COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams
Monday, January 31, 2023
10:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCIL PRESIDENT DARRELL L. CLARKE, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR., VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILMAN MICHAEL DRISCOLL
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON
COUNCILMAN JIM HARRITY
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS
COUNCILWOMAN SHARON A. VAUGHN

RESOLUTION: 181014

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COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, and good --

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I'm here, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good. Thank you, and good morning to everyone. I want to thank you for being here today --

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Good morning. What's up, Jim?

MAYOR KENNEY: Hello.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Councilman --

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: What's up, Jim?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Councilman, we're live.

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Oh, excuse me, sir.

MAYOR KENNEY: It's a South Philly thing. That's all.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: I understand. We normally have the same thing going on up North. Good

morning. This is the public meeting and public hearing of the City Council Committee of the Whole. The Board of Education and the Mayor are called to order.

Mr. Christmas, can you please call the roll.

THE CLERK: Council Lady Bass.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good morning. I am present.

THE CLERK: Council Lady Brooks.

(No response.)

THE CLERK: Councilman Driscoll.

COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: Good morning. I am present.

THE CLERK: Council Lady Gauthier.

(No response.)

THE CLERK: Council Lady Gilmore Richardson.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Good morning,

Mr. President. Good morning, colleagues. I am present.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good morning.

THE CLERK: Councilman Harrity.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: I am --

THE CLERK: Councilman --

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: -- present.

THE CLERK: Councilman Harrity is counted.

Councilman Johnson.

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Present.

THE CLERK: Councilman Jones.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Good morning, Mr. President. Good morning, Mr. Mayor and team. Goo morning, School District. I am present.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good morning.

THE CLERK: Council Lady

Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Good morning, everyone. I am present.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good morning.

THE CLERK: Councilman Oh.

(No response.)

THE CLERK: Councilman O'Neill.

COUNCILMAN O'NEILL: Good morning, everyone.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good morning.

THE CLERK: Councilman Phillips.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Good morning, colleagues. Good morning, Council President. And good morning, School District of Philadelphia. And also our viewing public, good morning. I am here.

THE CLERK: Councilman Squilla.

(No response.)

THE CLERK: Councilman

Thomas.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good morning, everybody. I'm present.

THE CLERK: Council Lady Vaughn.

COUNCILWOMAN VAUGHN: Good morning, everyone.

THE CLERK: Council President Clarke.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: And good morning everyone, and thank you for being here. A quorum of the Council has been established. And at this time I would like to recognize the presence of the Board of Education members and the Mayor.

This public meeting and public hearing of the Council Committee of the Whole, the Board of Education and the Mayor are for the purpose of coordinating our activities for the improvement and benefit of public education in the City of Philadelphia, as required by Section 12-209 of the Philadelphia

Home Rule Charter and City Council Resolution No. 181014.

Mr. Christmas, can you please read the title of the resolution.

THE CLERK: Resolution 181014, calling for the Council Committee of the Whole to convene public meetings and public hearings pursuant to the educational supplement of the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter to review the administration, management and operations and finances of the School District and adopt plans to coordinate the activities of the Board of Education, the Mayor and the City Council for the improvement and benefit of the public education of Philadelphia.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you. Joining us today are Mayor James Kenney, the Board of Education President Reginald Streater and Board Vice-president Mallory

Fix-Lopez, Board members Sarah-Ashley Andrews, Julia Danzy, Leticia Egea-Hinton, Chau Wing Lam, Lisa Salley, Cecilia Thompson and Joyce Wilkerson, School Superintendent Dr. Tony B. Watlington and Student Representatives Sophia Roach and Love Speech.

I'd like to welcome you to today's hearing. Our biannual partnership meeting has been productive and we look forward to continuing this great relationship that we have for the children of the City of Philadelphia.

The agenda today will go as follows: First, Mayor Kenney will be recognized for remarks. Then Board President Reginald Streater will be recognized for the purpose of introducing Board of Education members and the School District Superintendent.

The Board will make a presentation on its current and

upcoming initiatives followed by questions and comments from the Councilmembers. Then Dr. Tony Watlington will then be recognized for the presentation of School District initiatives and plans for the current school year, followed by questions and comments from City Councilmembers. And we will then move to our public hearing for testimony from members of the public and then adjournment.

At this time, I'd like to recognize Chair of Education in the City of Philadelphia City Council, Councilman Isaiah Thomas for remarks.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good morning, Council President. Good morning, colleagues. Good morning to our partners at the School District. And good morning to our Mayor, Mayor Kenney. Thank you to everybody for coming together to have an important conversation around the state of education and the conditions that our

schools are in as well as the conditions that our students and our employees are essentially dealing with.

I'm excited about today's dialogue and I look forward to our continued partnership as it relates to making sure that every young person in the City of Philadelphia no matter what zip code they live in has access to a quality education.

Council President, thank you for your leadership and I'll turn it back over to you so we can do a deeper dive into today's scheduled conversation.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for your comments and your hard work on behalf of the citizens and the children of the City of Philadelphia.

At this time, I will recognize Mayor James Kenney for remarks.

MAYOR KENNEY: Thank you,

Mr. President. And good morning, and thank you for having me here today. It is my pleasure to be here with you to discuss what I consider to be one of our City's most essential functions, educating our youth and the strength and future of our public education system.

Quality education continues to be a core priority for our Administration, and I know it does for City Council also. From educating our youngest learners to our older adults, education is a critical component for the City's economic and social health. We have served more than 13,000, and hopefully 15,000, by the end of this year, children and their families through a free quality Pre-K programming with PHLpreK, increased school-based mental health services, connected 22,500 to free Internet with PHLConnectED, and created additional student and family support

at 20 community schools.

Since 2016, the City has over $1.2 billion to improve the School District of Philadelphia. A historic increase in our investment, and I thank Council for their help in getting this done. Let's not forget our return to the School District to a locally controlled School Board, removing Harrisburg from day-to-day oversight of our City's schools. All this would not have been possible without the partnership of the leaders here in City Council and the School District and the Board of Education.

But I know I also come before you today on the precipice of new leadership in our City and state. Dr. Watlington assumed his role as our new Superintendent just last summer. We have a new Board President, Reginald Streater. We have a new Governor. And we will have a new Mayor this time next year.

We can make a lot of progress in the year to come. I'm committed to expanding our partnership, and I call on our new and future leaders to do the same. We can make real change for children by continuing to invest in our schools, in our children and in our educators. We are here together for our children, for our City and for our future. I thank you and look forward to this meeting and moving on together into a very successful final year of the Administration.

Thank you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you for your remarks and your commitment to public education in the City of Philadelphia. We really appreciate it. Thank you.

I would like to at this time recognize Board President Reginald Streater for a presentation by the Board.

MR. STREATER: Good morning. Thank --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Good morning.

MR. STREATER: -- you for having us here today to share updates with you on the Board of Education's work. I would like to take a moment to introduce my colleagues on the Board. Vice-president Mallory Fix-Lopez and Board members Sarah-Ashley Andrews, Julia Danzy, Leticia Egea-Hinton, Chau Wing Lam, Lisa Salley, Cecilia Thomas, Joyce Wilkerson and I'm the Board President, Reginald Streater.

I would also like to welcome and congratulate the newest members of Philadelphia's City Council who were elected in Special Elections in November. We look forward to working with you and other members of the City Council as partners in this work to support our student learners and school communities.

On behalf of the Board, I would also like to thank Mayor Kenney, Council President Clarke and each member of City Council for the opportunity to be with you here today and for your partnership in service to the students in Philadelphia.

Please move to the next slide. Today we would like to provide you with important updates since our last meeting in May. We will share updates on the Board's new leadership for 2023, our vision for the School District of Philadelphia, the implementation of Goals and Guardrails, the Board's five-year plan to increase student achievement and discuss more education priorities in which we need your support and partnership to further expand on the progress toward our Goals and Guardrails.

Please move to the next slide. At the December 15th action meeting, the Board of Education held

its annual organization meeting and elected new leaders, myself, Reginald Streater as President and Mallory Fix-Lopez as Vice-president, and we immediately began serving our one-year term.

We replaced Joyce S. Wilkerson as President and Leticia Egea-Hinton as Vice-president who opted to leave their leadership roles, but who will thankfully remain on the Board to offer their experience and insight in guiding our work forward. I am deeply appreciative, honored and humbled for the opportunity to serve as President of the Philadelphia Board of Education.

I would like to once again thank the Board for its vote of confidence in me. However, no person is an island, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Board, members of the City Council and the Mayor to do the critical work

for our students and school communities.

My background includes being appointed to the Board in 2021. I am a graduate of Germantown High School, and have two learners attending a Philadelphia public school. I'm an attorney at Berger Montague practicing employment unpaid wage group and serve as a fierce advocate for historically disempowered people in the law and in the public in general. And I strongly believe that public education is not only a civil right, but it's also a human right.

Board Vice-president Fix-Lopez appointed to the Board in 2018 is currently an Assistant Professor of English ESL, English as a second language, at the Community College of Philadelphia and is an Adjunct Faculty member in Educational Linguistics at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Vice-president

Fix-Lopez also regularly consults with biomedical research institutions across the United States to support professional development efforts focused on effective science communication for their intentional researchers.

Finally, she lives in South Philadelphia with her husband and two learners and her oldest child attends George W. Childs School. Board Vice-president will continue the presentation. Please move to the next slide. Thank you.

MS. FIX-LOPEZ: Thank you, President Streater. And good morning. I would like to point out the latest Board member group photo on this slide is missing Board member Cecelia Thompson, but we hope to have an updated photo with all nine of us very soon.

We want to begin our conversation today by resharing our commitment to student achievement and

the work ahead. We remain committed to the following priorities: First, we will double-down on Goals and Guardrails, which we will focus on in the next slide. Our Goals and Guardrails allow us to focus decision-making and the District's resources on a student-centered approach to educating our learners and not be guided by the overpoliticization of education and discrete issues.

Second, we aspire to improve our collective communication, stakeholder engagement and further center the voice of parent, student and teachers. Third, we will continue to see greater collaboration with the City, state and federal governments and continue our advocacy efforts for collaboration in funding and support.

Four, we will continue our attempt to have one system of education that works in harmony and

alignment and will create mechanisms that survive the test of time so that we can move to a public education system that becomes less politicized.

Last but not least, we aim to give our new Superintendent the runway necessary to continue his strategic planning process, which may require us to go slow so that we can eventually go fast. Above all, we aspire to be effective and passionate advocates and stewards that our students deserve.

Board member Thompson will now continue this update. Please move to the next slide.

MS. THOMPSON: Thank you, Vice-president Fix-Lopez. We want to share an update on our five-year strategic plan, Goals and Guardrails, which we adopted in December 2020. As a reminder, we have five academic goals focused on reading, math, and college and career readiness for all students.

Just as importantly, our plan also includes four guardrails, which we believe are the conditions necessary to help our students learn and achieve. Our four guardrails foster welcoming and supportive schools, enriching and well-rounded school experiences, partnering with parents and family members and addressing racist practices within the School District.

During our monthly action meetings, Board members devote time to monitoring progress by reviewing data that indicates how on track the School District is to achieving the plan's objectives. Goals and Guardrails have allowed the Board to set clear expectations for student success, monitor progress towards those expectations and to adopt a budget and policies that provide supports based on the needs of our students.

The Goals and Guardrails

were essential to our Superintendent search process, and we believe we have the right leader in Dr. Watlington to carry out these goals. The Board has been monitoring the progress of Goals and Guardrails for two years now. This monitoring has helped the Board identify our students' needs and guided our decision-making and investments in targeted strategies and resources.

