

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

REDISTRICTING IN THE CITY OF WILMINGTON
AND NEW CASTLE COUNTY
A TRANSITION, RESOURCE, AND
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY TO INTERIM PLAN
December 1, 2015

Submitted to
The Delaware State Board of Education

Executive Summary

Legislation approved in 2015 authorizes the State Board of Education to change or alter the boundaries of school districts in northern New Castle County in a manner consistent with some or all of the redistricting recommendations made in the final report of the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee, provided that the General Assembly passes, and the Governor signs, a Joint Resolution supporting the proposed changes. In its decision the State Board of Education shall adopt a transition, resource, and implementation plan developed by the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission. This plan fulfills that mandate.

The Case for Redistricting

- Twenty-three separate governing units, including seventeen located in the City of Wilmington, now are responsible for delivering public education to 11,500 Wilmington children with no unified plan, little collaboration, and no requirements for coordination.
- The district arrangement imposed by court order in 1976 to improve the education of black students in Wilmington has failed to achieve its purpose.
- Accelerating learning for all students requires a coherent and responsive governance arrangement.

The Action Agenda for Improved Wilmington Student Outcomes

Redistricting is part of a multi-part action agenda for improved outcomes depicted on the final page of the Executive Summary.

Three streams of action are required: Creating Responsive Governance, Funding Student Success and Meeting Wilmington Student Needs.

Creating Coherent and Responsive Governance of Wilmington Public Education

Streamlining traditional districts responsible for Wilmington public education is a key part of the process needed to focus responsibility and leadership for the education of Wilmington students. It is not the only part, however. Collaboration among charters, among districts, and among charters and districts must be improved and sustained. A complementary part of the Commission's mandate is to actively promote and support such collaboration, so that the sum of the public education assets represented by the diversity of Wilmington schools can benefit more students in more ways than at any time in the past or present.

Funding Student Success

Strengthening the overall education finance structure is of fundamental importance to public education across Delaware. While Delaware spends a great deal on public

education, the expenditure of those funds must focus more effectively on meeting the needs of Wilmington students—and other students at risk throughout Delaware. Actions are needed to ensure a sufficient and reliable revenue base at both the state and local levels and also to ensure that funds are allocated in ways that most directly and effectively address the diverse and often complex needs of students at risk.

Meeting the Needs of Wilmington Students, Most Especially Students in Poverty

Addressing the challenges of students in poverty requires a developmental approach that focuses on alignment of needed supports and services starting in early childhood and extending through entry into a career or higher education. This stream of action requires coordinated efforts from all sectors, including more effective integration of state services and the alignment and mobilization of cross-sector initiatives and partnerships. It also requires greater parent and community engagement in Wilmington schools and in support of the continuous improvement of Wilmington public education. The combination and synergy of all of these changes are essential to increasing in-school and out-of-school supports, from early childhood until the transition to work or higher education. A key dimension of meeting the needs of all Delaware students is an investment in culturally competent educators.

Progress on all three streams together is needed to improve student outcomes and the Commission's redistricting plan establishes a path for progress along each stream.

Under the enabling legislation, the State Board must act on the plan in its entirety, recognizing that implementation requires actions by many institutions over four years.

The implementation of redistricting should be contingent upon the provision of the resources needed to improve student outcomes.

Redistricting Recommendations

- Effective July 1, 2018, the boundaries of the Christina School District should be altered so that it no longer serves the City of Wilmington, and should focus on serving the students in the western portion of the current district. The Christina Board of Education reviewed and approved by a vote of 5-1-1 the framework for planning developed by the Christina administrative staff in collaboration with the staff of the Red Clay Consolidated School District (Appendix B).
- Effective July 1, 2018, the boundaries of the Red Clay Consolidated School District should be altered to include that portion of the City of Wilmington now served by the Christina School District. The Red Clay Board of Education has voted 7-0 to support this change pending the allocation of resources needed for the effective education of its students, their continued engagement in the process, and an appropriate timeline for implementation. By a vote of 4-1, the Red Clay Board of Education approved the interim framework for planning to be part of the Commission's plan to be submitted to

the State Board of Education. That plan and the transmittal letter accompanying it are included as Appendix C.

