

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Meeting the Needs of Children in Poverty Committee

United Way of Delaware

Meeting Minutes

February 22, 2016

Michelle Taylor, Co-chair, called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The minutes were approved with no corrections.

Michelle Taylor reviewed highlights from committee previous meetings. She then noted that the focus of this meeting would be on presentations from representatives of the traditional northern New Castle County school districts about the various approaches that their respective districts were taking to address the needs of children from low-income families. She added that Dr. Bob Andrzejewski, Christina School District Superintendent, was unavailable for this meeting, but asked to present during the March meeting.

Michelle Taylor discussed the research plan that was developed by the committee co-chairs, Michelle Taylor, The Honorable Chandlee Kuhn, and Dr. Jackie Jenkins, along with Dr. Dan Rich from the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration. She explained that the University of Delaware will conduct resource mapping for each of the three committee focus areas. This research should take approximately eight months and will guide the Committee's recommendations. Additionally, the University of Delaware will conduct a policy and resource map focused on policies related to serving low-income students. One area of focus will be on early childhood education programs (ECE), including an assessment of demographics and services in the state tapping existing resources including those at the University and members of this committee. The initial stages of this research should take approximately eight months. Representatives from the University of Delaware will give progress reports on this research throughout the process. The United Way of Delaware (UWD) has begun conducting research on best practices for our of school services.

Michelle Taylor posed the following question to the Committee: What can we do now to help kids and families? She explained the importance of identifying early wins to motivate changes in Wilmington schools.

Michelle Taylor asked Adriana Bohm to give a brief recap of the State Board of Education meeting on February 18, 2016. She asked others who were in attendance to add any additional information.

- A bus to Dover was arranged for students and parents from Wilmington to attend the meeting. Many of the students and parents made public comments about the need for support and services in the city of Wilmington. After the public statements, the State Board of Education and Tony Allen of the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (the Commission) had lively exchange that resulted in the conditional approval of the WEIC redistricting plan.
- The Conditions for approval included 1. Approval by the Delaware Department of Education of priority school plans submitted by the Christina School District, and 2. Change of the word "shall" to "may" in item #2 of the resolution within the plan. Dr. Niki Castle clarified the condition about the Christina priority school plans.

Michelle Taylor notes that the pressing issue surrounding the WEIC plan was determining how the plan improves outcomes for children in Delaware. This is something that this committee will work to address.

District Presentation: Harold Shaw, Red Clay Consolidated School District

The PowerPoint presentation is attached at the end of the minutes. Harold Shaw, Manager of School Turnaround, noted the following items from the presentation:

- District demographic information
 - Red Clay has a very diverse student population, with 33.8% being students from low-income families.
- Red Clay also has eleven Title I schools, and three schools that are designated as Priority Schools.
- Discussion of Title I support
 - Red Clay has at least one reading specialist per building, math specialists, and behavioral support specialists assigned to the schools.
- Red Clay established an Office of School Turnaround that works with the Priority Schools in the district.
- Red Clay has a library project, which provided books for children to build their own library, and gives children in the district ten books per year.
- Red Clay has also partnered with organizations to establish mentoring programs to connect at-risk children to adults, after-school programs and transportation for accessibility to these programs, wellness centers in the district's secondary schools.
- Red Clay has also partnered with Communities in Schools (CIS) to work with students in the district's secondary schools.
- Harold Shaw explained that pre-k programs are offered at four schools in the district and that Red Clay is working to improve Pre-K programs and accessibility for families in the district.

Chandlee Kuhn asked Harold Shaw what Red Clay is doing to address discipline in school, particularly out of school suspensions.

Harold Shaw responded by saying that schools in Red Clay are using the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) model to reduce out-of-school suspension numbers and keep children in school. The district has also formed a dropout prevention team that visits with schools and families.

A committee member asked if academic performance is improving at priority schools. Harold Shaw responded that information was not available at the last district meeting, but preliminary findings are positive. He explained that progress is being made, and that Red Clay is looking to expand programs to non-priority schools to replicate results. The district has also partnered with the University of Virginia to help implement academic improvements.

Michelle Taylor asked about big wins in Red Clay. Harold Shaw explained the district's partnership with the University of Virginia regarding an academic improvement model that uses a data-driven instruction method to bolster academic performance.

