

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission – Meeting the Needs of Children in Poverty Committee**

United Way of Delaware Board Room

Minutes – October 26, 2015

**Michelle Taylor, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.**

Michelle announced that the other co-chairs were unable to make this meeting, but would be rejoining the committee at the next meeting.

The members of the committee and public were asked to introduce themselves.

The minutes from the September 28<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved.

Michelle Taylor reviewed the feedback that the co-chairs had received at the end of the first meeting. Overall, the committee liked the format and structure of the September 28<sup>th</sup> meeting. However, there was some confusion between which comments had been made by members of the committee and which comments members of the public had made. Michelle Taylor noted that the set-up of the room for this meeting was different to help distinguish between the two types of comments, and adequate time would be made at the end of the meeting to receive public comment. Feedback from the previous meeting also revealed that members of the committee were interested in more data related to poverty in Wilmington/Delaware and how the committee would determine whether or not their work had been successful.

Michelle Taylor remarked that she had spoken to Dr. Dan Rich about the importance of creating a definition of “low income” or “poverty” that could be used not only for this committee, but the entire Commission. There are many potential indicators of poverty so in order to ensure consistency across the Commission a definition should be developed. The Institute for Public Administration staff compiled information about poverty in Delaware and the difference between “low income” and “poverty” This information was distributed to the committee members.

Based on the homework assignment to re-read the overview of this committee individuals members discussed their “vision of success.” The following comments were made:

- A weighted funding formula is necessary
- Current lack of knowledge of services that are available is an issue. Success would mean that families fully understand the services available to them and are able to leverage them.
- More integration between out of school supports and in school supports, more of a comprehensive, integrated approach to the services available, and smoother pathways for community groups who want to provide services to students and their families.
- A statewide movement to address illiteracy, similar to the current movement in Pennsylvania.
- Taking a look at what education and social services are currently provided, then creating a plan to determine how they can collaborate and work towards the goal of improving the physical, social, emotional, cognitive life of the child.

- The community should be engaged. They must have a voice, but also share the responsibility of creating a healthy environment where children can come to school ready to learn.
- The plan developed by the committee must be able to be implemented.
- Focusing not only on programs and practices, but also focusing on the people who will be making it possible. Introducing cultural sensitivity and competency trainings so that they are prepared to work with students, regardless of their background and experiences.
- Achievement gaps consistently reduced each year.
- Increase the overall percentage of the population that earns livable wages and reduce the racial gap.
- Decrease in the percentage of Wilmington families in poverty through education and employment opportunities.
- Decrease in the number of minorities currently imprisoned.
- A study is being conducted to see what barriers currently exist for latina/o students. It includes surveys for teachers and focus groups for parents and students.
- In addition to a final goal, steps that measure success along the way should be developed. Examples include a comprehensive guide of available services, development of a template that could be given to providers to provide information about their organization.
- Cultural sensitivity training for teachers.
- It is important to identify what will make students want to go to school.
- Focus on parents, many of them feel as if the education system failed them. Putting a program together to get buy-in from the parents is important because without the support of the parents it will be very difficult to get buy-in from the students.
- Accountability will be important. Ensuring that someone is implementing the comprehensive plan formed by the committee.
- Creating “Communities of Learning” in neighborhoods throughout the city. Allow parents to develop their own plans or strategies for improving the educational opportunities for children in the community.

Kelly Sherretz and Elizabeth Burland from the Institute for Public Administration presented material on the current landscape of poverty in Delaware.

- A question was asked is children who are legal citizens, but whose parent are illegal immigrants are eligible for federal programs.
  - The staff did not have an answer at that time, but will follow up with the answer at or before the next meeting.
- A point was raised that the data in the WEAC report refers to an older measurement of low-income that is not currently used, however since the report was examining low-income levels over a period of time the older measurement was used to ensure consistency.
- Under the new measurement it appears as if the number of students in poverty has decreased dramatically, even though by using the older measurement we see that the number has actually increased.

Kelly Sherretz and Elizabeth Burland introduced demographic data from students in the City of Wilmington and State of Delaware. Michelle Taylor stated that the data is missing children from birth to age 5. She is working to acquire that data.

- A question was asked related to whether the data regarding student in poverty could be correlated for race, as that was not part of the data provided.
- A question was also asked if it would be possible to have data that would show the effect of potential redistricting.
  - As redistricting would not occur until 2018, it was determined that it is unlikely that accurate data could be provided.

Kenny Oates, committee member and academic dean of Shortlidge Academy, presented on his professional and personal experience working in a high poverty schools.

