

Strategic Plan For Specialized Public Education Opportunities

Meeting #4 – December 21, 2016 – Townsend Building, Cabinet Room

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Minutes

Attendees:

David Blowman, Department of Education
Joan Buttram, University of Delaware
Susan Haberstroh, Department of Education
Earl Jaques, Chair, House Education Committee
Jeff Klein, University of Delaware
Elizabeth Lockman, Community Member
Bernardette Maxwell, Lake Forest School District
Tina Shockley, Department of Education
David Sokola, Chair, Senate Committee
Debbie Zych, PolyTech School District

Members on Via Phone:

Mervin Daugherty, Red Clay Consolidated School District

Members Absent:

Heath Chasanov, Woodbridge School District
Nick Manolacos, Odyssey Charter School
Salome Thomas-El, Thomas A. Edison Charter School
Leroy Travers, Campus Community School
Brenda Wynder, Lake Forest School District

General Public/Interested Parties:

Tammy Croce, Delaware Association of School Administrators
Bill Doolittle, Advocate
Sarah Fulton, House of Representatives
Donna Johnson, State Board of Education
John Marinucci, Delaware School Boards Association
Kendall Massett, Delaware Charter Schools Network
Kevin Ohlandt, Public Member
Kimberly Williams, State Representative

Welcome and Introductions

The fourth meeting of the Strategic Plan for Specialized Public Education Opportunities began at 2:06 p.m. The group was welcomed and Mr. Blowman noted that Mervin Daugherty may be calling in.

Approval of Meeting #3 Minutes

The group reviewed the minutes from Meeting #3 and Earl Jaques motioned to approve the minutes in their current form, and David Sokola seconded the motion. Everyone voted in favor of approving the minutes with no changes. The minutes were thereby approved.

Review of Policy Questions/Recommendations

It was noted that at our last meeting we summarized some of the policy questions to date. University of Delaware staff organized some of those discussion items and the policy recommendations that came out of the PCG reports in order to provide us with the “Suggested Recommendations to Include in the Strategic Plan for Specialized Public Education Opportunities” handout that was distributed to the group.

For this meeting, the group will talk through those recommendations in hopes of pulling together a report, which we will email to everyone as soon as possible. We want to get something together before January 11, 2016 (which is the date of DOE’s presentation before the House Education Committee). It is important to note that further discussion may be needed, but we hope to be in position to make some recommendations today if we can reach consensus.

Mr. Blowman welcomed Representative Kim Williams to the meeting.

Jeff Klein suggested the group review the handout titled, “Suggested Recommendations.” He explained the recommendations were broken down into large category headings.

Transportation – The group discussed how this can be a real barrier to parents exercising choice in Delaware. Issues include quality and availability. Likewise, it is a barrier to rural students, low income families and inter- and intra-district choice by traditional school districts. There are perceived inefficiencies in the system.

Rep. Jaques commented that there is a lack of transportation for afterschool programs, and would like that specifically added to the list.

Another member questioned if magnet schools have different transportation situations in that they can set their own bus routes. The answer is that it varies. There are instances where there is approval of such transportation through the Budget Act or Epilogue. The school district that houses the magnet school would still be responsible for their share of costs. One member added to that by saying that magnet school transportation should be standardized. Mr. Klein acknowledged that this recommendation aligns with PCG’s recommendation #8.

There was also a question on the definition of magnet schools. It was stated there is not a definition in code or regulation.

A member of the public questioned that if districts have the flexibility that charters schools do, would that fix this problem. The answer is potentially. For the districts the state is allocating resources based on approval of routes. The State doesn’t approve routes for non-feeder pattern students. The formula would need to change from one not based on approval of routes, but on combination of students and length of route. It was noted that this is different at various vocational-technical schools as well.

The group agreed that transportation is a barrier to choice process.

Certificate of Necessity (CN) Process

Mr. Klein presented the question to the group, “should the CN process mesh with the charter school process regarding long-term projections?” The CN proceeds needs to focus on programs, not just

enrollment and physical space needs. One member noted that the CN process should mesh with the charter school process if they are planning in a comprehensive way. Also regarding the charter school authorization process, there needs to be a clearer definition of community impact. Mr. Klein noted that this recommendation aligns with PCG's recommendation #1.

There was additional discussion about this item including comments such as the impact and how this may need to be addressed in the future.

There were various questions from the public related to impact such as community outreach, and also questions related to location of the proposed charter school. For example, if the proposed charter school does not have a location, how can they gauge community impact? Also preferences were discussed and specifically the five mile radius and other preference criteria. It was asked if school districts have to show necessity in order to get approved first. The answer is not necessarily, and it depends on what their request is for, i.e. building new school vs. buying land.

School Choice Application Process

In review the group discussed the need to streamline and centralize the school choice application process by requiring all LEAs to use Data Service Center's online choice application portal, and by examining the school choice timelines. Parents need to be provided with relevant information on school choice options to make best decision for their child. Mr. Klein noted that this recommendation aligns with PCG's recommendation #2.

Additional discussion occurred on this topic, as someone noted that not all parents have access to or are comfortable with completing it online. It was suggested that someone at the district could enter the information online, but that may be a time consuming process and draw on resources. It was suggested that maybe a physical space/computer could be provided to have parents complete it online themselves.

