

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission  
Tuesday, February 28, 2017  
Sharp Conference Center, Marshallton Education Building  
Meeting Minutes**

**Chair, Dr. Tony Allen called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.**

**Chairman T. Allen asked the Commission members and the members of the public to introduce themselves.**

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

T. Allen called for an approval of meeting minutes from December 13, 2016 Commission Meeting. The motion was so moved and seconded. Meeting minutes from December were approved.

**Chairman T. Allen asked for updates from each committee.**

Vice-Chairman, Elizabeth (Tizzy) Lockman provided an update from the Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement (PEaCE) Committee. The committee has moved forward with two subcommittees, the first to have outreach efforts in hopes of creating stronger relationships with families and to work with Lauren Bailes, Assistant Professor at University of Delaware, to develop an outreach and engagement plan for a survey and original research analyzing the efficacy of parent engagement in the City of Wilmington. Committee members are completing institutional review board (IRB) training to move forward with surveys.

Aretha Miller, co-chair of the Charter District Collaboration Committee. A. Miller gave an overview of the ongoing work of that committee. She said that the committee was spending some time conducting research on partnership and collaboration models, highlighting work specifically done by Sarah Yatsko from the Center for Reinventing Public Education and the Gates Foundation on Charter District Compacts. A subcommittee has formed to determine what a charter district compact would look like in the city of Wilmington. The group hopes to develop a report submitted to the Commission by the end of April proposing a model for a Wilmington Charter District Compact. A. Miller also noted that she took the opportunity to attend a Charter District Compact conference in Camden, New Jersey. Also, there will be a future opportunity to visit and analyze Cleveland to see their Compact model in practice.

Michelle Taylor, co-chair of Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty Committee (MNSP) provided an update that the Committee is working on to achieve better outcomes for kids in the key area of Kindergarten-readiness. Feedback from elementary school principals and the Readiness Teams indicate early intervention is the key to ensure students are meeting early milestones. She concluded her update by saying that the committee would be looking to community stakeholders to help with early intervention and detection of children that are having difficulty meeting their pre-kindergarten academic development milestones. The committee is working on tangible things while keeping long-term goals in mind.

**Discussion of the State's Education Priorities and Path Forward – Governor Carney**

T. Allen thanked Governor Carney and Secretary Bunting for attending the meeting.

Governor John Carney thanks the Commission for the work they've done for the past few years.

One of the Governor's top issues remains how to address public education in our state. He also noted that he puts this issue in a larger context of Delaware's economy. He talked about Delaware's economy as being one in transition, similar to that of the rest of the country. Thus, Governor Carney stated, it is imperative to have excellence in education, especially for students in low-income and high concentration of poverty, specifically in Wilmington.

The Governor discussed how trying to maintain the funding for early childhood education for the next couple of years. The Governor noted that we have a lot of work to do and we can't fail. The Governor continued by highlighting that the City of Wilmington cannot be successful if the children in the city are not successful academically. He stated that ensuring success for all children starts at the classroom level and that improving schools requires a focus on what can be done on that level to raise student achievement. Governor Carney stated the work of the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission is paramount to have continuous improvement.

Governor Carney stated that he wants people focused on achievement and educational improvement, regardless of political discussions. Governor Carney stated he is, without a doubt, committed to this issue, committed to what is going to make a difference, then, how to accomplish the goals politically. He stated that he will continue to bring stakeholders together to note specific things that we are able to do to move the needle to improve outcomes for low-income students.

Governor Carney stated that our budget deficit is one of our biggest obstacles in achieving what is possible. The 350-million-dollar budget deficit will need to be stretched to keep our financial commitments to early childhood education and public education in respect to the successes we have made in the past couple of years. Governor Carney stated that the plan the Commission has come up with is a good one but the problem with it is that it handcuffs the state, similar to our current funding system does. Governor Carney stated that this would require us to work together.

Governor Carney posed the question, as the Commission has, of what would be the best way for students that live in Wilmington to attend school. He continues to ask the question of the best way for these students to attend schools. He mentioned that he continues to build his team, who are all working hard to assist him and finding answers and develop a plan.

Governor Carney stated the Delaware Department of Education will be reorganized, with the help of Secretary Bunting, to provide resources for schools and districts. There is a need of expertise in urban education. As a recommendation of the Commission and others, Governor Carney stated the Family Services Cabinet Council was reestablished by executive order today. There is a dire need to coordinate wrap-around services. Governor Carney said he is confident that we will move forward and work together on these issues.

