

Strategic Plan For Specialized Public Education Opportunities

Meeting #3 - November 30, 2016 – Townsend Building, Cabinet Room

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Minutes

Attendees:

David Blowman, Department of Education
Heath Chasanov, Woodbridge School District
Susan Haberstroh, Department of Education
Earl Jaques, Chair, House Education Committee
Jeff Klein, University of Delaware
Elizabeth Lockman, Community Member
Nick Manolakos, Odyssey Charter School
Bernardette Maxwell, Lake Forest School District
Tina Shockley, Department of Education
David Sokola, Chair, Senate Committee
Leroy Travers, Campus Community School
Brenda Wynder, Lake Forest School District
Debbie Zych, PolyTech School District

Members Absent:

Joan Buttram, University of Delaware
Mervin Daughtery, Red Clay Consolidated School District
Salome El-Thomas, Thomas A. Edison Charter School

General Public/Interested Parties:

John Marinucci, Delaware School Boards Association
Kendall Massett, Executive Director of Delaware Charter Schools Network
Kevin Ohlandt, Member of the public
Kim Williams, Representative, Delaware General Assembly
Kristin Dwyer, DSEA

Welcome and Introductions

The third meeting of the Strategic Plan for Specialized Public Education Opportunities began at 2:01 p.m. The group was welcomed and introductions were made. The agenda was reviewed by all. Representative Kim Williams and Senator Sokola were welcomed to the meeting.

Approval of Meeting #1 Minutes

The group reviewed the minutes from Meeting #2. Earl Jaques motioned to approve the minutes in their current form and Tizzy Lockman seconded the motion. Everyone voted in favor of approving the minutes with no changes, and the minutes were thereby approved.

To date the group has been discussing issues regarding existing choice patterns statewide, not just application acceptance, but how the choice process looks and how it aligns across the state. Jeff Klein of

University of Delaware has done an analysis of the school choice data that is available in the Data Service Center (DSC).

DSC Data Analysis of Capacity – Jeff Klein

Jeff Klein provided a handout to the group for his presentation (posted online) and explained that parents can go to the website schoolchoicede.org, create a unique username, and submit choice applications to any participating school. All schools except for a few are on the DSC system. He noted that the data presented does not accurately represent all the school choice applications, as some are submitted in paper copies as opposed to online (via DSC). (The document provides the districts and charter schools participating in the DSC online application process.)

Some highlights from the presentation include:

-Overall the number of applications submitted is not reflective of number of students participating in choice, as you can have one child apply for two or more schools, and the parent can also rank the choices. When we look at this data for the 2016-2017 school year, 24,957 applications were submitted in the DSC system. In reality there were more, but again this is just those entered into the DSC system.

-Kindergarten choice period is open until school starts. The regular school choice application period is from the first Monday in November through the second Wednesday in January. Charter schools and vocational technical schools can continue to receive applications until the fulfillment of availability.

-There are also “good cause” applications. These are instances where a parent moved to a school district, and even though they may not be living in a resident district (say a house construction was not complete), most districts or schools allow the child to start at the beginning of the school year. Another example may be if parents were divorced. The “good cause” provisions are included in Delaware Code.

-For this past school year, 18,856 applications were marked as complete by the school/district, and it is only these completed applications that are entered into lottery pools. Reasons why an application may be marked incomplete is that parents fill out choice application but don't register with their home district first. Or, sometimes an application is incomplete, and usually the school will contact the parent to get the necessary information.

-The data presented also shows what feeder district applications originate from. Most applications were submitted from parents in the Christina School District. As an example, it was noted that Indian River (IR) is not in the DSC system, so the committee cannot see how many choice applications are there.

-If we break down the numbers by resident/county, we see the bulk of applications come from New Castle County (87%) and Sussex County has the least (due to IR and Sussex Tech not being in DSC).

-In looking at ethnicity, some applications did not indicate Hispanic or Non-Hispanic. Also important to note that ethnicity is not race.

-In looking at race by county, we see that 34% are for African American students, and 38% are Caucasian, with 10% don't provide race or ethnicity. Therefore, there is no evidence that minority students are applying for choice and not getting it. A member noted that minority students are participating in school choice proportionately less to schools that have higher rates of achievement. We probably could not draw any specific conclusions from these data because it is only a subset.

Representative Williams asked if this includes paper school choice applications. Jeff noted it does include paper applications if schools entered them into the DSC system. It was noted that we do not know how many paper applications get submitted if they are not submitted into the DSC system, and that can skew the numbers. She also asked if UD has compared these numbers to those that DOE has on its website. Jeff noted it will not correspond because DOE's numbers are for those who successfully enrolled in choice and these numbers are for those seeking choice.

