

In The Matter Of:
Wilmington Education Improvement Commission
Warner Elementary School

Public Hearing
December 8, 2015

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IN THE MATTER OF:

WILMINGTON EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION

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

Public Meeting of the Redistricting
Committee of the Wilmington Education
Improvement Commission, taken pursuant to
notice at Warner Elementary School, 801 West
18th Street, Wilmington, Delaware beginning at
6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, December 8, 2015, before
Jennifer M. Guy, Registered Professional
Reporter and Notary Public.

BEFORE:

JOE PIKA
HENRY HARPER



1 DR. PIKA: Good evening. We've
2 reached our appointed start time, so I'd like
3 to move us forward.

4 I'm Joe Pika, and I'm the hearing
5 officer for tonight. These public hearings are
6 an extension of the process of soliciting
7 public input. In advance of these public
8 hearings, the commission has held nine town
9 hall meetings, including at least one in each
10 of the four districts, and at schools in both
11 the City of Wilmington and in New Castle
12 County. This is the fourth public hearing of
13 five that will be held.

14 All of the Wilmington Education
15 Improvement Commission meetings, including each
16 of these of the five hearings, have been open
17 to the public and posted on the commission and
18 district websites. To get the word out about
19 the meetings, postings have been made to the
20 solutionsfordelawareschools.com website, let me
21 repeat that, solutionsfordelawareschools.com;
22 the Solutions for Wilmington Schools' Facebook
23 page; the district websites; and with community
24 organizations such as the YMCA. The



1 information was also shared by the members of
2 the commission and its committees with various
3 networks throughout the county and the city.

4 Just a few procedural items for
5 the record. I'll be reading from a script, and
6 later in that script, I'll be explaining how
7 those interested in speaking will have the
8 opportunity to make themselves heard tonight.

9 So move to the script. Good
10 evening. I declare this public hearing to be
11 open. My name is Joe Pika; I am the co-chair
12 of the redistricting committee of the
13 Wilmington Education Improvement Commission,
14 and I have been appointed by the chair of that
15 commission to conduct this public hearing.

16 The Wilmington Education
17 Improvement Commission interim redistricting
18 report was released on November the 17th. We
19 are here tonight to gather public comment on
20 that report. This is not a question-and-answer
21 session, and that's important for everyone to
22 understand. We are actually precluded by
23 regulation from answering questions the public
24 might have. There are others in the room who



1 are able to answer questions if you have them,
2 and if you speak to the staff or one of the
3 people standing in the room, they should be
4 able to direct you to someone that can answer a
5 question for you.

6 This hearing provides the
7 Wilmington Education Improvement Commission and
8 the State Board of Education with an
9 opportunity to receive public comment on the
10 Wilmington Education Improvement Commission's
11 interim report released on November 17th.

12 A court reporter is present so
13 that an accurate record of this hearing can be
14 made. It will be necessary for each speaker to
15 clearly identify him or herself by name and
16 affiliation before beginning to speak so that
17 the court reporter will be able to note who you
18 are in the transcript. I'm also joined at the
19 front table by Henry Harper, who is co-chair of
20 the redistricting committee of the improvement
21 commission.

22 The record of this hearing and
23 the other four hearings will be provided to the
24 members of the commission and the members of



1 the State Board of Education, together with any
2 written or electronic comments received at this
3 hearing or outside of this hearing between
4 November the 17th and January the 14th. This
5 meeting is also being recorded, and that
6 recording will also be posted and shared with
7 the State Board of Education for their use.

8 We will proceed in the following
9 manner. We'll take comments from anyone who
10 desires to speak. There are sign-up sheets at
11 the back of the room; someone is signing them
12 right now. Those wishing to offer testimony
13 during the hour and a half provided for the
14 public hearing must sign up. Sign-up began at
15 6:00 p.m. this evening and will end at 7:30
16 p.m., at which time we'll collect the remaining
17 sign-up sheets.

18 We will allow individuals to
19 speak in the order in which they signed up, and
20 I'll begin with the first sign-up sheets now.
21 Each individual will have three minutes to
22 speak; each group will be allowed five minutes
23 to speak. Those giving testimony will be given
24 a 30-second warning by our timer here in the



1 front row, and then will be told to stop after
2 their time is up. For those who have come this
3 evening with questions, again, I'm sorry, but
4 procedural guidelines don't allow us to answer
5 questions at this public hearing.

6 Testimony will be from up here on
7 the stage so that we can project it. Sorry, we
8 only have one microphone. The first speaker
9 tonight is Julia Noonan.

10 MS. NOONAN: Hello, my name is
11 Julia Noonan. I happen to be a teacher at
12 Bancroft Elementary, but I happen to be here
13 speaking for myself.

14 I want to be sure that in any
15 further publications coming out from the
16 commission, that when they list unit counts and
17 how they're earned, they also list how they're
18 spent. Because it leaves the impression that
19 this unit count accounts for this classroom
20 teacher, full stop. So if you could please
21 make sure that that is clear to people in the
22 press and people that you're sharing
23 information with, that unit counts don't just
24 go for a classroom teacher. Thank you.



1 DR. PIKA: Mark Nardone. Is that
2 how you say it?

3 MR. NARDONE: Close.

4 DR. PIKA: Pronounce your name
5 again.

6 MR. NARDONE: My name is Mark
7 Nardone, I'm a parent of a four-year-old who
8 should start Shortlidge next year.

9 I went to public schools in
10 Delaware. Most of the time, I think I got a
11 great education. I don't think the schools are
12 in the state they were when I was a student,
13 which was a long, long time ago.