T. Allen then opened the floor to questions from Commissioners and then members of the public.

Fredericka Jenner, Commission member, commented saying that she believed that the re-establishment of the Family Services Council was an important and productive way to start.

Governor Carney responded that it was not his original idea, but his transition team, and the Commission, helped with this. He noted that we needed a better way to coordinate services. He added that it is important to corral existing resources and use them in a way that works for each individual school. Governor Carney provided an example that highlights that there are different solutions for different schools. He told the antidote that one school principal stated that an extra dollar would be used for a social psychologist to help students cope with trauma, while another school principal in Kent County stated that an extra dollar would be spent on an extended school day program to include all students.

Chandra Pitts, Commission member, asked is Governor Carney could name some of the methods in schools that are effectively closing the achievement gap.

Governor Carney responded that one method is to efficiently use data, such as Long Neck Elementary School has done, to guide teachers how to efficiently use information to help students. Governor Carney also stated that there needs to be good teachers and a good use data for great improvements, which can be a hard enterprise to keep going in all schools, for all students, all the time.

Representative Charles Potter, Commission member, asked if the Governor would commit to ensuring that seed money recommended by the former Governor for education in Wilmington would remain in place.

Governor Carney responded by saying that it is not possible to guarantee that any funding can stay in place with the existing budget deficit. He believes that the work for education needs to continue specifically looking at changes at the individual level and then the systemic level and then the case can be made for whatever funding we need. The Governor noted that he has a difference of an opinion on weighted student funding tied to the unit count but is committed to finding a mechanism. The Governor noted that he hoped to begin by establishing an opportunity grant program to operate in conjunction with Title I funding.

Chairman, T. Allen asked if it was the Governor's intention to put forward a plan on governance and potentially funding that might differ from the Commission's plan but would be influenced by our work.

Governor Carney noted that he is absolutely committed and feels that the plan would be influenced by our work but would probably not be exactly the same.

Yvonne Johnson, Commissioner, stated that one cent should not be cut from education and expressed her disapproval of the idea of cutting any funding to early childhood education programs, advocating the consolidation of school districts as a way to streamline the way resources are used.

Governor Carney responded by noting that there are statewide discussions occurring right now to understand the priorities of Delawareans. He reemphasized his commitment to education. He also noted that the costs of education and health programs in the state exceed revenues. He noted that student population growth and the increasing proportion of students identified as having learning disabilities are big drivers of education cost increases.

The floor was then open to members of the public.

Kevin Ohlandt, member of the public, asked about Governor Carney's stance on the transparency of audits being published, specifically the lack of transparency of state audits compared to charter audits being published.

Governor Carney's stance is that if the audits are public, they should be made available to the public, and, to his knowledge, they are.

A member of the public asked the Governor if there were any items that he would consider raising taxes for.

Governor Carney answered by saying that no final decisions have been made on a budget proposal, and that such information will be available when the proposal is finished on March 23.

Senator Dave Sokola, Commissioner, remarked on the new ESSA plan and the access to quality teaching. He noted that there are pockets in some school districts where barriers to hiring and retaining good teachers exist, which are a hindrance to improving the quality and performance of schools, and that he was on the committee that is seeking to address this issue.

Governor Carney reiterated his belief that quality education and improving schools begins with good teachers, good school leadership, and support for students that should come from home or from a caring community.

Eve Buckley, Commissioner, commented saying that, similar to the point made by Y. Johnson, there should be an emphasis on efficiency given the state's budgetary constraints and that the state should evaluate services as they're being provided to eliminate redundancies.

Governor Carney answered by saying that public leaders have an obligation to ensure that public resources are being used in the most efficient way possible. He affirmed that his office is committed to doing so and noted that his administration has created the Government Efficiency and Accountability Review, which he hopes will be an ongoing effort to make the best use of tax money as it pertains to the delivery of service in the state.

### **Discussion on the State's Education Priorities and Path Forward – Sec. Susan Bunting, Delaware Department of Education**

Secretary Bunting began by reiterating the Governor's position on kindergarten preparedness saying that Governor Carney has shown a commitment to students being ready for kindergarten. She noted that this commitment is contingent upon to giving students and teachers what they need to ensure that students are ready for careers and college. She went on to laud WEIC as an

example of community members getting together to address issues in education. Secretary Bunting continued by saying that the forthcoming ESSA plan would be an adequate framework to improve education with the well-organized support that a group like WEIC could provide. She highlighted that the state Department of Education is committed to providing equitable access for quality education, and is planning on working directly with the schools in Wilmington and has begun to do so. She noted the challenge of money but that it should not get in the way of helping students today. She expressed that the Department will still have to monitor and regulate certain things under federal law but will be dedicated to supporting students and building partnerships. She noted that she strongly believes in students, collaboration at all levels, and open and honest communication.

