

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

P.S. DuPont Middle School Library

Minutes – November 17, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 4:15 p.m. by Tony Allen, Chair.

Dr. Allen asked each member of the commission to introduce themselves, followed by the members of the public.

Dr. Allen announced that the Interim Redistricting plan was made available today for public comment.

The minutes from the October 20 meeting of the commission were approved.

Meeting the Needs:

Michelle Taylor, Co-chair, provided an update on her committee's work. The committee met yesterday and went through the action agenda items in the WEAC report that pertain to their committee. They were able to get through six of the seven items. By December 14th meeting, the committee hopes to have a full draft to present to the commission.

There were no questions for the committee co-chair.

Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement:

Yvonne Johnson and Chandra Pitts, Co-chairs, gave an update. At the previous meeting, the committee came up with recommendations in four main focus areas. The committee is meeting tonight to write the recommendations that they will formally submit to the commission. They have been inviting people who are experts in the topic of education engagement. Their hope is to improve the engagement of students, parents, teachers, and the entire community using national best practices. They have been pleased with the attendance at their meetings. One of their primary recommendations is to fund community engagement units, as a one-size-fits-all is not appropriate.

There were no questions for the committee co-chairs.

Charter District Collaboration Committee:

Eve Buckley, Co-chair, said that the committee has invited outside speakers, the last spoke to the history of charter schools in Delaware. The second portion of the meeting is a focus the available data. They have looked at data of all Wilmington schools, including the demographics information of students in these schools. They meet on November 18 and hope to discuss best practices for English language learners.

There were no questions for the committee co-chair.

Review of Public Comment Period

Dr. Dan Rich shared information about the official public comment period: this period is part of the public record that will be later submitted to the State Board of Education. This period begins November 17, 2015 and ends on January 14, 2016. Public comment includes submissions via the Commission's website, emails sent to solutionsfordelawareschools@gmail.com, mailed to the Institute for Public Administration, and the transcripts from the Public Hearings. Dr. Dan Rich reminded the Commission that the Interim Plan is a working document. On December 1st, the Commission will release an additional draft based on comments received from Commissioners and members of the public. The Commission

will meet on December 9 to review and make final changes. The Commission will vote to submit the final plan to the State Board of Education on December 15.

Chandra Pitts asked if it is too late to add a hearing held at a Wilmington community organization. The Chairs replied that it is not too late to add another public hearing—although it is late to change one.

Dr. Dan Rich reminded that Public Hearings are not Town Halls—no questions are answered in Public Hearings. In Public Hearings, only information is delivered. After learning the difference between Public Hearings and Town Halls, Chandra Pitts requested another Town Hall in the City of Wilmington to inform the community. Tizzy Lockman mentioned that they are working with a community organization already to schedule a town hall at the beginning of the new year, before the formal comment period to the State Board concludes.

Dr. Dan Rich reminded the Commission that Facebook comments do not qualify as the public record under the State Board rules. A Town Hall is also not part of the public record. Town Halls are useful for the Commission and the public, but they do not qualify as public record.

Review of the Redistricting Interim Plan

Dr. Dan Rich took the Commission to the Executive Summary and the Action Agenda on the Interim Plan. He asked the Commissioners to look at these sections carefully in order to improve it, if possible. The infographics in the interim plan easily describe the work of the Commission.

The Interim report includes data that backs up the recommendations that the Commission will submit to the State Board. Changes to the plan have been made after the Commission's meeting with the State Board on November 5.

Dr. Dan Rich reminded the Commissioners that the State Board of Education understands that they can approve or disapprove the package as a whole. They cannot just approve part of it or reject part of it. They can reject it, but then they will have to inform the Commission why they are disapproving it. In that case, WEIC will still have some time to make some changes to the plan to resubmit it to the State Board.

Dr. Tony Allen invited the Commissioners and the members of the public to send feedback to the Commission if they are unclear about anything or if they have recommendations for the plan.

Part three of the Interim plan includes clear steps for redistricting. Redistricting is meant to create more streamlined governance. The answers to provide guidance to improve students' guidelines are not included just with redistricting. Redistricting is important, but it is not the only thing that has to be done to improve education. A great deal of planning has been going on by both Christina and Red Clay Consolidated School Districts. The Colonial School Board has voted to continue serving children in the City of Wilmington. Brandywine School Board voted to continue serving City Wilmington's children within their current boundaries.

Appendix B in the Interim plan includes Christina's draft framework for planning.

The Red Clay School Board approved the draft district framework for planning with several conditions. The Commission supports these conditions.

The Colonial School Board has agreed to continue to discuss the possibility of expanding their services in the City of Wilmington. Additionally, they resolved to continue to be included in the work of the Commission.

From June 2018 to July 2019 is the implementation period for the full plan.

Funding:

Jill Floore, Co-chair of the Funding Student Success Committee, explained the funding recommendations. They looked at overall funding for public education in Delaware and the actual redistricting costs. The first recommendations are using the current unit funding system, which is effective but has some gaps. It would add a unit for low-income students, English language learner, and basic special education k-3.

Jill Floore took the Commission through the recommendations which can be found in the Interim Redistricting Plan.

A member of the public asked what sources of funding will be required to make this happen. Jill Floore explained that the final report will show clearly how the weights would impact what the schools look like. This plan should not result in a large tax increase for Red Clay residents, which means the majority of the burden will fall on the state.

Michelle Taylor asked if the intention is to go after all five of the recommendations. Dr. Dan Rich answered that the intention is to go after all the recommendations, though all the funds are not needed at once.

Yvonne Johnson thanked Jill Floore and the funding committee for all of their work. She asked if the Governor's budget comes out in January and does not include a line item for WEIC, would the whole plan will fail. She addressed her concern that property reassessment will not be approved during an election year, and is this realistic to ask for.

A member of the public discussed the need for efficiency in education, noting an e-textbook product as a possibility for creating more efficiency for the use of funds.

Chandra Pitts responded to this commenter describing her agreement with this sentiment, that the point is to look for innovative solutions and allowing for more flexibility of funds.

Chandra Pitts asked if the school board votes automatically change the Commission's recommendations. Dr. Dan Rich responded that they consider these board votes, though it does not automatically change the recommendations. Ted Laws responded that the votes of the School Boards, who were elected by the members of the public, should be weighed heavily. Representative Charles Potter said that it is also important to consider the Wilmington City Council who represents the people of the City of Wilmington.

Eve Buckley raised a concern that many people reading the plan will perceive themselves as "losers" in the situation. Jill Floore answered that no school should lose through this plan. The funding formula needs to target interventions for students who have higher needs.

Ted Laws asked that the sentence on page 2 of the Executive Summary should be changed to all districts and charter schools, rather than singling out the Colonial School District.

Dr. Tony Allen reminded that it is important to know that WEIC has decided to give an extra year for the implementation of the plan. This would allow more time for planning.

Chandra Pitts raised a concern that only one partnership is mentioned, but there are so many organizations that the Commission should be working with and collaborating on, based on the WEAC recommendations.

Dr. Dan Rich added that section six on the interim plan could be expanded and Commissioners are welcome to send suggested additions. If pieces are missing pieces, please contact the Commission leadership.

Public Comment:

A member of the public said that he is concerned with the extreme focus on funding, because funding is not everything. He also added that there should be more student perspective. We need to know what works for students and what does not. Student feedback will be important to see what works—because there are some successful stories too.

Chandra Pitts responded that their committee also looks at the successful programs across the country and the world, and invited the members of the public to participate in their committee which met immediately after the Commission meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6:18 p.m.