

Enrollment Preferences Task Force Minutes: Meeting #8
Tuesday, October 28, 2014
6:30 pm- Baltz Elementary School

Task Force members present:

- Representative Kim Williams, Delaware House of Representatives, Co-Chair
- Senator Nicole Poore, Delaware State Senate, Co-Chair
- Senator David Sokola, Delaware State Senate
- Frederika Jenner, Delaware State Education Association
- Terri Hancharick, Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
- Dr. Mervin Daugherty, New Castle County Superintendent
- Yvonne Johnson, Delaware Parent Teacher Association
- Chuck Taylor, Charter School Network
- Dr. Victoria Gehrt, Superintendent from New Castle County Vo-Tech
- Dr. Deborah Zych, Superintendent from Polytech
- Mark Pruitt, Magnet School Representative
- Julie Rumschlag, Magnet School Representative
- Henry Clampitt, Charter School Representative
- Elizabeth Lockman, Parent Representative
- Catherine Hegedus, Parent Representative

Staff present:

- Fran Fletcher, University of Delaware
- Mark Brainard Jr., Delaware House of Representatives

Members Absent:

- Representative Darryl Scott, Delaware House of Representatives
- Secretary Mark Murphy, Delaware Department of Education
- Randall Hughes, Delaware State Board of Education
- Susan Francis, Delaware School Board Association
- Lindsay O'Mara, Governor's Office
- Dr. Matthew Donovan, Delaware Association of School Administrators
- Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald, Kent County Superintendent
- Dr. David Ring Superintendent from Sussex County
- Dr. Allen Lathbury, Superintendent from Sussex Tech
- Donald Mell, Charter School Representative
- Dr. Terri Hodges, Parent Representative
- Gary Stockbridge, Delaware Business Roundtable

Public attendees:

- John Lynch, New Castle County Vo-Tech
- Kathy Demarest, New Castle County Vo-Tech
- Greg Meese, Newark Charter School
- Ron Russo, Community Member
- Kathleen McRae, ACLU Delaware
- Kendall Massett, Delaware Charter School Network
- Mike Matthews, Red Clay
- Bill Doolittle, Community Member
- Linda Jennings, MOT
- Brian Glary, MOT
- Sam Paoli, Charter School
- Maura Duke, Newark Charter School
- Stephanie Prendergast, Newark Charter School

- Charles McDowell, Red Clay
 - Elvira Berry, Reach Academy
 - Jen Nagourney, Delaware Department of Education
 - Amanda Gonye, Red Clay
 - Joane Schlosky, Christina
 - Joanne Johansen, Red Clay
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Meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m.

1. Introduction

Representative Williams asked for a motion to approve the previous meeting's minutes. The motion was made by Catherine Hegedus, seconded by Frederika Jenner, and unanimously adopted by the task force.

Representative Williams spoke about Delaware's charter school law, Senate Bill 200, which passed the General Assembly in 1995. Representative Williams read testimony regarding the concern expressed by some members of the Delaware Senate that charter schools may not provide an equal opportunity for every Delaware student.

Senator Sokola commented that, as a member of the Delaware Senate at the time, based on the testimony from charter school proponents, the intent of the legislation was to give all students an opportunity to attend. With regards to Charter School of Wilmington, Senator Sokola reflected that for the first three years, every student that applied was accepted because the school was not over-subscribed. Once the school began testing for possible admission on the same morning as some of the other area schools, Senator Sokola recalls having multiple meetings with school officials about the intent of the legislation versus the interpretation currently being practiced by the school, without coming to an agreement. Senator Sokola concluded by saying that his message to schools officials was to try and find ways to expand the opportunity so all interested students could partake, but some officials were not interested.

Henry Clampitt said that in the testimony, the school being referred to was called Academy of Math and Science, not the current Charter School of Wilmington.

Senator David Sokola responded that the concern expressed in the testimony was in regards to these schools becoming elitist schools that would not provide an equal opportunity for every Delaware student.

