

Wilmington Education Advisory Group

Monday, March 2, 2015

Achievement Center

Wilmington, Delaware

- Present:** N. Ivonne Antongiorgi; Tizzy Lockman; Henry Harper, Ph.D.; Adriana Bohm, Ph.D.; Shefon Taylor; Nikki Castle, Ph.D.; Councilman Nnamdi Chukwuocha; Karen Eller
- Excused:** Tony Allen, Ph.D.; Richard Smith; Marco Ramos; Meredith Griffin; Rosemary Banks; Susan Hessling; Cheryl Trawick; Sheila Wyatt; Melissa Browne; Meghan Wallace; Chandra Pitts; Mayor James Baker
- Guests:** Dan Rich, Ph.D., University of Delaware; Elizabeth Burland, University of Delaware; Neil Kirschling, University of Delaware; Syrita McDaniel, Wilmington University; Alfred Lance, Community resident; Aaron Selekman, Educator; Ron Russo, Caesar Rodney Institute; Clint Laird, Caesar Rodney Institute; Mike Wilson, PREP; Sam Gwines, Wilmington University; Arthur Kirksey; Rob Martinelli; Delaware Today; Kia Ervin, Communities in Schools; Melissa Froemming; Kim Graham, Christina Cultural Arts Center

Welcome

Tizzy Lockman, who served as chair in Tony Allen's absence, convened the meeting at 6:05 p.m. Eastern. She thanked all guests for attending and led the group in a round of introductions before introducing Charles Madden, Executive Director of the Achievement Center.

Introduction to the Achievement Center

Charles Madden welcomed the group, thanked them for their work on the committee, and offered a brief introduction to the Achievement Center, an initiative of the Wilmington Hope Commission. He informed the group that the Achievement Center helps formerly incarcerated individuals successfully re-enter the community by providing centralized services such as assessments, job training, educational and peer support, behavioral health services, and family reunification programs. The Achievement Center's integrated, full-service approach makes it a unique re-entry program to Delaware.

Report Update

Dr. Dan Rich led the committee through a review of the interim report which had been marked up to reflect areas that need to be revised, clarified, and added for the final report based on the feedback that the Committee has received from its stakeholder meetings. In doing so, he also provided an overview of the interim recommendations for guests to the meeting. He informed the committee members that they would be receiving this annotated report and given the opportunity to provide feedback and roster additional changes for the final report. Some of the intended changes include:

- Providing a profile of the Wilmington Community
- Elaborating on each governance change with implementation timelines
- Developing a framework that could guide the funding issues involved with district consolidation and rearrangement
- Clarifying that the intent of the committee is not to propose a moratorium on charters, but rather to call for a strategic plan for their development
- Proposing a structure for the charter consortium

- Providing more detail on the content of a strategic plan for charter schools
- Elaborating on funding for early childhood education
- Increasing the narrative around vo-tech schools
- Expanding information on the implementation commission

Elizabeth Burland, a Graduate Research Assistant at the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration, offered the committee a glimpse some of the data analysis that will be incorporated into the final report. She shared some of the data that will be used to create a snapshot of students that live in the city of Wilmington. This snapshot will include an analysis of DCAS-Math and DCAS-Reading scores, grades 3, 5, 8, and 10; race, low income, ELL, and students with disabilities information; and graduation and dropout rates. All data will be from 2014. Elizabeth Burland also provided insight into another new section of the report: district profiles. She gave a snapshot of the analysis being done on the enrollment impacts on the districts before and after the proposed redistricting. Each district will be analyzed across several indicators including some of the aforementioned data points.

Themes from Online Engagement

Shefon Taylor briefed the committee on the major themes that have emerged from the Facebook group "Solutions for Wilmington Schools", which now has over 1,300 members. Some of the themes included:

- There is a lack of clarity surrounding the governance redistricting recommendations. The committee could do a better job of articulating the recommendation as well as the potential impact on students, teachers, and the community.
- There were significant conversation by community members about parent involvement/engagement and the role that it plays in reforming a school system. Some of the commentary included beliefs that if parents are not involved nothing can be done. Others believed that a comprehensive system of engagement should be embedded within all schools in order to change outcomes.
- Overall, there was strong agreement in the section for "Meeting Wilmington Student Needs".
- Overall, people responded positively to the recommendations in "Funding Student Success".
- It is requested that stronger language is embedded in the report regarding early childhood education and the state's investment in it.
- Segregation concerns also came through as an ongoing thread (both racial segregation, as well as amongst class and school systems (charter, district, private)).

In addition to themes, Shefon Taylor posed additional questions that were raised by members of the Facebook group. Some of these questions include:

- How are we as a committee defining/measuring achievement or determining success?
- What type of support will be provided for parents/families?
- What is the parent's role in educating/supporting children?
- Would redistricting be a disruption to the community?
- What is the plan for training teachers in the various needs of children living in poverty?
- Should we be focused on more money or focused on how money is being allocated and used in schools?
- How do we ensure that the money gets down to the student/teacher level?

