

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

Marshallton Education Center, Wilmington, DE

Meeting Minutes – September 27, 2016

Chairman Dr. Tony Allen called the meeting to order at 5:10pm

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

Dr. Allen began the meeting by providing a legislative review, prompting commissioners and members of the public to raise any questions they might have during the review of legislative action. The State Board of Education approved the redistricting plan, which he noted was the first step in the process. He noted that advocates for the WEIC plan were very active in lobbying efforts. He then went on to discuss the legislative action of the Commission as indicated below:

- House Joint Resolution 12
 - Supported the proposed changes to school district boundaries in New Castle County and recognized that the plan presented by the Commission and approved by the State Board of Education would require necessary and sufficient funding to achieve the goals laid out in the plan for redistricting and improving student outcomes. The resolution passed in the State House of Representatives, but was defeated in the State Senate.
- House Bill 424
 - Authorized the State Board to proceed with the redistricting, but did not constitute approval of any particular revenue or spending measure proposed in the Commission's plan. This bill was defeated in the Senate
- Senate Joint Resolution 17
 - Affirmed the decision of the State Board of Education to approve the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission's Plan for redistricting and support the continued work of the Commission in developing details of implementation of the WEIC plan. Passed the General Assembly.
- Senate Bill 300
 - Clarified that a vote by the General Assembly in supported the State Board's decision to affirm redistricting, but did not constitute approval of any particular revenue or spending measure proposed in the redistricting plan.
 - Provided a \$200,000 supplemental appropriation to establish the Wilmington Redistricting Transition Fund, which can be used to assess the fiscal impact of transitioning City of Wilmington students from the Christina School District to the Red Clay Consolidated School District.

Dr. Allen went on to discuss the Commission's action going forward, where he outlined the focus of the Commission's continued work. He began by saying that the Commission will continue to push for redistricting in order to streamline governance. He also noted that the Commission will continue pushing the weighted funding formula, highlighting the need to inform the public that the goal will be ensuring that no burden be placed on the affected districts. To see more specific information on these topics, please see the attached item "Legislative Update and Path Forward."

Dr. Allen opened up the discussion to the commission. The Commission decided that it will be important to distribute the “Legislative Update and Path Forward” to their networks inclusive of teachers, community members, and stakeholders. There was a question on the advancement and advocacy of community members on behalf of the work of WEIC. Dr. Allen noted that a plan should be developed for the new Community Outreach and Advocacy committee headed by Commission Member Chandra Pitts.

There was a question on how what happened last year could be, if at all, a stepping-stone to better advance the agenda of WEIC. Dr. Allen responded that areas that stood out most was the need to determine the impact of redistricting on student performance. He noted that a popular sentiment against the plan was that the redistricting plan is a “Wilmington only” agenda.

Commission member Michelle Taylor made the point that children in communities across the state still have unmet needs, and asked how the Commission could use a plan to keep WEIC’s work consistent with public needs. Dr. Allen reiterated the need to determine the new direction of the Commission before proposing plans of action; which, to his estimation, should take two months or so. Dr. Rich added that it would also be prudent to wait until after the election.

Commission Member Yvonne Johnson noted that rumors were circulating that WEIC is dead. She stated that this should be a point of concern, and asked if there was a way to send a clear message that WEIC has not disappeared. Dr. Allen opined that there is no message that will change that mindset, adding that the Commission needs to make sure its members and priorities are in alignment before any movement to change that mindset can be made.

Dr. Rich reiterated that the Commission might want to wait until after the election before taking any discernable steps that could be seen as action on a particular agenda. He also made note that, in light of the requests for more detailed information on elements of the plan on the fiscal impact analysis, that the analysis should be a point of emphasis. He also made note of the need to emphasize that WEIC is a statewide initiative. Dr. Rich went on to say that the Commission spent so much time on timetable and redistricting that it was not able to move as expeditiously on other initiatives.

Committee Structures

Dr. Allen shifted conversation toward organization and structure of the committees, highlighting that there were leadership changes in progress. He also made note of what he saw as being two challenges going forward: the first being the name, which makes the work the Commission does seem like it is primarily for the benefit of the City of Wilmington; and the second, the idea of the WEIC plan being synonymous with redistricting.

