

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

Community Education Building
Meeting Minutes – April 26, 2016

Chairman Tony Allen called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Chairman Allen asked the members of the public to introduce themselves, followed by introductions from each of the Commission members.

Chairman Allen began the meeting with a moment of silence for the tragedy at Howard High School. He allowed members of the Commission to share their feelings about the incident.

Chairman Allen reminded the Commission members to utilize the resources available to them through the other Commission members

Chairman Allen provided an update on progress in the General Assembly.

Chairman Allen stated that the intention is to start in the House, as did the bill in 2015 that created the Commission. The leadership team is addressing two items when talking to legislators. First, recognizing the historic opportunity currently available, and second, emphasizing that at the heart of all of the recommendations is this need to change the funding allocations. He said that the leadership team has been working one legislator, one committee, and one house at a time. He also mentioned to the Commission that the leadership team would be calling on more members to have them begin to reach out to legislators that they have personal relationships with.

Chairman Allen reminded all members that the reputation of the Commission's work over the next five years will not be judged solely on the outcome of the redistricting legislation. He stated that the Commission has set forth a discourse on public education generally and is at the center of the education funding debate. The University of Delaware has created the UD Partnership for Public Education, which will be funded through the new Urban Education Partnership. The Commission will also be releasing yearly reports based on the work done by the committees and the Commission and analyzing data on Wilmington students, something not yet done by anyone else.

Chairman Allen asked if any of the other members of the leadership would like to comment on the legislative progress.

Dr. Rich mentioned that there is still a long way to go in the process and it is "not over until it's over," especially with respect to the funding issues. He believes that when the leadership team has been able to engage some of the legislators who have not been as involved in the process so far, it has led to productive conversations.

Chairman Allen asked if any of the Commission members had any questions.

Aretha Miller asked for clarification related to the data on Wilmington students.

- Dr. Rich explained that previously all data was analyzed at the district level, so other than the analysis done in the WEAC report, no one had ever looked at Wilmington students as an observational unit. The Commission has made a commitment to do the analysis of Wilmington students and share it every year. This will give everyone the opportunity to look at the milestones and progress.

Frederika Jenner asked if the Commission was looking at students K-12, regardless of where they go to school, and if attendance would be one of the factors that the staff would be examining?

- Dr. Rich responded affirmatively to all three questions, as long as the proper data can be acquired. He also mentioned that there needs to be more done to connect with early childhood. The Commission should also be looking to see what happens to these kids after grade 12, but will have to work on acquiring the right data.

Karen Eller asked if the analysis would include information about access to mental health services. Specifically, the number of students who receive services and the number of students waiting to receive services.

- Dr. Rich said that the staff could try. They would need the data from the state in order to include it in the analysis. This data is difficult to acquire for a variety of reasons, including privacy laws.

Dr. Eve Buckley asked about the strategy with the respect to the legislature. She asked if the leadership team had reached a point where they were beginning to count votes.

- Chairman Allen answered that yes, the leadership team has begun to count votes.

Yvonne Johnson asked if the leadership will let the Commission know when the bill will be introduced to the House Education Committee.

- Chairman Allen explained that the bill could be introduced as early as next week.

Dr. Rich introduced Liz Farley-Ripple and Kelly Sherretz, the Director and Deputy Director of the new UD Partnership on Public Education.

Chairman Allen asked for updates from each committee.

Dr. Jackie Jenkins, co-chair of the Meeting the Needs of Student in Poverty Committee, presented an update report, which was distributed to each Commission member and can be found linked on solutionsfordelawareschools.com.

Following the presentation of the update report, Dr. Jenkins fielded questions from the other Commission members.

Aretha Miller pointed out that most of the committee's work seemed to be focused solely on students in traditional district schools and asked if the committee was also examining charter school students

- Dr. Jenkins said that the committee was beginning with programs offered in district schools to make the work more manageable, but would not exclude students attending charter schools from their analysis or recommendations.

Chairman Allen asked for more of an explanation on the “My Very Own Library” program.

- Dr. Jenkins explained that it is an effort to make sure kids are reading on grade level by grade 3. There was a pilot done in a few Wilmington schools, the students enrolled in these schools get a book at the end of each month that they are able to keep and use to begin their own personal library.
- Karen Eller mentioned that her school, Bancroft Elementary School, was one of the schools participating in the program. She commented that she thought it was a great program and that Scholastic Books had come twice to her school and each time the students could select three books. During the first visit, an author also came and signed books for each student, which they also were able to keep.

Frederika Jenner asked where Early Childhood Day would be held in Dover.

- Dr. Rich answered that it would be taking place in Legislative Hall.

Dr. Jenkins concluded by sharing that the City of Wilmington is working on a reading initiative that would precede the My Very Own Library program and target mothers before their children are school-aged.