Monique Taylor-Gibbs, committee member and teacher, added that the data-driven method that does not put the emphasis on teachers, but allows students to look at and analyze their data allows students to make informed decisions about their learning and performance. She gave several examples of

students taking active roles in their performance and students discussing quality comparisons and using data to track progress. She explained that her students seem to be more engaged when students are aware of, and charged with, tracking progress and developing corrective measures for learning. She did explain the inequity in using data to compare teachers, as classes are not distributed equitably and therefore lead to incomparable data sets.

Chandlee Kuhn asked what the committee can do to help with immediate needs in the district.

Harold Shaw responded that the district could use help with socioemotional supports and resources for students.

A committee member asked, as a parent in the conversational about socioemotional supports, why there is no representation of Latinas on the [district] board; and that there are no black male teachers in the schools. She followed by asking why there was no representation in books and learning materials for children of color.

Another committee member raised a question about supports for ESL. Harold Shaw responded that Red Clay is working to provide ESL services, and that providing such programs is a growth area for the district.

A committee member shared a concern that there is a lack of consistency in gifted education programs in Red Clay Schools. She explained that she had to choose her child out of Red Clay to allow her child to be placed in a gifted education program. She also asked why there are inequities and inconsistencies with isolation and resources for children with special needs and Title I students. Harold Shaw answered that Red Clay is attempting to make the gifted education programs more consistent, but finding certified staff is a challenge and a growth area. He also says that he is unable to address the resource concern at this time, but will follow up.

A committee member asked about Communities in Schools (CIS) program. Harold Shaw explained that CIS is 20+ years old, and works with low-income students on college/school prep and soft skills needed for academic and professional development.

There was a follow up question about whether CIS works with parents. Harold Shaw answers saying that CIS does not work directly with parents, but parents are pulled into the process because parental permission is needed for student involvement with the program.

District Presentation: Dr. Dusty Blakey, Colonial School District

Dr. Dusty Blakey, Colonial Superintendent, began the presentation on the Colonial School District by discussing the demographics of the student population of Colonial.

He then highlighted what he called the district's 'four pillars,' which were key areas of focus for Colonial's efforts to improve outcomes for students:

- *Early Childhood,*
- *Leadership and Learning,*
- *Innovation, and*
- *Access and Opportunity.*

Dr. Blakey explained that Colonial is in the process of expanding the district's investment in early childhood programs. He continued by discussing the role of the Early Childhood Education Council (ECEC) to increase the capacity and quality of ECE programs in the district.

Dr. Blakey noted that the district featured a number of programs designed to address student needs and develop understanding of best practices among the leadership and educators in the Colonial SD.

Dr. Blakey explained that the district is in the process of establishing and refining programs and services that provide for the social, emotional, and physical wellness of its students, and hopes to expand such programs from kindergarten through 12th grade. As an example, Dr. Blakey talked about Colonial's Wellness Centers, which was created to address the school district's identified problem of students seeking health services and the gap in service provision.

Dr. Blakey also noted that the Colonial has also developed a "Saturday academy" for students and families that are English language learners that will assist in the process of closing communication gaps between affected families, communities, and schools.

Dr. Blakey noted that the goal of this focus is to make all of the programs and services that the district is developing or offering accessible to all of the families in the community that need them. He explained that accessibility is a huge barrier when it comes to family involvement with the schools and programs in the district, which is a problem that Colonial is committed to address. For example, Dr. Blakey highlighted the district's understanding of food insecurity and access to food options and says that the district operates a Mobile Feeding Van to help meet that particular community need. Dr. Blakey also said that the need for substantive job and life skills training was also an important element of the district's accessibility focus, and that the district has partnered with programs and businesses to address that need.

Dr. Blakey continued by highlighting district efforts to expand capacity within the district, touching on Colonial's revamping of schools to allow for connecting students to vocational specialties (Healthcare, STEAM, and Visual Arts), and expanding accessibility to libraries and the latest learning tools.

He closed by touching upon the district's work to streamline and improve professional development for teachers, saying that Colonial is the only district with its own teacher evaluation system. The Teaching and Learning Framework (TLF), Dr. Blakey notes, is a district evaluation protocol that seeks to hone in on fundamental aspects of effective instruction. The TLF uses Peer-to-peer evaluation and feedback system that works to improve instruction delivery and teaching.

A committee member asked why Dr. Blakey chose to emphasize non-academic and community supports.

Dr. Blakey responded by saying that the district decided to focus on these areas because they feel that removing barriers to accessibility is best chance for long-term success. Dr. Blakey continued by saying that the district also thought that a focus on capacity building was good for continuity. Dr. Blakey added that he believes there is an existing information gap between the district and the community that keeps community members from accessing services and assistance.