A public member noted that we shouldn't eliminate the paper copy. The group agreed we would not eliminate the paper copy, just add the online option. It was also noted that we would gain a lot of understanding by using the online system.

A question was asked regarding Red Clay's paper applications, how did they include them in the lottery? Merv Daugherty indicated they do enter them into the DSC system.

A representative from a smaller school district noted that small districts don't do a lottery, as there are not enough applications.

Another question was asked regarding when supplemental information is required, does the system prompt you? No, a parent would fill in the main part, and then need to add supplemental information.

The issue of the timeframe of the application process (Nov-Dec) was raised, and it was noted that this may be a bad time for some families due to the holidays. The group indicated that maybe a wider or no timeframe would be better. There was some push back as to a wider timeframe as opposed to less, as there are time constraints for districts in terms of considering capacity.

Perhaps we change the language from "on or after" to say "on or before" first Monday in November. This would give them more opportunity. There is no benefit to submitting the application earlier in the

process. It was noted that consistency is important and we need to ensure that this would work for districts and the DSC, and know how this would affect the lottery.

Someone asked if a parent can edit their application via DSC system. Yes, you can if it's in draft, but once submitted, it is submitted, and at that point you would need to delete the application and resubmit. It's not closed until close of choice date.

Regarding the DSC choice portal, why do you need to register at your home school before doing choice? Tammy Croce, who is a retired school district employee, noted that they (the feeder pattern school) want to be the ones to verify the address even if the student is doing choice. This is because the feeder pattern school is providing the local funding to the choice school for the student. It was noted that this is a barrier. It was further noted that it is sometimes a struggle to get kids to register for kindergarten at all. Requiring the parent to go to the neighborhood school and the school choice school to complete paperwork just presents another barrier to kindergarten/school registration.

Vocational-Technical School Choice Process

For this item we are looking at determining if vo-tech programs are needed at traditional high schools to help those who do not have access to vo-tech high schools. We need to determine if there are sufficient seats in vo-tech schools and if vo-tech schools are offering the right mix of programs for Delaware's students. One school district wants to confirm this by looking at labor/market statistics. Mr. Klein noted that this recommendation aligns with PCG's recommendation #5.

There was additional discussion about students choosing programs within vo-tech school districts, and someone suggested that this indicated that some students can learn basic skills, like culinary skills, from a vo-tech school. Someone else noted that all schools are looking at labor market statistics now, and noted that with CTE classes there are benefits in all pathways. This is important as schools want to offer pathways that will offer students jobs. Others in the group do not believe all students should be tied to CTE programs, as there may be higher level spots to fill. This could give some students a leg up.

Traditional Districts Creating their own programs

For this item the group noted that having traditional districts create new educational opportunities (magnet schools/other programs) could be beneficial. The State encourages the development of informal and formal programs for all types of schools. Also, higher education and daycares are encouraged to explore programs. Mr. Klein noted that this recommendation aligns with PCG's recommendation #3.

Additional discussion occurred around this topic, specifically making sure AP courses and Dual Enrollment continue as these reduce the cost for college. Likewise, district leaders and board should maintain control over what programs they are to have (not the State dictating), but we may need to incentivize some districts to recognize demands and create programs. It was noted that it is not always easy for schools to judge the increase in capacity.

Admission Preferences

It was recognized that the work conducted by the Enrollment Preference Task Force could assist in the choice process, and will be recognized in our final report. Rep. Williams noted that she intends to bring forth legislation for enrollment preferences in the next session. Mr. Klein acknowledged that this recommendation aligns with PCG's recommendation #4.

English Learners (EL)

It was noted that an ELTask force has been created and is developing a strategic plan. Their work should be reviewed in order to determine how to best engage EL and their needs. It was noted that this recommendation aligns with PCG 's recommendation #7. It was further noted that information regarding this task force will be put on the website.

At this point, the group discussed the relationship between the April 1 requirement for charter schools, and whether the first year agreement is or is not a barrier. One member noted that this is unfair to public schools that this agreement forces children to stay at a school they don't want to attend. This agreement was instituted because parents were "school" shopping and it curbed some of that activity. While this is the law, the April 1 date is a hardship for schools.

Tammy Croce reminded the group to keep in mind that May 15 is the date for notification of teachers regarding a reduction in workforce and that the school boards must approve at their April board meeting (prior to May 15).

Next steps:

The group was advised that the next step is to draft a report with recommendations and circulate it with a timeline to the group over the holiday, in order to meet the January 11 deadline. A final version of the report and recommendations would be circulated by January 11.

It was noted that this strategic plan is a living document and therefore will change. When we print a final version, we will do so in a way that we can change pages as things progress.

Public Comment

Bill Doolittle provided public comment reminding everyone that the best interest of the child needs to be our primary focus as we move forward. Additionally he congratulated Polytech School District for a take-all lottery (which includes special education students). Lastly he noted that there are multiple programs for special education students who are denied choice.

Kim Williams provided public comment by noting that the greatest barrier is what parents have to provide, such as transportation, etc.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:51 p.m.

Drafted 12.21.16