We encourage you to attend a Board meeting and become engaged with our work on student achievement. Board member Wilkerson will continue the presentation. Please move to the next slide.

MS. WILKERSON: Thank you, Board member Thompson. We'd now like to turn to our priorities for the School District of Philadelphia. The Board has four key priorities to help improve the academic achievement well-being of our students. These priorities include, one, fully

funding the District's schools; two, upgrading our facilities; three, addressing gun violence and; four, having fully staffed schools.

Board member Salley will continue the presentation.

MS. SALLEY: Thank you, Board member Wilkerson. First, I would like to begin by acknowledging Mayor Kenney's commitment to supporting public education during his tenure as Mayor as he enters his last budget season. We also greatly appreciate the support that City Council has provided to the School District over the years.

These partnerships are vital to supporting our school communities and working together in the best interest of our students and learners. As you know, the School District of Philadelphia is the only school district in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that cannot raise its own taxes. And the District is

completely dependent on our local and state elected officials to provide such resources necessary to ensure that every student in the City has access to a quality public education that prepares them for future success.

According to an analysis by the Public Interest Law Center and the Education Law Center, the School District would need an additional $1.14 billion annually to meet the educational needs of our students. This includes an additional $318 million in annual funding from the City.

The current system of funding education in Pennsylvania shortchanges school districts like Philadelphia, so the Board has been urging the Pennsylvania General Assembly to provide a fair, adequate and predictable funding system that enables all learners to meet state academic standards and one that does

not discriminate against low-wealth school districts.

We ask for your continued support in advocating for our students. We are also calling on you to balance the needs of our students with the needs of residents and to commit to fully funding our schools by increasing the annual appropriations by $315 million within the next four years.

We need your support and partnership to continue and sustain the investments the District has been able to make over recent years and to ensure that every student has access to an education that allows him or her or them to thrive and succeed in a global society.

Board member Mallory Fix-Lopez will continue this presentation. Please move to the next slide.

MS. FIX-LOPEZ: Thank you, Board member Salley. We would now

like to focus on School District facilities. We know you share our goal of ensuring schools are safe, welcoming healthy spaces where students and staff want to be and learn each day. We know that the average age of school buildings is 70 years old. And according to a 2017 analysis of School District facilities, the District's deferred maintenance totals $4.5 billion.

Also according to that 2017 analysis, additionally 85 of our school buildings should be considered for renovation and 21 buildings should be considered for closure and replacement. With that said, we are making substantial investments in capital and environmental improvements to our school facilities.

Last year we committed to investing $325 million over four years on major projects and renovations. This was on top of and

in addition to the already approved plan bringing our total capital investments to $2 billion over the next six years. Current improvements include: New construction projects such as Cassidy, major renovations and site improvements including classroom additions, playgrounds, art room facilities and major interior and exterior improvements and environmental improvements, including more than 4,400 asbestos-related abatement actions in 241 buildings were completed in 2022.

At least 168 schools now have lead-safe or lead-free certifications. We've installed more than 1,665 hydration stations and recently won a $5 million grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to help reach our goal of one hydration station for every 100 students within the next five years. But more work and more resources like the $318 million annually needed and

asked for by the City are needed to make sure all of our students are learning in buildings that prepare them for the future and for future success.

The School District cannot shoulder this financial burden alone. We need our City and state partners to invest in our infrastructure so that we can accelerate the work we are doing. We look forward to partnering with you in our work to improve the conditions of our school facilities throughout the District.

Board member Andrews will continue the presentation. Please move to the next slide.

MS. ANDREWS: Thank you, Board Vice-president Fix-Lopez. I would now like to address gun violence in the City. I'm sure you will all agree that there is an urgent need to decrease levels of gun violence in the City to keep our learners safe wherever they are, but

especially as they go to and from school.

We applaud the work of Mayor Kenney and City Council to implement new programming and dedicate funding to address this current crisis, but more needs to be done to protect our young people. The School District has put in place a number of measures to address safe passage to and from school. However, addressing gun violence requires a coordinated and comprehensive response.

Last spring we came to you with specific asks to support putting programs in place to keep students safe when they are not in school. We ask that you first increase the safe corridors around all schools during travel times to and from school. Earlier this year with funding from the Commonwealth, the School District announced the first phase of a new Safe Paths program where paid community members helped ensure safe

passage to and from school for our young people. But currently, it is dependent upon a grant and federal funding. So we are asking you to increase the funding for an Integrated Town Watch Services to replicate and expand the Safe Paths program.

Second, we want to ensure young people have safe places after school, on weekends, during the summer and other days when schools are closed. At the request of City Council last spring, the School District identified schools in every Councilmanic District where we would make school buildings available to community organizations during nonschool hours so that young people have a safe place to be. But providing safe places for young people cannot be the School District's responsibility alone. So we are asking you to provide adequate funding for all libraries and

recreation centers so that they can open after school on the weekend and through the summer.

Additionally, we ask for your support in enforcing curfews and expanding curfew centers throughout the City. And third, create safety zones around schools and enforce gun laws. While state preemption laws are frustrating, our current laws, including the prohibition of gun possession by learners must be enforced by police and the District Attorney to keep our community safe.

So we are asking you to ensure our police officers enforce current laws and partner with the District Attorney to ensure that there are appropriate consequences for those who break the law. Fourth, we would like to expand mental health services. The School District has implemented a number of programs to support the social and emotional health of our school communities.

For instance, we have a Rapid Response program in schools to help our communities respond to tragic events. And we have put in place additional programs under Dr. Watlington's leadership to support the mental and emotional health of our students and staff.

However, our programs are also not enough. Our young people and staff need additional support outside of the school system, so we must work together to provide a multi-pronged approach to addressing the mental health care provider shortage in the City.

We are calling on you to implement programs designed to build our provider capacity through the creation of a Philadelphia mental health service corp. where public funding could be used to provide training, scholarships and loan repayment to those who commit to working with Philadelphians impacted

by gun violence and trauma as well as the public workforce, and the establishment of public-private partnerships to increase the number of mental health care providers modeled after the University of Pennsylvania's Leonard A. Lauder Community Care Nurse Practitioner Program.

The critical point that I would like to make is that if we want our learners to learn, thrive and succeed, then we must ensure that they are safe and that their physical and emotional health is intact so that they are ready to learn. And we hope you will support our efforts to safeguard our learners and help them realize their fullest potential in life.

Board member Lam will now continue the presentation. Please move to the next slide.

MS. LAM: Thank you, Board member Andrews. Due to funding

constraints referenced earlier, the School District is at a competitive staffing disadvantage. Our financial position forces us to make decisions based on revenue rather than on need. As a result, staff at the School District on average make less than their peers working in better-funded suburban districts.

Additionally, our staff is more likely to work in old school buildings where limited revenue has forced the District to defer maintenance projects in favor of adding critical staff and investing in classrooms. Despite our funding challenges, the School District has worked hard to address these issues.

The School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers agreed to a new contract in 2021 that includes a 9 percent raise over three years. To ensure our students have access to high quality educators, we are calling on you to partner with

the School District on recruitment and retention.

We are asking you to commit to, one, provide street parking around schools for school staff. Many of our school buildings do not have parking spaces. As a result, school-based staff might have to park blocks away from schools. In neighborhoods where we have seen increases in violence, our school-based staff have safety concerns.

Two, provide SEPTA passes for school-based staff who use public transit. Three, provide loan forgiveness, parking vouchers and other incentives for Philadelphia residents to work in Philadelphia schools.

Board President Streater will continue this presentation. Please move to the next slide.

MR. STREATER: Thank you, Board member Lam. I want to end our presentation by reiterating how

strongly we believe in the importance of working together. We cannot do this work without your support and collaboration. The Board is dedicated to working in partnership with you to ensure the District is best positioned to meet the needs of our young people who deserve a safe and nurturing school community where they are valued, respected and encouraged.

Again, we need you, again, we need you and understand that it is our collective responsibility to come together and serve as a village for our children to support, educate, protect and inspire them to reach their greatest potential, especially when they face daunting challenges to their success and well-being.

On behalf of the Board, I thank you for your continued partnership and support for our schools. We are now happy to answer questions you may have.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

Thank you. Thank you, President Streater and members of the Board, for your presentation. I have a number of questions. I want to try to consolidate the questions and then have to get answers from you either today or actually by Dr. Watlington because I know there's a significant overlap in the things that we interact with you all with respect to funding, buildings and all the other aspects of the school operation. And then I'll ask my colleagues if they have any questions or comments.

President Streater, during the course of the presentation by various members there was one issue with respect to the federal dollars that came particularly around capital. I'd like to see if you could provide us, at some point not necessarily now, but for the federal dollars for infrastructure what would the challenge have been, because we

got a sense that during the course of the infrastructure vote, it was going to be money flowing to various needs as it relates to buildings, school buildings, bridges and all the other things.

So if you can give us a scenario that but for those federal dollars, so we can actually see where this gap that you just referenced is. Is it based on not enough federal infrastructure dollars or just some shortfalls in local revenue stream?

With respect to that, I do want to also get a sense of your projected deficit in outyears based on the revenue stream from the City of Philadelphia. We have in the City -- on the City side, we are experiencing relatively higher-than-projected fund balance over the next couple of years. And I don't know -- particularly given the fact that the School District gets 55 percent of those dollars versus 45 for the City,

if you all have experienced a significant increase in your fund balance as a result of these high assessments and all the other revenues coming off of the pandemic.

The other issue with respect to school buildings, we continue to have school buildings that there are conversations about. I'll talk to you, not President Streater, but Dr. Watlington, and prior to that the former School District Superintendent about the use of buildings that are currently vacant in my District and I'm assuming across the City of Philadelphia.

We had a conversation, this was before you, Dr. Watlington, about the potential of a school authority as it relates to renovation and potential new construction of school. As we set the way from the prior Superintendent, that conversation kind of got lost and some of my colleagues actually left to run for

various offices, well, they ran for Mayor, and that conversation kind of went away. That was an interesting thought.

It would have given people the opportunity to participate, all interested parties and also move it along so the School District can focus on educating children as opposed to putting their fingers in the dice as has happened over the last several years as it relates to school buildings.

I told you I had a lot of -- I'm just putting them all in and you can get back to me. Safety issues with respect to cameras, I know with our last budget we and the Administration put money for safety cameras. We had a big press conference, the Mayor and members of Council. I think it was out at Bartram, Councilman Johnson, School where we talked about providing money for the exterior to assist in both

the proposal to have safe passages with actual parents and volunteers and the ability to manage that through a realtime camera surveillance system. We need to get a sense of that.

I'm going to actually leave that whole parking issue alone. God bless you on that one. I'm sure there's a lot of people that would like to have parking on their street, let alone at their workplace, so I'll let you figure that out. And one last one, with respect to the taxes, is it the position of the Board, the preference is for the School Board like other counties and municipalities across the state to raise revenue via the School District raising taxes as opposed to City Council authorizing the tax increase?

So I know that was a lot of questions. I don't expect you to answer them all now. I just wanted to get them out there so we can

see -- in a timely way. Either if you can answer some now and if you need to review and forward those in writing or some time over the course of this public hearing.

MR. STREATER: Well, I can address --

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Mr. Council President?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yes. Councilman Johnson.

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Just for clarity and a point of information. I know we did make a commitment to provide funding for cameras. And just based upon my recent work with representatives from the District, that funding to date has not been released from the Philadelphia Police Department to the actual School District.

And so, hopefully we can address that during this particular hearing because obviously we're in a state of emergency when it comes to

gun violence. It's been a year since we've actually did that press conference outside of John Bartram High School. And so, we have to work with a level of expediency around this issue.