T. Allen asked what the Secretary's position on charter/district collaboration happened to be.

Secretary Bunting expressed her belief in collaboration and that school choice is important, and noted the efforts to bridge any existing divides between charter schools and traditional public schools.

C. Pitts, Commissioner, remarked that the state has, on several occasions, come up with various plans to address issues in public education. She then asked what the Secretary thought made the forthcoming ESSA plan different from previous efforts and what she thought of the Commission's plan.

Secretary Bunting responded saying that the ESSA plan would give the state a type of flexibility that hasn't been available with previous laws. She added that the plan has also provided many opportunities to include the public throughout the process. She concluded her response by noting that the plan proposed by WEIC has many facets, and of those, she has been skeptical about the Commission's proposal for extra funding for students of low-income families and students with special needs, but believes that it is possible to make substantive changes to improve outcomes for these populations.

M. Taylor, Commissioner, thanked Secretary Bunting's support for early learning. She then asked Secretary Bunting what she believed needs to happen in order for the state to meet the needs of highly vulnerable populations.

Secretary Bunting replied by saying that there was a need for more collaboration between Departments but also at all levels in efforts to meet the needs of these students, and that a change in attitude and perspective would be required to meet the challenges associated with doing so.

Margie Lopez-Waite, Commissioner, commended the Secretary for truly "walking the walk" and for listening to her recommendations for English Language Learners in the ESSA plan.

Representative Kim Williams expressed a concern over labeling our schools on a 1-5 rating scale in the ESSA plan which will label our schools as the "haves" and "have nots." She noted that we should not continue to do this, specifically noting the comparison of schools given the allowance of enrollment preferences. She noted that she is moving forward with legislation to make the changes necessary so all kids can have access to all of our schools.

Y. Johnson, Commissioner, asked what the Department of Education expects to do to address issues regarding parent engagement and the inclusion of families across the state, as it has a big impact on the success of students.

Secretary Bunting responded by noting parent/family advisory groups and collaboration, but a lot of the work has to be done at the district level to make true impact, adding that there is also room for collaboration with the Department.

Dr. Jackie Jenkins asked if the department had any plans for collaboration and cohesion on early learning space to ensure kindergarten readiness.

Secretary Bunting replied saying that the Office of Early Learning has been added to the state Department of Education, which would be responsible for making such plans.

A member of the public alleged that the Department of Education banned the learning of cursive and writing. He went on to add that suburban schools should be able to separate themselves from urban districts because it seemed that urban schools and the residents they serve were controlling the decision-making process. He also questioned schools permitting the use of cell phones by students during instructional time, saying that students were listening to rap music instead of learning. After being prompted by Dr. Tony Allen to pose his question to the Secretary, the citizen asked why more isn't done to focus on career readiness, an area in which he believed the charter schools excelled.

Secretary Bunting responded saying that, to her knowledge, no such bans on the learning of cursive had been issued by the Department. She concluded by saying that all the gentleman's concerns were issues that are determined at the local level.

Ralph Ackerman, Commissioner, made a comment in regard to previous statements advocating district consolidation, saying that the Commission convened several leaders of all of the school districts in New Castle County, and that such recommendations have already been made. He continued by citing the failure of a previous effort of operating a consolidated school district in New Castle County at the hands of public desire to localize control of schools.

Henry Ellen Minnehan asked Secretary Bunting if the Department had any plans to establish a mentoring program for new teachers in the state.

Secretary Bunting responded by saying that the Department would look into extending the existing mentoring program plan to four years so we can coach new teachers longer and support them.

A member of the public made a comment asserting that the Department should focus on ensuring that additional supports be made available for students in crisis that need extra help in the classroom.

Chair, T. Allen, thanked Secretary Bunting for being here and answering questions.

## **Fiscal Impact Analysis Presentation**

Dr. Joe Pika and Chris Kelly gave a presentation on the status of the ad hoc fiscal impact committee report on the financial impact of redistricting. They made the point that the items being shared at the meeting were part of the committee's preliminary findings. The committee, at the time of the presentation, had met six times, and the committee's working groups had met ten times. J. Pika and C. Kelly noted that the committee found that the transfer of their schools to the red clay consolidated school district would directly impact 4,357 students in the affected schools. The proposed changes would require the transfer of eight buildings, and approximately \$1.1 billion in taxable property.