14 My plea is an emotional one, and
15 that is if I believe if you think the schools
16 need reform, you need to be part of the
17 process, your children need to be part of the
18 process. I'm dismayed and a little bit
19 frustrated because I very much want my children
20 to be part of that process, too, but I don't
21 think at this point I can compromise the
22 quality of their education for that.

23 We will make some decisions as a
24 family about what we're going to do with our



1 kids. But I do want any, the state board, the
2 legislature, when they consider this plan,
3 please consider the children first, do what you
4 can for them. And I want to thank this body
5 for all the hard work you've done here. Thank
6 you.

7 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
8 Mr. Nardone.

9 Cathy Thompson.

10 MS. THOMPSON: Good evening. My
11 name is Cathy Thompson. I happen to be a
12 member of the Red Clay School Board, but I'm
13 here as an individual; I am not speaking on
14 behalf of the Board.

15 I have, and I have expressed it
16 during the school board meetings at times, but
17 I am troubled by a couple of fundamental things
18 about the commission. I am troubled that the
19 legislation and that the commission as
20 originally set up took away rights of the
21 voters. So as you know, and we had gotten an
22 opinion indicating that there was an
23 unconstitutionality or question of the
24 unconstitutionality regarding the original



1 legislation, because as -- and I don't have it
2 in front of me because I didn't bring it with
3 me tonight. But as the law was crafted in
4 order to change the district boundaries, there
5 needed to be action, and it had to affect the
6 whole state, and there needed to be a
7 referendum in the districts that were affected
8 for the voters voting on the redistricting.
9 That has been taken away by this whole action,
10 and that troubles me tremendously. And I'll
11 speak more about that at our board meeting as
12 it comes up.

13 I am also very concerned about
14 the amount and the time and materials. This is
15 a very, very important subject, and there are
16 lengthy materials that are published over time.
17 I know the most recent interim report is over
18 150 pages, and additional comments keep coming
19 out. And it's very difficult as a working
20 person to stay on top of all that material, to
21 be able to really digest it and understand it
22 and make some kind of reasoned comment about
23 it. So the timing, the fast and furious work
24 of the timing of all the materials concerns me.



1 I also think the time here is
2 very compressed, and it has been. This whole
3 thing has been happening in less than a year's
4 time. And I think the compression also really
5 gets in the way of people understanding and
6 having a real voice in what is actually going
7 on. So the timing and the compression bothers
8 me.

9 I also, as I've expressed, am
10 very concerned, because I do think Red Clay in
11 particular is going to be unfairly and
12 disproportionately impacted financially. And
13 I'm very concerned about that as a Red Clay
14 school board member. As you know, 40 percent
15 of the funds end up being local money, and
16 whatever the district is, we're going to have
17 to get those funds and pay those funds. I've
18 spoken about that before.

19 I don't think there's any
20 fundamental basis for doing it, and I'm very
21 concerned about the resolution that's being
22 passed, because I've seen a draft, it keeps
23 changing, and the one thing it doesn't do is
24 allow Red Clay to have a voice. If the



1 funding, the necessary funding is not adequate,
2 it says the commission will determine it in
3 conjunction with the affected districts. Red
4 Clay needs a very distinct voice because Red
5 Clay alone is uniquely impacted by this. Thank
6 you very much.

7 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
8 Ms. Thompson.

9 Jacqueline Jenkins.

10 DR. JENKINS: Good evening. My
11 name is Dr. Jacqueline Jenkins, and I am here
12 representing the Wilmington Education Strategy
13 Think Tank, known as WESTT.

14 Dear Dr. Allen and Wilmington
15 Education Improvement Commissioners: We the
16 members of the Wilmington Education Strategy
17 Think Tank, WESTT, appreciate the depth of the
18 work that has been put into the commission's
19 interim plan entitled Redistricting in the City
20 of Wilmington and New Castle County, a
21 transition resource and implementation plan.

22 As you know, our group of
23 concerned citizens has been working since 2013
24 to develop, prioritize, and advance specific



1 goals for the benefit of Wilmington students,
2 including, one, the reduction of districts that
3 serve the city; two, the development of an
4 equitable weighted funding formula addressing
5 student need; and three, the establishment of
6 an authoritative role for Wilmington and the
7 continuous improvement of the education of its
8 residents.

9 We are pleased to see these
10 priorities reflected in the WEIC
11 recommendations earlier this year, and in
12 endorsing the action agenda, we committed to
13 supporting viable action steps and
14 resource-oriented proposals. The ideas
15 presented here and our ongoing work are
16 evidence of that commitment.

17 WESTT supports the commission's
18 plan with conditions. We believe there are
19 several key principles that must be the
20 foundation of the ongoing work of the
21 commission, state, and the general assembly for
22 any plan to succeed. Our continued support
23 will be based on indication that these are
24 accepted and pursued.



1 Resources first. The
2 transformation of the structure of school
3 funding to be weighted toward student need is
4 critical, and achieving this must take
5 precedence in the governor's recommended budget
6 and in the decisions made during the 2016
7 legislative session.

8 Address concentrated poverty.
9 The continued proliferation and maintenance of
10 schools with higher concentrated poverty and
11 inequitable distribution of resources is
12 unacceptable.