-Jeff noted that we do have the zip code for each application submitted, and a chart displayed the highest number of choice applications from those zip codes (19702) in Newark/Bear area. As we move south there are less people in those zip codes, and again some Sussex school districts are not participating in DSC. A representative from Woodbridge School District noted that they mostly have paper applications submitted. The Lake Forest School District representative agreed with that statement and added they do not have many who submit online.

-Jeff noted that we can see the number of applications received by date, with 27% submitted the first week the choice process is open. We also see numbers decrease during the holidays, but increase in the new year as the deadline approaches.

-In other charts we can see where students are applying to based on their feeder district. For example, 949 Appoquinimink residents applied for MOT Charter and 510 Appoquinimink residents applied for an Appoquinimink school other than their feeder pattern school. We have this data for choice/charter enrollment, so we could compare applications to enrollment. This comparison would be interesting to see.

-Jeff notes the data shows the top 6 most common choice schools with Christina residents choosing to Newark Charter School the most.

At this point several questions/answers were discussed:

Q: If we don't have a paper trail or some districts are not participating, how reliable is this data?

A: The New Castle County data is solid, but is less so the further south you go. There are not many paper applications that are not put in the DSC system because otherwise it would be difficult to run the lottery. This is a policy concern and potential recommendation. It was stated that the data are not as robust as needed, but what is here is reliable.

Q: Do all districts need to do a lottery system?

A: Yes if they have more applications than space. It was noted that smaller districts like Lake Forest just fill to capacity and do not do a lottery. Representative Williams noted each local school board has to approve their lottery.

Q: What is the criteria for a school district to participate in a lottery?

A: To run a lottery through DSC, students have to be in the system. Currently, it is voluntary to participate online through DSC. This may be something the committee wants to change/recommend.

Q: Based on the data available in terms of applications vs students, would that impact the patterns we see?

A: We do not think it would impact the data patterns we see emerge in school choice.

Q: How many school districts use the system to do a lottery?

A: This information was not available as this has not been asked. Representative Williams noted that she has a potential bill to make that happen.

Potential New Application Process For Charter School/CN Overlap

Denise Stouffer, Education Associate in DOE Charter Office, provided a presentation on the Charter School Application Process and Timeline. She referenced the Charter School Application and process/timeline (both available online) that is used for the opening of a new charter school.

From approval in April to the opening of school (which is the school year after that), several verifications take place, such as enrollment numbers, financial viability, academics. These items are also monitored every year the charter school is opened. This process is governed by Title 14 of Delaware Code, Chapter 5 (also available online).

At this point the group asked questions regarding the charter school approval process:

Q: How many applications has the state received since the process began vs. how many have opened?

A: We do have the numbers but not readily available for this meeting. It was noted that over the last couple years there have not been many applications and those applications received have been screened out in the initial stage of the process. There were also a couple charter schools who had approval to open but then did not do so.

Q: Does Red Clay Consolidated School District have their own process for charter schools?

A: They may have their own process, but the district uses the State's template. A district could come up with their own process.

A member noted that Christina follows what is in the law in terms of what they have to turn in. Red Clay did not vote to have their own process anymore. The group was reminded that due to legislation that there is a moratorium on any new charter schools opening in the City of Wilmington until June 2018 or the completion of the strategic plan.

Q: What does a charter school have to do to show community impact? What does that look like?

A: The Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) is looking for number of students, grade level, connections to people within community, enrollment, and established need for the charter school in the area.

Q: If a charter school offers a language immersion program like a public school is that considered impact?

A: Impact can mean many different things.

Q: What is the difference between community impact (as noted in Delaware Code as amended by SB 209) and district impact?

A: Title 14, Del. C., Section 511 (b)(4) outlines what is required of a charter school with regard to impact and consideration of other factors. There is no distinction in the law between community impact and district impact.

It was stated that the bar has been raised for the approval of a new charter school, as it is harder now to get approved than five years ago. Interested applicants are fully aware of what it takes to get through the process.

Recently, the DOE has been more active in intervening in the process prior to a charter school opening.

A member of the public asked for confirmation that the City of Wilmington moratorium under the current Charter School Application process that begins January 3, 2017, and thus a charter school would not be allowed to open until 2018-2019 school year. Others confirmed that is correct.

The transportation barrier was restated briefly and how differences between rules related to whether intra-district choice vs. vocational-technical vs. charter choice may dissuade people from going through any of these choice process.

Q: Regarding application patterns and demand vs. need, are applications requesting a program that should/can be replicated?

A: The waiting list info is actual data. It becomes a problem when you have two choice schools with the same programs. Different districts have different levels of choice because of programs they have put in place.

One member noted that there may be an opportunity here. DOE currently does not have a mechanism to identify students that want specific programs (like IT or culinary arts). The only current data are the choice data we have (i.e., kids applying to programs/schools). This committee may include a mechanism that can be put in place to identify what specific programs are desired. The districts and charter schools and an entity wanting to open a charter are currently able to do this.