I just want to note that just for the record we can do a deeper dive later on in the hearing, particularly around the issue of cameras. They should have been installed, to be quite frank with you. But to my knowledge, the funding has not even be released to the District just yet. I just wanted to state that for the record.

And thank you for the latitude, Mr. President, before we get into the full discussion.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yeah, Councilman, good point. It's a similar situation with the Housing Authority because we also put money in the budget for the Housing Authority dollars. You'll get

whatever response, but we actually -- we kind of got somewhat of a response from the City of Philadelphia with respect to the release of that funding, so this will play out during the course of the hearing. We'll hear from the School District, their perspective on why as they say they're not in receipt of those dollars. But thank you, thank you, Councilman.

President Streater, I'm sorry for the interruption, sir.

MR. STREATER: No, that's okay. This is your forum. I'm a visitor here. Very happy to be here though. I just want to address a few things that you mentioned. As it relates to asking for the power authority to raise taxes, that was not the point of that comment. The point of that comment was to just reiterate how much we need you, right. It's really meant to say we need you, we need you, we need you.

And I think in addition to that it's important to note we're very appreciative of the 55 percent that you mentioned that we get, very appreciative of that. But when we look at what children just right outside the City get to educate their children per pupil, it's $0.60 on the dollar that we get. Again, I'm not blaming anyone. It's just our budgetary realities, and that's why we look at our budget in the way that we do.

As it relates to the federal dollars, we're trying to be great stewards with public dollars but we see that there's going to be a fiscal cliff in the year 2025. That's something that we're also worried about and preparing for as well. And -- I tried to take notes here. And as far as the Parking Authority issue, again we're raising it here in this venue just seeking help and support on that. I think Vice-

president Mallory Fix-Lopez can add a little context while we're really beating this drum.

MS. FIX-LOPEZ: Yeah. Thank you and I really appreciate that, President Streater. In particular with the Parking Authority, so we came last year and asked about this. And I think last year it was a very similar response to this year -- I think the quote was good luck with that. And frankly, you know, what concerns me the most is if we can't figure out parking for public school teachers, I feel like we're doomed as a city and we're not going to be able to figure out public education.

One of the things that we know is students need teachers that look like them, right. We've talked about the need for Black and Brown teachers in the City of Philadelphia. We are working very hard on that. One of the things that we get, one of the main pieces of feedback that we

get when we go to different schools around the City is that I don't feel safe coming to my school.

One particular school was at the time Sheridan. They've recently changed their name, but Sheridan Elementary is losing staff and is difficult to staff the school because the teachers say there's no place for me to park, I do not feel safe taking public transportation, the K&A stop is not a stop that I feel comfortable getting off at, let alone have students get off. There's no safe areas in the neighborhood for me to park at, especially because I don't have a parking permit, right, because I live in West Philly and I travel to Kensington to teach. There's nowhere for me to park. I end up blocks and blocks away and I don't feel safe.

That is a battle that the School District is not able to solve. That is a City issue. And so, I think it's a last ditch effort for us

to ask for the parking support because, you know, the City has not created safe neighborhoods in some places for teachers to actually go then to teach. So if the City can't make those areas safe, at the very least we can do is ask for parking closer to the schools for teachers because their public transportation options are also not safe.

So at the end of the day, I'm saying, you know, I am very troubled by the response of City officials of good luck with that and God bless you in that effort, because if we cannot figure out parking, we are not going to be able to figure out a $4 billion deferred maintenance issue, let alone all the other layers of struggle.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you for that response, and thank you for chastising me for saying good luck with that. It was rather flippant. But the reality is,

is that this parking issue in the City of Philadelphia is an evergrowing problem every day for everybody. And that's why I said it in the way I said it, because the policies that established high density developments with no requirement for offstreet parking, the levels of the pace of construction was I think frankly speaking unforeseen as it relates to a lot of different neighborhoods.

So I say that based on a reality of every day there's a conversation about nowhere to park. It's just a challenge. So I don't know how you resolve it. We did the residential permit parking issue. That, frankly speaking, is not really working all that well.

The issue with respect to contractors coming in doing work, business people also requested parking for themselves and their employees in their neighborhoods, so

it is a very challenging issue. And maybe I shouldn't have been as flippant. But it's just every day I get beat over the head by people who live in the neighborhood who can't even park in their own neighborhood, let alone work in the neighborhood. And the challenge with respect to parking happens to co-exist. So --

MAYOR KENNEY: Can I ask a question --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: -- we're prepared to have that conversation with you.

Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR KENNEY: Yeah, I'm just wondering whether or not we're trying to address a problem that can't be addressed in the normal way and maybe -- and I don't know whether or not we can get some feedback from the Board or from Valerie -- from Mallory.

Do you think the teachers would like what Thomas Jefferson

Hospital does. They have a parking area underneath 95 at Penn's Landing with a shuttle bus that goes back and forth to the hospital. Now, I understand that everybody's going to one place so it's not like you have 50 schools, 60 schools. But I'm wondering if there's maybe some pilot program we can do with remote parking and transportation to the school.

And I'm sure, Mallory, you know the schools that we're talking about as well or better than I do. And maybe there's some remote parking area that we can have teachers park safely and then they all get on a bus and they go to school and the same thing after school.

MS. FIX-LOPEZ: Yeah. I very much appreciate that brainstorming. I think that at least shows the effort to try to solve a problem rather than kind of dismissing an ask that we're trying to ask for. We heard constantly

about this issue. I think at this point, and I would default to President Streater, I think at this point anything is worth a try. Yeah, anything is worth a try, so thank you so much for offering that. The problem is we do not have resources and a budget to even try a pilot. But thank you. I appreciate that.

COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Council President --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: So I was going to leave it alone. But again, this is an issue for everybody and finding a remote parking location for every school --

MAYOR KENNEY: It's not every school.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: -- is going to be a challenge. I'm just trying to be real here.

MAYOR KENNEY: Because some schools have parking lots.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yeah. I mean, yeah, you got a school

that has a parking lot. They use it where playgrounds used to be, so it is a challenge. I'm not going to sit here and just give you a scenario where it's going to be an easy fix. It's just not, right.

And we are prepared to work with anybody who's prepared to come up with some solution. But there are other people in the City of Philadelphia that are experiencing similar challenges as it relates to parking, both in their residential community, both in their workplace --

(Background interruption.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Excuse me, everybody. This is Education Chair Thomas. Please mute yourself. Excuse me, everybody. Please --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Hello. Can you please mute yourself.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: -- mute yourself. Please mute yourself, everyone. Sorry, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
No problem. All right. So I'm not going to belabor that issue, but we're willing to more than try to help to resolve the problem. For all employees, at the end of the day we should have safe neighborhoods so that shouldn't even be a problem, frankly speaking, that people -- that's the overall issue, and that's the issue that hopefully we can get to at some point so it doesn't matter where you park.
COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
Council President, can I offer a point of --
COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
Yeah, hold on. I'm getting ready to call on you now.
COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
Okay. Sorry.
COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:
Yeah, I got the list.
Chair recognizes Councilwoman Gauthier.

COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

Thank you. Sorry for that. I just wanted to mention that we've been dealing with this parking issue too. Last year we were dealing with this issue with teachers at Powel, and we winded up creating a new permit, a new City permit for teachers.

And so, that's legislation that we did I believe last session or the session before that could be implemented in other areas. I will say it has not been extremely popular, at least it's not yet. We had a lot of back and forth with the Admin about the pricing on that permit.

And so, Streets really wanted to make it comparable to a transit pass. So it is $96 a month, but it's comparable to a SEPTA pass or what folks would be paying if they were using SEPTA. And certainly, it's legislation that could be changed until it really fits users.

So I just wanted to mention that there's already legislation out there that we can take a look at or take another look at that can be implemented at more schools than just the one we've implemented at so far.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Councilwoman.

Chair recognizes Councilman Harrity.

MR. HARRITY: Thank you, Council President.

I actually just have a little statement for Ms. Lopez. I live a block from Sheridan School. If your teachers are scared, how do you think my kids feel. We need to, you know, I get you guys want parking, but we have other issues that we need to deal with starting with the violence in that neighborhood and what the kids have to see on their way to school.

We're traumatizing them right off the bat before they get

anywhere. That's a K through 8th grade school. It's atrocious what those kids have to go past on their way to that school. So I'm sorry. I get that the teachers need parking and I get that the neighborhood is unsafe, I live there. But we need to help to clean it up. Thank you.

MS. FIX-LOPEZ: Yeah. I think we're in agreement with all of that. Thank you. I appreciate it.

MR. STREATER: President Clarke, can I respond briefly?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Yes, please, President --

MR. STREATER: Mr. Harrity, we definitely understand everything you're saying. And trust me, that's something that weighs heavy as two children who go to public schools as well in Philadelphia. But part of our Superintendent's strategic plan he's trying to implement now to help children right now is to help teacher attendance in schools, and we're

really trying to find every single thing in our power to remove all barriers for teachers on schools.

I know he hasn't done his presentation and he's going to probably speak about this yet. But based upon research and the data, children who are educated by highly-prepared resourced teachers who are present more than I believe 90 percent of the time, I'm not sure -- Dr. Watlington, you can add that -- tend to have better outcomes.

So again, we can hear you. We definitely respect your perspective and we champion that as well. But if we didn't advocate for that as well, I think we wouldn't be doing our due diligence. And I think Board member Lam kind of wanted to get in here real quick, if possible.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, President.

Chair recognizes Councilman Squilla.

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

Councilman Squilla.

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

Okay. I think Board member Lam had her hand raised -- no?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

Did you want to respond to -- Councilman Jones, yeah, I see it.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you, Mr. President. It must be something wrong with my hand-raised feature.

But first of all, thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thank you, Dr. Watlington and team, for your presentation. I want to particularly note for the record --

(Background interruption.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE:

Folks, can I ask y'all to please stay on mute if you're not being called on

to speak. Sorry, Councilman. Go ahead.

COUNCILMAN JONES: That's all right. I want to thank the School District during the unfortunate closing of Daroff and Bluford, which impacted 1100 students. There was an all-hands-on-deck effort to address that. I'm going to put a pin in that.

But today a 15-year-old was shot on 61st and Nassau on their way to Overbrook High School, my alma mater. We have a process every Monday. Dr. Watlington has been on it where we do roll call check-ins to check the temperature of the area, to utilize cameras that President Clarke and other members of Council fought for.

And I need to -- so we've done that maybe seven years ago. And we need if not now in this hearing and future hearings to know the status of that implementation of safe

corridors for students in the most persistently dangerous schools.

Note that there are 48 zip codes in the City of Philadelphia. 12 of them are particularly redlined in the sense that they have the vast majority of underperforming schools. In those same 12 zip codes where there is violence, the highest percentage of inmates on State Road come from. School-to-prison pipeline, a real thing.

I don't know, haven't seen in your strategic plan thus far how we address that, how we look at the causal effects, and it's not all your fault, not at all, but it is all of our responsibility. And you play a key role in that, that the kid cannot read by 4th grade. Planners know how many cells to build by the time they're 18, which brings us to learning loss.

What were our attainment levels pre-COVID? What were our

attainment levels for students during COVID? And what is our attainment recovery, learning loss recovery post-COVID? Because those are the things that -- I care about parking situations, I do.

But at the end of the day, we're in the business of educating children. And if we have a 50 percent drop-out rate hovering around that, if we were making donuts and 50 percent of those times going through that conveyor belt the donuts failed, we would be closed. If 50 percent of the time we couldn't produce a car off of an assembly line, that factory would be closed.