- Effective July 1, 2018, the schools and students currently served by Christina in the City of Wilmington should be assigned to the Red Clay Consolidated School District.
- All students can choose to remain in their current school as of the end of the 2017–2018 school year until their program is complete.
- The Christina and Red Clay districts will continue to collaborate on the interim frameworks for implementation already approved by each of their Boards of Education. This collaboration will ensure the smooth, minimally disruptive, transition of students, staff, and facilities.
- The Colonial Board of Education and the Brandywine Board of Education both voted to affirm their commitment to continue to serve students in the City of Wilmington within their current boundaries.
- The Colonial School District should expand collaborations and new programs that will strengthen opportunities and support for its Wilmington students. The district could become a leader of partnerships that take advantage of existing choice patterns for its Wilmington students and also provide families with information about the full range of options for meeting the needs of their children within the Colonial district and in other nearby districts and charters.

Funding Student Success

The enabling legislation stipulates that the Commission's plan will identify the state, district and local resources that will be required to support the redistricting transition and provide for the effective ongoing education of all the affected students, and for the support of schools with high concentrations of low-income students and English language learners.

The recommendations for 2016–2017 include:

- Establish weighted unit funding to address the needs of low-income and English language learners and other students at risk. This funding should begin with districts impacted by redistricting with the long-term goal of expanding statewide.
- Provide a transition fund as well as initial capital funding to support immediate costs of implementation.
- Authorize impacted districts to make limited tax rate adjustments to meet operating expenses related to redistricting.
- Invest to sustain and accelerate improvements in early childhood education.

Longer-term recommendations focus on strengthening the revenue base supporting public education at both the state and local levels, including property reassessment, and

adjustments in the allocation system to fully address the needs of low-income students, ELL and other students at risk.

Mobilizing Cross-sector Resources

Effective implementation of the Commission's plan requires a broad partnership that mobilizes the resources and capacity of institutions from all sectors.

The Commission's plan aligns with and is supported by other education initiatives including:

- Delaware's early childhood education strategic plan and strategies
- Student Success 2025
- Education Funding Improvement Commission
- Wilmington Education Strategy Think Tank
- Statewide Review of Education Opportunities and Strategic Plan
- Access to Justice Commission

The Commission will mobilize cross-sector engagement and support including:

- More effective coordination of state programs and services
- Enhanced alignment of nonprofit and community support led by the United Way
- Wilmington Office of Education and Public Policy
- University of Delaware Partnership for Public Education
- Enhanced charter and district collaboration
- Increased parent, educator, and community engagement

Red Clay and Christina Transition, Resource, and Implementation Plan

The Commission, in collaboration with the districts has developed a transition, resource, and implementation plan that follows a four-year timeline for final implementation:

- January 2016 to June 2016 Approval and Confirmation
- July 2016 to June 2017 Detailed Program Planning
- July 2017 to June 2018 Transition of Responsibilities
- July 2018 to 2019 First Year of Full Implementation

The plan addresses the following considerations.

- Orderly and minimally disruptive reassignment of students affected by the boundary change and the reassignment of governance responsibilities
- Implications for educators, administrators, and other personnel that may lead to equitable adjustments to local collective bargaining agreements

- Distribution of capital assets
- Student transportation
- Engagement of educators, staff, parents, district personnel, and community members
- Plans for special schools and programs
- Choice options and policies
- Alignment of technology
- Child nutrition services
- Alignment of curricular materials

Confirming District Boundaries

- The State Board should confirm the existing boundaries of New Castle County school districts as defined in Part VIII of this Plan.
- The State Board should confirm the altered boundaries of New Castle County school districts, effective July 1, 2018, as defined in Part VIII of this Plan.

Milestones and Measures of Success

- The Commission will submit an annual evaluation of progress to the State Board, the Governor and General Assembly that will focus on milestones and measures of success for improved student outcomes.
- Interim outcomes include: increased attendance, persistence and engagement rates; reduced student trauma and disciplinary incident rates; and growing participation in high quality early childhood education programs and other in-school and out- of school programs that support enhanced developmental progress and learning.
- Long-term outcomes include: increased graduation rates; reduced achievement gaps in standardized tests; improved college and workforce readiness; reduced youth incarceration and recidivism rates; and greater access to opportunities that result in productive and rewarding lives.

Action Agenda for Improved Wilmington Student Outcomes