Heath Chasanov noted they partnered with Seaford School District on manufacturing because it was identified as a need.

It was noted that the reason we have school boards is to represent the community and the needs of that community. The group agreed that is a fair statement.

Mr. Chasanov was asked how the district identified there was a need for manufacturing. The response was that Choice applications, or popularity of existing program in schools informed the districts. Local school boards and administrators have the authority to identify these kinds of needs.

Rep Jaques noted that the Christina School District is thinking about their own school of arts, since Cab Calloway is so hard to get into. How do they know if there are enough students interested? The old theory of "build it and they will come" may apply, and it is adjusting to the market. Someone else suggested you put a disclaimer in your course catalog that if a certain number of students do not register the program may not be implemented or run.

Q: Does the DOE have socio-economic status (data) on the application. No, choice applications specifically do not include such info because of current Code related to civil rights reasons. However, if students are already in the system and then choice, the DOE could identify some of this information if the student was in the system. If it is a new student, the DOE would not have that info until the student is enrolled in system. The DOE could do a run by zip code to gain some information.

It was noted that the Enrollment Preferences Task Force ruled against a lot of that additional information. Yes, that is correct and there are specific reasons why it is not on the application. Rep. Williams asked why it was not noted in the PCG report. She also noted that information from the District/Charter Collaboration Task Force was included while this work was never finished. DOE noted it was working with PCG to find out that answer. Rep. Williams is upset the report was not looked at and does not understand how we can move forward without looking at that report. It was noted that while such report was referenced and PCG may have used it for their reports, that is not exclusive of all information. It was noted we can make that report part of the materials online.

It was noted that there may be some slight CN overlap with the Charter School application process, but one reason the impact conversation got traction was that Red Clay had CN approved for renovation/new building and there was a charter school application for the same area. There is legitimate concern regarding having approved funding for new school and the potential for losing students to a proposed charter school. In that specific instance the school ultimately did not open, but it fueled concern.

It was noted that this is the other part of community impact – traffic concerns with two schools close together. It was noted that DOE could not have disapproved the charter school on that basis.

When SB 209 (previous General Assembly) was presented, the two school districts submitted impact letters to the State Board of Education, which specific concerns about the impact on current district. Unless deficient that impact cannot be deciding factor in and of itself. SBE thought this was unfair and they wanted to weigh in. This is a complex issue with a variety of outside factors

Kendall Massett noted that in evaluating reasons why charter schools should open, the positive impacts should be considered as well. There is a great deal of focus on the negative aspects. When parents/teachers need something that is not being provided, there needs to be an opportunity for charter school to open.

Q: Was a needs assessment performed at all?

A: Yes, that was the second report PCG prepared.

Q: Was there a recommendation for an ongoing needs assessment?

A: That could be a recommendation that comes out of this committee.

A committee member noted that with regard to the moratorium on charters in the City of Wilmington, there were concerns about having no control / discretion over where schools would be located.

DOE is required by Delaware Code to look at capacity, enrollment, and that DOE will work with the district to determine possible change in feeder pattern before construction. Both charter and districts have to defend the need. The planning process and CN process would need to occur.

Likewise, if district has unfilled capacity, the district has the ability to offer a charter school use their facility. It may not be in the districts best financial interest to declare it has unused space. Additionally, there can be expenses (nurses, principals, etc.) in each new building. There is potential benefit to others, like DTCC in one case, so the capacity doesn't have to go to charter school.

One member of the public noted that what we heard last time from Jim Pennewell with regard to CN progress should be included in that charter school enrollment, i.e., capacity within the area that school serves. We need to look at all the (historical) data when making a decision.

DOE reps noted that that the law says you go to school in area of residence. For instance, by law Appoquinimink is required to serve any student in their district. There may be existing charters that can be taken into consideration but charter applications may be another issue.

Another member of the public asked if DOE could look at removing enrollment preference or other barriers to kids as a recommendation

Q&A/Future Discussion Items

It was noted that there our work is not done, and we may need another meeting. Our next step is to put together a list of policy questions/solutions and have conversations about those policy questions at the next meeting. The committee also recognizes that it will not be able to provide solutions to all policy questions at this point, as some of those solutions are outside the authority of this Committee or even the DOE. The group agreed DOE would provide a list of policy questions and distribute to everyone prior to the next meeting.

It was reiterated that our goal is not to exclude any issue that is being raised, but that we want to need be responsive to the timeline

The group looked for dates for another meeting, sometime after December 19. Suggested dates will be put out via Doodle Poll.

Public Comment

Kevin Ohlandt asked what the timeframe was for this report. DOE noted that we are trying to respond to legislation HB 56 as amended. He noted that comments he made earlier in the meeting were sufficient for his public comment.

Likewise Kim Williams was asked if she had public comment, and noted that her previous comments constituted her public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:52pm.

Approved 12.21.16