

Governor Carney to Christina Board: Let's Partner to Improve Wilmington Schools

WILMINGTON, Del. – Governor John Carney on Tuesday met with the Christina Board of Education during a study session at Bancroft Elementary School to discuss a proposed partnership between the state and Christina School District to more effectively serve educators and students in Christina schools in the City of Wilmington. The following are excerpts from his remarks:

"I've lived in this city for 30 years. And it's always been clear to me that as goes the City of Wilmington, so goes our state. Wilmington is our economic and cultural capital. Its success in many ways will drive Delaware's long-term success. And so we need a city that is safe, with strong neighborhoods and good schools. We're working with Mayor Purzycki, legislators, members of city council, businesses and the community service agencies to achieve these goals. Our efforts have to start with improving our schools, and doing a better job educating city children."

"It's clear to me that the most important thing we should do now is focus on making changes that will raise achievement levels for city children. That's part of my responsibility as Governor, Dr. Bunting's job as Secretary of Education and your jobs as school leaders and Christina Board members. We're in this together. I'm here today, at the invitation of your Superintendent, because I want to partner with you to say 'enough.' I believe it's time to begin intensive efforts to get our teachers, principals and students what they need in the classroom."

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Governor John Carney

Full remarks to Christina School District Board of Education –
October 3, 2017

**As prepared for delivery*

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Thank Rick Gregg, members of the Board, Principals, teachers, parents and others present.

I'm here with Secretary of Education Susan Bunting and Dorrell Green. I appreciate the opportunity to address the Board in this workshop format.

I've lived in this city for 30 years. And it's always been clear to me that as goes the City of Wilmington, so goes our state.

Wilmington is our economic and cultural center. Its success in many ways will drive Delaware's long-term success. And so we need a city that is safe, with strong neighborhoods and good schools. We're working with Mayor Purzycki, legislators, members of city council, businesses and the community service agencies to achieve these goals.

Our efforts have to start with improving our schools, and doing a better job educating city children.

One of the first things I did when I took office was ask Secretary Bunting to visit Wilmington schools.

I joined her on some of these visits. And while we certainly saw dedicated teachers and principals, what we saw by and large was very discouraging.

And when the proficiency scores for these schools were released this summer, we saw that they fell well short of what's acceptable.

All of us, together, are responsible for doing better.

It was pretty clear to us that Christina's portion of the City schools – Bayard, Stubbs, Bancroft, Palmer, and Pulaski – are in the most need of help.

Already we have taken steps that, I believe, will help our efforts in all city schools.

We opened the Office of Innovation and Improvement at the Department of Education, to focus state energy on these and other high-needs schools.

We created an Opportunity Grants program that, while not funded at the level that I want, will help identify proven practices for serving disadvantaged students.

We put basic needs closets in Wilmington schools, so students can have access to hygiene products, school supplies, and winter clothing, in a dignified way.

We've reestablished the Family Services Cabinet Council to better coordinate services to families and children, and to address issues of poverty that are impeding the success of our city children.

But we need to do much, much more, and that's why I'm here today.

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We didn't get here over night. And we could spend all day debating the reasons for how we got here. I know a lot of that history through my father who worked in the old Wilmington Public School District and through my many years in state government.

Some blame a lack of resources. Dysfunctional families. Inexperienced teachers. Weak leadership. Busing. Trauma in the home. Segregated neighborhoods. Too much testing. Not enough testing. Bad parenting. Education bureaucracy. Violence in the city.

Over the last few years the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (WEIC) did a comprehensive study of the challenges, and came up with a plan to make changes. We've incorporated many of their recommendations into what I'm about to discuss.

It's clear to me that the most important thing we should do now is focus on making changes that will raise achievement levels for city children. That's part of my responsibility as Governor, Dr. Bunting's job as Secretary of Education and your jobs as school leaders and Christina Board members. We're in this together.

