

Council Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Meeting held at Warner Elementary School, 801 W 18th St, Wilmington, DE 19802
and via Zoom

Public Session

- Helen Anderson chaired and opened the meeting at 6:05 pm
- Welcome and Housekeeping provided by Helen Anderson
- Council Roll Call provided by Helen Anderson
 - **Attendees:** Helen Anderson, AJe English, Dorrell Green, Deirdra Joyner, Lisa Lawson, Alex Najemy, Deirdra Joyner, Nia Elliot and Celita Cherry. Minutes from the February council meeting were approved.
 - **Public Comment:**
 - In-Person public comment by Helen Fuhrmann
 - **Partnership Updates:**
 - **OST Updates**

During the meeting, updates on the Out of School Time (OST) programs were provided, highlighting several key developments:

 - **Contract Updates:** Several contracts with partners were executed as of late January and early February, leading to programs being rolled out with ongoing recruitment efforts noted.
 - **Student Participation:** Currently, various programs are either in the process of recruiting students or have already begun serving students. For instance, there are 84 students enrolled in Club Z tutoring services, and Horizons Tower program on Saturdays is serving literacy needs.
 - **Metrics of Success:** The importance of measuring recruitment and student engagement efforts was emphasized, with plans for regular updates and reports on participation and outcomes.
 - **Feedback:** There was a clear emphasis on prioritizing students from Wilmington Learning Collaborative (WLC) schools in the Out of School Time (OST) programs. Council members discussed the importance of exhausting recruitment efforts to ensure that students attending WLC schools are served first before considering students from other schools. The goal is to focus on the specific needs of WLC students and improve their educational outcomes before opening the programs to students from

outside the collaborative. The council members expressed a desire to see targeted recruitment efforts that specifically engage WLC students.

- Community Engagement: Council members expressed the need for effective communication strategies to ensure families are informed about available OST programs, emphasizing the importance of direct outreach through various channels, including school leaders and community engagement activities.

Old Business:

- **Strategic Planning Update:**
- Draft of 2026-2029 Goals & Interim Benchmarks
 - Focus Groups and Data Gathering: Mr. Malik Stewart from Empower Schools will visit WLC schools from March 18th to 20th to conduct focus groups. This aims to gather firsthand insights about the impact of ongoing efforts and to inform the strategic roadmap.
 - Benchmarks and Goals: The Council discussed the draft goals and interim benchmarks shared with them. Emphasis was placed on aligning these with the state's strategic plan, especially focusing on early literacy.
 - Council Member Concerns: Dr. Green raised concerns regarding the goals set by WLC, stating, "What within these goals does the WLC actually have the ability to control?" "We need to be cautious that we're not setting ourselves up for failure by establishing goals that are beyond our control." He emphasized the importance of focusing on measurable outputs that the WLC can influence directly.
 - Discussions highlighted the importance of supporting Tier 1 instruction: Dr. Green articulated a need to pay attention to Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, arguing that such targeted interventions are essential for students who need additional help. He mentioned, "If we only focus on Tier 1 and neglect those in Tier 2 and Tier 3, we risk losing students who require more intensive support." Dr. Burgos responded by advocating for strengthening Tier 1 instruction, stating, "While I understand the importance of Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, we must prioritize enhancing Tier 1 for all students to prevent the situation where students fall behind."
 - Feedback on Engagement: Council members expressed the need for a focus on family engagement, suggesting that integrating family partnerships into the strategic plan is crucial. One member noted, "We

need to find ways to engage our community in supporting schools, not just fixing them."

- Call to Action: There was a consensus that more collaboration is needed among Council members, superintendents, and other stakeholders to define clear, actionable goals. The importance of ensuring that goals are realistic and achievable was emphasized, with one Council member stating, "We must come together to ensure that we're all on the same page and focused on what is best for our students."