So with all due respect, are we going to go slow on the runway? Every year that we go slow and that stat where that school-to-prison pipeline happens, that's almost irreversible. So it is not your fault, but it is all of our responsibilities. And we have to

move faster to stop the bleeding literally and figuratively, both in physical violence and in lost generations that don't get the outcomes they're supposed to get.

Finally, and I'm going to shut up, these questions will be asked during budget again. Finally, how do we track those donuts, those cars that we produce, those young people? How do we measure success? Just because you wind up on a college campus does not mean you graduate. How many of our young people wind up in the military? How many of our young people wind up at a wage job that can support themselves and their family?

I think over a four-year period and beyond we should measure that so that we know what we are actually doing. And so, in this strategic plan thus far I think we need to take a deeper dive to look at those kinds of results.

And finally, finally, the Daroff School which we closed because of a number of things dealing the responsibility of the operators, we were also told that the condition of the school was subpar to have children in, subpar to be open. But yet I find out unbeknownst to any communications to me directly, the Councilperson of that District, that that is a relocation site, a shelter site for people being shipped up from the border.

I'm confused. If it's not good enough for our students, how is it good enough for any human being. These are the questions I'm going to need answers to.

Thank you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Councilman. Thank you. There's some significant issues.

Chair recognizes Councilman Squilla. Councilman Squilla.

COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank

you, Mr. President.

Real quick, I just wanted to go back to the parking issue as we have them in every school, at least in my District. The challenge is -- and we need to work together. There are some area schools that don't allow neighbors to park in the lots after hours and then won't use them because sometimes they need them for recess and other things, and then park in the neighborhood. And we need to make sure that we're collaborating together with the community organizations that are there and the schools so that we work together to come up with a plan. That's the only way this is going to work. Because if we have adversarial relationships between the community and the schools, it just won't work.

So I'm happy -- at least in my District we work very well together. I mean, we butt heads at times and there's challenges. But as

long as that collaboration is there, we can figure out a solution. But I don't know if it's going to be one generic solution for every school.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: All right, Councilman. You're right. At the end of the day, just from my perspective, you have to fix the issue as it relates to crime. That's the underlying issue. We got to figure that out, you know. We put a lot of money towards this issue.

The School District has strategies as it relates safe corridors. We, the City, have put in money for surveillance cameras. Everybody's ready to work and we've got to fix that, and this whole parking thing is a challenge because of that underlying issue which is the lack of safety. People just don't feel safe in the neighborhoods, both teachers, both citizens, both children. We have to fix that, so that's going to be a significant part

of our focus as we move ahead, particularly around schools.

MR. STREATER: President Clarke, can I respond to something that Councilmember Jones -- to some of the questions he raised?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: President Streater, yes.

MR. STREATER: Thank you. So thank you for your questions. And also, thank you for re-organizing the conversation or at least reminding us not to forget about student success and outcomes as well. But first, I want to thank you for your partnership with Bluford and Daroff earlier this year. You were such a huge help in helping us figure out that situation. So I just want to do that on the record as well.

But your question about learning loss, yes, so when we compare ourselves with other school districts, the learning loss was not as precipitous. So there were school

districts in urban spaces, suburban spaces, rural spaces that had a much deeper decline. And I just wanted to give an appreciation to the parents, the students, the School District, the teachers who put in that work when everybody was remoting, we didn't even know whether the pandemic was ever going to end. So I just wanted to just give you that update as well.

As far as what we're doing now, I believe Dr. Watlington is going to speak more about this. We can have all the resources we want in the schools that are available, all the, you know. But if the students aren't coming to school and if they have low attendance, you can bring the child to the resource but if they can't get the resource, they're not learning what they need to learn when they need to learn it. And also, that also applies to teachers.

I know it may seem simple to

some people, but sometimes we have to do the fundamentals first before we can move forward with the great big grandiose ideas as well. I don't want to step on Dr. Watlington's feet. I know he's going to want to get to this as it relates to what he's doing for the now.

Also, as it relates to safety, yes, just today whenever there's something that happens in the school, Dr. -- Mr. Bethel and our School District, we send our resources out to all schools, whether they're charter schools or noncharter -- or nonpublic charter schools as well.

We do have a safe path program, so we are moving our resources further and further outside of the school to help support the City in this role and this responsibility for making sure that our children are safe. But just as a reminder, every time we move

resources outside the school, that's one less resource that we can use to educate our children.

So I wanted to give you those updates as well. I wanted to address some of the things you said on the record, and thank you personally for the work you did, the yeoman's work you did behind the scenes in the Bluford and Daroff situation. We'll get back to you on those other topics that you asked for.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, President.

Chair recognizes Councilwoman Lozada.

COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA: Thank you, Council President.

I just want to reiterate all of those questions that Councilman Jones just finished mentioning. And I agree with Councilman Squilla, one resolution is not going to solve all. My District is home to many of the

schools who are amongst the lowest performing, and that is not only because teachers are afraid of coming, but because families are afraid of walking in the neighborhoods.

And so, I think that while parking is important for everyone and we need to find a resolution of that, our focus needs to be on how we ensure that our children have a safe and successful academic journey. My children are not getting that. My children have historically not gotten that and it is not fair.

They are living in the epicenter of the opioid crisis. And while it is also a city-wide issue, they are more affected than a lot of other children. Families are afraid to get them to school. What are we doing to support those families to get their children to school? How are we ensuring that they understand that when their children get into

that building, they're going to be safe?

And there's been a disinvestment in our school buildings in the 7th Council District. And so, what are we doing about that? How are your requests going to support that those schools that are amongst the lowest performing get the necessary resources immediately? And what is different?

What are you doing different besides -- in this proposal what is different than what you were doing before to ensure that our kids get what they need to be able to be successful?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Okay. Thank you.

MR. STREATER: So to answer your question what are we going to do to invest in our students, the divestment to students in your District, again I'm going to have to punt that to Dr. Watlington and his

staff as it relates to those schools and those places.

But this Board does have the laser focus, laser focus on preparing our School District and looking at funding and looking at how we rebuild the District in a way that aligns with the Goals and Guardrails and student success, student outcomes and also the make-up of neighborhoods as well.

Board member Salley, did you want to add something?

MS. SALLEY: Yes. And just -- I want to remind us, and it may not be pleasant, and just to try to almost connect the dots from a number of the conversations that Dr. Watlington has been helping us to baseline where we are for the first time, right, to understand where we are.

I know he set a charge, and I'm sure he'll talk about it in a few minutes, for us to become the fastest

improving district in the country. But right now in 2022, 84 percent of our 8th graders could do math on grade level, right. What the data also says is that when a kid enters the 9th grade and is off grade, they're three times more likely to drop out of school.

And the other statistic that Dr. Watlington's initial research has been able to help us get our arms around actually predates the pandemic. So we can't confuse the learning loss from our baseline, which says that for 10 consecutive years 70 percent of our kids, right, our students, our learners have not be been able to read on grade level.

So good, bad or ugly in addition to the crime being an issue to address, we have to get back in the business of public education, right, and education in terms of working. And what Dr. Watlington's full intention is, and the Board, it

is our aim to support it, is to take that information and that data to get down to a school-by-school, if you will, action plan that makes sense.

And I think it's really helpful to understand what was described here as that pipeline from school-to-prison, those 12 zip codes will have an action-oriented way to begin to be very specific. And when you hear me talk about this, it's not just the longer time fix for a sustainable public education for Philadelphia, but it's also the right now, right, so what band-aids, crutches, what temporary solutions do we have to put in play.

And with all that said, I want to thank President Clarke for the opportunity to come back with more details. In the comments that I made today, I mentioned this $318 million gap, right, and this need to raise funds. As we dig further into and as part of the budget season,

we'll look forward to being able to detail that more specifically to be able to move the schools on the improvement path.

So if we look at our conversations around Goals and Guardrails, you can expect us to move from the macro conversation to more detailed, more specific action-planning really school-by-school and of course being able to look at it zip code-by-zip code.

So we're going to look forward to being able to come back and talk about the $318 million as well as all the other supports in collaboration we can do with City Council and other elected officials to restore public education in Philadelphia. So I just want to kind of just highlight some of the this is where we are today and I'm thankful, as harsh as the data is, being able to understand the data and use it to

point us, we can get back on the game of public education and even have some things like intensive tutoring or high-dosage tutoring is what Dr. Watlington calls it, we're going to have to invest in something like that in the short term to even help kids in current grades in general.

And so, I know we've kind of got sidetracked on the parking which is an important piece, but I don't want us to lose sight of where we are and, two, the collaboration needed for near-term things and long-term things to restore public education in Philadelphia. So thank you for the opportunity to make these comments.

MR. STREATER: Yeah, I think --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Thank you, Board member Salley.

MR. STREATER: -- President Clarke, I want to get Mallory the Vice-president real quick and then Dr. Watlington, if he wants to say

this. And I think we're starting to get into his territory a little bit. I think it's important to hear from the Board, but I think he's going to give us more substance, some of the stuff that I believe City Councilmembers are asking for and more substance.

MS. FIX-LOPEZ: I --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT CLARKE: Present Streater -- hold on, Dr. Mallory, one second. President Streater, I'm going to -- after that, we're going to have Councilman Harrity and then Councilman Johnson. I'm going to have to jump off for a second.

Councilman -- the Chair of Education will be chairing when I jump off. Thank you. I'll be back.

MS. FIX-LOPEZ: And I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Watlington with this transition. I heard a lot of conversation from I think it was Councilmember Lozada and

others saying, what's going on in the schools, we need to focus on the education, but talking about the violence and the safety outside of the schools and what are we going to do about that.

And as I'm hearing that, my question would be what is City Council also going to do about that and partner with us, right. So for us to be able and for Dr. Watlington to be able to laser focus on what's happening in the schools and the academic portions of it, we need the support to work with the City to help us with what's going on outside of the schools.

We heard President Streater say, every resource we take out of the school to work on something outside means that we're not putting it into student success. So Dr. Watlington is going to talk a lot about that. But the partnership of us, we focus on inside, obviously

some goes out, but the question is what is the City doing to make that safe travel to school happening so Dr. Watlington can become successful inside the schools.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you for that comment. I'm going to be taking over as Chair. Let me just provide a little bit of clarity. First of all, we're not going to go to the Superintendent yet. There are other Councilmembers who are in the queue who have questions for School Board members that did not get a chance to answer. I know Council President said Councilmember Harrity.

Councilmember Harrity, we have other Councilmembers who haven't spoken for the first time yet, so we're going to allow them to speak first. We're going to allow you to go second, and then we'll go from there.

I'm also going to implement a five-minute limit as it relates to

comments as well as questions so that everybody gets an equal opportunity to communicate their concerns to the District as well as to the School Board.

So with that being said, Chair recognizes Councilmember Johnson, then we'll go Councilmember Gilmore Richardson. And then I'll close out the first round myself. And then I'll pass it to Councilmember Harrity for a second round. And if there are no members in for a second round, then we'll transition to our Superintendent.

Councilmember Johnson.

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First and foremost, I want to congratulate Reginald Streater for becoming President of the Board. I want to also congratulate my constituent Mallory Fix-Lopez also for becoming Vice-chair, and as always it's good to see

Dr. Watlington. So to all the members of the Board, thank you for taking time out of your schedule and being here.

Just a couple of brief questions: One, in response to -- because it seems like this is a -- I'm just kind of getting the vibe as like us versus them type of conversation going on. So I just want to, one, reach out and say that around what can Council do, as part of the Special Committee on Gun Violence, I will be inviting Dr. Watlington and his team to a roundtable discussion around how we can collaborate better around the particular issue of gun violence, so that invitation will be forthcoming with other City agencies as well, particularly around keeping our young people safe.

