

**Redding Consortium for Educational Equity
Settlement Work Group
January 24, 2022 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 November minutes. Shannon Griffin, Work Group Member, seconded. The minutes were approved as submitted.

II. December Meeting Update

The Independent Funding Assessment RFP feedback was approved by the full Consortium at the December meeting, and was received by the Department of Education.

III. Legislative Updates

There is no new legislation of note yet in the 2022 session, and the FY 23 budget presentation is expected soon.

Shannon discussed a resolution written by herself and other stakeholders from the Consortium and educational community. The resolution would reconstitute the Delaware State Parent Advisory Council (DESPAC) to oversee Title I programs, oversee progress towards equitable education for Title I students, and collaborate with the DE Department of Education on its annual Title I plan. The resolution would also establish an Educational Equity Council to oversee the Education Ombudsperson program.

A separate bill has been written by the group to make the Ombudsperson program a permanent structure called the “Equity Ombudsperson Program” with the same parameters as the current program, with oversight from the Educational Equity Council. The goal of the new program is to fulfill the current ombudsperson role while also working proactively to tackle systemic equity issues, including racism and ableism. Shannon asked the work group to review the pieces of legislation and provide feedback. She asked for the support of the work group and the full Consortium on this work.

Chuck Longfellow, Co-Chair, asked if the resolution and bill are still works in progress. Shannon said they are about 98% complete except for small language tweaks.

Laurisa Schutt, Work Group Member, asked if the Equity Ombudsperson can act if someone raises an equity issue. Shannon said they can, and they should be allowed access to the appropriate data to solve the problem. It is designed to be an advocacy organization.

Chuck noted that the provision that places legal costs and the burden of proof onto LEAs could open the door for predatory or “cash grab” lawsuits, especially in the special education space. He asked what safeguards could be put in place to prevent this. Shannon said that the bill requires the Ombudsperson to utilize Delaware non-profit legal services. Bill Doolittle, one of the collaborators on the bill, added that the burden of proof provisions are written specifically to avoid the current issues in the special education space.

IV. Wilmington Learning Collaborative Update

After the Governor collected feedback from stakeholders, the Wilmington Learning Collaborative was pushed back to begin in the 2023-24 school year. The 2022-23 school year will be a planning year. The Governor is proposing a \$7.0 M allocation for the collaborative.

V. FY 2023 Requirements

Chuck reviewed the FY 23 requirements for the Settlement. Opportunity Funding increases are on track. The K-3 basic special education unit funding was approved ahead of its deadline. The Ombudsperson, Early Education provisions, and the Independent Funding Assessment are on track to be in compliance. Funding for teacher recruitment and retention is expected in FY 23 as part of the settlement.

VI. Settlement Implementation Progress Report

Aaron presented a draft of a progress report on the settlement’s implementation. Each settlement provision is graded from 1 to 4 based on the speed at which it is being implemented, and how well the action aligns with the Work Group’s expectations for what is needed to improve educational equity. Work Group members were asked to provide their thoughts on a shared document. With the group’s approval, the completed progress report will be voted on by the full Consortium at the February 10 meeting.

VII. Meedra Surratte, Parent Information Center of Delaware

Meedra Surratte, Executive Director at the Parent Information Center (PIC) of Delaware, presented on the organization’s plans for the Ombudsperson program. PIC has an established statewide presence providing parent training and information center and technical assistance. The organization believes it is well situated to take on the ombudsperson role as well. The new Ombudsperson wing of PIC will create family friendly materials for conflict resolution, act as an advocate for students and their families, facilitate the resolution of parent and student concerns, and secure legal representation for families when necessary.

The program will be run by a statewide program director with an assistant director in each county with their own support staffs. PIC already has New Castle County and Seaford locations, and intends to build their capacity statewide. The support staff will be comprehensively trained using PIC’s internal programs and external programs recommended by stakeholders.

PIC has also established the Family Leadership Advisory Committee (FLAC) as a collaboration between PIC, families, community organizations, and other stakeholders. FLAC will be the public forum for making improvements to the Ombudsperson program over time using internal and external evaluative measures, and an open line of communication for advertising services and recruiting staff.

Questions

Chuck asked if there is a process for how the Ombudsperson will prioritize certain cases over others. Meedra said that they were very intentional about outlining that process. Additionally, they are training the intake specialists to interpret calls to the general PIC line and route the families to whatever services they need.

Monique Martin, Work Group member, asked what languages will be available for services. Meedra said that PIC currently has staff fluent in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. They also have access to the language line in order to support families speaking other languages.

VIII. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The Settlement Work Group will be meeting on March 28, at 5:00pm.

Attendance

Work Group Members

Aaron Bass, Co-Chair
Chuck Longfellow, Co-Chair
Shannon Griffin
Tika Hartsock
Gary Henry
Monique Martin
Shelley Rouser
Laurisa Schutt

Members of the Public

Raye Jones-Avery, Redding Consortium member
Matt Denn, Redding Consortium Co-chair
Bill Doolittle
Brendan Laux
Haley Qaissaunee
Lisa Rice
Kelly Sherretz
Meedra Surratte