13 Commitment to equity. Policies
14 to ensure equity must be central to any process
15 moving forward at any level, district to state.

16 No opting out. Colonial and
17 Brandywine School Districts' status quo
18 positions are unacceptable.

19 Getting the metro district right.
20 A consolidated metropolitan city/county school
21 district is highly desirable, but we feel
22 further deliberation is needed regarding its
23 ideal configuration to ensure the above
24 priorities of pursued.



1 We have included a table on page
2 3 to further explain these positions and have
3 attached reports on WESTT's position on school
4 funding reform. We take seriously our
5 responsibility to facilitate the best possible
6 opportunities for our youngest citizens to
7 succeed. We thank the members of the
8 commission for doing the same and seeing the
9 value in our expertise. We look forward to
10 continuing to work together toward these goals.
11 Sincerely, the Wilmington Education Strategy
12 Think Tank, Ray Avery-Jones, executive
13 director -- excuse me, Ray Jones-Avery,
14 executive director, Christiana Cultural Arts
15 Center; Nnamdi Chukwuola, Wilmington City
16 Council and the chair of the Education Youth
17 and Families Committee; Theopolis K.
18 Gregory, Sr., president, Wilmington City
19 Council; Shannon Griffin, community organizer,
20 ACLU of Delaware; Lynne Howard, consultant,
21 Christina Cultural Center; Jacqueline Jenkins,
22 chief strategy advisor, Office of the Mayor of
23 the City of Wilmington; Kathleen MacRae,
24 executive director, ACLU of Delaware; Brooke



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1 Moore, special projects, Office of the Mayor of
2 the City of Wilmington; Maurice Pritchett,
3 chief executive officer, Pritchett Associates;
4 and Jae P. Street, New Castle County
5 councilman. Thank you.

6 DR. PIKA: Do you have a document
7 you want to submit?

8 DR. JENKINS: We'll email it.

9 DR. PIKA: Thank you. Thank you,
10 Ms. Jenkins.

11 Henry Clampitt.

12 MR. CLAMPITT: Good evening. I'm
13 Henry Clampitt. I formerly served on the
14 Charter School of Wilmington's Board of
15 Directors. I no longer serve on that board,
16 and I'm speaking on my own behalf and generally
17 on behalf of the citizens of Delaware,

18 In October of this year, I
19 offered some WEIC-related suggestions to the
20 Red Clay board in public comment, and so
21 tonight I offer you a summary version updated
22 of those comments.

23 The first of my two main points
24 is to talk about WEIC and the voice of the



1 taxpayer. A key constituency which needs to be
2 considered and have more voices' support from
3 WEIC is the taxpayer. It might be up to the
4 WEIC to articulate the funding needed, but
5 please wait until the legislature responds with
6 a tax pardon or lack thereof. The public
7 deserves its long-standing level of control
8 over school taxes and control over district
9 boundaries. Unfortunately, the legislature
10 through SB 122 has already removed some of its
11 local control temporarily to allow the state
12 board to redraw district lines without the
13 inconvenience of a referendum. But it's the
14 WEIC itself and not legislature per se in the
15 current WEIC plan draft. It is the WEIC that
16 they're setting out to end the use of
17 referendums for approval of referendum taxes.

18 So I ask the WEIC to please
19 support the fundamental democratic principle
20 represented by tax referendums. Please revise
21 your report to support this principle. The
22 current local school boards were not elected to
23 have this taxing authority that you're
24 proposing.



1 My second point is around the
2 risks of an overreaching or ideologic WEIC
3 plan. The public should recognize the law
4 calls for the WEIC plan to be consistent with
5 some or all of the WEAC recommendations. Some
6 or all. It doesn't call for expanding the WEIC
7 plan far beyond the WEAC's recommendations. So
8 not only do I suggest that the WEIC plan get
9 back to the action lists recommended by the
10 WEAC, I further suggest that the WEIC plan
11 contain some but not all of those WEAC
12 recommendations. I suggest this revised focus
13 of the WEIC plan in order to ensure that the
14 plan actually passes through the state board,
15 the legislature, and the governor with approval
16 by all. Asking for everything under the sun
17 will risk failure. Alienating the applicant
18 for successful charter school programs will
19 risk failure. Neglecting to lay out a detailed
20 cost and funding plan will risk failure. The
21 WEIC plan should be weighted more to the
22 essential and less to the distant aspirational
23 or ideological in order to improve its chances
24 to provide the public support and for



1 legislative and executive practice. So please
2 pick and choose your message and your
3 priorities carefully. Respect all of our
4 public constituencies. Please vote with public
5 support. Shooting for one side of the moon for
6 a one-sided moon shot then cutting out on the
7 launch pad doesn't do anyone any good. Thank
8 you.

9 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
10 Mr. Clampitt.

11 Bill Doolittle.

12 MR. DOOLITTLE: My name is Bill
13 Doolittle; I'm a volunteer advocate for
14 children at risk, including children in
15 poverty, children with disabilities, and
16 English language learners.

17 WEIC's potential is the best
18 chance to allow children at risk to meet their
19 potential we've had in over 40 years. This
20 opportunity includes moving forward to focus
21 resources for these children at risk in
22 Wilmington using best practices to fully fund
23 and meet their needs.

