

**Redding Consortium for Educational Equity
Settlement Work Group
March 22, 2021 5:00–6:30 p.m.
Meeting Minutes**

I. Welcome

Aaron Bass, Co-Chair of the Settlement Work Group, welcomed everyone to the meeting and presented the meeting agenda.

Gary Henry, Work Group Member, moved to approve the previous meeting minutes. Tika Hartsock, Work Group Member, seconded. The minutes were approved as submitted.

II. Legislation Updates

Aaron provided updates on the legislation that was recommended by the Consortium. Senate Bill 56 passed the Senate 20-0-1 and is currently assigned to the House Education Committee. House Bill 86 was released from the House Education Committee and is ready to be heard by the House. House Bill 100 was released from the House Education Committee and assigned to the House appropriations committee.

III. Equity Statement Discussion

Chuck Longfellow, Co-Chair of the Settlement Work Group, discussed the new revision to the Major Capital Improvement Program regulations. He highlighted the process for having major capital projects approved, including the process for creating a certificate of necessity and going to referendum. He noted that often times these projects have equity problems because some schools may receive additional or disproportionate funding in order to appeal for more “yes” votes on referenda. To achieve equity, the process must be reformed so that all needs are met before additional “sweeteners” are added to projects.

Work Group members discussed the Equity Statement in breakout rooms, then reconvened. The first breakout group discussed how equity statements need to be comparative in nature using metrics beyond just demographics, and inclusive of students with disabilities. The second breakout group discussed how the equity statement is a good first step, but needs an entity to actually enforce equitable projects. Both groups were in broad agreement that the equity statements should be transparent and publicly available.

IV. Social Determinants Work Group Presentation

Raye Jones Avery, co-chair of the Social Determinants Work Group, presented on that group’s work and recommendations. The interim recommendations of the work group include three main priorities for the state budget: (1) Perform research on racial disparities, (2) Build school

and community partnerships for wraparound services, and (3) Focus on holistic child development from birth to age 5.

Additionally, the group recommends for the state to enhance its data collection and planning, and focus assistance towards students facing barriers of race and poverty. Specifically, they recommend efforts to gather transparent and user-friendly data in school enrollment & performance, access to academic & extracurricular opportunities, and outcomes.

Raye further discussed the focused assistance needed for students facing barriers of race and poverty. Investments in services for children from birth to age 5 such as home visitation programs, developmental screenings, and pre-k for three- and four-year-olds is needed to close gaps in equity. Investments in wrap-around services such as school-based health centers are needed as well.

Aaron asked what data should be focused on in order to help determine if children are receiving an adequate education. Raye noted that adequacy is viewed as a minimum, which is contradictory to equitable. She later added that there is a legal definition to adequacy, but the recommendations are most related to opportunity, access, and sustainability. Matt Denn, co-chair of the Redding Consortium, added that the lawsuit settlement is a legal floor for adequacy but the goals should be set higher than meeting the minimum requirements.

Jeff Menzer, co-chair of the Social Determinants Work Group, commented that research based and rigorous data inform the recommendations instead of anecdotal evidence. The idea is to build robust data in order to accelerate momentum on higher leverage change.

Laurisa Schutt, Work Group Member asked Raye and Jeff if they believe the coming federal funding will be enough to meet the higher leverage needs. Jeff thinks that it could be a good catalyst, but only if the group stays on top of the issues to move the recommendations forward.

Chuck Longfellow, co-chair of the Settlement Work Group, said he believes in the priorities as they were presented. He commented how some stakeholders believe that some priorities have to come first and cannot be solved all at once. Jeff commented that the group's charge was to work on these specific issues, but agreed that there are many issues around education that need to be solved.

Kristin Dwyer, Work Group Member, commented that these recommendations relieve some of the social and emotional considerations from an educator's responsibilities, and allow them to focus on educating. She asked Dwayne Bensing, ACLU lawyer, if the state needs to define adequacy by 2024 as part of the independent funding assessment. Dwayne answered no, the independent funding assessment is about examining the raising and distribution of educational funding and making recommendations to improve equity, not legally defining adequacy. It does not compel the state to make changes incorporating the recommendations.

V. Educators Work Group Presentation

Representative Michael Smith presented on the recommendations of the Educator Work Group. The group was tasked with reviewing local data and best practices to make recommendations for recruitment, retention, and equitable allocation of diverse, high quality educators in the City of Wilmington.

The group firstly recommends that the state invests in programs to develop high quality educators from Delaware programs, including but not limited to alternative pathways to certification and tuition forgiveness.

The group additionally recommends that professional learning and coaching programs for administrators and educators be instituted to improve school climate and limit teacher attrition. Specifically, they recommend that these programs be modeled off programs in Laurel and Seaford and tailored to each Wilmington school.

Shannon Griffin, Work Group member, asked about supports students taking Praxis exams, which have historically been a barrier. Rep. Smith said these supports were discussed and they'd be in support of that in the future. Aaron noted that House Bill 143 was amended to remove the Praxis I exam as a requirement. Rep. Smith reiterated that the goal is to remove barriers for skilled professionals to become teachers. Tika also noted the potential for paraprofessionals and parents to become part of the pipeline. Rep. Smith agreed, and noted that the whole school community must be supported. Gary said that the Praxis I exam is not necessary, but there's a compelling argument for keeping Praxis II to ensure educators are knowledgeable and prepared.

Shannon recommended that investments be made in Delaware State University and other programs around the state to maximize the potential for minority students to become teachers. Rep. Smith agreed and said that funding does not need to be a barrier to accomplish this, because encouraging and exposing students to these programs before they graduate high school brings them into the pipeline. Chuck noted that elevating the teaching profession is necessary to convince students to want to become teachers. Rep. Smith said that emphasizing the positive aspects educator and administrator relationship may be a way to accomplish this. Aaron reminded the work group that teacher recruitment and retention is an aspect and priority of the settlement.

VI. Discussion

Aaron posed the question of how the recommendations of the two work groups align with the settlement and push to create systemic and equitable change. Matt commented that the recommendations are good, but they are part of a long list of budgetary proposals for the joint finance committee to consider. There is still a lot of work to be done to make the recommendations a reality. Gary commented that there are a lot of great ideas in the recommendations, but noted that work needs to be done to unify and package all the different ideas into effective systemic change.

VII. Ombudsperson

Aaron briefly reviewed the Ombudsperson requirements of the settlement. The next meeting will feature discussion on the ombudsperson program and the specifics of its implementations. Shannon added that there are questions about exactly how the program will be implemented and codified so it remains a permanent institution. Tika stated that SESPAC has been working on furthering the idea of ombudsperson programs and the need for them to be versed in special education law and related services.

VIII. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The next meeting of the Settlement Work Group will be on April 12, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

Attendance