Aretha Miller and Dr. Eve Buckley, co-chairs of the Charter and District Collaboration Committee, provided an update from their committee.

The co-chairs said that their committee has been wrestling with a couple key questions. What constitutes meaningful collaboration? How do collaborate with institutions that are your competitors?

They noted that there was consensus around the notion of organic collaboration by focusing on conversation that are relevant to all schools that have high concentrations of poverty. Some subjects that have been discussed as possibilities include restorative justice and trauma training.

The committee has also been analyzing comparative demographic and student performance data to suggest what might be useful collaborative opportunities. However, they were clear that the objective of this analysis is not to compare district and charter schools directly, but to find places where meaningful collaboration could occur.

Chairman Allen noted that the committee had faced some early difficulties with participation and asked if things had improved.

- Aretha Miller said that the outlook and participation of committee members had improved.

Aretha Miller asked if there is a better way to share data between committees, for the purposes of building institutional knowledge.

Rosa Colon-Kolacko asked if it would be prudent for the Commission to identify data points that the Commission would use to justify success.

- Dr. Allen mentioned that that had been done to a certain extent in the compendium that had been submitted to the State Board of Education.

Karen Eller mentioned that she had been in a professional development workshop where the principal of Shue-Medill Middle School had made a presentation about the collaboration between their school and the Milford School District. Their work could be used as an example of where collaboration was already happening in the state.

In response, to some of the conversations Aretha Miller emphasized that charter schools should not be treated as “phase two” of the commission’s work and should be viewed as equal to the traditional district schools.

Dr. Eve Buckley stated that while there have been better, more productive conversations at their committee meetings, there also been a drop-off in attendance, and asked why that may be the case.

Dr. Rich commented that now that the committee action plans are being formed it is a good time to reexamine the committee’s members and make sure that the committee has all of the people resources that it needs.

Frederika Jenner said that she, as the President of the Delaware State Education Association, wanted to emphasize that DSEA is very interested in community collaboration between traditional district and charter schools. She noted that the rhetoric has always been difficult in Delaware because of the differences between the schools and services that they provide. She hopes that the DSEA representative on the committee has been attending and participating.

Chandra Pitts and Yvonne Johnston, co-chairs of the Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement Committee, provided an update on their committee’s progress.

The co-chairs mentioned that collaboration across committees is crucial to the success of the Commission overall.

The co-chairs have been working with the IPA staff to refocus their efforts after going into a bit of a recess during the effort to activate community members in support for the redistricting process.

Numbers within the committee are down, but the co-chairs do not feel like momentum has been lost.

The co-chairs described the Success Pillars they will use to evaluate their work and went through a general timeline of what they would like to accomplish.

Chairman Allen thanked the committee co-chairs for their updates and asked if there were any additional questions.

Aretha Miller asked about pursuing outside funding and whether or not a protocol should be developed for obtaining outside funds for committee initiatives.

- Chairman Allen commented that he does not view the Commission as the vehicle for getting additional resources, but each Commissioner is a force in their own right.

The minutes from the pervious Commission meeting were approved.

Chairman Allen asked for any other business.

Student representatives Johnny Means and Breyonna Williams provided comments on the Commission's discussion.

The Commission congratulated Chandra Pitts for her induction into the Hall of Fame of Delaware Women.

Chairman Allen opened the floor to public comment.

Bill Doolittle commented on the current climate of the General Assembly. He mentioned two focuses, money and process framework. He also mentioned that I3 grant applications would be opening soon and all LEAs are eligible to apply.

Dorrell Green, an administrator in the Brandywine School District, commented on getting parents engaged. He mentioned that their district has often found it is difficult to get the parents into the schools, so they often have to go out and meet the parents where they are. He also mentioned that the asset mapping being done in the Meeting the Needs of Student in Poverty Committee, should help inform the Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Attendance at the 4/26 Meeting**

Commission Members

Tony Allen, Chair
Tizzy Lockman, Vice-Chair
Kenny Rivera, Vice-Chair
Eve Buckley
Rosa Colon-Kolacko
Karen Eller
Meredith Griffin
Fredericka Jenner

Yvonne Johnson
Margie Lopez Waite
Johnny Means
Aretha Miller
Harrie Ellen Minnehan
Joe Pika
Chandra Pitts
Breyonna Williams

Members of the Public

Jackie Jenkins
Bill Doolittle
Gwen Angalet
Neil Kirschling
Tom Driscoll

Mike Matthews
Meghan Wallace
Henry Harper
Dorrell Green

Institute for Public Administration Staff

Dan Rich
Kelly Sherretz
Liz Farley-Ripple
Elizabeth Burland

Chester Holland
Annie Gould
Kelsey Mensch