24 But in practical terms, what does



1 fully funding best practices mean? For every
2 school, fully supported school-wide programs
3 for social, emotional, and trauma supports.
4 Extended learning opportunities including
5 before and after school, weekends, summertime
6 opportunities, not just for academic
7 curriculum, but to develop the broader skills
8 and strengths that our children need to
9 succeed. Opportunities for individualized
10 learning, including smaller student-teacher
11 ratios and direct support when needed. A
12 robust family outreach and negatement system
13 allows every family to benefit of being part of
14 the school community. And strong extensive
15 development support for our educators, not just
16 for academic, but be prepared to meet
17 children's broader needs in a culturally
18 concrete way.

19 If implemented with fidelity, our
20 schools with high percentages of children at
21 risk would receive 12 to 20 additional teachers
22 and counselors to make sure our children are
23 fully supported throughout the day and ready to
24 learn when they walk in the classroom.



1 While the WEIC plan calls for
2 adequate funding to accomplish this, the WEIC
3 funds committee plan provided less than half of
4 what is required to meet these needs. Worse
5 yet, the insistence that initial funding must
6 be district-wide for Christina and Red Clay
7 rather than focusing on children living in the
8 highest levels of concentration of poverty in
9 Wilmington is a problem. While there are
10 certainly pockets of poverty in the suburbs, it
11 is important to understand that to put these
12 two districts' funding ahead of other
13 Wilmington schools in poverty including those
14 in Brandywine and Colonial and those in
15 Wilmington's charter schools serving high
16 concentrations of poverty as well as ahead of
17 other students in high concentrations of
18 poverty elsewhere in the state is a problem.

19 There's no fully equitable way to
20 pay for these supports. The most critical
21 issue is fully funding the state's two largest
22 districts before funding any other high-needs
23 districts and schools will likely deal what
24 would have been a challenging initiative to get



1 funded by a legislative to one that has almost
2 no chance of being funded as described in the
3 plan.

4 We need a plan which fully meets
5 our high-risk children's needs and is
6 structured so that politically it has some
7 chance to being passed and funded. Thank you.

8 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
9 Mr. Doolittle.

10 Lee Davis.

11 MS. DAVIS: Good evening. My
12 name is Lee Davis. I am a retired Red Clay
13 teacher, retired Red Clay board member, and I
14 am representing myself.

15 A single feat of daring can alter
16 the whole concept of what is possible. The
17 collective people throughout the State of
18 Delaware must finally put words into action.
19 Are we a state where education is a priority?
20 I support the commission in their efforts. It
21 takes courage to decide that what we need, that
22 we need this change more than we are afraid of
23 it. Do concerns lurk in the back of my mind?
24 Yes. About how this will help students,



1 capacity, trust, timelines, and the list of
2 specific priorities.

3 However, I believe that we need
4 to act boldly, for we cannot stay where we are.
5 As Mr. Hanby said at last night's meeting, we
6 can no longer wait. Personally, I am weary of
7 fighting the old. Let's build something
8 better. Please understand that redistricting
9 with sustainable funding is only a first step.
10 The new resolution appears to put in checks and
11 balance, a system of checks and balances. Even
12 now, foundational bricks are being laid. Yes,
13 we need funding. Talk to your legislators and
14 say, I value education, find a way to fund our
15 schools. Yes, we need honest and true
16 collaboration among our districts and between
17 charters in our districts. Conversations are
18 beginning to happen. Action needs to follow.
19 Yes, we need the business community to partner
20 with us to build a strong, educationally and
21 economically viable Delaware. Money helps, but
22 we need them to truly engage. Let our voices
23 ring loud. The status quo in Delaware is not
24 acceptable. Remember, a single feat of daring



1 can alter the whole concept of possible. Thank
2 you.

3 DR. PIKA: Thank you, Ms. Davis.
4 Do we have another speaker sheet?

5 Cory Nourie. How far off was I?

6 MS. NOURIE: Hello, everyone.
7 I'm Cory Nourie, I am the parent of two
8 children at Highlands, and I am a city
9 resident. I'm going to speak really fast for
10 my three minutes.

11 As I listen to more and more
12 discussion about the issues with the city kids,
13 I am more and more resolute in my belief that
14 we desperately need to assist these children.
15 While these children face the mind-blowing
16 challenge of poverty and all that entails,
17 they're also facing bigotry, racism,
18 discrimination and being told they're not
19 deserving, less than others, and not worth
20 fighting for, and it sickens me.

21 To those who could not understand
22 the cycle of poverty and what the children are
23 dealing with every day, let me help enlighten
24 you. Research clearly demonstrates the trauma



1 of being raised in poverty without access to
2 basic needs and resources, trauma to one's
3 psyche, trauma to one's physical being, trauma
4 to one's ability to focus, trauma to one's
5 ability to regulate emotions, and trauma to
6 one's ability to learn. I don't know how
7 anyone can be a star pupil when his stomach is
8 growling as he hasn't had food in the last 16
9 hours. I don't know how anyone can stay awake
10 and be attentive in a classroom when the night
11 before she was kept awake by gunfire outside
12 and the sirens and lights and first responders
13 on the scene. I don't know anyone can prepare
14 for standardized testing when he's sharing one
15 room with five other people and there's no
16 electricity again. His clothes haven't been
17 washed in a week. This is the reality the kids
18 are facing.