J. Pika and C. Kelly mentioned that there is no expected change in federal resources, as funding is contingent upon the placement of students, and that there would be a minor discrepancy in state resources due to fractional units. The discrepancy is estimated to total approximately \$17,500. In both of these cases the funding would transfer from the Christina School District (CSD) to the Red Clay Consolidated School District (RCCSD). The RCCSD, according to J. Pika and C. Kelly, would be left with a \$7.5-\$10 million budget shortfall as a result of the redistricting process, while the CSD would be left with a net savings of \$2.5-4.5 million. The shortfall would be the result of the difference between the cost of educating the students that would transfer over and the revenue generated by the property that would transfer. J. Pika and C. Kelly said that the one-time transitional costs of redistricting have yet to be determined and are contingent upon a number of factors.

The key issues identified by the committee, according to J. Pika and C. Kelly, were the expected budget shortfall of the RCCSD; the expected net savings in the budget of the CSD; responsibility for debt service costs; appropriate tax rate for former CSD Wilmington residents; and concerns related to the New Castle County tax pool.

Chairman T. Allen reiterated that the Commission is legally obligated to provide the report on fiscal impact of redistricting by SJR 17 and SB 300, which was passed in July of 2016. He then opened the floor for questions.

Y. Johnson, Commissioner, asked if the report is available for review before submission. She expressed the concern shared by Red Clay residents that they don't want the tax burden to fall on them.

T. Allen responded by saying that the findings will be sent out once they are finalized. He added that the Commission passed a resolution last July that the final decision rests with the Red Clay and Christina School Boards, which is why we suspended the timeline for redistricting last July. He also noted that the Commission has always said that we would not proceed without 'necessary and sufficient funding' from the state. This analysis articulates the facts as they exist today so that decisions can be made one way or the other.

M. Taylor asked what the Commission would do if the plan for redistricting were to be rejected, adding that there needs to be more clarification of the work that the Commission will take on if the redistricting plan falls through.

Chairman T. Allen added that our top priority has always been funding equity. We were obligated by law to provide this plan and particular analysis first. He noted that the plan contains around 40 other proposals for changing educational outcome of students in Wilmington, and that redistricting is only one of those.

D. Rich responded by stating that the Commission has a mandate to meet the needs of Wilmington students and to meet the needs of students from low-income backgrounds across the state until 2021, and that the Commission's focus would continue to be on that mandate.

C. Pitts asked if there was a specific number representing the expected budgetary shortfall for the Red Clay Consolidated School District in the fiscal impact report. She also asked about the number of students that would be affected and the practicality of merging WEIC's plan with the ESSA plan being formulated by the state.

J. Pika responded by saying that the committee hasn't listed a specific number because the report has not yet been finalized. J. Pika responded by saying Red Clay would be responsible for 4,357 students.

Chairman T. Allen responded by opining that Governor Carney approved of the tenets of the plan, but did not like the plan's components. T. Allen then noted that he'd welcome discussion of any other plan proposed by the state or the Governor's Office.

R. Ackerman asked if the Commission's recommendations on extra funding for Low-Income and ELL learners are calculated in this analysis and how that would change the equation.

J. Pika stated that no, the extra weighted funding was not included. The weighted funding for those specific things would be "new" money for new purposes and programs that do not exist, particularly at the ELL and k-3 special education.

A. Miller asked if the buildings that are under enrolled by Christina would have to be taken over by Red Clay.

J. Pika noted that he thinks they would go over to Red Clay and could be surplused.

D. Rich asked the room to consider the implication of property values. He stated that the analysis clearly indicates the current value of property revenue in the Christina part of the city is insufficient to effectively and properly educate the students, no matter which district has the responsibility.

Mark Holodick recalled the Governor's comments earlier when he noted that we have a 350 million budget gap but there are things we could be doing that could impact students in the classroom. He hopes that the Commission continues to work with the subcommittees to identify the best practices, collaborate with the Department, and start moving forward toward action.

Kenny Rivera, Commission member, stated that this is more than just a dollar amount, but the focus should be on the students. He thanked J. Pika for the work of the committee.



Linda Poole reiterated the point about the consolidation of 11 districts into 1 and then into 4 areas, which didn't work, so now they remain districts. She highly encouraged the Commission to talk to the people who did that work because the costs that were unidentified were enormous.