I'm here today, at the invitation of your Superintendent, because I want to partner with you to say "enough." I believe it's time to begin intensive efforts to get our teachers, principals and students what they need in the classroom.

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To that end, I'm proposing that the State, Christina School District, and Christina Education Association form a partnership that focuses exclusively on Christina's city schools.

My vision is to spend the next few months talking as a group about what this partnership would look like, so that by the end of this calendar year we can sign a memorandum of understanding to work together to improve these city schools and the proficiency of the students. I want to be ready to put our new plans into effect by the start of the 2018 school year. This aligns with your Superintendent's timetable for implementing change as well.

I think our partnership should address five main issues that I've heard over and over again as I've toured schools in Wilmington.

First, principals need more control over key decisions in their schools. I would like to work with you to give

principals the leadership tools they need and the flexibility and autonomy over structural areas such as staffing/hiring, school schedules, and programs. To give them the resources to implement extended learning time, and to create other school conditions necessary to best meet student needs. As part of this partnership, the Office of Innovation and Improvement would work with principals and our institutions of higher education to provide principals with high quality professional learning, coaching, and support. The Department of Education, using state resources, would assist Christina School District in training principals to better use observations to provide effective feedback that will elevate instruction.

Second, educators in high-needs schools need more say in how resources are used. I plan to engage Christina's city educators to ensure we are working in partnership with them, as they are on the ground every day working to improve student outcomes. I would like to work with you to empower teacher-leader teams at each school to partner with school administration on key decisions like working conditions, resource use, and school culture. The Office of Innovation and Improvement would work with our institutions of higher education and use the full expertise of the Department of Education to provide educators with professional learning that is relevant, consistent, and meaningful.

Third, we need to address the fact that student achievement rates at Christina's Wilmington schools are among the lowest in the state. In partnership with DSEA and CEA, I want to create more flexibility for these schools to provide students with additional learning time, including vacation and weekend academies. Teachers would receive stipends for additional hours worked, supported by state funds and the redeployment of district resources. I would argue serious conversations, in partnership with the Christina Wilmington community, need to take place around building use. We are doing our students, educators, and taxpayers a disservice when we have half-empty

school buildings – needlessly spreading resources thin.

Fourth, we need a plan to address the significant trauma students in Wilmington experience outside the classroom. I'm proud of the work already underway between the Office of Innovation and Improvement, DSEA, the Office of the Child Advocate, and community leaders to train staff to create trauma-informed classrooms. We need to double down on those efforts. I have already directed the Family Services Cabinet Council to work with City leaders to implement the CDC report, including finding a way to share data across state agencies about students in need. That work is under way.

Finally, we need to build systems to create meaningful, sustained change in Christina's Wilmington schools. As part of a partnership with you, the Family Services Cabinet Council would launch a two-generation network to support infants, toddlers and adults, with the goal of breaking the cycle of generational poverty. Additionally, we ought to convene higher education institutions and create a pipeline to develop teachers and leaders ready to enter into our Wilmington schools. These efforts cannot be a flash in the pan. We need to methodically build systems that will endure.

Give principals a bigger say. Trust and support our teachers. Tackle low proficiency rates. Address trauma. Build systems. That's what I propose we work on together.

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The partnership I'm proposing isn't flashy. It's not an education fad or sound bite. It's about the nuts and bolts of educating children. It is a simple but intense effort to put the focus where I think it belongs – in the classroom.

Frederick Douglass said that "it's easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." And that's the choice we're facing. We all have dreams for our children. But right now, we're consigning far too many of our students to a life

that no parent wants for their child. Every student we graduate who can't do basic math or who can't read or write, we're sending into the world knowing he or she doesn't have the tools to succeed. Doors are closing for these children before they even leave the third grade.

I believe, and I know you do too, that it would be immoral to let this situation continue this way.

So I'm asking you to form this partnership with us. Let's take the next few months and work out the details. I'd like to hear your thoughts on what I've laid out, and on how you think we can work together.□

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