19 In schools, someone makes fun of
20 him for having knock-off Jordans. His mom had
21 to work five hours for the knock-off pair at
22 her minimum wage job. The real ones would have
23 cost her 17 hours of work to pay for them.
24 They show up to school every day and do the



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1 best they can. They're greeted by teachers who
2 encourage them, support them, respect them, and
3 guide them, usually at the teachers' financial
4 expense. The teachers are there to educate
5 these children, but so much of their time is
6 spent loving, nurturing, and protecting them
7 from what they experience every day and they're
8 being sheltered in the school building.

9 To say that the schools don't
10 need resources for mental health support is
11 negligent and deliberately ignorant to what
12 these students need most. They need trauma and
13 support professionals who can help these kids
14 with strategies to grow and offer them guidance
15 through this social and emotional burden.

16 These children are in school for
17 one half their waking hours, assuming they have
18 a place to physically sleep where they can
19 close their eyes. They need every possible
20 resource and support to circumvent their lives.
21 School is the refuse they have, the chance to
22 get a little more ahead, the chance to work
23 with all kinds of people and learn about
24 opportunities. Just because people choose to



1 not learn about reality or have the experiences
2 themselves doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

3 How lucky some people are to have
4 never worried about where their next meal was
5 going to come from or if all their children
6 would come home. The weighted funding for
7 students living in poverty is not -- this is
8 not going to be a quick fix, but it's fixable
9 within a generation. If we focus energy and
10 resources on the students who then need them,
11 all kids will be better served and have better
12 outcomes. Poverty is a real and a vicious
13 cycle. We donate money to research to cure all
14 kinds of medical ills. There isn't a funding
15 source to cure poverty. I've heard it time and
16 time again people who blame parents and even
17 worse of the children for their circumstances.
18 No child will suffer because of the weighted
19 funding for children living in poverty. It
20 will only enhance the children's education of
21 Delaware and more specifically Wilmington. The
22 teachers will be able to spend time teaching,
23 children will be able to spend time learning,
24 and the students who need it will have access



1 to the supports that they need to be prepared
2 for each day. It's a win for all of us.

3 DR. PIKA: Thank you, Ms. Nourie.
4 Jenn Roebush.

5 MS. ROEBUSH: I'm just a parent
6 here, been coming to some of the meetings; I
7 don't know all the details of the plan. I've
8 got a 9th grader at Charter School of
9 Wilmington and a 7th grader at Brandywine
10 Springs. They've grown up going to a school
11 that they can walk to, that's safe, been safe,
12 that's been quiet. But it hasn't been enough
13 for me knowing that they're not really getting
14 the experience of what it's really like as part
15 of the world. And I'd love for them to have
16 more diversity, to be more involved with what's
17 going on in the community. And I would like to
18 even give up some of their privileges that
19 they've had to know that other kids throughout
20 the state and the country and whatever are
21 getting the same upbringing.

22 I know we can't -- it's just such
23 a complex issue, but I'm worried that enough
24 people don't know the details of what the



1 commission has been doing. And I know you guys
2 have done a lot of putting things on Facebook
3 and whatever that you can get out, but there
4 are so many people that don't know what's going
5 on, they don't know what this plan is even
6 about.

7 And I'm worried that the
8 legislators aren't going to know what the
9 constituents want because the constituents
10 don't know what's the plan and what's going on.
11 I'm worried if the plan doesn't fail, what's
12 going to happen next? So I want to encourage
13 the commission to find a way to continue this
14 fight, because it's vital for everyone to have
15 more equality and more safety and more
16 privilege for all of our kids.

17 I just think we need to get more
18 people involved, and I don't know how to do
19 that. That our schools are asked to do, the
20 city schools are asked to do more and the
21 county, the suburbs, too, to do so much more
22 than just teach the kids. How can we have a
23 good education if we don't have a good
24 foundation reaching out with the community



1 resources and religious resources? And I don't
2 know if the commission, what all they've done;
3 like I said, I don't know all the details. But
4 I want to say keep fighting, keep working on
5 it, and keep reaching out. Thank you.

6 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
7 Ms. Roebush.

8 Andy Hegedus.

9 MR. HEGEDUS: Good evening. I've
10 been involved in the Wilmington schools and
11 education finance for over a decade, and I'm
12 here tonight because I think education finances
13 are the point of highest leverage.

14 First I want to say that I'm
15 fully supportive of the WEIC recommendations
16 and that we must take action. The WEIC report
17 lists necessary actions. In two areas I think
18 these necessary steps should be done, but they
19 are not sufficient for us to reach all of our
20 goals. I'll comment on both.

21 The first issue is the additional
22 funding for students in poverty, English
23 language learners, and special ed. We need the
24 necessary -- and I agree with the first step



1 step of weighted reallocation. However, more
2 funding is not enough without a reallocation of
3 funding that is in the system.

4 Without resources, teachers can't
5 be successful. Over time, senior teachers move
6 to easier to be successful in schools. If you
7 run the numbers on city schools and suburban
8 schools and you look at the average all-in
9 costs of the teachers in those schools, there's
10 about a \$50,000 difference in that. So if you
11 look at a medium-sized school with about 20
12 teachers, that would mean that about a million
13 dollars is allocated more to suburban schools
14 than to city schools.

15 Any arguments I've heard against
16 moving to a student-weighted funding are not
17 against reallocation. They're all issues of
18 transition and how we get there, that I'm sure
19 if we put our heads together, we can address.