But a couple of brief questions I want to get to the bottom of: One, my heart kind of fell in

listening to the numbers that Lisa just talked about, the lack of achievement in terms of reading with our young people. And I remember, Reginald, when you became the President or when you were going through the interview process, you talked about the conspiracy to kill Black boys, right. Basically the book by -- say the brother's name.

MR. STREATER: Jawanza Kunjufu.

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you. And so, this is a 10-year process that was just mentioned where there's 74 percent young people not on the reading level. So I just want to get a better understanding on -- because I hear about I think it's $319 million budget. And every time I've been in Council with my last 10 years and even as a State Rep, we've always made sure the District got their proper amount of funding, always, right. But we never see the

needle move, to be quite frank with you, in terms of achievement of our young people. And that's the question that we hear when we talk about our constituents, especially around the issue of taxes, right.

They say, okay, well, you want us to reduce the Homestead Exemption, right, and we're about to lose our homes in gentrified neighborhoods for the schools, which I say, okay, no problem, we got to take care of our kids, but at the same time what's the return on your investment in terms of moving that needle forward.

So hopefully, as we go forward, I want to see a better -- is something going to be different about how we educate our young people because for some reason we keep coming back to the same place over and over with whomever the Superintendent is, with basically to be upfront with you achievement

levels where young people aren't really accomplishing what I believe that they should be accomplishing?

So we'll do the funding. Hopefully, on the state level you'll advocate for a fair funding formula, right. But we keep investing money, money, money. But at the same time, it seems like the expectations and how young people are achieving in terms of reading and math, I just haven't seen the needle move. So hopefully, Dr. Watlington can give a deeper dive into what his plan is going to be around the guardrails and really zeroing in on this issue.

And then also, what are we going to be doing from a District standpoint to engage parents? When Dr. Ackerman was here, God bless her soul, one of her hallmarks that I do give her credit around was engaging parents, making sure that parents were an integral part of whatever the District was actually doing.

I remember she brought Les Brown in because she understood that some parents are operating at a certain level, but it was probably one of the highest turn-out events that we had in the City when it comes to partnering with the School District of Philadelphia, because she understood that you had to uplift the parents as well because they weren't at the same level as I guess interacting with other individuals in terms of how they were educating their children and taking care of their children, but they showed they cared by showing up. So that's my other question.

And then last but not least, one of the Board members early on, I think it was you, Sarah, that talked about when we want the City to do more around mental health and trauma and so forth, and we've already implemented those things in the District. So I just want to know

what's the actual things that happened besides the rapid response team? What are we doing around trauma-informed support services?

I did get a brief idea from Karyn Lynch and talking to Captain Kevin Bethel some time ago, but I want to be supportive of helping our young people who are going to school basically shocked and -- shell-shocked because not just being shocked, but their friends being murdered, their family members being murdered, and they're also going to school trying to learn under all this stress and pressure of living in neighborhoods where people are dying day-in, day-out.

So it's what trauma-support services are we doing? What parental engagement are we doing? And what are we going to do differently to reduce those numbers of young people not achieving when it comes to reading and math? So I know that was

a lot, but those are the three things because there is a direct correlation. I think Councilman Jones talked about it.

If I can't read, right, I'm going to be the guy that's probably going to be the class clown in class or I'm not going to go to school. If I don't go to school, I'm going to hustle. If I ain't hustling, I'm on the corner. I'm going to do other things that's unbecoming, you know, a good citizen in our community. So those are the three core areas that I have an interest in partnering with the District about as well as highlighting the things that we are doing from the Council and City side. Thank you.

MR. STREATER: Thank you. And just to respond brie -- I'm going to respond briefly, but I'm going to ask Board member Wilkerson to chime in here as well. I think -- so when we look at the data, it looks like

COVID really hurt a lot. We were actually making strides as a District, you know. But then if you look --

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I don't mean to cut you off, Reginald. But Lisa said -- I'm being upfront with you. Lisa kind of clarified that, no, we ain't just focusing on COVID. This has been going on before COVID, before your watch, Bro, so --

MR. STREATER: Understood. Understood.

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: I just want to clarify that. I'm going to let you go ahead and talk.

MR. STREATER: Understood. I'm just adding context as well. Yes, the pre-existing numbers weren't the numbers that any of us should be looking at ourselves and say, we did a good job, right, I get that. But I just wanted to put that into context that, yes, COVID did happen and it did have an impact on learning loss.

And again, as I said earlier if you look at the data that relates to other big cities, urban spaces, places that have more resources per child, the learning loss was not as bad as other places. I think that -- look, I'm not saying we won the game, like we take our ball home and we're done. But I'm just saying I think that means something, right, as well.

Number two, I think, yes, it is important to think about student outcomes and those numbers, which we have a laser focus as well, but we're looking at also a multi-varied approach of giving our children what they need. I know Council President and our Superintendent were at Strawberry Mansion introducing a pilot program. We can have actual relationships with the unions and things like that. So students can graduate from high school and have a job making $40,000 a year, $50,000 a year, right. Again, I'm not saying

woo-hoo, good for us, but that's something that we're doing as well --

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Can I respectfully just interject. Just so you know, and I think every Councilperson on this call knows that, you know, and kudos to the Building Trades and I support them and I support Ryan Boyer and so forth. But also, if the kids can't read and write --

MR. STREATER: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: -- they can't pass an apprenticeship test, and they know that to be quite frank. That's what they respond and say, well, they can't read and write so that's why our numbers are down. So I say we have to figure out ways to help them get there so they can pass their test and they can do the reading and the math as opposed to throwing up their hands and saying, well, they can't pass the reading and

writing, therefore we're not increasing our numbers around diversity and inclusion. So I just wanted to add that to that conversation.

MR. STREATER: Yeah, much appreciated, and we definitely understand that. And again, trying not to step on Dr. Watlington's presentation or what his staff would have to put more meat on the bone, but there is an understanding of professional development for the teachers who do teach the CTE courses so they can understand the pedagogical approach of how to teach a child the academics piece as it relates to -- in addition to the trade piece, right. So we're aligned at that point.

As it relates to engaging a parent, right now the Board is looking through Board member Cecelia Thompson who helps to direct the CAT group, which for many who don't know,

under the City Charter the Board of Education has to have a Parent Advisory Group, right. And we're trying to right now get them the laser focus they need and the resources they need and the parameters they need so that they could be an even better tool of engaging with parents.

And I'm not saying that's the end-all-be-all. But this is something that is percolating within the Board itself. We are self-aware of engaging with parents. And as far as City and mental health supports, I think that's something that Dr. Watlington can speak more to as well. And then, President Wilkerson, if you can kind of chime in on this topic.

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: And, Mr. Chairman --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes --

COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: -- I know he's about to wrap me up.

Mr. Chairman, one last part if you don't mind, if you can just give me the small latitude. And one last part, are we addressing cultural competency when it comes to teachers that are teaching our children? I know Councilman Thomas and myself and Sharif El-Mekki have an interest in adding more African American male teachers in the classroom. But even beyond the African American teachers in the classroom, because education has changed based upon our environment, is there any interest or any focus around cultural competency in teaching our young people who are actually learning in like a shell-shocked environment coming from our neighbors dealing with gun violence and so forth in areas of poverty?

And that's my last question, Mr. Chairman.

MR. STREATER: Joyce.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yeah, or

President, anyone want to respond to that briefly? Maybe a 30-second response so we can move on to the next Councilmember.

MS. WILKERSON: Yeah. I just wanted to say briefly that this is the right conversation for us to be having, the right questions for you to be asking: Why is it that after more than a decade our children aren't learning? It's the reason that the Board adopted its Goals and Guardrails and found that we were the second lowest-performing school district in the country, that we as a Board spent less than 10 percent of our time talking about student achievement.

One of the things you'll hear from Dr. Watlington is we don't have the right curriculum, we don't teach -- we don't support teachers uniformly. We don't put our strongest teachers in the most challenging situations and we don't

focus. I think we are now asking the right questions because our children have the ability to achieve at high levels. But we as adults are going to have to change.

We're going to have to do things differently. We're going to have to be together in focusing on a strategy. So I'm deli -- these are tough questions. I'm sitting up here squirming. I've been on the Board for six years, you know. But these are the right questions that we have to ask and answer if our children are going to have the kind of opportunities that they deserve.

And I'm excited to have Dr. Watlington, to have an outsider's perspective on why it is that we haven't been able to deliver to our children. And I think when we pivot to him, you're going to hear some very basic stuff. It's not glamorous. We're not doing the basics right. So I'm excited about

the new leadership.

I'm excited to have Reginald Streater at the helm. I'm excited to have Dr. Watlington. I'm excited about the Board's focus and asking the tough questions because that's the only way we're going to get success for our children. And with that, I'll be quiet.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you. Thank you for your comment. Thank you for the response. Councilmember, thank you for your questions.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. And thank you to Board Chair Streater and all of the Board members present, Dr. Watlington and all of the School District personnel who are here.

Mr. Chair, I have a number of things that I'd like to get on the

record for this first round, and maybe possibly in the second round we can hear additional feedback from the Board, particularly Board Chair Streater and the other members of the Board. But I think it's important not only as an At-large member of Council, but also as a School District graduate and a mother of three students at two different School District schools to get all of this on the record with the time that I have allotted.

So first, I want to circle back to, and I've been taking copious notes around all of the things that have been mentioned, but I wanted to circle back to one of the Board member's testimony about the need for enforcement around the curfew.

And I just wanted to put on the record that we have worked with the Department of Human Services and PPD to put out two additional RFPs that will be due in the coming weeks

to establish two additional Community Evening Resource Centers in our Northeast Division, which is the 2nd, 7th, 8th and 15th Police Districts and also the East Division, which has been talked about for quite some time during this hearing which encompasses the Police Districts of the 24th, 25th and 26th Police Districts. So we anticipate by this summer we will have six Community Evening Resource Centers up and running in every police division in this City that will be open every single day from 7:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. for our young people to go to voluntary on involuntary. So that's the first thing I wanted to get on the record because that was mentioned as a part of the testimony.

The next thing I wanted to start with, and I'll go back to where CP sort of started, in talking about the federal dollars and the infusion of federal dollars and how that

enabled all of us to really weather the storm of COVID-19 and its potential financial impact for the School District and also for the City.

But I want to pivot specifically to enrollment. If we could get an answer around the enrollment for this current school year, how that differs from the projected enrollment for this school year. We know that we anticipate additional challenges around the outyears of the five-year plan around revenue. And so, we wanted to talk about and I wanted to specifically talk about enrollment because that will lead into my next set of questions.

And then I wanted to also focus on and one of the members talked about the staffing constraints and not having a fully staffed School District. And again, I think that goes back to the enrollment and the

enrollment projections and sort of the reality around enrollment, which ultimately for me goes back to the issue that I have spoken to the District about for several years now regarding the school finder application on your website and how families are not being routed to the proper public schools, which I believe is dramatically impacting our enrollment for our schools.

And I've sent the District proof of this. I did let you all know in advance that I would be bringing this up at this hearing because I've tried to work with you all on this issue for the past several years. I was told last week that the issue was corrected. I went back to the site and the issue has not been corrected.

And I do believe that this issue of not routing families to the proper public school is the reason why our enrollment projections are

off, which then impacts the staffing that we have for our school. So I would like the data on projected enrollment versus actual enrollment for this year and the coming years.

I also wanted to talk about very briefly the learning loss in young people reading on grade level, particularly around and after COVID-19. One specific program that I could point to that I thought was very successful that was happening on the ground in the District was the AARP reading program where they brought in retired teachers to sit and help the young people learn to read better and to have more of an opportunity outside of just the classroom environment in school to read more.

That program has been dissolved and taken out of the school that I know that my daughter and my son attend and I'm sure all the other schools, so I wanted to put that on

the record. And I will come back on the second round since I have one minute left.

And the least thing I wanted to mention was how we are supporting our administrators across the District, recognizing that they have a lot of young people who have been impacted by gun violence. What are the exact supports for administrators and for teachers and the school staff around that issue. I wanted you all to get that on the record as well. So that's all I have for this round since I have one minute left.

But I would like responses to those issues that I brought up, particularly around the data for the enrollment, around your projected revenue in the outyears of your plan, the staffing challenges and what you're doing to rectify that, and then we'll go from there.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: (Mute).

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Mr. Chair, you're on mute.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I was thanking you and hoping that we can get a response to some of the issues that you communicated, and just to let folks know that I will be going next. So we'll close out the first round with Councilmember Phillips and then we will move on to the second round of questions.

MR. STREATER: Yeah. So as it relates to -- some questions are probably more the School District and the Superintendent should respond to. I don't know if you want to respond to it now or we can do it after your presentation --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: President Streater, if you can just pin those questions. If you can just let us know, I hear a staffing question. I figured that would be our Superintendent. If you can just

answer the questions that specifically apply to the School District, I'll make sure that my colleague comes back around when you the School District -- I'm sorry. If you can answer the questions that's for the School Board, I will make sure that my colleague comes back around when we do the School District. Thank you.

MR. STREATER: First, I want to say thank you for letting us know about the work that's being done to help with the issue of curfews and the resource centers that you mentioned where students can be from -- our learners can be between the hours of 7:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m., I believe. So thank you. That was very helpful for us to know that there is work being done at City Council on this issue.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Point of information.

MR. STREATER: Yes.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: I just wanted to share that that information has been shared on the ground with the schools in those areas. And now that the other divisions will be added, the same will happen. I don't want anyone to take away from this public hearing that this is the first time that you all are hearing about that. We have shared that information and we will continue to share it. I just wanted to say that for the record.

MR. STREATER: And I just wanted to affirm you and say we really appreciate you. In addition to that, I think as far as the projected revenue piece, we see a clip, fiscal clip happening for the year 2025. And I think what reorients me, like what's going on here is when you have $0.60 on a dollar already, right, you're kind of already in the hole and we're always feeling like we have to rob Peter to

pay Paul.

So we're always appreciative of the federal dollars and City Council dollars, and I think the District can respond more explicitly about what exactly that looks like. I just wanted to say that for the record and tee that up for Dr. Watlington when it's time for him to speak.

How we're supporting administrators, I'm not going to say everything that we're doing, but I think it's important for me to raise that the Board authorized and voted on and approved mental health supports for our staff. So we're not just looking at the mental health of our students, but we're also looking at the mental health support for our staff and teachers and things like that.

So I'm just going to leave it at that. And I believe, Dr. Watlington, your staff can answer

the rest of the questions.

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir, President Streater and Chair Thomas. I made a note of the actual enrollment numbers. We'll follow up very quickly, expeditious to get that essentially on the record.

Also, I did hear Councilmember Gilmore Richardson's concern about a routing issue that you brought up previously that was not corrected. We will give that immediate attention and follow up.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you so much, Dr. Watlington. And I will again continue to work with the officials at the District on this matter. I've even had the team rephrase the wording that we've sent over to you all for the past several years seeking to get this issue rectified. Obviously, this is before your time, but I do think this issue is really -- it is really affecting the

enrollment for our schools, which then impacts the revenue that you all receive at the District, which then impacts the staffing for the schools.

And I know it probably sounds like a minuscule issue, but it's not. It is one of the most important issues that the District must address over the last several years. And, Dr. Watlington, I will be honest with you and I will not mince my words. I am very happy that you are there and in leadership in the District. But you have changed, not very much under you has changed.

And so, we're still dealing with the same folks who don't believe this is an issue. So I'm going to put that on the record publicly, because if they thought that it was an issue from an administration perspective, they would have corrected this years ago.

And so, I want to put that on the record, I'm very happy that

you are there to have a different perspective on what this issue could be. But while you are new, a lot of the same folks underneath of you are the same. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

DR. WATLINGTON: Duly noted.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, colleague.

Before we get ready to transition to the second round, I just want to put a couple of things on the record from my perspective as well as some issues that I have. Number one, in the midst of the presentation today I was really disappointed not to hear anything as it relates to the individual Black charter institutions that have communicated a number of different concerns to the District.

We were supposed to get a report last fall. That didn't happen. We were supposed to get a report in January. That didn't

happen. And for that not to be mentioned at all in the entire presentation is similar to the concerns that's been communicated that that specific demographic of Black-led institutions feel forgotten about.

I also wanted to communicate my disappointment as it relates to listening to this issue around parking and parking spaces. We are in a dialogue on a consistent basis to hear a Board member say that if we can't figure out the parking situation for teachers, we are doomed. If the issue was that critical to the point where as though it could make or break the success of our schools, I'm wondering are there a list of schools. When I think about Martin Luther King High School or Frankford High School or Washington High School or Northeast High School, I don't know any of those schools that have these parking

issues.

I'm not saying that they don't exist across the City, but if this issue is that prevalent and that important and it can make and break the success of our schools, I'm wondering is there a list of schools that we have where we have this parking crisis so we can begin to brainstorm exactly what we can do about that? Because unfortunately outside of a few isolated incidents, this is the first that I'm hearing that this is this serious of a crisis that it can make or break our schools, so that would be very much appreciated.

You also mentioned the $325 million in federal stimulus money that's looking to address infrastructure and you also talked about six years and $2 billion worth of infrastructure dollars being spent to address some of the capital issues that we have in our school. I know

that you've communicated this information for the record for City Councilmembers, but I think that it's important that you communicate this information to the general public today as it relates specifically to what we're looking to do with those dollars, how it's going to be spent.

And of course what I've been pushing and challenging on is not just the plan, but also encouraging local investment. So as we're spending $6 billion, that we're prioritizing Philadelphia-based businesses and Philadelphia-based companies and Black and Brown-based businesses as it relates to who gets those procurement opportunities.

Last but not least, I do think that it's appropriate to communicate to the public something around what's going of with the lawsuit. Clearly, from a legal purpose, you can't communicate certain things. But I think that

that is -- what is it, the something in the room, the elephant in the room, that a lot of people in the general public are concerned about.

So I do think it's important that before we move on to the Superintendent and listen to his presentation, that there's some level of communication around the lawsuit, your concern around the lawsuit, some of the issues that we have on our side with facilities and what you're hoping to get out of what we're doing, because we're all extremely concerned over our facilities.

As I've stated to a couple of you off the record, I do think that this lawsuit creates some perception issues and I also think that we didn't get the proper amount of time to negotiate an effective way to essentially handle this.

So I'll stop right there and I look forward to answers to some of the things that I just suggested.

But if I cut you off, I'm going apologize for that because I have to lead by example with the five-minute time limit.

MR. STREATER: Got you. So as it relates to the lawsuit, as you know we can't really speak too much to the lawsuit. But as I mentioned before in public that the Board is interested in a settlement of such. Our concerns are laid out in the media. But I mean, you know, they're also laid out in the complaint as well.

But I do want to say again the Board is happy and willing, the District is happy and willing to continue negotiations in order to come to some resolution so that we all can be on the same page as well. As it relates to the parking issue, I think what might have happened was we felt stymied when we heard in public last year -- and I'm not trying cast or make blame -- good luck with that,

right.

I think when we heard that, it kind of stymied us where maybe we felt hopeless, not hopeless, but there's nothing that we can do. So, yes, we can do better going forward. At least I as the Board President can be better going forward communicating such issues that are germane that are irrespectful of what someone says in public as well --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Sorry, excuse me. Sorry, Mr. President. The concern good luck with that, I thought that that was just something that happened today.

MR. STREATER: No, it happened last -- last year when we came before City Council, one of our biannual meetings that's something that we heard so --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Let me just put on the record from the context of what I heard today and from the context last year, that

seemed like it was a joking response. It didn't seem like it was realistically we're not going to do anything about it. I also want to put on the record to the public that we're in constant communication with the School District and the School Board. We meet on a monthly basis.

And again, that was never an issue that was communicated to this Council body and this is something that if it's as serious as it can make or break our schools and we can be doomed if we don't fix it, this legislative body and the Education Committee, specifically under my leadership, we'll do everything in our power to make sure our schools aren't doomed. So I just want to put that on the record, President Streater.

MR. STREATER: And me saying that, I wasn't trying to say any of those things, trying to say what you're saying and what you said

wasn't fair and accurate. I was just trying to frame we did ask for it before and we did raise it. But again, we will do better going forward with bringing things up again and again even if they're not -- and also, it was a part of a group of asks. That wasn't the whole presentation. I think the parking issue, that's kind of in good space, taking kind of the air out of the room. There were other things that we asked for as well.

But again, we're looking forward to going forward to partnering with the District, partnering with the Ed Committee, finding some extra time in addition to those times to communicate so we can be fully aligned. As it relates to the charter school -- the Black charter school issue, please count that against the head and not the heart. I will give a brief update.

So one of the drawbacks of

being underresourced for years and not blaming anyone is that we have some old and antiquated technology. And as an attorney when you're doing discovery, it can be very hard and onerous to get documents and things like that if you don't have updated IT and updated technology and things like that.

So you can do Boolean search. A Boolean search is if you go on Google and you say, you're looking for T-shirts within two words of another word, and then all the emails or all the documents will come up with things that are within those two words and things like that. So having those kind of technological drawbacks have created an unintended consequence of slowing down the mechanism in ways in which the independent investigator can do their work.

But with that being said, we have given tens of thousands of

documents, some the old-fashioned way in boxes, you know, doing searches the old-fashioned way. We put a lot of resources behind trying to get this done as fast as possible. Just speaking for myself, I would love to get this done as fast as possible. And I would love for it to be done in the best way possible.

In addition to that, it is independent so I can't give any updates on the investigation is heading this way or this is what they're finding. The Board of Education truly wanted it to be an independent investigation. We're not putting our fingers on the dial and trying to dictate what the outcomes are, but we are kind of hamstrung on some issues that are out of our control as well.

So we apologize for not getting the report out -- well, it's not up to getting the report out for us, not being able to have the

documents, but we are kind of hampered by our technological disadvantages of sorts but --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So, Mr. President, because I'm out of time, we'll talk about capital and the $6 billion -- I mean, the six year $2 billion investment a little bit later in our conversation. The one thing I will say for the record is because of these delays, we are going to look to have this conversation hopefully next month as it relates to a Council hearing and put ourselves in a position to begin to move this conversation to a public platform because we're really disappointed in the fact that this information was supposed to be communicated last summer, and then again last fall, and then again earlier this year, and now it's getting pushed back to the spring. And I'm not pointing any fingers or any blame. But what I do know is

that the public needs answers.

I'm also going to be looking forward to a list of schools that have these issues around parking so we can begin to do a deep dive around what it is that we need to do to address that issue because we don't want our schools to be doomed.

With that being said, I will pass it to Councilmember Phillips so Councilmember Phillips can close out the first round of questions. And then after that, we'll begin a second round of questions and we'll start with Councilmember Harrity and then Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

Council colleagues, please put in the chat feature if you wish to be teed up for a second round. And after the second round of questions, we will move on to our Superintendent in the next part of our presentation.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Phillips.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Hi. Thank you, Chairman Thomas. I appreciate your facilitation of this meeting. So recently I've been visiting schools in the 9th District and among -- during my time visiting the schools, I've learned that some of our area high schools have a dearth of advanced placement classes in our schools.