Representative Williams discussed the Delaware Code as it concerns vo-tech and magnet schools. Chapters 2 and 10 deal with vo-tech schools while magnet schools are only mentioned in passing in Chapter 10 without defining them. Representative Williams said she reached out to the National Conference of State Legislatures to provide information regarding vo-tech and magnet schools across other states. Information regarding magnet schools was submitted by Magnet Schools for America and National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Magnet Schools of America defined magnet schools as free public schools of choice operated by a school district that have a focused theme. Most magnet schools do not have entrance criteria, but the belief that all students have interests and talents. Magnet schools often use a computer based lottery for admissions while some gifted and talented programs require a form of student assessment and/or teacher recommendation. Many magnet schools focus on admitting a student body reflective of the surrounding community.

Mark Pruitt discussed magnet schools across the country where 1/3 admit students based on random lottery, 1/3 admit students using criteria specific to that school, and 1/3 admit students using separate demographic groupings while conducting a lottery. Mr. Pruitt followed that by saying the magnet schools

in Red Clay have a responsibility to mirror the demographics of the district and have a plan to increase participation in the application process.

Representative Williams turned the meeting over to Fran Fletcher who would facilitate the rest of the meeting.

2. Discussion

Fran Fletcher began the discussion of assessment as it pertains to the items that had been placed on the "parking lot" at previous meetings. A list of these items was distributed to the members of the task force. Ms. Fletcher explained the process for the evening's discussion. Each member will have 3 minutes to speak on assessment. Following that round of discussion, each member will have 1 minute to follow up on what had been said.

Senator David Sokola began the discussion by saying, in some instances, assessments do not successfully gauge a student's interest or ability to succeed. However, with an issue as broad as assessments, it would be difficult to try and perfect the system without unintended consequences.

Dr. Vicki Gehrt said any assessment should be in line with the mission and purpose of the specific school, whether it is a vo-tech, magnet, charter, or other choice school. Dr. Gehrt elaborated by saying that a cookie cutter approach would do a disservice to students.

Julie Rumschlag said she believed there is a place for assessments in education policy. As the dean of Cab Calloway, Ms. Rumschlag said the school's assessments are directly in line with its mission.

Dr. Deborah Zych, as the representative from Polytech, said the district believed assessment was appropriate in terms of placement testing after admission has been granted to a student. That type of placement testing aids the district in successfully placing students in the proper courses.

Chuck Taylor said that the parent's choice to find the best fit for their child is vital to the success of Delaware's schools and must not be hindered. It is up to the parent to match the mission of a school or program to their child's needs and interests. Mr. Taylor concluded that no one should be taking that choice and opportunity away from the parent.

Elizabeth Lockman expressed concerns that some parents experience a barrier around assessments while trying to choose their child. Ms. Lockman followed up by saying that it is important to ensure an equitable system that is functioning in a way that can manage the diverse populations attempting to utilize it.

Mark Pruitt continued the discussion by saying the different missions and programming that exists across vo-tech, magnet, and charter schools make it difficult to come up with a solution surrounding assessments.

Terri Hancharick expressed concerns that, when looking at assessments, students with disabilities will be left behind. Ms. Hancharick said that often students are assessed on attendance, grades, and discipline, and many students with disabilities would not make it. These students need the same opportunities and putting up additional barriers would limit their inclusion.

Yvonne Johnson said she was concerned that a "one size fits all" approach would be detrimental to student growth. Although some aspects of assessments are flawed and limiting, assessments, outside of testing, that gauge a student's interest are beneficial to the success of the student.

Henry Clampitt discussed his support for assessments. School leaders should be mindful about student's life circumstances that could potentially create barriers, so an outreach program is vital to offset that. Mr.

Clampitt explained the Charter School of Wilmington's admissions process. The school received 900 applicants with only about 230 available slots. The school offers high level coursework in math and science that is not found elsewhere in the state. The application rubric looks at math and science foundation and interest at an 8th grade level; it includes a TerraNova test in reading, another TerraNova in math, middle school math and science grades and participation in extracurricular math and science activities. Some students, possibly due to a bad day or other life experiences, do not make it to the specific interest preference through the rubric, so CSW has a backstop—the interview. 400 applicants make the preference through the rubric and the remaining 500 students are offered the opportunity to interview, which is an additional opportunity to gauge the interest of the applicant. Typically, 200 interviews are requested and 100 of them earn the preference in addition to the 400 from the rubric. Still, only around 230 spots are available. Mr. Clampitt concluded by saying that assessment is a fair way to allocate a scarce resource, and, therefore, these resources should be expanded to accommodate the demand. He further suggested that access is limited by the enrollment cap and one way to expand access would be to raise the enrollment ceiling for the school.