- Some students in high poverty schools come to school not knowing basic information about themselves, information that the committee members would take for granted, even including their names.
- Social skills are one of the first areas where teachers can identify low-income students struggling, primarily through their interactions with other students in the classroom.
- Depending upon a child's personal challenges and how supportive their home environment is, it can take more than one year to catch a student up with their peers in terms of social development.
- Students coming in to school are expected to successfully build relationships with other students, their teacher, and other adults in the building. Building relationships can be one of the most challenging things for low-income students. If they did not attend a high-quality preschool they may have no prior experience that they can use to assist them in developing these relationships.
- Teachers can even struggle to forge relationships with their students.
- Hungry students are often mistaken for irritable students causing increased tensions between student and staff members, particularly in male students.
- Student can come to school having just found out that the man they thought was their father actually is not, or that their relative was killed in gang related violence the night before, yet are expected to learn like every other student without any real kind of supports.
- In cases of students who qualify for special education, parents may not understand what their child's rights are so the child may not receive the services they are entitled to.
- There is a very strong stigma attached to mental health services in the community, so many do not seek treatment that could be very helpful.
- There are not bad parents, but there are parents who are just truly uninformed.
- The greatest service schools can do is to give parents the tools to allow their children to break the cycle of poverty.

Following Kenny Oates's presentation there was a brief discussion of other personal experiences of committee members.

- One committee member remarked that they are the student that Kenny Oates had described, and reiterated that it is crucial for students to learn how to build relationships with those around them.
- Another committee member remarked that the personal narratives should be shared with the public so that the public understands why each of the committee members is so passionate about improving the education system.
- Another committee member commented that their family moved to Wilmington during desegregation and, as a minority, knew they were not welcome in the formally all-white schools. The committee member also shared several examples of racism that are occurring in Delaware schools today.
- Another committee member cautioned that parents might appear to administrators as if they do not think that education is important, but really they may have just had a negative experience with an administrator in the past and just not know how to communicate their feelings. They also stressed the importance of giving students a reason to come to school, whether it be athletics, the arts, vocational training, etc.
- There was also a brief discussion of teacher education programs and how they could be improved to create better outcomes for students.

Michelle Taylor closed discussion and moved on to discussing what would happen at the next committee meeting. Committee members were split between three sub-committees: Early Childhood, In School Support and Services, and Out of School Support and Services. Michelle Taylor announced that November would be a working meeting. Any work assigned to each sub-committee that is not finished by the end of the November meeting must be completed using outside sessions prior to the committee's December meeting. A general framework of the committee's work will be established at the December meeting so that Michelle Taylor and Jackie Jenkins may present it to the Commission at their January meeting.

The committee members in attendance assigned the charges outlined in the Action Agenda in the Meeting Wilmington Student Needs section in the WEAC report to the appropriate sub-committees. The Early Childhood subcommittee was assigned action agenda items 2 and 7, the In School Support and Services subcommittee was assigned action agenda item 3, and the Out of School Support and Services subcommittee was assigned action agenda items 1, 4, 5, and 6. The committees will be assigned additional charges created by the committee membership as the process continues.

There was a discussion about potential ideas for transforming schools into community centers.

- It was suggested that staffing is usually the largest obstacle to keeping schools open after hours. One suggestion to combat that was to hire local parents to staff the schools, a strategy that would double as a workforce development strategy.

- There was a suggestion that schools could partner with local organizations that could host classes or workshops within the school. Indian River used a similar approach when they were looking for community support for their referendum. The community aspect of the school was reinforced and it brought many community members into the school who otherwise would not have had a reason to.

Michelle Taylor invited members of the public to comment.

- One member of the public encouraged the committee not to worry about the financial aspect of the plan, and focus their energy on producing the best product possible. They also noted that extended learning opportunities are at the absolute core of helping students, and that out-of-the-box thinking will be required. In addition, thought this was a good, productive meeting.
- Another member of the public encouraged the committee to reach out to community organizations to get an estimate of how much a typical afterschool program would cost, and after determining approximately the number of schools that they would like to implement them in, provide an estimate to the funding committee so that they can include it in their package.
- A parent noted that there are many different kinds of racism that exist in schools and every form of racism needs to be addressed. They also chided the committee for not including the students in their discussion. They encouraged the committee to focus on the students, stating that they will bring their parents with them, not the other way around.

Michelle Taylor thanked everyone and indicated to look for the meeting minutes and the next home work assignment.

**The meeting adjourned at 5:50 p.m.**

**Wilmington Education Improvement Commission  
Meeting the Needs of Children in Poverty Committee  
Attendance at the 10/26 Meeting**

**Committee Members**

Adriana Bohm  
Nikki Castle  
Rosa Colon-Kolacko  
Melissa Froemming  
Jacqueline Paradee Mette

Terrance Newton  
Kenny Oates  
Michael Simmonds  
Deb Stevens  
Michelle Taylor

**Members of the Public**

Jamee Boone  
Bill Doolittle  
Tyrone Jones

Peggy Geisler  
Orrin White  
Swiyah Whittington

**Institute for Public Administration Staff**

Kelly Sherretz  
Elizabeth Burland  
Annie Gould