

**Redding Consortium for Educational Equity
Settlement Work Group
September 16, 2021 5:00–6:30 p.m.
Meeting Minutes**

I. Welcome

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

Aaron Bass moved to approve the minutes from the previous work group meeting. Gary Henry, Work Group Member, seconded. The minutes were approved as submitted.

II. Legislative Updates

The three bills recommended by the Work Group and the Consortium (Senate Bill 56, House Bill 86, and House Bill 100) were all signed into law over summer 2021. Additionally, the House passed House Concurrent Resolution 24: Modernizing Delaware’s Education Funding System on June 30, 2021.

III. Path Forward

Longfellow outlined the progress towards compliance with the settlement. The legislature and state met its obligations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. The Ombudsperson program is currently funded at \$1M for FY 2022 and is in the Request for Proposals (RFP) stage.

Longfellow also presented the minimum actions needed for settlement compliance for FY 2023, including an additional \$4M towards teacher recruitment and retention, and sufficient funding to complete the Independent Funding Assessment by January 2024.

IV. Ombudsperson Update

The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) issued the RFP for the Ombudsperson program on April 15, 2021. DDOE reissued the RFP on September 10, 2021 with four additions to the scope of services:

- Specifies disciplinary matters as “including but not limited to suspensions, expulsions, and school related arrests.”
- Clarifies role in facilitating the resolution of parent and student concerns “regarding discriminatory acts, policies, and practices.”
- Adds: “Providing ongoing support and mentorship to students after the resolution of disputes or complaints to ensure that resolutions adequately address students’ needs.”
- Adds: “Evaluating program satisfaction by parents, guardians, and students who are recipients of the program’s services.”

Shannon Griffin, Work Group Member, stated that while the current RFP is a step in the right direction, the Ombudsperson office should be codified as an agency to guarantee the independence of the agency, fund it sufficiently, and enable it to have a governance and oversight role in addition to dispute resolution.

V. Independent Funding Assessment RFP Discussion

The Work Group discussed their thoughts on what will be required for the independent funding assessment to successfully identify what changes are needed to improve educational equity. Aaron shared an internal draft of a potential RFP as a baseline for the discussion.

Gary Henry said that it is important to define “independent” for the purposes of the assessment because a narrow definition may result in only a handful of out-of-state consulting firms being considered for the assessment. Chuck noted that the settlement explicitly stipulates that the assessment “shall be done by an organization that is independent of the State.” Aaron recommended that the group ask the legal teams involved to answer the question. Gary also said that holistic funding assessments should be a recurring practice, like in Maryland.

Sarah Stowens, Work Group Member, asked if the RFP needs to define a timeframe for the funding assessment, especially given the changes that may occur as a result of property reassessment in the coming years. Aaron said the range could be from the adoption of the unit-funding model to the present. Gary said that the state only has solid data from about 2006 onward, and it may hamper the quality of the assessment to use data farther back than that.

Sarah additionally asked if the new funding changes and additions that have occurred after the settlement would be taken into consideration in the assessment, or if the scope should be limited to before the settlement implementation. Aaron said that the recent changes should be considered since they are part of the broader question of determining an ideal funding system. Chuck added that the new funds are on top of the broader funding formula, and it is important to understand the impact they are having in addition to the regular funding formula.

Kristin Dwyer, Work Group Member, said that the legislature could form a specific group review the results of the assessment and make recommendations for changes to the education system based on the results. This would ensure the assessment was not a “one and done” project.

VI. Future Discussion: Delaware Funding System

Aaron explained a future discussion for this work group will focus on the current issues surrounding the DE funding system and how the work group should provide input on improving the system by late winter or early spring.

Tika Hartsock, Work Group Member, said that the annual September 30 student count is an issue area that should be discussed.

Kristin said that the group should frame their future conversations about funding from a positive perspective, asking, “What do we want from our funding system, and how do we get there?”

VII. Path Forward

The path forward for the group is to finalize a draft of the independent funding assessment RFP to present to the full Consortium, review and make recommendations for the Delaware funding system, and continue to monitor the implementation of settlement items. Aaron reported that the equity data dashboard, which will enable transparent oversight of educational equity in the state, is scheduled to be published in December 2021.

VIII. Public Comment

Bill Doolittle agreed that the Maryland funding model is a good starting point. He said that the Independent Assessment RFP should include an adequacy study as part of the scope. He also said that “independent” can be defined broadly if there is oversight to ensure that the assessment is free from internal influence. He strongly recommended that this opportunity for change is done deliberately, thoroughly, and not wasted.

The Settlement Work Group will be meeting on October 25, at 5:00 p.m.

Attendance

Work Group Members

Aaron Bass, Co-Chair
Chuck Longfellow, Co-Chair
Raushann Austin
Kristin Dwyer
Shannon Griffin
Tika Hartsock
Gary Henry
Monique Martin
Shelley Rouser
Sarah Stowens

Members of the Public

Bill Doolittle
Haley Qaissaunee
Kelly Sherretz