

Wilmington Education Improvement Commission  
Status Report on Action Agenda | December 2016

PREPARED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE'S  
INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

## Commission Foundation

In September 2014, Governor Jack Markell formed the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee (the Advisory Committee) to recommend how to strengthen the public education system for all City of Wilmington students. After extensive review of past commissions, the history of City of Wilmington education, and the changes in conditions over the past decade, the Advisory Committee produced an action agenda included in the report ***Strengthening Wilmington Education: An Action Agenda***. In August 2015, House Bill 148 was signed which created the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (the Commission) to carry out the action agenda and to strengthen the overall performance of the public education system on behalf of all students.

## Commission Mandate

1. Serve as a state advisory committee to the Governor and General Assembly for the administration of planning, recommending, and implementing changes to improve the quality and availability of education for children in Pre–K through grade 12 in the City of Wilmington and advise the State on improvements for all schools within the state with high concentrations of children living in poverty, English language learners, or both.
2. Work with and across all governmental agencies, educational entities, and private and nonprofit institutions to promote and support the implementation of all recommended changes from the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee.
3. Monitor the progress of implementation of the action agenda and recommend policies and actions to the Governor and General Assembly to facilitate progress and to promote the continuous improvement of public education on dimensions addressed by the Advisory Committee’s recommendations.

## Guiding Principles

The Commission includes a diverse representation of the Wilmington community, including educators, parents, advocates, and community activists. While diverse, the Commission has approached the work with shared expectations and agreement on guiding principles. While our focus is Wilmington, the Commission believes these principles should apply across Delaware.

**Providing Access to High-Quality Education**

Delivering high-quality public education to all children, including those who are low income, black or Latino, is not only a Wilmington problem. It is a challenge facing all of Delaware.

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**Meeting High-Standards for Student Learning**

All Wilmington schools should meet high and rising standards for student learning in Delaware and across the globe. There should be agreed-upon measures for student success in meeting those standards that apply to all schools.

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**Engaging Families and Parents**

Parent and family engagement is critical to the effectiveness of public education, and we must establish a strong Wilmington education partnership between schools and the families they serve.

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**Creating Community Partnerships**

Wilmington schools should be seen as community assets and must have allies to address the complex challenges of educating the city’s children. These allies include engaged families, community and business partners, early childhood educators, mental and physical health providers, institutions of higher education, and social service providers.

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**Ensuring Access to High-Quality Educators**

All Wilmington students should have access to high-quality educators who are prepared to meet their diverse needs, and to the human and financial resources needed to support student success.

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**Collaboration and Strengthened Commitment**

Wilmington students should continue to be served by a combination of district, charter, and vocational-technical (vo-tech) schools. Policies and practices for Wilmington schools should promote collaboration, shared learning, and a mutual commitment to improvements that serve all students.

