

Council Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 4, 2026

Meeting held at Red Clay District Office, 1502 Spruce Avenue, Wilmington, DE 19805 and via Zoom

Public Session

- Helen Anderson chaired and opened the meeting at 5:56 pm
- Welcome and Housekeeping provided by Helen Anderson
- Council Roll Call provided by Helen Anderson
 - **Attendees:** Helen Anderson, AJe English, Dorrell Green (Susan Huffman as Proxy), Deirdra Joyner, Lisa Lawson, Alex Najemy and Deirdra Joyner, Nia Elliot. Minutes from the January council meeting were approved.
 - **Public Comment:**
 - Non
 - **Partnership Updates:**
 - **Library of Congress Initiative**

The Library of Congress initiative, titled "Empowering Young Delaware Citizens: Inquiry-Based Explorations with the Library of Congress," is a three-year grant program focused on enhancing social studies education across the Wilmington Learning Collaborative (WLC) schools in Delaware. The initiative involves collaboration among multiple district partners and aims to support educators in integrating social studies and literacy.

Key components of the initiative include:

 - Collaboration Across Districts: The program promotes collaboration among various school districts by using uniform Delaware-centric social studies standards and curriculum.
 - Professional Development: Educators participate in a series of in-person workshop sessions led by experts, focusing on themes such as enslavement, segregation, and celebrating Black culture. Each session includes providing teachers with relevant picture books and primary source materials to enhance student learning.
 - Inquiry-Based Learning: The initiative emphasizes inquiry-based explorations, encouraging young learners to engage with primary sources through strategies that support critical thinking and literacy development.

- **Focus on Literacy:** By integrating social studies with literacy instruction, the initiative aims to improve reading comprehension and background knowledge in students, particularly in the K-3 setting.
- **Lesson Plan Development:** In addition to workshop participation, teachers create lesson plans that will be available for dissemination to all educators in the system, promoting broader access to resources developed through this initiative.

Overall, the program is designed to enrich social studies education while fostering literacy skills among young Delaware students.

- **Education Support:**
 - **CLDS Teacher Leadership Design Fellowship:** Currently has 24 participants in the Year 2 cohort, partnering with Eastside Charter and Silver Charter.
 - **Teacher Innovation Lab:** A new cohort with 23 fellows focusing on instructional practice and teacher leadership. This program includes coaching, training, and visits to innovative schools to inspire and adapt new practices to their classrooms. Recent visits included the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta and several schools in New York City, both of which were deemed transformational by participants. Key takeaways focused on student agency and adapting innovative ideas back to their own practices.
 - **TAP Practice Prep Cohort:** In the fall, 26 educators went through practice preparation and para-pro testing, with nine already passing their exams. Support continues for those needing to retake or complete additional tests.
 - **College Unbound Master's Degree Program:** Nine students are enrolled, with the possibility of having the first graduate by May.

Additionally, Ms. Highsmith also highlighted new initiatives like tuition support funds, which has awarded scholarships to 13 individuals, and the Educator Innovation Microgrant program, which has received 32 applications and awarded 10 grants. The overarching theme highlighted the positive impacts of these programs on educators' professional development and student engagement.

- **Out-of-School Time Update**

- The out-of-school time update indicates that several partners are currently at different stages of readiness for their programs. Some contracts have already been signed, and recruitment is underway for programs launching in late February. Monthly reports will begin on the 15th of each month, containing details about student enrollment, attendance, and logistical support needs.
- There is a focus on tracking all activities and ensuring effective communication with partners to understand their needs. The goal is to ensure successful program implementation and to expand opportunities beyond the school year and into the summer. Overall, there is a collaborative effort to ensure that all out-of-school time initiatives are being carefully monitored and supported.

Old Business:

- **Strategic Planning Update:**
 - In the strategic planning update, Empower Schools has been involved in facilitating discussions and conducting SWOT analyses (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) with various educator leader teams and school community councils.
 - The process has included gathering insights from a significant number of educators across different schools to inform the direction of the WLC. The facilitator is scheduled to provide a summary of findings and insights on February 18th, where additional discussions around governance and organizational structure will take place.
 - There is a strong emphasis on ensuring that the goals set will guide the organization effectively and align with the needs of the community. The goal is to foster synergy among educators and stakeholders to move the collaborative work forward. The update highlights ongoing efforts to engage educators and refine the strategic vision for the WLC, ensuring it remains relevant and impactful.
- **Office Space:**
 - The office space update indicates that there is no current update due to some setbacks regarding the initial property of interest. After further review, it was determined that the original location would not be a suitable

fit, primarily due to parking and other logistical challenges. As a result, the WLC is exploring alternative properties. This indicates ongoing efforts to secure an appropriate office space that meets the necessary requirements for the organization's operations.

New Business:

- **2/18 Council Retreat**

- The February 18 council retreat highlights that the council is preparing for a focused retreat aimed at examining the governance structure of the WLC. A facilitator, Angela Perry, has been hired to lead the retreat, which will involve one-on-one conversations with council members leading up to the event.
- The retreat will aim to reset and refine the WLC's strategic goals, engage with the administration and Secretary of Education for buy-in, and address the future direction of the organization. The council is looking to foster a collaborative atmosphere with increased energy and willingness to engage in moving the work forward. There is a sense of urgency to solidify the council's direction for sustainability and effectiveness. The goal is to ensure that all members are aligned and that the organization can effectively advance its mission following the retreat.

- **JFC Budget Hearing**

FY27 Budget

- The WLC will present its budget alongside the Reading Consortium as part of the broader Department of Education presentation on February 18. The team is preparing to advocate for continued funding for the WLC, particularly highlighting the accomplishments and impact achieved to date.
- There is careful consideration being given to the budget, with a focus on summarizing programmatic spending and documenting the financial needs for the upcoming fiscal year. The presentation aims to clearly communicate the importance of the WLC's work and the need for financial support, especially in light of anticipated state budget cuts. The discussion emphasizes preparing the materials thoroughly and ensuring that the council members are well-informed about the presentation details ahead of the hearing.

- **Stuffing Needs**

- **Grant Writer**

- The WLC is considering contracting a grant writing position to secure additional funding for its initiatives. The rationale behind this decision is the need for dedicated support in pursuing multiple funding opportunities, especially in light of potential budget cuts.
 - The proposed grant writer would work towards generating applications, researching local and national funding sources, and assisting in building the organization's capacity to attract financial support. This position is viewed as a strategic investment that can help sustain the organization's efforts and expand its resources. The council is encouraged to consider this opportunity, with plans to further flesh out the details of the contract and the specific goals associated with the grant writer's role. The discussion reflects a proactive approach to ensuring the financial viability of the organization amidst ongoing funding challenges.

Adjournment

Motion by Helen to adjourn, seconded by Lisa Lawson. Unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 7:30pm.