20 The second issue is allowing
21 school boards to raise operating funds within a
22 small limit. This is also necessary because
23 increased costs for salaries and energy and
24 other issues can be accommodated. This power



1 should be a permanent power and not temporary,
2 as outlined in the report as it's currently
3 written.

4 The fundamental issue here,
5 though, is one of accountability, and misplaced
6 accountability. If you look at how voters
7 vote, right now they vote based on funding
8 rather than on school boards. If we change the
9 dynamics so that school boards can raise
10 operating funds themselves and include recall
11 powers for board members and shorter board
12 terms, then that will change the dynamics of
13 the system, and people will vote for
14 accountability and the governance and
15 leadership will be accountable for raising
16 funds and for changing the dynamics of the
17 system rather than have the burden be on the
18 teachers and the students when there's not
19 enough operating funds to run it. Thank you.

20 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
21 Mr. Hegedus.

22 Do we have any others? Nnamdi.
23 Since I murder your name every time I say it,
24 I'm going to let you say it. So if you'd say



1 it as you start speaking.

2 MR. CHUKWUOLA: Councilman Nnamdi
3 Chukwuola, and I'm presenting a letter on
4 behalf of the City of the Wilmington's
5 Education, Youth and Families Committee.

6 We the members of the City
7 Council of Wilmington Education, Youth and
8 Families Committee would like to thank the
9 members of the Wilmington Education Improvement
10 Commission for its efforts to improve the
11 quality of the education delivered to the
12 students of Wilmington. Our committee supports
13 WEIC in its mission and understands that
14 accomplishing its goals leads to improved
15 educational opportunities for our children,
16 schools, communities, and the city.

17 This body stands in agreement
18 with efforts to reduce the number of school
19 districts servicing the City of Wilmington. As
20 stated in our letter dated March the 19th,
21 2015, included in the original WEAC report, in
22 order to establish this two-district model, the
23 committee believes that it is imperative that
24 city-specific dialog and planning occur with



1 Red Clay and Brandywine School Districts.
2 Although redistricting efforts have moved
3 forward, to date, full district collaboration
4 has not occurred. Without full participation
5 from the partnering districts, the likelihood
6 for success is drastically diminished.

7 This committee believes that
8 moving forward -- this committee believes that
9 moving all of Wilmington children from
10 Christina and Colonial School Districts into
11 Red Clay District will not only increase their
12 burden but also intensify the number of high
13 poverty schools within the city. An
14 appropriate redistricting solution must be
15 equitable and fair to our children, families
16 schools, community, and city.

17 The members of the Education,
18 Youth and Families agree that our state should
19 move to a weighted student funding formula.
20 This change will help to ensure that our
21 students have the classroom and school-based
22 supports needed to promote their growth and
23 development. We hold the position that funding
24 needs to be the priority change that fuels



1 redistricting efforts, and not vice versa.

2 As our city continues to develop
3 its role ensuring that our children are
4 receiving fair and equitable educational
5 opportunities, the City of Wilmington Office of
6 Education and Public Policy and the Wilmington
7 Education Alliance are essential to this
8 committee and our city having an active and
9 contributing leadership role in advancing the
10 educational opportunities for our students.

11 Again, we are in support of WEIC
12 recommendation, but believe that more district
13 collaboration is needed in the redistricting
14 effort, that funding needs to take priority,
15 and that the office of Education and Public
16 Policy for our city must be established to
17 develop a plan for our city action and
18 leadership for our city's future.

19 Submitted by the members of the
20 Wilmington City Council Education, Youth and
21 Families Commission, Nnamdi Chukwuola, chair;
22 Hanifa Shabazz; , Sherry Dorsey-Walker;
23 Michael A. Brown, Sr.; Maria Cabrera; and
24 Ernest "Trippi" Congo. Thank you.



1 DR. PIKA: Thank you, Councilman
2 Chukwuola.

3 Helene Keeley.

4 REPRESENTATIVE KEELEY: Good
5 evening, everyone. My name is Helene Keeley,
6 and I'm a state representative in the third
7 district. And I've sat through several of
8 these hearings, and decided tonight was a night
9 that I wanted to make some public comments.

10 My legislation, it was my
11 legislation that actually allowed the committee
12 to go forward and come up with a plan. And I'm
13 very hopeful with the plan. I don't
14 necessarily think it's 100 percent perfect, but
15 I don't think anything is 100 percent perfect.
16 I think we need to be very cautious and make
17 sure that the funding is there, and that comes
18 down to our responsibility on the state level
19 to make sure that it is available.

20 I agree with Nnamdi and many
21 other speakers that spoke tonight about the
22 weighted funding formula. But most
23 importantly, I think we need to be very careful
24 about the timeframe of this. We cannot do this



1 all at once. We have to make sure that every
2 student, every school is prepared to transition
3 into whichever new district it might be. I'm
4 hopeful that Brandywine and Colonial and Red
5 Clay and Christina will work collectively
6 together.

7 And the most important reason
8 that I say that, collectively together, is I
9 started out my morning today at 8:00 a.m. at
10 the Hope Commission. And they did show that
11 there was some hope. And the woman who
12 eloquently spoke a few minutes ago about PTSD
13 and the trauma, I think it was one of the
14 teachers that spoke about how she has to deal
15 with it every single day with her students in
16 the classroom.

17 We understand that if we do not
18 solve this issue this time around, because
19 obviously desegregation didn't work,
20 neighborhood schools has not worked. In my
21 personal belief, this is the last chance we
22 have. Otherwise, we're going to have to have
23 20,000, million, Hope Commissions out there. A
24 young gentleman spoke from his heart this



1 morning and said for the first time in his
2 life, he had a father figure. He had the
3 opportunity to have someone encourage him on a
4 daily basis. Unfortunately, this is the
5 reality of city students, like it or not.

6 Born and raised here in the city,
7 I'm the last of my siblings that still lives
8 here; the others live in the suburbs. Their
9 kids are very lucky to go to the schools that
10 they have gone to and are currently in. I
11 can't say that for my constituents. However,
12 we can try and make sure that we give them the
13 opportunity that every other student has in
14 really good schools. Otherwise, we'll be
15 paying on the back end with incarceration.
16 Thank you.

17 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
18 Representative Keeley.

19 Equetta Jones.

20 MS. JONES: So I wasn't going to
21 say anything, but I made a vow to my students.
22 My name is Equetta Jones. I am a parent of
23 children who live in the city. I was born and
24 raised in the city. I am a product of city



1 schools. I also teach in a city school, and I
2 pay taxes and I live in the City of Wilmington.

3 My children attended Warner
4 Elementary School. My oldest is thriving, full
5 scholarship at Wilmington University, which he
6 was offered multiple, multiple opportunities at
7 other places. My middle child is at McKean, he
8 lives in the city, he's transported there, he's
9 doing well, and my baby is at A.I. high.

10 The reason I'm standing here is
11 because at my dinner table, my children all so
12 often ask me why people don't see them for who
13 they are, which also offered prompted a
14 conversation in my classroom. I'm very
15 transparent. So we talk about current events.
16 And my students want to know why people don't
17 see them. They want to know why they are in
18 the newspaper but no one takes the time to come
19 into their classroom. Because if you come into
20 Wilmington University and Delaware State
21 University, which are the names of our
22 classrooms, they know their dad, they can
23 articulate their dad. They understand what the
24 SRI is, they understand is the SMI is, they



1 understand what our Scotch words is, baseline
2 data, unit one data and unit two data as well
3 as their math expressions data. Quite frankly,
4 they can articulate better than some of my
5 other counterparts in other schools.

6 But their question is is why
7 doesn't anyone take the time to come and see
8 what we're learning? Why do they think that
9 our teachers can't teach us? Right now for our
10 school, they love it. We reconfigured, we have
11 a 3, 4, 5, and Warner, K through 2 down the
12 street. Our students love it. It's a
13 different mind-set. But when they come here
14 and say, Ms. Jones, if I live here, will I have
15 to go to another school? Because they know. I
16 shouldn't have to be the one to answer that
17 question.

18 So those of us, we have
19 legislators, our district is very
20 well-represented. They embrace our children.
21 But when they ask me and they're actually
22 taking the time to run for offices in the city
23 government as a mock in our building, they have
24 a right to know. They have a right to be



1 heard, and I made a commitment to do that for
2 them. That's it.

3 DR. PIKA: Thank you, Ms. Jones.

4 Any other sign-ups? Is there
5 anyone else here at this moment who would like
6 to speak? This is your opportunity.

7 I'm not trying to rush you, but
8 giving you the chance to think it through. If
9 not, we have had this situation -- there's
10 someone. See, sometimes if you just wait long
11 enough.

12 Reid Millius is our next speaker.

13 MR. MILLIUS: Thank you. I
14 should have spoken at a different one where I
15 wasn't facing the crowd.

16 My name is Reid Millius, just
17 representing myself. And letting you know that
18 I reviewed the Wilmington Education Improvement
19 Commission's interim redistricting plan titled
20 Redistricting in the City of Wilmington in New
21 Castle County, a Transition Resource and
22 Implementation Plan. And I would like to thank
23 the commission for inviting formal public
24 comments beginning on November 17th and



1 continuing through January 14th.

2 Specifically my comments are
3 based on the December 7th version of the
4 interim plan. As a parent and guardian of
5 three children impacted by this plan, and an
6 advocate for all children, I have the following
7 observations.

8 First, I want to express my
9 agreement with the commission's recommendation
10 that developing a public education system with
11 a coherent and responsive government
12 arrangement will positively impact the success
13 of all children.

14 My second observation is that the
15 plan is a very complex and multi-faceted
16 document. I am concerned that the families
17 that are being impacted most by the plan may
18 not have the ability or the opportunity to
19 fully understand the impact of that the plan
20 may have on their family. The commission
21 should consider including -- I'm sorry. The
22 commission should consider its approach to
23 informing those targeted the most by the plan
24 and its changes.



1 My third observation is that the
2 plan provides very little, if any, information
3 on the cost of implementing the plan. The
4 commission should consider including a
5 description of the cost of redistricting as
6 well as the possible savings, i.e., busing and
7 overhead and administration. The plan
8 describes two fiscal commitments from the local
9 opportunity, including poverty reassessment and
10 a tax rate adjustment. However, it does not
11 describe how the community will be informed and
12 encouraged to support and authorize the
13 increases.

14 The commission also needs to
15 ensure that the message is consistent across
16 all documents. For example, in the document
17 provided to us tonight, it states -- this is
18 the Red Clay specific questions, sorry.

