

## **Redding Consortium for Educational Equity**

### **Retreat Meeting**

**March 11, 2024**

### **Meeting Minutes**

The Redding Consortium retreat meeting convened at 5:05 p.m. at the Delaware State University (DSU) at the Riverfront (Capital One) Building in Wilmington, DE. Senator Elizabeth Lockman, co-chair of the Redding Consortium, welcomed all in attendance. Senator Lockman announced the two newest members joining the Consortium, Maria Cabrera, serving as a community leader representative in place of the late Ted Blunt, and Ayanna Khan, serving as the business representative.

#### **I. History of Governance Reform**

Representative Nnamdi Chukwuocha provided a historical overview of the previous reform efforts for governance change in the City of Wilmington. These reform efforts include the Wilmington Neighborhood Schools Act Committee (2001), Wilmington Education Task Force (2008), Wilmington Education Advisory Committee (2015), and the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (2016). These educational task forces and commissions were created to recommend plans for governance change and they presented these plans to the Delaware General Assembly. Each of these stakeholder groups recommended reducing the number of traditional school districts serving students in the City of Wilmington. No action was taken by the General Assembly on the plans submitted by the Neighborhood Schools Act Committee, the Wilmington Education Task Force, or the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee (WEAC). The redistricting plan for the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (WEIC) made it through the State Board of Education and the House, but the vote for the WEIC plan failed in the Senate and it ultimately did not pass.

Rep. Chukwuocha shared how the vetted WEIC plan would inform the current efforts of the Redding Consortium's work on governance reform. Rep. Chukwuocha noted that the Funding and Governance Work Group, created by the Redding Consortium, focused on its mandate to address redistricting in the City of Wilmington and Northern New Castle County. This work group, led by Rep. Chukwuocha and former co-chair Eugene Young, had several meetings to propose and review redistricting models and this work was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. After this, the Funding and Governance Work Group Co-Chairs transitioned to modifying the work to a two-chair model. Councilman Street has since become a co-chair with Rep. Chukwuocha on this effort. Councilman Street and Rep. Chukwuocha have decided not to rehash the same conversations about what model to consider through the traditional work

group structure, but to instead review and consult the well-vetted plans like WEIC's plan that had been already presented before to the State Board of Education and the General Assembly. Their work also focused on championing the voices of the Wilmington community and how the Consortium can address these much-needed reforms on behalf of Wilmington families, students, and school communities.

## **II. Current Phase of the Draft Governance Proposal**

Rep. Chukwuocha shared that he and Councilman Street consider the WEIC plan as a starting point to build on. Additionally, Rep. Chukwuocha remarked that they have both met with various stakeholders and district leaders to discuss the path forward on the "modified River Plan" in order to adapt to it a model that could be feasibly implemented and successfully make it through the State Board, House, and Senate. Rep. Chukwuocha provided an overview of the modified River Plan, which included a major changes from the WEIC plan: Christina and Colonial School Districts would leave the City of Wilmington and the Brandywine and Red Clay Consolidated School Districts would be the two traditional districts serving City of Wilmington students. Rep. Chukwuocha announced that a modification to this River Plan would be that the Red Clay Consolidated School District would keep Warner Elementary School and Shortlidge Academy. This modification was made after receiving feedback from district partners about the redistricting proposal. Councilman Street and Rep. Chukwuocha have met with all four of the districts to hear their input on the proposal.

Rep. Chukwuocha announced that the purpose of this retreat was to have the Consortium members participate in workshops and exercises designed to gather feedback on the modified River Plan proposal. Per the Redding legislation (HB229), the Consortium would have the opportunity to develop multiple plans for consideration regarding redistricting. Rep. Chukwuocha stated that this work is an important first step in the development of a redistricting proposal that can be drafted, submitted, and finally implemented to improve education in the city. He remarked that this proposal is not only about changing district lines or moving students, but part of a broader reform effort to also consider changes to the New Castle County Tax Pool, the city's involvement in the educational destiny of students in the city, and governance reform and working with the Wilmington Learning Collaborative on the coordination between the school districts. Rep. Chukwuocha observed that this is a good time to focus on this work with the ongoing property reassessment, the need for referendum reform statewide but particularly in New Castle County, and the recommendations of the funding report that all collectively call for change in the city.

Kevin Kelley, Consortium member, shared historical context about busing in the City of Wilmington and its impact 50 years later. He talked about the work of the Wilmington

Neighborhood Schools Committee and the lack of support among legislators for this reform effort in Wilmington during that time. Kelley stated that the biggest difference now is that there is more support from local and state legislators who are willing to look at this situation differently and act on making necessary changes for the city. Kelley also shared that it is not just about moving students, but making sure they have the resources and support they need to make them move forward in life and be successful. He stated that education is the most important issue and more attention needs to be focused in light of the heavy attention on crime reports in the city.