Frederika Jenner questioned the intent and unintended consequences of assessments and whether or not it would necessarily be a bad thing if a student was enrolled in a school that did not directly match their skill set. Ms. Jenner added that it is a parent's obligation to match their child to the mission of the school. She concluded by questioning how an interest should be judged and doesn't a student show interest simply by applying to that particular school or program?

Catherine Hegedus believes assessments give power to the school rather than the parent or child trying to choose into the school. Interest should not be measured by a test, essay, or grades, but be measured by the simple fact that the student applied.

Representative Kim Williams discussed her belief that any assessment that occurs should take place after a student is admitted. She followed up by saying that when a student applies to a school, that shows an interest in the program.

Senator Nicole Poore said that the assessment practiced by the Charter School of Wilmington mirrors the practices of a private school. Every child, particularly those with special needs, deserves equal access to all of Delaware's public schools. However, there is not a one-size fits all.

Fran Fletcher began the 1 minute round of discussion.

Dr. Viki Gehrt reiterated that education policy needs to honor the uniqueness and mission of every school and program.

Julie Rumschlag agreed that all students deserve access and pointed out that Cab Calloway has a strong outreach program to schools and communities that may not be aware of what Cab Calloway has to offer. This program increases opportunity for all students.

Dr. Deborah Zych expressed the difficulty she would have casting an all-encompassing vote on assessments.

Chuck Taylor expressed the key to the success of a school and their students is the involvement of the parents and that parental choice must not be taken away.

Elizabeth Lockman said that there is work to be done in order to make a system of assessments that is equitable and accessible.

Mark Pruitt reiterated the need for vo-tech, magnet, and charter schools to consistently strive to improve the processes for which students are enrolled.

Terri Hancharick reiterated that all students deserve to be exposed to the programming offered in all public schools. Assessments prevent that from occurring.

Yvonne Johnson said that it would be unfair to punish those with access because others may not have access.

Henry Clampitt reiterated his belief in assessment, and that the Charter School of Wilmington does significant outreach to ensure accessibility. The state should expand the schools that are in high demand.

Frederika Jenner said that a parent would not deliberately mismatch their child's ability and skills and enroll them in a school that was not a good fit for them.

Catherine Hegedus reiterated her belief that public schools should not select their students as private schools do. It is the job of a public school to educate any student that is enrolled, and that once a parent expresses interest in a choice school by applying, their child should be on the same playing field as any other applicant.

Representative Kim Williams expressed concerns that assessments can hinder diversity in schools, and could pose a barrier for parents who may have a difficult time navigating the system due to income level, education level, or other life circumstances.

Senator Nicole Poore said that because some choice schools use assessments in specific ways, traditional public schools suffer due to the lack of accessibility for all students.

Discussion will continue at the next meeting.

****Note: Digital copies of all the document pertaining to the task force can be found on <http://legis.delaware.gov/LIS/TaskForces.nsf/113411bdd5de74d385257b3b005e343c/49b267f532b422d185257b6c0061a658?OpenDocument>***

4. Public Comment- The views and opinions expressed in this section are those of the individual speakers.

Greg Meese from the Newark Charter School said that the school has no assessment in place, but believes that the sibling and distance preferences be left intact.

Mike Matthews said that the task force should be mindful of the challenges of the students in traditional public schools and that the effort to label students enrolled in the "priority schools" should be stopped.

Bill Doolittle said that measuring student ability is a gray area and the burden of enrollment should be on the school not the student.

Ron Russo said that the demand of charter schools in Delaware is proof that these schools do a good job. The solution to the problem of access is to reduce demand.

5. Next Steps

Next meeting: To be determined

The meeting adjourned at 8:29 pm.

