

Strategic Plan For Specialized Public Education Opportunities

Meeting #1

October 25, 2016

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Minutes

Attendees:

David Blowman, Department of Education
Mervin Daughtery, Red Clay Consolidated School District
Steven Godowsky, Department of Education
Susan Haberstroh, Department of Education
Renee Ickes, Odyssey Charter School (sitting in for Nick Manolakos)
Earl Jaques, General Assembly, Chair – House Education Committee
Jeff Klein, University of Delaware’s Educational Resource and Development Center
Elizabeth Lockman, Community Member
Tina Shockley, Department of Education
Brenda Wynder, Lake Forest School District
Debbie Zych, PolyTech School District

Members Absent:

Heath Chasanov, Woodbridge School District
Salome El-Thomas, Thomas A. Edison Charter School
David Sokola, General Assembly, Chair - Senate Education Committee
Leroy Travers, Campus Community School

On By Phone:

Joan Buttram, University of Delaware’s Educational Resource and Development Center
Elizabeth Chmielewski, PCG (Public Consulting Group)
Anna D’Entremont, PCG
Annaelise Eaton, PCG

General Public/Interested Parties:

Laura Manges, member of public/Milford School District
Kendall Massett, member of public/Delaware Charter School Network
Bernardette Maxwell, Lake Forest School District
Denise Stouffer, Department of Education/Charter Schools

Introduction

The first meeting of the Strategic Plan For Specialized Public Education Opportunities began at 10:08 a.m. The meeting was called to order and everyone introduced themselves. It was noted that this was a public meeting and that public comment would be accepted at the end of the meeting. Joining the meeting by phone were Joan Buttram of the University of Delaware’s Educational Resource and Development Center as well as staff from PCG (Public Consulting Group) including Annaelise Eaton, Anna D’Entremont and Elizabeth Chmielewski. PCG worked with DOE and the State Board of Education (SBE) on the needs assessment phase of this project by conducting a survey of information from districts

and charter schools and creation of an interactive map last fall and then worked with DOE on additional information over the last few months.

Committee's Charge

The committee's charge originated in two ways. First, Governor Markell came to State Board of Education Meeting in March 2015 and charged SBE and DOE with doing a needs assessment on special education opportunities within the State and then charged the DOE with writing a strategic plan. Secondly, House Bill 56 as amended by House Amendment 1, puts a moratorium on new charter schools in the City of Wilmington until a needs assessment and strategic plan for specialized public education opportunities are developed. In fulfilling this charge, PCG assisted the State with the needs assessment, which was explained later in the meeting. The second phase is the strategic plan which is the focus of this group of individuals.

Prior to PCG's presentation, Secretary Godowsky made brief remarks thanking everyone for their participation. He noted that data collected through PCG, the DOE team, and other entities including the University of Delaware brings us to a place where we can make meaningful analysis of the data and continue forward. Representative Earl Jaques previously encouraged DOE to pull all this into a strategic plan. He noted December 1 is our goal to get this done. He also noted that there is a great cross section of people on the committee. He again thanked them and noted that this is an important part of our work.

It was recognized that in setting up this process there was a great deal of information to go through. The goal is to move quickly with some meaningful conversation around the needs of the state. Questions like, "What should it actually look like?" and other questions as referenced on the Guiding Questions (attached and which were in attendee's packets), will provide a sense of where we have some options for parents. Note there are many processes in place such as an established process around authorizing charter schools, processes related to the vocational technical education system, and some districts are creating their own programs including magnet schools.

The goal is not charter vs. magnet vs. votech vs. traditional. The goal is to look and ask, "Are there ways to expand specialize opportunities across the state?"

Some background on House Bill 56 as amended was provided. It was noted that from the General Assembly's standpoint, we have different kinds of schools and they need to know how they all fit together to make a good education system, so that they can fund them appropriately. This is a struggle for them and likely for parents too. Hopefully this strategic plan will provide us the answer.

The question was asked when we are inundated with request for new schools, are we putting them where they need to be or are they going there just because some group decided it? Is it based on population, future growth, etc?

The group turned to the Guiding Questions which were read before the group:

- How does the current mix of programs regardless of type of school align with current demands/needs as determined through needs assessment?
- What is the mix of programs that the state believes would be beneficial to meet the needs of all students in order to?
- How can we ensure that any new schools proposed and designed meet the needs of the community in which it is to be located or draws students?

- How do we ensure that the original plan is aligned to best practices for student learning?

A question was asked regarding will the strategic plan address access and equity to those opportunities. The response was that it is easy to get information on current demand, but it's harder to determine needs for the future. The Certificate of Necessity process around the request for new schools (enrollment, not programs) was referenced. Also, it was noted that we have a robust choice process – both in and across districts, which can create fluidity and uncertainty in the system. Also noted is that districts know their community is best, but what is the State's role? That role has traditionally been left to districts, and as such this may create tension.

Another concern from the General Assembly's viewpoint, and such was noted with the WEIC proposal, is who is paying for it. Some feel we should change our school districts to "county-wide" districts, so the county pays for students in that area. We need to have discussion about school districts and whether other type of schools are in there as well.

It was noted that another challenge we will face in this work is being clear about the scope of this committee.

Supporting Materials

Several supporting materials were provided in attendees' packets and/or will be available online in the near future. Those that were in the attendee's packet are attached to the minutes. Such supporting materials consist of:

- House Bill 56 as amended by House Amendment 1
- Draft Guiding Questions
- Enrollment Trends
- PCG Report – December 2015
 - Corresponding PCG PowerPoint – December 17, 2015
- PCG Report – October 2016
 - Corresponding PCG PowerPoint – October 25, 2016
- Interactive Map
- Certificate of Necessity Process
- Charter School Authorization Process
- Surplus Building Process
- UD Enrollment Study
- School Choice Information/Application
- Delaware Service Center (DSC) information

It was noted that UD projection data may be surprising. It was commissioned last year through the FY16 budget, and notes that unit growth has been higher in the last few years. A straight line demographic analysis including birthrates, migration, etc. It assumes current choice patterns, but does not account for behavior change/patterns.

One member commented that in order to be productive, we have to ask the right questions, make decisions, and have policy. Other agreed that more policy is needed and that when this is done, what will be helpful for those who make policy decisions and for parents is to have maps showing different categories (blue, green, yellow, red) which would indicate to parents the performance of schools so parents can make a choice. This is about transparency.

One member commented that, in addition, we need to make sure data is useful and measurable. It was noted that much of that is already in the framework.

Review of Reports (PCG)

PCG staff on by phone provided a review of the work they have done to date via two reports. The first was an overview of SREO Phase II Findings and Recommendations PowerPoint from October 25, 2016 (attached). For this PCG was charged to:

- Identify the current specialized educational opportunities available in traditional, vocational, charter and magnet schools
- Produce a report on statewide educational opportunities with supporting data and analysis
- Develop an interactive statewide geographical map detailing school data and information.

PCG collected data from DOE and UD, and conducted their survey and focus groups to obtain data on how people are choosing their school choice. One of the biggest findings was that data indicated that students from low-income families, students with disabilities and students receiving ELL services participate in specialized educational opportunities at lower rates than their peers.

Additionally, PCG looked at the national landscape and determined there are many shared challenges. They found that the following are characteristics of a quality school as per their research – student, staff and parent engagement, school climate and safety, college and career readiness, responsiveness to diversity, quality of teachers and leaders and educational programs. School quality, school choice patterns and school academic performance were key among stakeholders.

Additional areas for review: English Language Learners Needs and Analysis of High Demand Schools
Tizzy asked about the definition of school choice, is the student considered in school choice based on if they applied or if they attend a school not in their feeder pattern? It was noted that if they are attending a school that is not in their feeder pattern, they are counted as a student exercising choice.

There was discussion about using the DSC choice application (statewide), which does allow for DOE to pull data, even though it is not required to be used. Since it is optional and there is not data for all districts, PCG couldn't use it.

It was noted that transportation needs to stay on the table. It was noted that vo-techs, magnet and charter schools have transportation. In traditional public schools, districts have to pay for it. If transportation is a barrier, it's a big barrier and students can't get there, so they go to a charter school because of the transportation issue. It was noted that it is easier for non-low-income middle class families who have more flexibility to make choice work, than it is for low-income, high needs student. Low income students were underrepresented and we need to determine if students are not getting accepted to choice schools or are they just not participating in the process. One of the challenges is that we are prohibited from collecting special criteria information (i.e., low income, English Learner (EL), etc.), but parents can put in racial demographics. We will be able to determine by zip code as to which areas are applying for choice. A member questioned whether the school choice application asks for prior school attendance or resident school, which we will be able to use. It was noted that the choice application does ask this information.

Policy recommendations regarding new school approval process, communications and marketing, collaboration, admissions preferences, vocational/technical and disproportionate number of students

choosing to choose out of their home district, English Learner Task Force, and Transportation were a part of the report as well.

Q&A/Future Discussion Items/Public Comment

There was a call for public comment. Kendall Massett, Executive Director of the Delaware Charter School Network noted that before reports are put online, PCG needs to fix the report to say District/Charter on one of their charts. Additionally, with respect to transportation and access to programs, especially in low income areas, it's about finding an opportunity to have access for all programs for all families. There are issues with not enough drivers or buses for the schools they have. She suggested we look at policy for better access, through transportation and collaboration for all schools. Downstate is not as easy as upstate, but overall we want to improve statewide. Also regarding the choice and charter piece, she suggested getting more parents to know about it is key.

Laura Manges, a member of the public and Milford School District noted there is no representation from Sussex County on the committee, except one attendee. Susan noted that Heath Chasanov is a member of the group, representing Woodbridge School District, and that he was unable to attend today but is expected to attend future meetings.

The next meeting will be November 9 from 2-4pm in the Library Conference Room. If attendees cannot attend themselves that they may send someone else as a proxy. Several of the documents referenced in the meeting and in the packet will be put on the DOE website for reference.

The meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

Approved 11.09.16