Dr. Allen turned conversation over to Dr. Joe Pika to discuss the Fiscal Analysis Ad Hoc Committee. Dr. Pika mentioned that the committee tasked with driving the fiscal impact analysis project is comprised of 13 experts that will oversee and review the analysis by the Red Clay Consolidated and Christina school districts with help of the Institute for Public Administration (IPA). Initial discussion topics addressed in the first meeting of the committee consisted of:

- The impact of the proposed changes on Red Clay and Christina school districts;

- Taxing in the districts;
- New Castle County tax changes;
- Capital costs of changing property/assets; and
- Timeline

Dr. Pika concluded by saying that the committee hopes to have a final report for the Commission by March of 2017, with a reviewable draft being available for the Commission in February and work being completed in January.

Aretha Miller asked if the fiscal impact committee had any input from the charter sector, emphasizing that she believed it to be important that charters be represented in the discussion. Dr. Pika noted that there was not but it is a good idea to consider before the first meeting in October.

Standing Committee Updates

Meeting the Needs of Children in Poverty Committee

Michelle Taylor, co-chair of the Meeting the Needs of Children in Poverty committee (MNCP) reported that the committee took the summer to conduct research and analysis. She noted that the committee would be meeting on October 5 to reaffirm the mission of WEIC and MNCP. In discussing additional efforts on the part of MNCP, Taylor highlighted programs such as a youth transition academy, parent surveys during the event that was part of the United Way's *My Very Own Library* program, and the ongoing asset and resource mapping project. She also mentioned that the committee was focusing on finding 'early wins' which provided help in meeting immediate needs of underserved populations in Wilmington. Lastly, she mentioned that, as part of MNCP's research efforts, she has met with school principals who created a 'wish list' of things they would like to see changed in their schools and districts.

She closed by mentioning that the committee would be focusing on four important points with the hope that they would drive development of a strategic plan:

1. Better integration between community and school services;
2. More socioemotional/behavior services;
3. Emphasis on cultural competency;
4. Better integrating academic preparedness work from pre-school into elementary education

Dr. Rich added that MNCP was also working with the *Access to Justice* initiative (ATJ), which aims at tackling school-to-prison pipeline. He said that the collaborative effort would be aimed at determining root causes of criminal behavior in at-risk youth, which was a step in meeting the need to address issues related to, and surrounding, education; not just criminal justice.

There was a question asked about the timeline for MNCP's research projects.

Chester Holland, Institute for Public Administration support team member, noted that research efforts were ongoing and was looking to have the asset and resource-mapping piece done by early 2017.

Commission member Vicki Seifred noted that the Commission should be aware of the scope of the work, warning that the Commission should not let it get too big to handle. She also asked about redundancy in existing programs, noting that a number of pilot programs may already exist in schools. Commission member Fredericka Jenner, on the subject of research, added that the Statewide Afterschool Initiative Learning program (SAIL) had done asset mapping on state/federally funded programs. She then agreed to forward the information to the IPA.

Charter District Collaboration Committee

Dr. Buckley, co-chair of the Charter-District Collaboration committee (CDC), reported that their committee had not met yet. She noted that the group was in the process of re-organizing. She also mentioned that the committee, at the end-of-year meeting, generated list of ideas of possible action items that might be useful in establishing collaborative efforts. She closed her report by stating that the goal of this year's group would be to establish meaningful, tangible action items that can be executed upon.

Aretha Miller, co-chair of the CDC, added that the committee was looking to organize in a way that will allow key decision-makers will be involved in the committee's work. She noted that the group had made contact with Sarah Yatsko of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to share information on best practices in charter/district collaboration. Yatsko agreed to meet with the committee in February. She closed her report by saying that CDC needs to be cognizant of the work of other committees in order to avoid redundancy in efforts.

Commission member Ralph Ackerman noted that the state created an environment of competition, and asked how do stakeholders overcome the barriers that can come of this environment.

Aretha Miller responded by saying that the group needs to think beyond the competition and create a unified school system. This prompted discussion among the Commission members on charter district collaboration. It was mentioned that other cities built their school networks around the system rather than simply creating competition. The committee agreed that there is no reason why stakeholders should not be collaborating. It was suggested that everyone in the state could do better, as the state has access to information that can allow for establishing a collaborative environment.