Update on Imagine Delaware

Karen Eller provided the following update on the Imagine Delaware event to be held on March 9, 2015:

- A list of fifty exhibitors is nearly finalized for the Education Expo for Wilmington parents and students from 4-6pm.

- Attendees are encouraged to bring their cell phone to the panel discussion from 6:30 to 8:30pm to participate in polls.
- The list of volunteers is being finalized but anyone interested should contact Karen immediately at Karen.ELLER@christina.k12.de.us.
- There is a link to preregister on the Solutions for Wilmington Schools Facebook page or The News Journal website

There was a discussion of whether or not attendees need to pre-register and if they need to present identification to attend. Some indicated that advertisements for the event did not present this information consistently.

Update on the City of Wilmington's proposed Office of Education and Public Policy

Councilman Nnamdi Chukwuocha shared the following:

- The Office of Education and Public Policy will help the city to develop its agenda to advocate on behalf of its students, schools, parents, and communities.
- The City Council President and City Mayor have both agreed to the office in concept.
- Currently, there is research being conducted into other cities with comparable offices to determine the best path for implementation.
- The goal is to approve a plan for the Office in the next few weeks to send to the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee to be considered for inclusion in its final report.
- Dr. Tony Allen and Dr. Dan Rich will be presenting the WEAC recommendations to the Wilmington City Council on Wednesday, March 11 from 6 to 8pm in the City Council Chamber. All are welcome to attend as the Council hopes to use this event to generate community feedback.

Community Meetings

Karen Eller shared a list of the meetings that have been conducted by Dr. Tony Allen and Dr. Rich on behalf of the committee to reach out to stakeholders from early education, higher education, the nonprofit sector, school administrations and school boards, parents, educators, religious organizations, charter and traditional schools, city and state government, the media, etc.

Process Update

Dr. Rich and Tizzy Lockman reiterated the committee's commitment to holding an open public feedback period until March 17th. The committee will publish its final report by the end of the March with changes that are responsive to and reflective of the public's feedback. The committee intends for its final report to be a platform for launching ongoing public conversation

Public Comment

Ron Russo commented that there is a model in Delaware for the Charter Consortium: The Delaware Association for Independent Schools, an organization that represents non-public schools. The group meets to discuss, among other things, shared services like group purchasing. He noted that Catholic school principals meet separately in addition to the larger Association meetings in order to discuss issues relevant to their schools. If the real purpose of charter schools is to improve all public schools, then there should be a consortium for all schools to collaborate in addition to having each different type of school meet separately.

Rob Martinelli sought clarity on the three to five year timeline that the committee has discussed for implementing the governance recommendations.

- Dr. Rich responded that it will take time to address and plan for the fiscal, operational, and other considerations that would result from implementing these recommendations but any longer than five years may prolong uncertainty for districts. The committee's recommendations will set the stage for short-term decisions that will move us down a path towards implementation.

Rob Martinelli also urged the committee to consider including specific goals with ways to monitor them in its final report, which Nikki Castle agreed with.

- The group discussed briefly other cities such as Boston, Denver, and New Orleans (post-Hurricane Katrina) which may offer insight for the final report.

Clint Laird asked about how the committee intends to recommend increased family and parent engagement.

- Dr. Rich and Tizzy Lockman responded that family and parent engagement will be one of the purviews of the Wilmington Office of Education and Public Policy. The committee recognized that there is no panacea but think the mobilization should come from the city and will make recommendations to unite the institutions that could make parents more supportive.

Mike Wilson commented that the data snapshot of Wilmington as a community should recognize that there are distinct sub-communities with very different makeups within the larger Wilmington community. He also urged the committee to consider suggesting diagnosing students' needs before age four.

Mike Wilson also recalled a conversation with an administrator from a previous WEAC meeting about student growth. The committee discussed the importance of looking at growth as a metric for student success, which is not always captured in state test scores.

A guest of the committee encouraged a shift in language. Rather than seeking solutions for Wilmington schools, which implies the "buildings", the committee should seek solutions for Wilmington *students*.

Aaron Selekman questioned the rationale behind reassessment. He raised the possibility of reassessment not increasing revenue, just redistributing the tax burden. The cost of reassessing property may not be worthwhile. Instead of reassessment, he pointed to opportunities to increase revenue by bringing investment into the city. There has been lots of work out of mayor's office and planning department along these lines. He indicated a desire to see the report and committee reference and support some of these efforts in the city to revitalize investment in the community.

Adjournment

Tizzy Lockman thanked all guests of the committee for their comments. She indicated that the committee will take these into consideration and will decide what falls within the reasonable scope of the WEAC mandate. She expressed the group's intention to make recommendations to improve the use of the machinery and systems already in place. Ultimately, one of the main goals of WEAC will be to make the systems work better to benefit students.

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm.