

Innovation and collaboration are focuses in Wilmington education think tank

Kevin Hayes

1313 Innovation in the Hercules building in Wilmington was the scene for presentations, conversation, and collaboration on February 26.

The Delaware Community Foundation's Focus on Wilmington, in partnership with Social Contract, held an event for community leaders and local professionals to come together and share current projects in and around Wilmington, with hopes of networking and future collaboration. Whitney Wideman is a project associate with Social Contract and helped organize and run the event.

"This is a Focus on Wilmington event where we brought in a lot of the key players in the city and others who were interested to present to people about the initiatives that they have going on in the city," said Wideman. "We have a segment built into every one of these session where each person is going to see how their work aligns with the presenter's work--so it's really an opportunity for them to network and for them to begin to build on their own initiatives." There was a full slate of scheduled presentations:

- REACH Riverside
- The Warehouse
- PDFF Reinventing Delaware
- Trauma Informed Delaware
- Violence + Hospital Based Intervention
- Healthy Communities Delaware
- Delaware Guidance + DHSS - Community Health Initiative
- Delaware Pathways
- Summer Collab
- Delaware Readiness Teams
- Education Equity Delaware
- West Side Grows Together
- Reinventing Employment Pipelines

Also presenting Dorrell Green, the current director of the office of innovation and improvement for the Delaware Department of Education and soon-to-be superintendent for the Red Clay School District.

"These events are important. The Delaware Community Foundation, investors and folks within the community are hearing about the innovation and work that's happening on the ground, finding ways to get plugged in and being able to support those efforts," said Green. "No one entity can do it alone. I just think this is a good example of folks coming together to support, as a whole. I'm thankful and always welcome the opportunity to present."

Green presented on behalf of the upcoming Dual Generation Center at Stubbs Elementary School, which is a partnership between the state and the Christina School District.

Whitney Williams will be the principal at the center that will primarily focus on early education.

"We're excited about it because it's going to allow the opportunity for us to do what we have always known as being what needs to happen--working with parents and the children, simultaneously," said Williams. "We'll now have a place where parents can come when they're with their children or not, but be able to get the support that they need, to be able to do a needs assessment, find out what it is that they need, be able to have the supports in the school so that we can help them and they can help their children." She described the framework of the center, which will be operational in August of 2019.

"It will still be a traditional school within our district, Christina, and so we'll have the pre-K program as well as the kindergarten classrooms. We're looking to have up to 175 children in the center and we'll also have the dual generation side where state services will come to partner, as well as other partners--other nonprofit organizations and other government agencies that will provide everything that we know the parents and family will need," Williams added. "We're excited about that. We'll be able to give them the traditional educational setting but also be able to incorporate programs such as the arts and other developmentally appropriate things like early intervention and reading--that we can help parents--even if they don't know how to read, they can learn how to be a reading coach to their child and be able to help them."

Wideman helped facilitate questions and progressive conversations after each presentation. She noted that one of Social Contract's main focuses was collaboration, which is a theme throughout the shared offices on the ground level of the Hercules building. "Working here at 1313 Innovation is a wonderful space and also being able to work with a lot of wonderful people in this space and to meet so many new faces, is always awesome for me," said Wideman. " I love to meet new people and to learn how I can extend my impact, as well."

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