Rep. Chukwuocha acknowledged Kelley's sentiments and remarked how the city's educational system has become increasingly inequitable as a result of the Neighborhood Schools Act. Rep. Chukwuocha also highlighted that an unintended consequence of these 25 years of inaction has led to the single-digit proficiency rates in city schools. This underscored the need to do something differently instead of kicking the can down the road for another generation of students. He suggested that bold action is needed to make necessary changes with engaged stakeholders who will work together to heal school communities and make the city whole.

Rep. Chukwuocha talked through the governance proposal timeline for December 2023 to June 2024. Councilman Jea Street and Rep. Chukwuocha drafted the governance proposal with support from Institute for Public Administration staff from December 2023 to February 2024. The Redding governance leadership team had two rounds of meetings with the four impacted districts, Brandywine, Christina, Colonial, and Red Clay Consolidated School Districts, to listen and record feedback in February 2024. From February to March 2024, the governance proposal was updated to include district feedback. Then, the proposal was reviewed by Redding Consortium members and discussed at the Redding retreat. Rep. Chukwuocha shared the timeline for engagement with Consortium members to work with stakeholders on feedback from March to April 2024 in order to present the plan to the State Board of Education.

### **III. Consortium Member Feedback Activity**

Redding Consortium members engaged in a "think-pair-share" where groups of two or three members reviewed the drafted 13 stipulations under the "Modified River Plan Redistricting Proposal" and provided insights and concerns amongst themselves. After discussing as pairs or groups, members shared their feedback with the Consortium.

**Stipulation One** concerns the orderly and minimally disruptive reassignment of students affected by the boundary change and the reassignment of governance responsibilities. An overview of the information shared is below:

- Discussion around whether or not Shortlidge (Evan G.) Academy and Warner Elementary School should remain in the Red Clay Consolidated School District (RCCSD) or the Brandywine School District (BSD).
- Need for clarification around the term “minimally disruptive.” The burden of tracking students following the redistricting should not fall upon individual schools, and the Redding Consortium should address new tracking means and measures.
- Need to address how charter schools factor into the proposal

**Stipulation Two** focuses on the redrawing of district boundaries in Wilmington and northern New Castle County to better serve the educational interests of all students, including reducing the concentration of low-income students and improving educational services and supports for English learners and other students at risk.

- The wording of stipulation two does not make total sense.
- The proposal should look beyond districts and feeder patterns into the broader ecosystem of arbitrary boundaries and lines through neighborhoods and streets. By doing so, this could break down barriers to increase engagement and interaction at an earlier age during points of interaction for students in adolescence.
- Children are still in the same neighborhoods, and the “Modified River Plan” would not reduce the low-income student population. Instead, the group recommended the Proposal to acknowledge that the population of students in poverty has increased across all schools in New Castle County (NCC) utilizing data.
- The proposal doesn’t give potential scenarios for its timeframe or how the rollout would work. The proposal could include scenarios like how redistricting affects Kindergarten.
- The proposal should address actions against school overcrowding and its adverse effects on students in and out of the City of Wilmington school districts.
- There needs to be clarification on the additional funding and support that will be provided and applied for low-income students, students with disabilities, and ELL students

**Stipulation Three** concerns the plan must permit students to continue their attendance at the school they attended prior to the boundary change with tuition payments made by the sending district as provided in Chapter 6 [tuition charges] of this title until such time as the pupils complete the grade levels offered in that school.

- Stipulation Three requires clarification and revision on the “mandated choice permit,” as tuition is only for special education students. Question if Stipulation Three would comply with [Chapter 4 of the School Choice Code](#).
- There is a need to revisit the financial considerations of dollars moving with the students.

- High school cannot be disentangled from Stipulation Three and should be in the proposal.
- Questions around how Stipulation Three will impact the City of Wilmington community and how to incorporate community voice and engagement into said Stipulation.

**Stipulation Four** focuses on student transportation.

- Transportation is complex in NCC and needs to be addressed in the proposal. Complexities include, bus routes not including community centers, routes do not overlap for families in the same district and services are not holistic. Dollar amounts per student should be calculated as there will be financial repercussions with bussing and transportation if students remain in their districts. The proposal should tie the education narrative in the City of Wilmington to the city's economy and workforce.

**Stipulation Five** concerns an assessment of the educational needs of City of Wilmington students and the resources required to meet those needs.