Rep. Baumbach asked about the ballpark on the difference in tax rates between the two districts and the use of the word "unfair" on one of the last slides in reference to 1985 assessment and 2008.

C. Kelly clarified that Rep. Baumbach was referring to the local expense and tax pool revenue and noted that if it were to transfer over it would be around 14.626 million for Red Clay and Christina would be losing around 16.855 million.

J. Pika noted that the word unfair reflects the language of the committee. He also noted that the NCC Tax Pool formula established and frozen in place in 2008 treats students differently in different districts, which is the big problem.

A member of the public asked for clarification on the deficit number for Red Clay based on transferring the students, the exclusion of the weighted unit funding, and the release of the transition costs.

J. Pika clarified that the report is projecting a shortfall between 7.5 to 10.5 million under what the expenses would be to educate the students and it does not include the new weighted unit funding. He concluded that the transition and facilities costs will be released and Red Clay would not bare them alone.

K. Ohlandt, member of the public, asked if delinquencies are included.

C. Kelly responded that a 1 percent delinquency factor for assessing the revenues before and after redistricting.

Reverend Meredith Griffin, Commission Member, commended the work of the committee and reminded that the most important number is the 4,357 students that the money should not overshadow.

### **Next Steps and Path Forward**

Chairman T. Allen remarked that it is important that, as the Commission deliberates next steps in the face of changing priorities and changes in state leadership, the Commission continue its work through to its end. He continued by saying that the Commission has a broader agenda, which focuses on meeting the needs of at-risk students. T. Allen noted that while the Commission's proposed plan to change educational outcomes for Delaware students has been rightfully criticized, no other plans to this end have been put forward for consideration.

He added that the current state administration is working to propose a different plan for education in the state but no actions on an alternative can be taken until such a plan is available

for review and discussion. The expectation is that the administration will formulate and propose an alternative and, because of the ideological similarities between Commission leadership and the Governor, there should be plenty of overlap between the Governor's plan and the plan proposed by WEIC. He concluded by announcing that there are two vacancies on the Commission and that new appointees will be selected in the near future.

### **Public Comment**

Bill Doolittle commented saying that while he understands the legislative mandate for the redistricting report. He noted that 13 months into the process, that we have not addressed the best practices or taken action in addressing the needs of children in poverty. He believes that this is not just the Commission that hasn't done it but we are the ones in the trenches and help these kids using what we know.

There was no other public comment.

The meeting was then adjourned at 7:08 pm.

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**Tuesday, February 28, 2017**  
**Sharp Conference Center, Marshallton Education Building**  
**Meeting Attendance**

**Commission Members**

Tony Allen, Chair	Margie Lopez-Waite
Tizzy Lockman, Vice-Chair	Frederika Jenner
Eve Buckley	Michelle Taylor
Yvonne Johnson	Meredith Griffin
Sen. Dave Sokola	Karen Eller
Rep. Charles Potter	Johnny Means
Aretha Miller	Joe Pika
Chandra Pitts	Kenny Rivera
Harrie Ellen Minnehan	Ted Laws
Ralph Ackerman	

**Members of the Public**

Adriana Bohm	Anne Gould	Bob Silber
Andy Hegedus	Ariana Minella	Bob Williams
Ann Aviles	Bill Doolittle	Cathy Thompson
Chris Kelly	Kristin Dwyer	Norma Ivonne Antongiorgi
Connor Bifferato	Larry Nagengast	Pavia Fielder
David Deputy	Linda Poole	Raye Jones Avery
Dusty Blakey	Liz Farley-Ripple	Rep. Baumbach
Dennis Loftus	Lynne Howard	Rep. Earl Jacques
Equetta Jones	Madeline Johnson	Rep. Helene Keeley
Gwen Angalet	Mark Holodick	Rep. Kim Williams
Gwen Sanders	Mary Schorse	Robert W. Rescigno
Henry Clampit	Megan Pauly	Rysheere Dixie
Jackie Jenkins	Meghan Wallace	Ted Ammann
Jerome Lewis	Melissa Froemming	Tim Foxx
Jill Floore	Merv Daugherty	Tim Griffiths
Jon Sheehan	Mike Matthews	Tom Driscoll
Kendall Massett	Nate Schwartz	Tom Ogden
Kevin Ohlandt	Noreen LaSorsa	Vicki Gehrt

**IPA Support Staff**

Kelsey Mensch  
Dan Rich  
Kelly Sherretz  
Chester Holland  
Melissa Micek