19 Q and A for the Red Clay School
20 District. It states no Delaware taxpayers
21 should experience undue tax burden because of
22 redistricting. However, on Page 5 of the plan,
23 it states 2018 and 2019 fiscal year to impact
24 the districts to tax rate increases. My final



1 observation is the plan neglected to describe
2 an impact on all of the students. It failed to
3 describe the impact of redistricting on
4 students, including those remaining in the
5 Christina School District. I would be
6 interested in learning more about how the
7 commission intends to continue to support
8 Christina in serving a large population of low
9 income children who need just as much support
10 even if they're not living in the Wilmington
11 districts. They face a lot of the same
12 challenges, in the Newark area that is part of
13 the redistricting for Christina, there are
14 several low income subsidized communities that
15 we into need to remember to support ongoing. I
16 think that's it. Thank you.

17 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
18 Ms. Millius.

19 Alethea Smith-Tucker.

20 MS. SMITH-TUCKER: Good evening,
21 everyone. My name is Alethea Smith-Tucker, and
22 I'm a concerned parent here in Wilmington.

23 After reviewing the commission
24 report, there were some glaring information



1 that was missing. Specifically, how this
2 commission and the changes by redistricting
3 would directly impact the education of the
4 students. What the focus appears to be is the
5 tax assessment, and also just the redistricting
6 as a whole. Speaking primarily regarding
7 logistics as opposed to methods and ways of
8 improving education.

9 I'm concerned that there were no
10 alternatives offered to this plan, and I'm also
11 concerned that the primary focus is to have a
12 total property assessment for the entire stay
13 versus a direct concern with the education of
14 the children. That information was excluded.
15 We do not know how Red Clay would choose to
16 help the low-income population in any direct
17 way, given the fact that Red Clay also has
18 priority schools in their district. So they do
19 not show a superior standing versus Christina.
20 So it troubles me that the information doesn't
21 include how Red Clay would approach improving
22 children's education directly.

23 Additionally, one thing Dr. Allen
24 had mentioned a while ago at one of our



1 meetings was that Red Clay was chosen because
2 it was amenable to charter schools. My primary
3 concern is the prioritization of education.
4 Because of that, I don't think that should be a
5 reason or a cause to sure up public education
6 if that is the primary premise.

7 So those are my comments. I
8 would like to see more board members at it,
9 more representation of parents. There was a
10 commission of several committees, and the only
11 information that was put out specifically was
12 from the finance committee, not the parent
13 engagement committee, not the improvement
14 committee. None of that information was put
15 forth, so I feel at this time that there was
16 necessary due diligence prepared in order to
17 favorably move forward with this redistricting.
18 Thank you.

19 DR. PIKA: Thank you,
20 Ms. Smith-Tucker. Any other comments at this
21 time? Anyone else?

22 We are required to continue this
23 meeting until 8:00 p.m., but what we have done
24 in several of the other public hearings when we



1 have reached this stage, a saturation point
2 where anyone who has wanted to speak has had
3 that opportunity, is that we have temporarily
4 suspended the meeting and then reconvened to
5 see if someone may have changed their mind in
6 that intervening time, or if anyone new may
7 have come into the meeting.

8 So what I will do at this time is
9 to suspend this public hearing for about 15
10 minutes, there about. You are able to mingle,
11 talk, interact, use the restroom, and we will
12 reconvene just prior to 8:00 to see if there
13 are any other comments to be made. Thank you
14 very much for coming this evening.

15 (A brief recess was taken.)

16 DR. PIKA: I'd like to call the
17 hearing back into session, please. And I'd
18 like to once again call on anyone who has not
19 yet spoken this evening. Is there anyone else
20 who would like to make a public comment for the
21 record this evening? Anyone who has not yet
22 spoken?

23 I did want to remind everyone
24 there is one more public hearing, which will be



1 on Monday, December the 14th in the City
2 Council chambers. Effectively, it is a
3 city-wide public hearing, whereas all of the
4 other public hearings have been co-sponsored by
5 districts, and kind of targeted on specific
6 school districts. At that time, as well, there
7 will be an opportunity for a
8 question-and-answer session before the public
9 hearing begins. And I believe the timing is
10 that the question-and-answer session will start
11 at 6:30 in the city council chambers. That
12 will run for approximately an hour, there will
13 be an opportunity there, and the public hearing
14 then will begin at 7:30 and run until 9:00 p.m.
15 8:30? I guess it's advertised until 8:30.

16 One last call. Is there anyone
17 else in the room who would like to make a
18 statement this evening on the record? No other
19 sign-ups?

20 So this hearing is now closed. I
21 want to thank all of you for coming this
22 evening and participating. All comments made
23 today or submitted between November the 17th
24 and tonight will be considered as a part of a



1 final report submitted by the commission to the
2 State Board of Education on December the 15th.
3 All comments made today or submitted between
4 November the 17th and January the 14th will be
5 available to the State Board of Education to
6 consider. That means that comments made at the
7 public hearing next Monday night will be made
8 available for the State Board of Education's
9 consideration.

10 Thank you all very much for your
11 participation this evening.

12 (Hearing adjourned at 8:00 p.m.)
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1 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER
2

3 I, Jennifer M. Guy, RPR, do hereby certify
4 that the foregoing record, pages 1 to 49
5 inclusive, is a true and accurate transcript of
6 my stenographic notes taken on December 8,
7 2015, in the above-captioned matter.

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10 Jennifer M. Guy, RPR
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