

## **Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Redistricting Committee**

University of Delaware Graham Hall, Room 185

Minutes – September 24, 2015

### **Dr. Joe Pika, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.**

The Committee approved the minutes from the September 10, 2015, committee meeting following a correction of the 6:00 p.m. adjournment time.

### **Dr. Pika asked for an update from the Red Clay and Christina school districts.**

Kelli Racca from Christina School District and Ted Ammann from Red Clay Consolidated School District informed the committee that their districts have been participating in weekly phone calls to identify central issues that will need to be addressed prior to the redistricting. Central issues already identified include current Christina community partnerships, instructional materials, curriculum, staff training, IEP transitions, technology, transportation, facilities, and the future of academic programs unique to Christina School District housed in Wilmington buildings. Kelli Racca also mentioned that Christina School District has created their own internal WEIC committee to ensure that all members of the Christina community would be represented.

### **Dr. Pika opened the discussion to questions from committee members.**

- A question was asked if all of the current Christina buildings would be properly and fully utilized after they become Red Clay buildings.
  - The answer was that a significant amount of thought had been put into how the buildings would be utilized. Attendance zones would be analyzed following the addition of the Christina students and schools to Red Clay and that the school buildings would not be viewed as a second group of schools. Many students in Red Clay who are currently bussed to Red Clay schools would be within walking distance to current Christina schools.
- A question was asked about what would occur at the high school levels given that currently Christina serves students in Wilmington in grades preK-8 and Red Clay serves students K-5.
  - The answer was that there will continue to be a lot of conversation about what will happen at the high school levels. Christina currently serves 600 high school students in Wilmington and is concerned about their high schools post-WEIC.
- A question was asked about the current configuration of Red Clay schools in Wilmington.
  - The answer from Red Clay representatives was that they are looking at all of the buildings and how they could be reconfigured so that they would all be at capacity. Following the transition, some buildings might serve other ages than they currently serve. Red Clay is thinking about several innovative strategies and uses for current buildings during a reconfiguration process.
- A question was asked about reconfiguration within Christina School District.
  - The answer was that this is one of the conversations that the WEIC Christina committee will be having.

### **Dr. Pika asked for an update from Brandywine and Colonial districts.**

Dr. Rich began with an update from the school district presentations given to the Colonial and Brandywine school boards. Dr. Rich explained that the current question to consider is if Colonial School District no longer serves students in Wilmington, given where the students are located, would they be better served by the Red Clay or Brandywine School District?

Ralph Ackerman, Brandywine School Board, mentioned that the WEAC final report recommended that both Christina and Colonial districts become part of the Red Clay Consolidated School District. The concern is that there is not enough time to gain community buy-in and gather input from the Brandywine community about accepting the Colonial students. It was emphasized that Brandywine is not necessarily opposed to the idea of taking the Colonial students, but would have to consider their referendum next year.

Dr. Rich made the point that the WEAC report was intended to be a baseline that would be used until the commission encountered an opportunity that could better serve the students in Wilmington. If there is a better way to serve students than what is written in WEAC report, the commission should take that opportunity. He also emphasized that the closest schools in the Colonial School District to the Colonial students in Wilmington are six miles away. The goal of the commission is to streamline governance into two districts that will remain in the City of Wilmington, so the committee has to look at both districts as options.

Dr. Mark Holodick shared the Brandywine School District's philosophy for educating urban children. Beginning in elementary school, many Wilmington students are bussed to schools outside of the city, they do not all attend Brandywine's elementary school within the city boundaries. The Brandywine School District does not believe in having schools with exclusively affluent children and schools with children who are exclusively low-income. All their schools should be diverse. Brandywine representatives also made the point that if the Colonial students became part of Brandywine School District, they might still need to be bussed six miles from their neighborhood to school, based on Brandywine's philosophy.

Dr. Dusty Blakey suggested that continuing to bus students six miles in a different direction than they are currently bussed six miles would philosophically go against what the Commission is trying to accomplish.

- A question was asked if Wilmington students in the Red Clay Consolidated School District stay in Wilmington, or are they bussed to the outlying suburbs.
  - The answer was that students K-5 stay in Wilmington, while middle school and high school students are bussed out. Choice plays a large role in high school selection.

**Dr. Pika closed that subject and introduced a work-plan that he created for the committee for the months of September and October.**

The committee will take the lead on writing several sections of the final report issued by WEIC to the State Board of Education. The committee will be responsible for making sure the data that makes it into the final report is accurate and complete.

Dr. Pika asked for a list to be created that would cover all of the issues that will need to be resolved.

The short timeline to submit a plan to the State Board of Education was emphasized.

- A question was asked about who set the timeline.
  - The answer is that the legislation set the timeline, however the work should be done in short order. Even though this part of the process seems very rushed, it has already been underway for a full year and will take several years before all of the changes are actually realized.

There was a discussion of whether the commission is creating a framework or an explicit plan. Dr. Rich responded that we will develop as detailed a plan as we can recognizing that many details await implementation.

**Dr. Pika introduced the Finance Committees decision points.**

The next meeting will include a discussion on school finance so that the committee will be able to stay on track with the work that the other committees are doing.

- A question was asked related to where the state would be able to find the money to fund the WEIC final plan and if the political will is there to make it happen.
  - The finance committee is looking at the funding formula in addition to other state resources. The funding formula will affect the entire state, not just the districts in New Castle County, providing an incentive for legislatures in other counties to support the package.
- There was a request for more specific data from the school districts on the number of students in each district who reside in Wilmington.
- A question was asked if there was any thought of moving away from the unit count for children in poverty, and looking at cash rather than units to provide more flexibility.
  - The answer was that the funding committee feels that there needs to be more flexibility.

**Dr. Pika introduced the guiding principles that affect the Redistricting Committee.**

The committee discussed multiple principles guiding the work of WEAC and focused on those specifically addressing redistricting.

The point was made that neither a single Wilmington school district, nor a unitary New Castle County school district are feasible options. It was also noted that the plan is not just to change the district boundaries. It has been made very clear to legislators, that unless they are willing to accept and fund the entire package, they should not agree to any of it. Similar to the legislation that was proposed and supported by WEAC, the Commission will provide language to the legislature for these proposed recommendations. A point was raised that research supports the idea of putting money into Early Childhood Education and given that there are finite resources, the WEIC recommendations should be careful not to take away funds from Early Childhood Education.

**Dr. Pika summarized the central issues and announced that the next meeting will begin with sorting the list of issues that Red Clay and Christina Schools Districts are currently compiling.**

**The meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.**

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission  
Redistricting Committee  
Attendance at the 9/24 Meeting**

**Redistricting Committee Members**

Joe Pika, Co-Chair  
Henry Harper, Co-Chair  
Ralph Ackerman  
Ted Ammann  
Dusty Blakey  
Merv Daugherty

Leah Davis  
Vicki Gehrt  
Mark Holodick  
Joseph T. Laws  
Harrie Ellen Minnehan  
Kelli Racca

**Members of the Public**

Mellissa Froemming  
John Laznik  
Laura Nash

Bob Silber  
Bob Williams  
Laura Wisniewski

**Institute for Public Administration Staff**

Dan Rich  
Kelly Sherretz  
Elizabeth Burland

Neil Kirschling  
Saran Singh  
Annie Gould