated that he hopes this project will be utilized, mostly by the Christina School District, but also in all parts of the city to be an invitation for informed partnerships.

Dr. Rich suggested the proposal to strengthen the P20 Council. He stated Joe Pika, Commission member, created the Council that brought together all leaders and representatives of all dimensions of education to advance education or career tracks. He stated the Council is created to strengthen the transitions between different parts of the system that are not aligned. He stated that Secretary now refers to it as birth through 20, because birth through kindergarten is usually outside the public education system, and then connects to the elementary school system through high school to college or workforce. He stated the Council was active for many years and now there is the opportunity to build up its capacity to help students. Dr. Rich stated the Governor has expressed his commitment to strengthening the P20 Council.

Dr. Rich suggested another opportunity to help students is through a Compact. He stated the Commission made the case that twenty-three governing units serve 11,500 public education students with no shared plan and no incentive for collaboration or scaling up best practices. He stated there is a desperate need to coordinate efforts and a Compact could be an application for all schools that serve Wilmington students to work together. He stated the Charter District Collaboration Committee proposes a Wilmington Compact to build a voluntary relationship to serve Wilmington students by identifying and applying best practices to those schools.

Dr. Rich stated the last area of the vision considers areas not yet addressed. He stated that one area is that is not mentioned in the vision is what to be done with students in Wilmington who are continued to be bussed to high schools on the other side of the county. He stated with three decades of experience as a group these students are not obtaining benefits from the arrangement. Dr. Rich suggested the proposal to move the improve options for high schools students. He stated the structural condition of the feeder patterns and district configurations have not been addressed.

Dr. Rich stated another aspect to be addressed is the special education funding. He stated the Governor does not support the Commission's proposal for additional unit spending for Special Education and English Language Learners, but the Commission is still waiting for an alternative investment proposal. He stated the opportunity grants are not all focused on this purpose and outcome but could be. He stated there are several other structural pieces to still be addressed. First, he stated there should be a streamlining of government. Second, he stated the allocation

of additional resources of high concentrations of special education needs. Third, he stated there should be a focus to meet the needs of students living in poverty and these needs to be expanded in the proposal.

Adriana Bohm, a Commission member, asked how they could have collaboration if there are things hoisted upon us, such as institutional racism and systemic racism. She stated that there is an abundant conversation about a district that is primarily Black and Latino, yet there is no discussion about how to address the systemic racism when we are discussing improving education. She stated there is another issue of collaboration in the context of the release of information if schools will be closing or not.

M. Matthews stated that his role is to heavily lean on local associations and engage local governance. He stated that his concern is that a vision is different and vaguer than a memorandum of understanding and the devil is in the details.

T. Lockman stated the same process seems to be playing out again and the last point of a lack of details seems to be lacking.

Dr. Allen asked Commission members, Meredith Griffin and Harrie Ellen Minnehan, if there are any other plans since they are engaged in the work.

Meredith Griffin, a Commission member, stated that this is the initial conversation that began as a partnership rather than being told what is happening. He stated the last two weeks there have been board members at the table engaged in a collaborative discussion. He stated it was unfortunate that the information was released today when it was originally to be released after a meeting in the coming week. He stated they have been wrestling with the same questions that have been brought up around this table. He stated the draft and working document will come to an agreement in the beginning of next Tuesday, but they do not know what it will look like until it is finished. He stated the Governor has been involved in Christina school district to hold a public meeting and has asked the public to give input. He stated that they have a strong desire to make this work collaborative and there is more optimism than previous adversarial relationships and a sense of urgency around this work.

A member of the public commented that from an educator's perspective, the Governor has gone to knock on doors to have true conversations and have the community's input. The member of the public stated community members are sometimes hesitant to come out to events, so having parent advocates that come from that community might help. They stated that there was a fallout from today's information leak. They stated those that are working on the front lines with children are not the ones making policy. They stated the policy should reflect that the students come first.

M. Maza agreed that policymakers should put kids first. She stated that she is from the Red Clay Consolidated School District and sometimes after school, there is nothing to do, so if they need someone to knock on doors that she would be willing to help.

Harrie Ellen Minnehan, a Commission member, stated this seems like a rerun of priority schools. She stated the district and schools are working together as collaborative and it is being done differently, but the goal is the same.

John Young, a member of the public, stated that he agrees with what has been previously stated that it has been a collaboration with the Governor's Office; however, he stated he is concerned with the timing of the work. He stated that the Governor has leaned on the timing for the advantage to do this now and get it done right; however, the majority of this work will be rushed in a week time span. He stated it seems like forethought to consider every stakeholder with students as number one.

Dr. Allen asked when does the board respond to the working document.

J. Young stated that the board would consider the negotiation and present a counterproposal soon. He stated they are slated to have action on the fifth and the twelfth.

Dorrell Green, a member of the public, stated that he is not here to litigate or point fingers, but he stated the Governor provided a vision and we have to engage the district. He stated there has been engagement with children and families, but the history plays a part in the mistrust. He stated the financial aspect is the key to move forward.

Dr. Allen stated the Commission would forgo the presentation tonight. He stated the Commission is to be thoughtful of the systemic racism and work within the long narrative.

Committee Updates

Eve Buckley, Chair of Charter and District Collaboration Committee, updated the Commission. She stated last year the committee was in strong agreement in potential value of collaboration across public school sectors for two primary reasons. The first reason, she stated, was that we have challenging circumstances, not resulting in improvements because the same communities are sending kids to different schools. She stated we need to disseminate solutions or original ideas of having different types of schools. The second reason, she stated, collaboration promotes efficiency.