And so, as an educator, a former educator and also a college access professional where I've helped a number of students get into colleges debt-free, advanced placement courses, specifically AP courses are very important for some of our students who are interested in going to college, to be able to attain a college education debt-free because most of the schools, including some of our schools -- most of our schools have large endowments and even the schools that don't have large endowments want top-tier

students.

And thus far, there's many schools here in the City of Philadelphia that have 2, 3 AP courses and comparable to some other districts who have 10, 20, 15 AP courses, and that's also important for an equitable playing field. And also, what are we doing from a district-level to really helping our students attain more CTE opportunities as well at every single high school? I know that's been brought up, but I want to be on the record to talk about that as well. Thank you.

MR. STREATER: Just as a quick response, I think even though the adults have failed for outcomes to show that our students are all top-tier, I think that every single student in our School District, every single learner is top-tier, and I know you believe that as well. But just to add some context, because of

the lack of resources, some of the other barriers that we have, we are trying to think outside the box. So I'm going to give a shout-out to PFT for allowing us to do a pilot program where we can have for now until we get the resources necessary to allow virtual AP courses being across schools, right.

I mean, I know that's not the best. We all understand inperson learning is the best, but we're trying our best to figure out our way through this with some of the barriers that we have as a school district as well, so big shout-out to that. And I know that's not the answer you want. That's not the magic fix. But I wanted you to know that that's something we think about, right.

I think if I sat here and I had nothing to say about it, you know, it might be this is something that, you know, the District needs to

think about. We definitely think about AP courses and things like that and making our neighborhood comprehensive high schools have access to the same things that I had access to when I was in Germantown, like when I went to Germantown High School where we had Cities in Schools and we had Law & Government, Junior Air Force ROTC. Whatever you wanted, you could get at the high school.

And I'm very appreciative. And I think Dr. Watlington is getting us back on the pathway where no matter what school you go to, you can get baseline, you know, a quality education where you can be able to get to certain schools for those AP courses. And as it relates to what you were saying, what are we doing more for the college-prepared readiness, I think that's a question that Dr. Watlington and his staff can answer, but I wanted to put some context to your question,

Councilmember Phillips.

DR. WATLINGTON: And, President Streater, if I may just add, Councilmember Thomas, in my Listening and Learning Tour a student told me that she had one advanced placement course offered in her high school whereas we have other schools that have a lot more AP courses.

As a part of our strategic plan work, we fully intend to set a baseline that all schools in the School District of Philadelphia will have a certain range and number of advanced placement courses for equity purposes. And so, you can count on us for that. More to come.

COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Thank you so much, Dr. Watlington and Board President Streater. That's what I wanted to hear. And, yes, for the record I do agree that all students are strong and excellent in their own right.

So with that being said,

thank you, Councilmember Thomas.
Back to you.
COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Councilmember.
We're moving on to the second round. Chair recognizes Councilmember Harrity.
MR. HARRITY: Yeah. You know, just to start off with a fact that have been studies that something as simple as a new school could bring, upgrade point averages itself. Segmenting into my questions, I see in your total capital investment plan is at $2 million. You have a list underneath there which said current projects and you had new construction.
I'd like to know how many new buildings or schools are we talking about and where are they going to be deployed with keeping in mind that if we are going to building new schools, maybe we should start in the neighborhoods where the grades

are lower than others and try to give these kids a sense of pride and just feel safe in a new, clean, state-of-the-art school. Just wondering about that. Thank you.

MR. STREATER: Thank you, Councilmember Harrity. And again, this is a question that I think the District will probably give you more of a substantive answer. But what I will say is our thinking and I feel safe saying this from the Board is that, yes, we want to rebuild the District as well and, you know, for example we have a lot of excitement about Cassidy and what it's going to bring and how that can maybe change the narrative of how sometimes we're so attached to buildings, that we don't think about what can be possible if we actually were to tear down a building that has a lot of respect from the community but we rebuild something brand new, so this is something that we're thinking

about.

And I know Dr. Watlington is going to talk about or he may talk about how we're trying to align that with our academic goals in a way so that some schools, say if you want to do more CTE things, right, you may have to build a school in a different way than you would if you didn't, right.

So that's all part of the process as well, but I wanted to put that context on top of -- and Dr. Watlington when his time comes up or if he wants to do that now, he can discuss the particulars of your questions, Mr. Harrity.

DR. WATLINGTON: (Muted).

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Superintendent, you're on mute.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. President, I'd like to answer that question during my time during the presentation. I will have

COO Reggie McNeil who will give a very clear, short update on new construction projects that are in the works.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Councilmember Harrity. Were there any other questions from you?

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: No. I'm just interested in hearing where they're going to plan on building and how soon we can look forward to our kids having some place safe and some place they can actually learn that isn't more like a prison.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Councilmember Harrity.

Board President Streater and the entire team, I just want to thank you for taking the time to be here with us this morning. Thank you for your service for the City of Philadelphia. While we do have a lot of passion as it relates to these types of dialogues, I just want to communicate for the record that being

a School Board member is a volunteer position.

And all of the people who are on the call today are choosing to be here. They're choosing to sacrifice their time, sacrifice opportunities they can be spending with their family, friends, building professional careers, to invest in our children. So what you hear today as it relates to the general public listening to our dialogue is a bunch of folks who care, a bunch of folks who are willing to serve and people who have stepped up to the plate and said that they will be committed to our children.

We all have different visions as it relates to the direction our schools should go in and we're all going to advocate in different ways. But at the end of day, it's imperative that we recognize that you are doing this on a volunteer basis and we appreciate

the work that you're doing, President Streater as well as the entire team over at the School Board. So I do want to say thank you.

Clearly, we all have concerns. Clearly, we all have a lot more work to do. But at the end of the day, we have to let you know that we appreciate your service as well as the other members of the School Board.

MR. STREATER: Thank you, and we appreciate you. And I know contrary to what it may look like on the outside, I am speaking and I feel very confident about that the Board really wants to partner and have a symbiotic relationship with the City.

Local control just started up again and I think that we are all working through the growing pains of doing that, but I'm committed as Board Chair to facilitate a relationship that creates a perception that I think the realities

are that we need you, and I hope that we can evolve to a space where everyone feels that we are needed as well so that we can do what's in the best interest of our children.

So I'm looking forward to working with you, working with whoever wants to work with us to do what's best for our children. And I believe I speak for the Board and they're in agreement with that and unanimity.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Mr. President. I'm assuming that there are no other comments for members of the School Board as well as my Council colleagues.

So with that being said, Mr. Superintendent, I will pass it to you and your team so you can begin your presentation.

Council colleagues, as you're listening to the presentation I'm sure you'll have questions. Please use the chat feature to

mention your questions. I already see Councilmember Gilmore Richardson has questions for the Superintendent. We are going to commit to the five-minute limit for this next round of questions.

And, Mr. Superintendent, I will pass it to you and I look forward to the dialogue.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Chair Thomas. I want to say good morning to you again as well as President Streater and Vice-president Fix-Lopez and all Councilmembers and Board members. It's a pleasure and an honor to be here today.

I want to begin on the next slide by just talking very quickly, I'll take about 10 minutes and then will be happy to take any questions, about our vision for the School District. We are laser-focused in the School District on achieving the Board's Goals and Guardrails, and to also position our School District to

become the fastest improving large urban school district in the country.

What does that actually mean? There is -- certainly, the Board's Goals and Guardrails relate to state assessments. We can also compare ourselves to other large urban districts by looking at the NAEP performance, which is the Nation's Report Card. It's administered in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and 26 urban school districts, and we're certainly one of those 26 urban districts.

So we ought to be comparing ourselves to ourselves. Are we getting better on the one hand in the state performance and local performance indicators. And then compared to 26 other national urban districts, we want to look at NAEP performance and reading and math, that assessment is given every two years. We want to look at four-year

graduation rates and our drop-out rates, so that's how we would measure that over time.

On the next slide, former Board President Wilkerson talked a little bit about the Goals and Guardrails. I put this slide in here because this is so, so, so critically important. I think the Board of Education did really significant work to create the Goals and Guardrails.

Two, the Board does significant work because at every meeting the Board is progress monitoring what are we doing and are we getting better in each of these areas. That's very different than a lot of school boards, urban or nonurban, across the country. And so, we're spending the time on the stuff that matters. We're developing accountability structures both for the Superintendent and my staff and all of the employees in the School District.

Now, there are some conversations among Councilmembers about where are we academically, so I want to put that in context. On the one hand, when you look at the National Association of Education Progress, the Nation's Report Card, and those 26 urban districts that participate along with 50 states, we outperform two. The overwhelming majority outperformed the School District of Philadelphia. We need to change that trajectory and we need to do it quickly, as quick as we can.

In terms of the state assessments, 3rd grade reading has been flat in the District for a decade. However, 3rd through 8th grade reading has increased 4 percentage points. 3rd through 8th grade math has increased 5 percentage points. The Goals and Guardrails that our Board has adopted requires us not to get incremental gains of 3 percentage points or 4 percentage

points, but 30 percentage points over the next five years as compared to 3 to 5 percentage points increase over the past decade. So these are aggressive goals.

I think the Board was bold and courageous to move in this direction, and I think they're putting their resources and time directly in alignment to achieving these Goals and Guardrails. So I think this is really significant. So everybody needs to pay close attention to that.

Since coming aboard as Superintendent on June 16th as last year, as you know I was engaged in three phases of work. The first phase was a 100-day listening and learning opportunity where I had an opportunity to have 90 sessions within the first 100 days with lots of people across the City and School District.

The second phase involved a

transition team of some 100 Philadelphians and local and national experts who helped us to devise 91 short- and long-term recommendations to consider as we move into Phase 3, which is the development of a five-year aggressive strategic plan. We're doing that work now, and we intend to take this plan to the Board, continue to work under the Board's leadership, and we'll take this plan to the Board at the May meeting.

Next slide. Now, why is this important? As we build a strategic plan, I am crystal clear that the children and families of the School District of Philadelphia can't wait five years. They can't wait until May for us to figure out a roadmap and a plan. So while we are building this plan, and I'll say more about why that plan is important and why it won't just be a piece of paper, our short immediate

priorities, our top priority right now in the District is safety.

And Board President Streater spoke to some extent and the other Board members spoke to some of the safety measures and student, staff wellness efforts we are undertaking in the District to ensure that safety is our top priority under the leadership of Chief Kevin Bethel.

We also -- Board President Streater said a quick word and Board member Salley I believe talked about some of our immediate focus areas. Let me be clear, the way you turn around flat 3rd grade reading scores in 3 to 4 to 5 percentage point increases in 3 through 8 reading and math and to make significantly greater improvement, the first step is to focus immediately on three areas:

Number one, we must increase daily student attendance. Because students who are in attendance 90

percent of each month have greater opportunity to improve academically. Second, we must focus on increasing teacher attendance. Why? The research is crystal clear after 50 years. The single most important factor in whether students improve their learning is a highly qualified, well-supported teacher who is stable in a school over time and they must have good attendance.

And third, we want to focus on reducing the number of kids who drop out in the School District. As of the last school year, just shy of 70 percent of the students in the School District of Philadelphia graduate in four years, and there's been a steady uptick increase in that number. But it was a rate of 70 percent in the last year.

That means 30 percent of our students don't graduate in four years and a good number of those 30 percent graduate in five -- some graduate in

five or six years and a good number of those are drop-outs. We need to push hard on getting that 70 percent four-year graduation rate up. So those are the areas that we are foundationally focused on right now, and we're not waiting for a strategic plan. We're not waiting until May.