New Business:

- **Budget Update**
- End of Year Financial Outlook
 - Budget Reductions: The WLC's allocation has significantly decreased, with a reduction from a recommended \$10 million budget to just \$2 million for the upcoming fiscal year. This reduction has raised concerns about how to maintain essential services and programs.
 - Projected Carryover: The projected carryover amount was initially used to determine the new budget allocation. However, it did not account for necessary expenses expected from January to June, which could further impact the available funding.
 - Council member Helen Anderson suggested that the WLC does not move forward with the \$1.5M capital project due to funding constraints and other logistical issues. Dr. Burgos stated that no contracts have been executed yet and any changes in the allocation might require submitting an amended budget. Overall, the council emphasized the importance of not allowing the funds to just sit unused.
 - Current Financial Commitments: The council discussed existing financial commitments, including salaries, operating expenses, after-school programs, and summer learning initiatives. These commitments strain the available funds and highlight the importance of managing finances carefully for the rest of the fiscal year.
 - Need for Clarity: Council members emphasized the importance of having a clear understanding of how much funding is truly available, what has been encumbered, and the implications of the budget cuts on staffing and services. Specific questions were raised about the sustainability of critical positions and how the council could advocate for additional funding.

- Future Considerations: There is an ongoing need for due diligence in monitoring expenditures and making strategic decisions about reallocating resources. The Council noted the need for more detailed budgeting discussions to ensure that every dollar is spent effectively to support students and families.
- **Vote on Draft FY27 Budget**
 - Proposed Budget: The draft budget proposed a significant reduction in funding for the WLC, decreasing the allocation from the previously projected \$10 million to just \$2 million. This drastic cut raised concerns among council members about the sustainability of vital programs and services.
 - Concerns Raised: Members expressed apprehension about approving the budget without a clear understanding of the financial implications. There were notable questions about the details of expenditures, which included discussions about staff salaries and the impact on direct services to students.
 - Community Impact: There was a shared concern among council members regarding how the budget cuts might affect the ability to serve the community effectively, particularly vulnerable populations. Members wanted to ensure that financial decisions would not compromise the quality of education and support for students.
 - Recommendation to Table: Due to the concerns and the need for more thorough analysis, it was suggested to table the vote on the budget. Council members agreed that additional discussions and clarity regarding funding commitments and expenditures were necessary before making a decision.
 - Next Steps: The council expressed interest in gathering more information and coordinating with district CFOs to understand their financial situations better. The council planned to revisit the budget in future meetings, aiming to make informed decisions that align with the needs of the WLC and its students.
 - In conclusion, the council ultimately decided to delay the vote on the draft FY27 budget to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the financial implications and to advocate effectively for the needs of the community.
- **Proposed FY27 Spend Down Plan**

- Dr. Lisa Lawson: She raised concerns about the implications of the reduced budget, questioning how the drastic cut from \$10 million to \$2 million would impact essential staffing and services. She emphasized, "We need to ensure that our plan does not compromise the quality of education and support for students." She also pointed out the need for clarity regarding the sustainability of critical positions funded through the budget. They remarked, "We must focus our spending on areas that directly impact student outcomes, and we need to be cautious about commitments that cannot be sustained."
- Advocacy for Future Funding: Members underscored the need to advocate for additional funding given the cuts. As one member noted, "While we navigate this spend-down, we must also prepare to advocate for the resources we need to ensure that we can continue serving our students effectively."
- Council members raised concerns about existing financial commitments and their potential impact on future financial planning. The discussion emphasized the importance of understanding whether allocated funds are encumbered or tied to specific outcomes or obligations. Members requested further analysis and clarification from district Chief Financial Officers regarding current expenditures and the status of remaining funds.
- The Council also stressed the importance of responsible fiscal stewardship to ensure resources are directed efficiently toward supporting students and families. In preparation for potential worst-case budgeting scenarios, members discussed the need to carefully evaluate all funding to determine its effectiveness and its contribution to improving educational outcomes.
- The Council agreed that additional meetings will be scheduled to continue the discussion and to allow for a more detailed examination of district financial positions.

Adjournment

Motion by Helen to adjourn, seconded by Dr. Green. Unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 7:35pm.