Vicki Seifred said that the existing 'animosity' between charter schools and traditional public schools comes down to funding. She added that there is a need to revisit the funding formula, and for the examination of what best serves the interests of the state's children.

Dr. Allen asked if the CDC has taken up the issue of friction caused by funding problems between charters and public schools.

Aretha Miller responded by saying that the CDC was waiting for leadership to green light committee action on that front.

It was suggested that the CDC should definitely take on that particular issue, even if it brings the issue to the Commission unresolved for the purpose of further discussion.

There was further discussion on the issue of equity in access as a more tangible agenda item than an issue that is highly complex. There are a number of assets that go under-utilized in the state; and that children in the state suffer if there is no collaboration. It was mentioned that work was done on collaboration between charter schools and public schools, but no headway was made because of adults did not compromise. It was suggested the CDC should attempt to figure out a different way to approach the issue given the failures of previous efforts.

Dr. Buckley noted that there are charter schools in the area that were extremely polarizing, adding that the CDC's focus has been on finding charter schools that are demographically similar to nearby public schools for the purposes of creating common ground from which to work.

Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement Committee

Elizabeth Lockman, chair of the *Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement* committee (PEACE), reported that PEACE is also undergoing a restructuring process. She noted that the committee had generated a set of questions, which prompted the IPA to conduct research. She said that the committee had met on September 14 to review definitions of “engagement,” and to determine the committee's path forward. She noted that PEACE was having issues with consistency in membership, and that reorganizing was essential to improving commitment and forward motion. She said that the goal of this year's committee is establishing a definition for “parent engagement”, and retrofitting that established definition to a framework created in the previous year. She closed her report by saying that PEACE was looking for ways to collaborate with other committees.

Michelle Taylor mentioned that parent engagement frameworks exist in some schools, and that she believed that joint work could be done by PEACE and MNCP. She went on to ask if notes taken as part of research would be public record.

Tom Driscoll responded by saying that, to his knowledge, only items submitted to commission will be public. He would look into the matter further.

Vicki Seifred went on to discuss her attendance of a conference dedicated to addressing impact of trauma. She believed the conference to be a well-orchestrated event, and thought that it should be considered as key item moving forward.

Research Updates

Dr. Elizabeth Farley-Ripple spoke on the research efforts of IPA, noting that the institute has provided a great deal of research support for the various committees of WEIC, and that the Partnership for Public Education is also available to help in providing research and development support for any committee work. She made mention of a forthcoming policy brief series, in which the IPA is looking to draft a number of briefs that drive the conversation of work related to WEIC and its committees. She added the point that, since the formation of WEIC and beginning of subsequent work by the IPA, the Partnership for Public Education is a direct

offshoot of the Commission's efforts and that the University of Delaware has prioritized efforts in improving schools across the state.

Councilman Nnamdi Chukwuocha mentioned that meetings had with City Council and the incoming Mayor had begun to take place for the purpose of discussing upcoming work around the WEIC plan.

Dr. Allen stated that the next meeting will be extended to set the direction of WEIC and goals for the upcoming year on October 20, 2016 in the Community Education Building, 4:30-7:30pm

Dr. Allen opened the floor for public comment

- Bill Doolittle expressed his frustration with the lack of motion on the part of the Commission as it pertained to equitable education funding. He said that it has been a year and nothing happened to make the changes he believed needed to be made. He opined that, if the Commission had worked on fitting the WEIC plan into the ESSA funding structure that the state would be eligible for additional funds for education.

Dr. Allen adjourned the meeting at 6:47pm

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
September 27, 2016
Meeting Attendance

Commission Members

Tony Allen, Chair
Tizzy Lockman, Vice-Chair
Kenny Rivera
Joe Pika
Eve Buckley
Ralph Ackerman
Aretha Miller
Vicki Seifred

Yvonne Johnson
The Honorable Nnamdi Chukwuocha
The Honorable David Sokola
Frederika Jenner
Margie Lopez-Waite
Karen Eller
Michelle Taylor
Johnny Means

IPA Support Team

Dan Rich
Kelly Sherretz
Kelsey Mensch
Chester Holland
Ariana Minella
Liz Farley-Ripple
Chris Kelly

Members of the Public

Bill Doolittle
Gwen Angalet
Jackie Jenkins
Tom Driscoll
Vicki Gehrt
Mark Holodick