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## Framework for Change

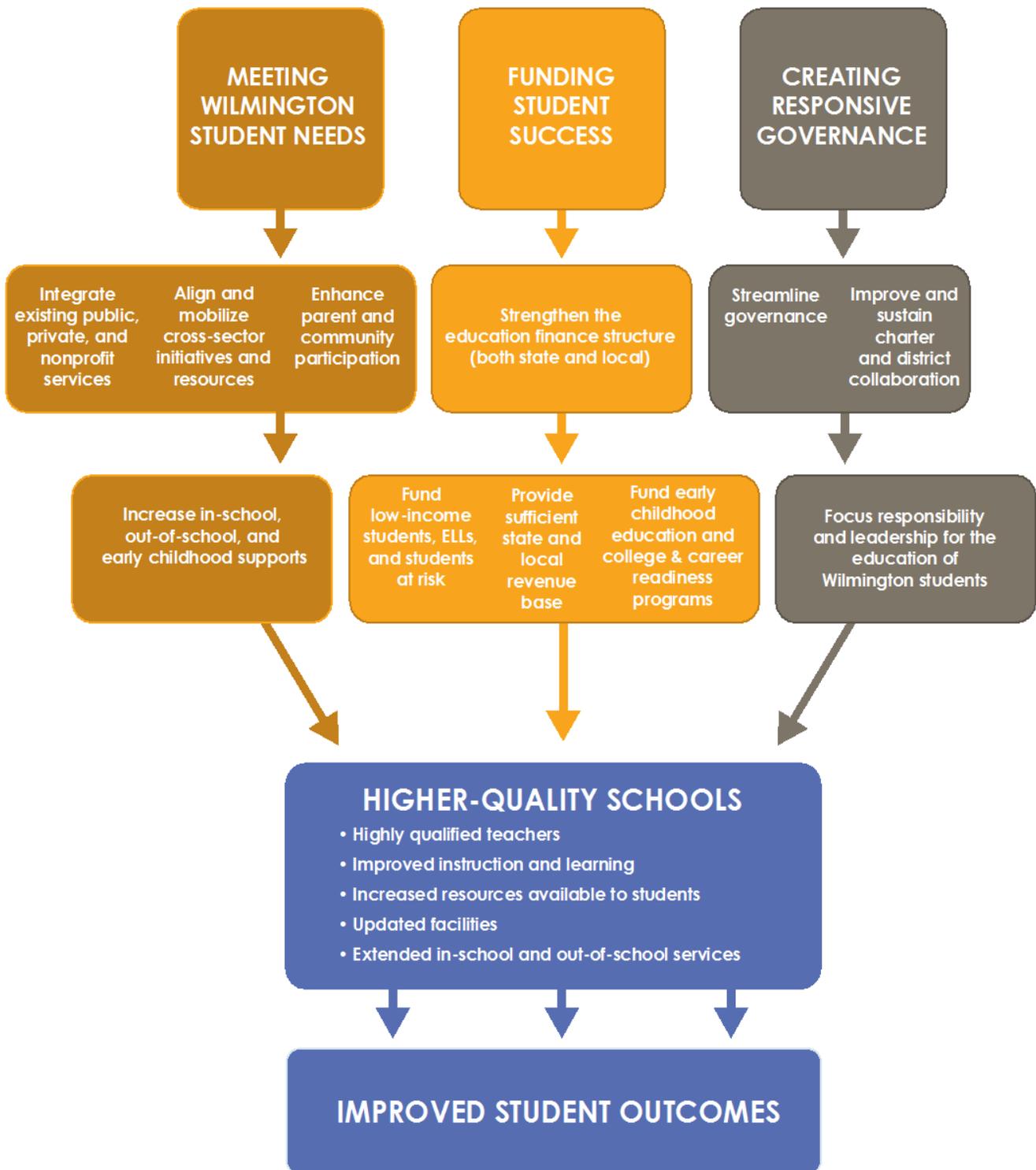
Taking a developmental approach, the Commission created a path for improved student outcomes through a framework for change that streamlines three areas of critical importance for an improved education system. These core areas include: (1) creating more responsive governance, (2) funding student success, and (3) meeting Wilmington student needs. Strengthening Wilmington education requires that actions be taken in each of these areas in a systematic, coordinated, and sustained fashion. Progress on all three of these streams together will result in improved student outcomes.

## Action Agenda Summary

### Creating Responsive Governance

The governance of Wilmington public education is fragmented and dysfunctional. More coherent and responsive governance requires actions on three fronts: (1) streamlining traditional school districts operating in Wilmington, (2) implementing a new vision of the role of charter schools in the improvement of Delaware public education, and (3) engaging Wilmington city government as a partner in public education. The Commission is committed to promoting a new vision of public education through which all units—traditional districts, the vo-tech district, and charter schools, accept a shared responsibility for and act in concert to support the effective education of all Wilmington students.

Action Agenda for Improved Wilmington Student Outcomes



## Funding Student Success

Strengthening the overall education finance structure is of fundamental importance to public education across Delaware. While Delaware spends a great deal on public education, the expenditure of those funds must focus more effectively on meeting the needs of students in poverty—and other students at risk throughout Delaware. Actions are needed to ensure a sufficient and reliable revenue base at both the state and local levels and also to ensure that funds are allocated in ways that most directly and effectively address the diverse and often complex needs of students at risk. Additional funding is needed in many areas across the educational lifespan of children—from early childhood education, through K–12, to college and career readiness. Funding also is required to attract and retain the most highly qualified teachers in Wilmington schools. This stream of decision and action requires the allocation of funds to support low-income students, English language learners, basic special education students, K–3, and other students at risk.

