

Wilmington Education Advisory Committee

Monday, March 16, 2015

Cathedral Choir School

Wilmington, Delaware

- Present:** Tony Allen, Ph.D.; Meredith Griffin; Melissa Browne; Meghan Wallace; N. Ivonne Antongiorgi; Tizzy Lockman; Henry Harper, Ph.D.; Adriana Bohm, Ph.D.; Shefon Taylor; Nikki Castle, Ph.D.; Karen Eller
- Excused:** Richard Smith; Marco Ramos; Rosemary Banks; Susan Hessling; Cheryl Trawick; Sheila Wyatt; Chandra Pitts; Mayor James Baker; Councilman Nnamdi Chukwuocha
- Guests:** Dan Rich, Ph.D., University of Delaware; Elizabeth Burland, University of Delaware; Neil Kirschling, Rodel Foundation; Debbie Wilson, Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League; Syvonya O. Brown, MWUL; Mike Wilson, PREP; Matthew Meyer; Kyara Panola, Community advocate and Red Clay parent; Alfred Lance, Red Clay resident; Aaron Selekmán, Red Clay educator; Tom Driscoll, Esq., Bifferato LCC; Connor Bifferato, Esq., Bifferato LLC; Arreon Harley, Cathedral Choir School of Delaware; Arthur Kirksey, parent

Tony Allen called the meeting to order at 6:02 P.M. Eastern.

The Cathedral Choir School of Delaware

Arreon Harley, Director of Music and Operations, conducted the intergenerational Cathedral Choir as they sang a welcome song for the committee. He then informed the committee that the Cathedral Choir School of Delaware, a 501(c)3 organization, is a unique after-school program that combines professional choral training, piano and voice lessons, leadership development, academic tutoring, and one-to-one mentoring. The program, which is open to students ages 7-17, has no prerequisites to admission, no fee to joining, and has never turned away a student due to lack of transportation. Due to its holistic nature, the program sees its students grow musically, socially, and academically. It boasts a 100% high school graduation rate. The Cathedral Choir School also partners with Brandywine and Red Clay school districts for a music in schools program and hosts a popular five-week summer camp option.

Updates from Dr. Tony Allen, Committee Chair

Dr. Allen informed the committee that he and Dr. Rich recently met with Wilmington City Council's Education, Youth, and Families Committee. They will continue to meet with stakeholders around the community and have upcoming meetings with the State Board of Education, Communities in Schools, Red Clay School Board, and parents from both Kuumba Academy and La Academia.

Open Discussion Regarding Imagine Delaware

Dr. Allen prompted an open discussion regarding key impressions from the Imagine Delaware event held on Monday, March 9, 2016. Comments and impressions included the following:

- It was encouraging to see all four districts and some charters present and talking at the expo since the typical environment is usually competitive rather than collaborative.
- As tense as the conversation can be at times, it was great to see the community come together and addressing these issues to provoke thought and talk. Conflict can be healthy as a way of to

getting people with different perspectives to find common goals. The conversation is not black and white, although the narrative often focuses on being pro or anti charter, testing, etc.

- While the support for redistricting and funding recommendations was overwhelming, some cautioned against accepting the results at face value since the question wording was a bit binding.
- This was a great example of engagement from community but we will need to keep pushing in order to move the agenda along. This is not a new conversation so the energy from the community needs to drive political will.
- Education doesn't happen in a silo. The more we can all work together the better. The committee needs to be clearer about how its recommendations support this notion.
- Regarding funding, there is a continued call for transparency and the desire to look at what models work nationally.
- The committee needs to continue to work to articulate how student achievement is tied to redistricting. The goal is to allow teachers and principals to do better serve students by clearing up some of the systemic problems that intervene. The committee agrees that redistricting isn't a panacea. There have to be next steps that follow which are driven by the Wilmington Education Improvement Consortium.

Imagine Delaware Survey Summary

Paper surveys were distributed on all of the tables at the Imagine Delaware forum. Karen Eller shared themes from the responses include:

- Lots of support for redistricting and reducing number of districts in the city but there are questions and concerns about what the next steps would entail
- Parent engagement: How do we give parents the needed tools to support families?
- Supporting early childhood and the recognition that this is a critical time.
- Looking to HeadStart as a family engagement model
- Helping parents feel welcome and needed in the school
- More utilization of and collaboration with libraries in schools
- General concerns over the "how" tied to the recommendations
- Support for the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission to aid implementation

Final Report updates

Dr. Rich briefed the committee on the Institute for Public Administration's process for finishing the report. The target completion date of the final report is March 26th. The committee members will be receiving sections of the report to review as they are drafted. IPA intends to follow up in early April with another version of the same report that utilizes more visuals and may include quotations from historical Wilmington education figures. The report will follow basically the same structure with a few additions and revisions that include:

- Letter to community from Dr. Allen
- Profile of Wilmington community and Wilmington education
- Profile of what will districts look like after redistricting
- Parent engagement section
- Refined guiding principles
- More details on the Office of Education and Public Policy
- Recognition of the dimensions (regarding funding, redistricting, etc.) that have to be systematically addressed by the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission

The group then discussed potential areas of addition and revision that included the following:

- Proposing a timeline for implementation or designating an organization to propose a timeline
- Identify ways in which the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission can play a role in helping educators to come together to discuss classroom practices
- Discussing cultural competency in terms of why it is important for students and what role professional development could play in developing it. Both the 2001 and 2008 reports discussed cultural competency and the committee discussed finding a way to talk about its importance without being prescriptive.
- Indicating how Wilmington Education Improvement Commission members will be chosen
- Determining a way to identify the needs and experiences of students. Without this information, it is difficult to find solutions.

Legal Counsel

Connor Bifferato, Esq. and Tom Driscoll, Esq. of Bifferato LLC shared with the committee that they have been analyzing the interim report for areas where there is potential for legal challenge. They intend to publish a memorandum for the committee that identifies potential legal questions that may arise, provides a brief legal history of redistricting in Delaware, and identifies the factors and tests that must be satisfied. Their analysis is not meant to determine the likelihood that a legal challenge would be issued or success but rather to provide the committee members with answers to the questions that they may be receiving.

Public Comment

Matthew Meyer shared the advice that, having experience in U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Civil Rights, it is important to do your due diligence but committee members should not shy away because the possibility of litigation will always exist.

Kyara Panola urged the committee to look at determining each student's identity as a scholar and individual. Parents, teachers, and committee members should advocate for finding and teaching to these children based on identify. For instance, the nonprofit Health Leads looks at other factors affecting students' abilities in school. In addition to focusing on the identity of each child as a scholar, it is important that there be a network of other organizations in the city to support the schools. There should be a culture of collaboration not competition. Lastly, Kyara advised the committee to work slow and steady, continue being patient, and build momentum rather than move too fast and alienate members of the community.

Arreon Harley agreed with the comment that school districts are not alone in the effort to support the city's children. He shared that his only criticism of the report is that it is narrowly focused on what is possible in just a charter or traditional school. There is only one sentence in this report about partnering with community groups. There needs to be more intentional partnerships between schools and community organizations.

Closing

Dr. Allen thanked everyone for attending and participating. He reminded the group that after the report is published, April, May, and June will be important months for community involvement. This will be the time to call for political action. The meeting adjourned at 7:50.