- "Educational needs" under Stipulation Five must be clearly defined and outlined in the proposal.
- The proposal must address current gaps in services and emphasize the demonstrated need for additional resources for students.
- Questions around how the proposal will measure educational needs, beyond student achievement and what resources will be provided to ensure proficiency once students move to a new school.

**Stipulation Six** focuses on directives for improving secondary education options for City of Wilmington students, such as the provision of additional secondary schools.

- There may not be a need to build a new high school in the City of Wilmington and schools like the Bayard School could become a magnet. Capacity concerns and constraints were discussed.
- Questions around how the proposal will incorporate the Wilmington Learning Collaborative (WLC) to assess and address the current capacity of City of Wilmington schools and districts.

Due to time constraints, the in-person Consortium members did not discuss their feedback on Stipulations 7-12. It was argued that Stipulations Nine, Ten, and Eleven are some of the most important in the proposal. According to the group, the Stipulations must clearly measure financial impact, emphasize who will pay for this, and include input from legislators and

constituents. Members also asked how the Consortium will ensure that the resources continue to be provided on an on-going basis and are not just there temporarily during the transition.

#### **IV. Next Steps**

Matt Denn, Redding Consortium Co-Chair, recommended that the proposal needs to be fleshed out more and include more concrete details for all of the stipulations - like was done for stipulations 1 -3 - for the Consortium members to react to and engage with. Additionally, Denn said the Consortium needs more time to review the proposal and suggested that the Consortium continue to meet more often as needed to have an opportunity to discuss what this proposal is going to cost and who is going to pay for it. There needs to be time to review those items in the proposal before those recommendations are sent out in a proposal to the State Board. Denn stated that there are other things that Consortium members would like to see as a part of the redistricting proposal that do not fall neatly into the categories, including what in the statute must be addressed and may be addressed in this plan. There are still details that need to be addressed like how to provide resource support for city schools. There is a lot to be done to support this and considerations of the time and effort required to make this happen.

#### **V. Public Comment**

Rep. Kim Williams stated that the Funding and Governance Work Group has not met since 2020. She expressed wanting to be supportive but has reservations about the plan. She shared that the agenda did not include the word redistricting but included governance. Rep. Williams also expressed concern for how she can communicate this plan and its impacts to her constituents. Rep. Williams also noted that the plan doesn't include the financial impact or a detailed consideration of who will pay for this plan, including the fiscal note. Additionally, Rep Williams shared that school board members were not generally aware about this proposal and that they had to learn about it through word of mouth. They will need to review the plan and provide input on things like attendance zones and how governance change affects feeder patterns.

Mike Matthews expressed concerns about the timeline, community input, and the involvement of the Red Clay School Board in this process. He expressed concerns about how we communicate this plan to the public for districts like Red Clay that just went through referendums and are currently going through the statewide property reassessment. Matthews asked if there will be another referendum for capital funding for these schools and what would be the costs associated with the plan.

**Sen. Lockman adjourned the meeting at 7:24 p.m.**

## Attendance

### Redding Consortium Members

Senator Elizabeth Lockman - Co-Chair  
Matthew Denn - Co-Chair  
Raye Jones Avery  
Aaron Bass  
Senator Eric Buckson  
Representative Nnamdi Chukwuocha  
Dorrell Green  
Tika Hartsock  
Lincoln Hohler  
Stephanie Ingram  
Joseph Jones  
Kevin Kelley  
Ayanna Khan  
Margie López Waite  
Emily Falcon as proxy for Jeff Menzer  
Xavia Mills  
Noelle Picara  
Mayor Mike Purczyk  
Dan Shelton  
Jennifer Thompkins  
Bettina Twardy Riveros  
Danya Woods  
Secretary Mark Holodick - *ex-officio*  
Secretary Rick Geisenberger - *ex-officio*  
Nicholas Konzelman - *ex-officio*

### IPA/DSU Staff

Haley Burns  
Alaina Robinson  
Kelly Sherretz  
Ashley Wilkinson

### Members of the Public

Dawn Alexander  
Ted Ammann  
Laura Burgos  
Jill Floore  
Taylor Hawk  
Carly Highsmith  
Lynne Howard  
Nneka Jones  
Lavina Jones-Davis  
Nicole Kennedy  
Eunique Lawrence  
Lisa Lawson  
Jose Matthews  
Mike Matthews  
Kenny Rivera  
Justin Richards  
Becky Ryan  
Jeff Taschner  
Cora Scott  
Jon Sheehan  
Kathleen Smith  
Deb Stevens  
Bob Vacca  
Representative Kim Williams  
LaToya Winkfield  
Jennie Yeow