## Meeting the Needs of Wilmington Students

Addressing the challenges of students in poverty requires a developmental approach that focuses on alignment of needed supports and services starting in early childhood and extending through entry into a career or higher education. This stream of action requires coordinated efforts from all sectors, including more effective integration of state services and the alignment and mobilization of cross-sector initiatives and partnerships. It also requires greater parent and community engagement in Wilmington schools and in support of the continuous improvement of Wilmington public education. The combination and synergy of all of these changes are essential to increasing in-school and out-of-school supports, from early childhood until the transition to work or higher education. A key dimension of meeting the needs of all Delaware students is an investment in culturally competent educators.

## Status Report on Action Agenda

The Commission has acted as community-based council outside of state agencies, working across all governmental units, educational entities, and private and nonprofit institutions to support the implementation of all recommended changes from the final report of the Advisory Committee. Last year, the Commission and the affiliated committees accepted and built upon the majority of the Advisory Committee’s recommendations. The status report below is for the period from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. It includes an assessment of progress for the Advisory Committee’s action agenda and for acting on the subsequent priorities established by the Commission and its committees. See below for the key.

Symbol	Status	Definition
	Completed	Action has been taken and wholly completed by the Commission.
	In Progress	Action has been taken to propose and partially complete the item, but it has not been fully finished.
	In Planning	Action discussed and in early planning stages.
	No Action	Action has not been taken.

<b>Creating Responsive Governance</b>			
<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Action Taken</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>Develop plan for the Christina School District (CSD) to leave Wilmington &amp; Red Clay Consolidated School District include CSD's Wilmington students and schools.</b>		Senate Bill (SB) 122 signed August 2015, mandates the Commission to develop a transition, resource, and implementation plan to carry out the Advisory Committee's recommendation on redistricting.	General Assembly
<b>Colonial and Brandywine School Districts should continue to serve Wilmington students.</b>		Colonial and Brandywine Boards of Education voted to continue to serve Wilmington students.	Commission and School Boards
<b>The State Board of Education should approve the Commission's redistricting plan.</b>		Plan Submitted to State Board in December 2015. Approved by State Board in March 2016.	State Board of Education
<b>The General Assembly should confirm the State Board's approval of Commission's redistricting plan.</b>		SB 17 provides conditional approval, with requirement for return to legislature for final approval. SB 300 creates Wilmington Redistricting Transition Fund and mandates a fiscal impact analysis.	General Assembly
<b>Complete fiscal impact analysis of redistricting for 2017 legislative session.</b>		The Commission created an ad hoc committee to assess the fiscal impact of redistricting and provide a report to the General Assembly by March 2017.	Ad Hoc Committee and Commission
<b>New charter approvals and expansions should be deferred pending a statewide needs assessment and a comprehensive plan for the desired number and mix of charter, district, and vo-tech schools.</b>		House Bill (HB) 56 puts a moratorium on charter approval in Wilmington until July 2018 or pending a state plan. Governor Markell initiated the State Review of Education Opportunities to serve as the basis for a state plan on the desired configuration of schools. Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) has initiated a needs assessment prior to completion of state plan targeted for December 2016.	Department of Education and General Assembly
<b>Charter schools should develop in accordance with a new vision that promotes shared capacity, collaboration, and best practices among charters and between charter and traditional schools.</b>		The Charter and District Collaboration committee has considered barriers to collaboration and national best practices.	Charter and District Collaboration Committee
<b>A Charter Consortium or collaborative compact should be established to better support operational needs and best practices of all charter schools.</b>		Research is underway on effective models for support of charter schools across the U.S. No action taken on proposed consortium.	Charter and District Collaboration Committee
<b>An Office of Education and Public Policy should be created in City of Wilmington government to promote active community engagement in public education.</b>		No action taken by the Commission.	City of Wilmington Government
<b>The New Castle County (NCC) Vo-Tech District and traditional district schools and Wilmington charter schools should collaborate on expanded vocational education opportunities for Wilmington students.</b>		No action taken by the Commission.	Commission with districts and charters

