

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement Committee (PEaCE)

Cab Calloway School of the Arts, Room 201

Meeting Minutes – September 14, 2016

Chair Elizabeth Lockman called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Welcome and Meeting Introduction

Elizabeth (Tizzy) Lockman, Wilmington Education Improvement Commission Vice-Chair, introduced herself and asked each member of the committee and members of the public to introduce themselves.

Commission Reminders

Tizzy Lockman began by saying she hopes this committee will start with a renewed focus and provide robust work this year. While the PEaCE Committee has less defined goals as other committees. However, this committee will utilize ample resources from the Institute for Public Administration to create an evidence-based strategic plan with practical proposals.

Work Plan

Kelly Sherretz, University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration, reviewed the current framework of the work plan for the committee. The committee will work on revising this plan over the next few meetings.

Success Pillars

1. Communication
2. Provide a Safe Environment
3. Empowerment; Shared decision-making

For each pillar there are the following considerations:

- (1) What would success look like for this pillar?
- (2) What action steps would be needed to achieve this goal?
- (3) What are benchmarks for success?

Areas of Research

At the last meeting, the committee came up with a list of research questions on parent and community engagement. IPA researched over the summer and provided a summary of their findings.

Melissa Micek, a Graduate Fellow at the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration, provided an overview of the research provided by the Institute for Public Administration for the Committee. She stated that some questions were consolidated and specific topics can be expanded upon with more details for future meetings if that is requested by the Committee. She discussed that engagement has many different perceptions and expectations; therefore, this research provides a foundation to agree upon the definition of engagement, the varying levels of engagement, and the tools for measuring engagement.

Kevin suggested there should be more information about why parents should be engaged, specifically, requested for further explanation of why engagement is important for all stakeholders. This includes the overall value of engagement for students, parents, and schools.

The committee started a discussion about the different barriers to engagement, including the environment and the level of parents feeling comfortable, especially non-English speaking parents. Melissa noted there are resources available about the value and barriers of engagement and this information will be brought to the next meeting. She also noted that it depends on the varied differences and specifications of why parents are not engaged in each school and the research provided a broad explanation.

Tizzy moved the conversation to gap identification, which was a focus of previous committee work. These gaps included the following:

- Parent Engagement
 - Parents not equipped with the necessary resources, lack of knowledge;
 - Parent's negative educational experience affects relationship with child's school;
 - Family basic needs not being met;
 - Transportation to activities at schools
- Educator Engagement
 - Relationship building with parents and families
 - Educator burnout
 - Lack of resources in the classroom
 - Teacher, administrator, and staff training
- Community Engagement
 - No community buy-in
 - Not enough connections between communities and schools
 - Staff training
 - Relationships between schools and community organizations

The Committee discussed specific examples of positive communication to show that engagement is a two-way street. The Committee decided that more examples can be brought to future meetings to discuss best practices and evidence for future recommendations.

Melissa mentioned the National Poll of the Public Attitudes Towards Public Schools exemplified the varied expectations for public school education; half respondents said public education was to prepare students academically while the other half responded the purpose was to prepare students to be good students and prepare students for the work force.

The Committee discussed if there are any surveys that measure the school climate in Delaware. Patti Nash stated there are parent satisfaction surveys for the Red Clay district and defended school districts, stating they are not always at fault. Bill Doolittle said that engagement often is seen as sporadic and not consistent.

The Committee discussed that a community-based approach and collaboration is the most effective measure for lasting engagement. Engagement is often left with many inconsistencies due to lack of collaboration. There was a discussion that some parents may serve on committees; however, serious decision-making is left with undefined expectations or tensions between stakeholders.

Unfortunately, it was noted that underserved populations get overlooked because of the complications of language translations or misconceptions of engagement. The parents that are active do not always represent the entire student population because of the unreachable parents. There was also vibrant discussion about parent liaisons or a spokesperson to communicate with parents and faculty. It was noted that instead of creating new information nights, the committee can connect and have input from parents is best suited at existing events.

Topics for Future Meetings

The future meeting will hope to focus on successful models of engagement in district and community schools. One example includes further research on the Christina parent engagement specialist and best practices of engagement specialists.

The Committee considered the expected final product and due date for the framework and the work plan. It was agreed that a draft of preliminary recommendations will be submitted in January and a final product will be produced by June.

Future research that the committee asked for and will be provided by the Institute for Public Administration include the following questions:

- What is the value of engagement for each stakeholder (student, parent, district?)
- What is a community school? What are examples and how would this help engagement?
- What is an unreachable parent and what can be done to engage these parents?
- What are specific barriers to engagement?
- What are previous examples of success, strategies, and surveys for engagement?
- What role does ESSA play in parent engagement?
- What legislation exists for parent engagement?

It was discussed that the work plan will need to be reformatted to include the specific areas of research and the important aspect of “providing value” to all stakeholders in engagement as a main component.

Public Comment

Bill Doolittle suggested there is a continuing conversation between formal meetings. Small virtual meetings through email or Google Docs would provide constant communication and progress within the committee.

The Committee decided the next meeting is Monday, October 10th, at Cab Calloway School of the Arts, Room 201, at 5:30pm. This change was to accommodate the Jewish holiday that week.

Chair Tizzy Lockman adjourned the meeting at 6:56 p.m.

**Wilmington Educator Improvement Commission
Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement Committee
Attendance at 9/14 Meeting**

PEaCE Committee Members

Tizzy Lockman, Chair
Renee Duval
Pati Nash
Kevin Noll

Members of the Public

Bill Doolittle
Wanda Korwek
Alisa O'Neil

Institute for Public Administration Staff

Kelly Sherretz
Kelsey Mensch
Melissa Micek
Taylor Hawk