

**Wilmington Education  
Improvement Commission**  
*Solutions for Delaware Schools*

**March 1, 2017**

**Governor Carney, Secretary Bunting Address the Commission**  
*A Response from the Chairman*

Wilmington, DE — Last night, Governor John Carney and Secretary Susan Bunting addressed the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission. This morning, Commission Chairman Tony Allen offered the following response.

On behalf of the Commission, I want to thank the Governor and the Secretary for coming to address the Commission, make their case for the importance of our work and answer a number of questions from the Commissioners and host of stakeholders and colleagues from the general public. The Governor was forthright in his remarks and framed his views in the broad context of economic vitality for the City of Wilmington as the catalyst for statewide prosperity and improvement in a number of areas, including public education reform. Not surprisingly, he also emphasized the state's current \$350 million fiscal dilemma, which in the view of many — including me — is structural in nature and can no longer be remedied by one-time solves and tinkering. I believe the Governor is acutely aware of the task before him in that regard.

We also heard him acknowledge two of the Commission's fundamental concerns. First, the public education governance structure, particularly in the City of Wilmington, is untenable and does not serve students from the City of Wilmington well. Our own view has been and remains that you cannot effectively serve 11,500 students in a singular geography by dividing them between multiple districts and charters with no uniform plan for principal instruction and service delivery, a disproportionate number of less experienced teachers, and inadequate resources for student and family support both in and around the school. It was clear last night that the Governor agrees on this point.

Second is the notion that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds need differing kinds of support than their more affluent, more mainstream counterparts. And those supports cost money, particularly for schools with high concentrations of low-income students, English language learners and kids with special needs in kindergarten through the third grade. While the Governor and the Commission agree on the tenets of this point, we fundamentally disagree on how to resolve it.

Governor Carney said that he does not support the addition of unit funding for low-income students, English language learners and other students at risk. He indicated that such support would "handcuff" the State as our current education funding system does. He also indicated that we already have "weighted student funding" in the form of federal Title I. In his view, additional funding supports for needier students and schools should come from better use of Title I funding, a federal allocation meant to support disadvantaged children.

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The Commission does not agree. The Commission has been uniform in our view that federal Title I funding is not a substitute for state funding. The gaps in equitable funding in the state of Delaware could not be clearer. While Title I funding is meant to help support students with the greatest need in all states, 46 other states have decided that the increase in English language learners (ELL) in their state require additional state resources to support these students. As a point of fact, ELL students in Delaware are the fastest growing population of students in the state. Moreover, in 36 other states -- including every state in the Northeast and the mid-Atlantic except Delaware -- additional allocations have been made for schools with high concentrations of low-income students. It's worth noting that 50 percent of Delaware public school students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, a long-held low-income standard for children and their families. Last, there remains a funding gap for kids deemed to have special needs from kindergarten through third grade, which means while they may in fact receive such supports in pre-school; there is no support for their effective functioning until they reach the fourth grade.

If it were true that we need not make any changes to the current system because of the performance of disadvantaged students up and down the state, then the Commission would relent, disband and go on its way. As we all know, the reverse is true. There are few sustained examples in which schools have had the opportunity to serve these kids well because they have had the resources for so doing. And while many have rightly critiqued the Commission's 40 recommendations for improvement, no one else has put forward an alternative. So inertia continues to win the day.

Governor Carney did indicate that he already has acted to set up the Family Services Cabinet Council on one of the Commission's original recommendations, and noted that he looks forward to working with the Commission on the improvement of education for all students.

He also indicated his intent to put forward his own plan, different from what the Commission has proposed and noted the importance of its **political and economic viability**. We are anxiously awaiting its arrival and hope that it reflects his stated intention to make education generally and in the city of Wilmington in particular one of his top priorities.

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