### Funding Student Success

Priorities	Status	Action Taken	Responsibility
<b>State funding should be allocated statewide for low-income students, English language learners, and basic special education students K–3.</b>		The Commission has proposed legislation to change the State’s unit count allocation to include this funding. Governor Markell recommended a pilot program but funding was not allocated by the General Assembly. No action taken by the Delaware General Assembly on Commission proposal.	Commission working with the Governor, General Assembly, and community partners
<b>Additional funding for early childhood education programs should be provided to meet the needs of students in poverty in Wilmington and statewide.</b>		Governor Markell recommended and the General Assembly provided most of the additional funding requested by the Delaware Office of Early Learning and the Delaware Early Childhood Council.	Commission, Delaware Office of Early Learning, Delaware Early Childhood Council
<b>The State should increase funding for extended in-school and out-of-school services and supports, including after-school programs.</b>		Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty Committee has made this a priority and is identifying best practices for improving state and community services. United Way of Delaware to take on the “My Very Own Library” early literacy initiative. Legislation proposed but not enacted in the last session on after-school programs.	Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty Committee, Governor, and General Assembly, United Way of Delaware
<b>Strengthening the revenue base supporting public education at both the state and local levels, including property reassessment.</b>		The Commission has proposed adjustments in the public education allocation system. No state or county action on property reassessment.	Commission, County Governments, and General Assembly
<b>Establish Wilmington Redistricting Transition Fund to support the costs of district reorganization and approve other funding adjustments needed for implementation of redistricting.</b>		SB 300 establishes the fund with an initial allocation of \$200,000. Commission’s Ad Hoc Fiscal Impact Committee is evaluating overall costs.	Governor and General Assembly
<b>Existing state funding for low-income children and families should be redirected by a comprehensive state plan to more effectively address the needs of students in poverty.</b>		No action taken.	Governor and State Agencies with Commission

<b>Meeting the Needs of Wilmington Students</b>			
<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Action Taken</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>A comprehensive early childhood education plan for high-quality programs and services for all children in Wilmington.</b>		No action taken on a Wilmington plan. State investments have increased access of low-income children to high-quality programs.	Delaware Office of Early Learning, Delaware Early Childhood Council, Wilmington Early Childhood Council, Commission
<b>A comprehensive plan for improving state and local services for low-income children and their families and for schools with high low-income student enrollment, including the integration of services and partnerships with private and nonprofit institutions.</b>		Commission conducting Wilmington asset mapping, inventory of state policies, and mapping of finances.	Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty Committee, Commission, Governor, and prospective the Interagency Resource Management Committee
<b>The State should increase in-school supports for students experiencing trauma and other social and emotional challenges.</b>		Legislation expands school-based health centers to all secondary schools. No allocation to meet trauma and socio-emotional needs.	Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty Committee, Governor, General Assembly, and State Departments
<b>Delaware P-20 Council should be mandated to recommend improved alignment of resources and programs to support student learning and development from birth through college and workforce.</b>		No action has been taken by the P-20 council.	Governor, Secretary of Education, and P-20 Council
<b>Mobilize and coordinate community (nonprofit and private) programs in support of schools with high concentrations of students in poverty.</b>		United Way of Delaware leading plan to coordinate efforts in Wilmington and statewide. Wilmington Alliance proposed but not implemented by city government.	United Way of Delaware, Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty Committee, community partners, Wilmington city government, and state agencies
<b>Governor should convene higher education partnership to strengthen Delaware education including coordinated programs of professional development, school improvement, and adoption of national best practices.</b>		No State action taken. University of Delaware established the Partnership for Public Education.	Governor and Higher Education Institutions
<b>Governor and business community should launch a business sponsorship program focused on Delaware schools with high percentages of low-income students.</b>		No action taken.	Governor and Business Leaders with State and County Chambers.
<b>Strengthen parents, educators, and community engagement and support with schools as community assets.</b>		Research on best practices reviewed by Parent, Educator, and Community Engagement (PEaCE) Committee. No actions taken.	PEaCE and Meeting the Needs of Students in Poverty Committees

## Path Forward

The Commission will continue to pursue the Action Agenda during the 2016–17 school year and Delaware legislative session. The priority items are as follows:

- State funding should be allocated statewide for low-income students, English language learners, and basic special education students K–3.
- Final legislative approval needed for the Commission’s redistricting plan
- Improve alignment of policies, resources and programs needed to support student learning and development from birth through college and workforce.
- Greater parent, educator, and community engagement and support needed for schools as community assets.
- Improve and sustain collaboration among all schools that serve Wilmington students.