She stated that we are choosing to split public and fracture resources, while there are some value and some costs. She stated we can bring the various actors back together who serve one community, these questions of children facing trauma can be better treated collaboratively to streamline resources.

Buckley went on to say that as of the end of 2016, the best route was to establish a Wilmington Compact. She explained the Compact is a voluntary commitment among schools, district, or individual charter, across the public sector, or possibly open to private schools, to collaborate with each other to share achievements and a shared responsibility for all students from same communities. At the end of last year, she explained that the Committee thought that in the fall of

2017, school leader conversations would take place on how the Wilmington collaboration should work and what priority initiatives should be. She stated they actually found it more effective to have individual conversations between school leaders and Commission members. She noted that this process is time-consuming, but it is more productive to sit down each leader and communicate the goal and how the goal aligns with their interests and priorities.

Committee member Marjie Lopez Waite followed up to say that there is great representation within the committee of school leaders. She stated the committee has found that when you bring leaders together and collaborate on goals and challenges, you find that these things intersect. She stated this is where ideas should be incubated and that they would have the greatest opportunity for a compact.

Marjie Lopez Waite said that it is crucial to leave misperceptions at the door. She suggested that we find and talk about the intersections and build upon them. She stated committee member Dusty Blakey is helping to continue the momentum of collaboration. She stated that as a committee we have come a long way, we are working to build a network to build compacts.

Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement (PEaCE) Committee

Devon Brown, a member of the public, stated that he is working with Tizzy Lockman on the Parent Information Project as part of the Commission's initiative to engage parents and inform them on the school choice process. He stated there is research to support students without engaged parents have lower test scores and higher disciplinary problems. He stated the project is aimed to reach out to parents and families through community centers, churches, and on an individual basis to engage parents by inviting them to workshops and have discussions with parents. He stated that many parents ask about the changes within the education system.

Tizzy Lockman stated Devon is a Public Allies. She provided the example of hosting an event at the Christina Cultural Arts Center to have conversations about the problems that parents face in the school choice system.

Public Comment

Bill Doolittle commented saying that priority schools were mandated and he is glad that this work seems to be collaborative model. He mentioned that there should be consideration of a consultative model that brings people for their input. He stated that it is very tight between groups of power that ninety-five percent of the decisions are already made before they get parents involved. He stated that he understands that collaborations are timely and mandates are quicker; however, he stated, the problem will not be solved unless it is a true collaborative model.

Ron Russo, member of the public, stated that he would like to offer something on school reform. He stated that this system was put together in 1995 to purpose to state's economy, trying to broaden the basis of our education reform to improve the economy, to attract business and

property values, and crime rates and longevity. He stated all these things apply if you work or live in Delaware. He stated if you need something for special needs poverty, it is in your interest what this committee is attempting to do. He stated imagine what the flow is into the state of Delaware if every child graduates from college and this should be an investment in Delaware.

Michelle Suchyj, member of the public, stated that she is a gifted and talented teacher at Pulaski Elementary School and Elbert-Palmer Elementary School. She stated that we started reform as corporations and education coming together to form Wilmington Charter as the original. She stated the news article created hysteria because the reader did not know all the details. She stated it is a positive part to take the direction of schools in STEM, as she sees partnerships between businesses and education because ten-year-olds can now code. However, she states, the problem is the seven degrees of separation with individual ideas and the challenge is finding people with common aspirations. She stated that any one that spends a day in a school will witness the potential of students that are willing to be engaged. She stated that students will either be working for you or in the prison system and you will be paying for them. She stated the problem is seeing the value of education, seeing the engagement and believing that they can do it. She stated children will meet whatever expectation you set for them. She stated that it is that relationship that will help children learn.

Carol Adams, member of the public, stated there is the idea that there is a Wilmington school district. They stated they truly feel like the ideal situation is Wilmington school district. They stated that Dorrell Green has made good suggestions for two segments, an educational segment and a social services segment. They stated to make the schools a hub and create the initiative and opportunity for the schools to be the location since every student goes to school. They stated that unless you have the segments integrated that it will not work. C. Adams stated they disagree with Dr. Rich that he raise the wage tax to fund the school district and that moving toward the county property tax. They stated until we get the school focus on urban kids with the necessary resources.

There was no other public comment. The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 pm.

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Tuesday, November 28, 2017

Commission Members:

Tizzy Lockman, Co-Chair
Tony Allen, Chair
Joe Pika
Harrie Ellen Minnehan
Adriana Bohm
Mike Matthews

Valentina Maza
Karen Eller
Meredith Griffin
Nnamdi Chukwuocha
Margie Lopez-Waite
Eve Buckley

Members of the Public:

Mayor Mike Purzycki
Tom Ogden
Devon Brown
Mark Holodick
Gwen Angalet
Shannon Griffin
Edward Freel
Jeff Taschner
Maureen Rozanski
Sam Barry
Bill Doolittle
Tom Driscoll
Valerie Dinkins

Tyrone Jones
Gabrielle Thomas
Michelle Suchyj
Dorrell Green
Bob Simperts
John Young
Bob Silber
Jessica Bies
Ron Russo
Jocelyn Rodriguez
Ciro Adams
Merv Daugherty
Noreen LaSorsa

IPA Staff Members

Dan Rich
Kelly Sherretz
Haley Qaissaunee
Cimone Philpotts
Chester Holland
Melissa Micek