A committee member asked if there was any additional information on socioemotional counseling.

Dr. Blakey answered saying that counselors are available in all of the schools to deal with socioemotional health issues outside of physical wellness; and that the district was dedicated to committing resources to ensuring the socioemotional wellness of students.

A committee member asked if there was any “game-changing” data available on the effectiveness of the Wellness center.

Blakey said that the district is doing basic tracking on center use and recording results from utilization of wellness services. When asked about student migration and consistency in services, Blakey mentioned that the district is making sure that resources, records, information will be available for duration of student tenure in Colonial.

District Presentation: Cora Scott, Director PK-12 Educational Services, Brandywine School District

Presentation is included at the end of the minutes. Cora Scott discussed the social and emotional needs and development, highlighting the following items:

- Brandywine’s *Response to Intervention* (RTI) program,
- The district’s movement to the Compassionate Schools model, provision of additional supports for ESL students,
- The establishment of an emotional support program that works with students from elementary through secondary schools,
- Access to social workers, and
- Partnerships with local community programs to provide additional support for personal and academic development.

Cora Scott also emphasized that the district is dedicated professional development and capacity building in the form of a partnership with Teach for America; the Relay Graduate School of Education, specialized autism training programs; and partnerships that provide additional training geared toward cultural competency and best practices.

In terms of academic improvement, Cora Scott noted that Brandywine is developing and offering programs that address access to additional academic supports, like the district’s investment and focus on having ECE centers earn recognition and designation as STARS programs, the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, SAT prep courses for 11th grade students, and participation in the BRINC initiative.

A committee member asked about demographics and poverty in Brandywine. Cora Scott responded by saying that only Harlan has a high concentration of low-income students, and approximated that 50% of Brandywine students are low-income.

Monique Taylor-Gibbs, a graduate of the Brandywine School District, remarked that Brandywine’s feeder pattern works. She asked, regarding AVID, if the students have the same teachers for the duration of their time in the program.

Cora Scott replied that the district tries to ensure continuity in the program, but is not always able to.

Another committee member asked Monique Taylor-Gibbs why she thought that the feeder pattern utilized by Brandywine worked, to which Monique Taylor-Gibbs responded that the exposure to diversity tends to diffuse issues associated with poverty and homogeneity.

Michelle Taylor brought up the issue of changing the name of the committee.

The suggested new name of the committee was *Meeting the Needs of Low- Income Children*.

After some discussion, the committee members agreed that they would like to change the name but wanted to brainstorm on the options. Michelle Taylor responded by saying that the committee should go back and look at proposed names and vote by email.

Public Comment

Bill Doolittle commented that early childhood supports were moving in the right direction. He noted that he was still concerned with school-based supports, saying that he still thinks them to be inadequate. He continued by saying that programs and individuals to help the impoverished children and families are there to help, but that he believes that systemic changes are needed. Mr. Doolittle added that he think that a full range of professional development is needed that gets at non-instructional training. He concluded his remarks by opining that parent and community engagement should still be a priority.

Michelle Taylor concluded the meeting by saying that the committee should think about “low-hanging fruit,” or “small wins” that can happen now, as it continues its work in improving the lives of children in poverty. She also asked that the committee continue to think of the proposed name change.

After some discussion, it was decided that the next meeting would be scheduled for Monday, March 21, 2016 to avoid school district spring breaks.

The meeting adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Meeting the Needs of Children in Poverty Committee
Attendance at the 02/22/2016**

Committee Members

Jackie Jenkins, Co-Chair	Karen Eller
The Honorable Chandlee Kuhn, Co-Chair	Melissa Froemming
Michelle Taylor, Co-Chair	Gloria Grantham
Dawn Alexander	Terrance Newton
Madeleine Bayard	Gwendolyn Sanders
Patricia Bell-Scruggs	Michael Simmons
Adriana Bohm	Deb Stevens
Vi Cade	Mary Kate Mouser
Nikki Castle	Monique Taylor-Gibbs
Rosa Colon-Kolacko	Cara Sawyer

Presenters

Harold Shaw, Red Clay Consolidated School District
Dusty Blakey, Colonial School District
Cora Scott, Brandywine School District

Members of the Public

Gwen Angalet	E. McCrae Harrison
Sherlynn Aurelio	Cynthia Larock
Elipse Barnes	Betty McVey
Gerald Brady	Lauren Wilson
Bill Doolittle	

Institute for Public Administration Staff

Elizabeth Burland
Chester Holland
Kelly Sherretz