Now, I do want to say a couple of words about the strategic plan process that we're engaged in. Next slide, and this is really, really, really important. Why are we -- why is Tony Watlington taking the time and the Board giving me the time and space to bring together lots of different groups of people, teachers, principals, students, parents, school staffs, Central Office staff and some other people outside of the District to develop this plan. It will do five things when it's complete:

First, our strategic plan will focus all of the work of the

Superintendent and the 440 staff in service of schools and students. It's a servant kind of leadership model where we exist at the District office to get teachers and principals in particular what they need so that they can get students and families what they need.

And I call out teachers and principals because the research says that teachers are the number one factor irrespective your race, ethnicity, income, et cetera, in student growth opportunity. Principals are number two in the research. Principals are so important though because they impact number one because they're the people who hire, recruit, onboard and retain teachers.

The second thing that a strategic plan will do, it will help us to figure how do we better engage with our students, parents, community staff and the unions as equal

partners, not as people who we just talk to from time to time, but how do we define what an equal partnership is, what does it look like and what are the specific strategies that we need to reinvest in.

It will help us determine what to stop doing in the School District and what to start doing. We are developing a fancy name called strategic abandonment tools. In other words, what are the things that we absolutely need to stop doing because when we look at the return on investment, we cannot say these things are working, and there are some things we can clearly say are not working. Some of our achievement indicators already tell us that. And so, we want to spend the time -- we have a team working on that and more to come in May.

We also want this plan to identify a limited number of research-based strategies that we

know work. And we want to align all of our resources to achieve the Board's Goals and Guardrails. Now, instead of -- what hurts a lot of school districts across the country is you have lots of people doing lots of stuff. The key is to do less things, go deeper and do them really, really well.

How do you determine what are the few things that you should do really well? First, we look at what the research tells us. We know investment in the Science of Reading training absolutely helps to improve student performance. It's one of the reasons why the state of Mississippi which historically has been at the bottom of the line in terms of student outcomes was one of the fastest improving states in 4th grade reading because of Science of Reading training. Light bulb goes off. We're looking at how do we really invest in things like the Science of

Reading training.

There are other things that will come about as a part of that process and in the interest of time, I won't spend a lot of time on those. Research-based, evidence-based strategies that we have data and research that we know work. And it's not a mystery as former Board President Wilkerson mentioned, it's just knowing what the research is and then being laser-focused and focus on focus.

And then finally, the other key is people must be accountable for improving performance and that starts with the superintendent. Now, as a Superintendent I want you to know I'm not afraid of accountability. I was a principal three times at the elementary and high school level and every school I worked at got better. Academic performance went up. Drop-out rates went down. Graduation rates went up significantly, because

we worked in partnership with our parents and other community members and we focused on the research.

So this strategic plan I want to assure all of you will not just be a piece of paper that looks good on paper with nice pretty pictures. It's about what I will be accountable for, what my cabinet will be accountable for, what the District Office 440 and all of our School District will be accountable for.

So that's why we want to take the time to make sure that lots of groups are engaged in the process because we want lots of our groups to have ownership. And I'll be honest with you, a teacher has a better sense of about what his or her or their students need at that classroom level.

So I've slowed down. I've taken my foot off the accelerator to slow down and say, let's engage teachers in the process so this

strategic plan is not something done to them, but with them and other groups.

Next slide. With that, I want to give a quick update on Act 158. As you know, the legislation passed Act 158 in 2018. It took effect last spring, last May. And students rather than just having to be proficient on a test score, one test score, I think the state made a very wise decision to allow students to meet one of five pathways to include -- five pathways that you see on this screen, and they also have to meet the local graduation requirements, which includes in Philadelphia 23.5 credits.

Now, on December 16th, Chair Thomas, if you recall, we reported to the City Council that as of December 16th our seniors had -- 42 percent of our seniors, all of had met their pathway in the local requirements of 23.5 credits. And then January 5th,

we reported to the community and the media that that number had increased to 47 percent.

The number will continue to rise as students complete some of their internships and apprenticeship opportunities. And I look forward to giving you an additional update on where we are with Act 158 at the February 21st City Council Education Committee meeting and at the School Board meeting, the Board of Education meeting on February 23rd.

Next slide. With that, I will say thank you for this opportunity to give a quick update on the staff's perspective about where we are and where we're going in the School District. And, Mr. Chair, we're happy to answer questions.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And I'm sure there will be plenty. Thank you, Mr. Superintendent. We appreciate your communication and we appreciate your presentation.

I'm going to take a moment as Chair to start with the first several questions. Let's start with Act 158 just because that's where you left off. It's good to hear that we're up to 47 percent. Do we anticipate there being any issues as it relates to making sure that young people have access to internship opportunities and other resources that's needed to get that 52 percent across the finish line?

DR. WATLINGTON: I think that it's a work in progress and we'll continue to double-down. In terms of if there are any barriers, I will just remind counsel that given the fact that someone has to coordinate and do the work at the school building level to coordinate internship opportunities, apprenticeship opportunities, meet with people, make sure students and families get connected, connect the dots, et cetera, we have lean staffs

in schools and certainly teachers are knee-deep trying to teach to make sure we can get academic performance up.

Our counselor rate historically has been 1 to 650 as opposed to 1 to 250, which is the national standard recommendation. And so, counselors have a full load of work. The one key barrier that I see having come here as Superintendent is devoting people time to work exclusively on this issue.

And from time to time, I'll just be transparent, I'll hear and people in the community tell me that they reached out to the school and somebody didn't reach back out or that a partnership was started but they didn't feel appropriate attention was given after something launched. That's something we're continuing to work on and allocate resources as best we can.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you. I think that the $2 million that we gave to the Commerce Department should have tried to address that issue as far as having a point person that people can go to. And I also look at the Mayor's Office and the Education team over there as possibly being a resource as well too because we have to expedite this process. I do want to say thank you to Dr. Brooks and her entire team because I know she's been running point on this and doing the best that she can given the circumstances that we have.

You mentioned counselors in the midst of your answer. Last week I had my second education debrief conversation and we were able to listen to educators from all across the City of Philadelphia and they communicated a number of concerns to us. And one of the concerns that I'm hearing is that counselors are being

pulled too many different ways.

We talked earlier about mental health support and providing mental health support for young people, so I'm wondering what are we doing about the vacancies as it relates to staffing issues? And I'm not just talking about teacher vacancies because we talk about that all the time.

I'm really talking about climate staff. I'm really talking about counselors, and how can we put ourselves in a position where a counselor is only focused on dealing with those thera -- the mental issues that young people are facing instead of being responsible for having to cover classrooms and to do other obligations that are essentially dealing with the operations of the school?

We want them to be therapists to focus on the therapeutic issues. And essentially,

that's not happening right now. So what's the plan to get us on that point?

DR. WATLINGTON: I'll tell you this is where an external set of fresh eyes are always good for a school district. One of the things I noticed upon becoming Superintendent here is that I could see the clear effects of having to lay off so many individuals in the past decade in order to clean up the District's finances.

When all those positions went away, it raised the caseload for counselors. So even though I believe our counselor vacancies are currently staffed at about 98.3 percent or so now, we need a lot more, because the needs that our kids have based on violence and other traumas and their experience during the pandemic, et cetera, we just need more help in that regard.

So I am not one of those

people, Councilmember Thomas, that's always got my hand out and say, just give me more, give me more, give me more. I'm one of those people who says give me more so I can be accountable for improving outcomes, and that's one area I just want to be very frank that we need more resources, we need more counselors in schools, particularly schools that are beset by an uptick in gun violence.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: And I think one of the things that we've been pushing is the public-private partnership, beginning to rely more on our social-serving agencies and other nonprofit organizations to hopefully supplement some of the lack of staff that we're seeing. Of course that's going to be an ongoing conversation.

I have several other questions I'm going to hold off for my second round. What I want to do

is take a moment to pass it to Councilmember Katherine Gilmore Richardson. So Chair recognizes Councilmember Katherine Gilmore Richardson.

And then after Councilmember Katherine Gilmore Richardson, we'll move on to our Majority Leader Councilmember Jones.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

And again, thank you, Dr. Watlington, not only for your testimony but for your work. I really enjoy working with you since you've been at the District, particularly around the 21st century schools and the partnership that was announced last week at Strawberry Mansion High School. I'm really excited for your leadership and for your fresh perspective at the School District and at 440 in particular.

I just wanted to take this

time to thank a couple of people who have really been helpful to our office, starting with Laurel Grbach. She has just been phenomenal and very responsive and always working with us. Edwin Santana who is always reaching out to us, checking in with us, getting back to us 5, 6 o'clock in the morning if necessary, so I wanted to say thank you to you also. To Michelle Alexander and the entire team in the CTE office, and in particular Melanie who has just been a superstar and Dr. Malika and so many other professionals that we've worked with.

I want to go back to the enrollment piece. I don't want to sound like a broken record, but I wanted to go back to enrollment for this year. What were the projections for this year? And now that leveling has ended, what have you seen as far as the actual enrollment in the District?

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Gilmore Richardson. I don't have those numbers in front of me so I don't want to quote the wrong number. I do have our Chief Operations Officer Reggie McNeil on the call with us, and I think that may be two things that he could speak to in the interest of time fairly quickly.

One, your question about enrollment if he has those numbers at the ready. And, two, I think that there was an earlier question about what are the construction projects that are in play or planned for the near term, perhaps he can speak to both of those.

Mr. McNeil, are you with us?

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you, Dr. Watlington. And thank you, Mr. McNeil. And I want to thank you too for always circling back and being very responsive.

MR. McNEIL: Yes, thank you, Councilmember Gilmore Richardson. I want to first just start off just talking about the construction projects. I heard Councilmember Harrity also ask about the construction projects that we have that are for new schools. So we are building a new school at Cassidy, also at AMY at James Martin, at Holme, at T.M. Pierce.

We've already completed the construction projects as you all know, the three schools that we've opened last year or in 2022 was Northeast Propel Academy, Solis-Cohen and also Powel and the Science Leadership Academy Middle School. We have over 200 active projects between now and the end of 2024.

A lot of the projects that I've named already that are going to open in 2024, those three schools AMY at James Martin, Cassidy and Holme, those projects are being funded with

our ESSER funds. So speaking to some of the other Councilmembers make mentioning of the 325 million, that was a gift to us that was outside of our normal funding for capital projects to open or build these new schools.

We've also committed another $125 million to our Guaranteed Energy Savings Act projects so that we can make sure that we stay the course and continuing to improve the ventilation across the School District. So we've selected around eight schools with that 125 million that we're going to actually have centralized cooling plants in those.

We've also had funds committed to our maintenance department for our general services contracts to also work on the electrical upgrades in a lot of our facilities across the School District. As you know from last year when we talked, we've had 600-plus

air-conditioning units installed in a lot of our schools, and we plan to do much more in the upcoming years in regards to ventilation. In regards --

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: And --

MR. McNEIL: I'm sorry.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

MR. McNEIL: I was going to pivot to the enrollment piece. I don't have any numbers on enrollment that I can speak to directly about the schools. But maybe Ms. Harris is online and she may -- Chief Harris, and she may want to speak about our enrollment numbers across the School District.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Before we go to enrollment numbers, just a little point of clarity on Councilmember Gilmore Richardson's question -- and I'm not going to hold the time against you, colleague --

you mentioned eight schools. What are those eight schools?

MR. McNEIL: I can give you those schools. I don't have them on the top of mind, but I can give you those at a later time.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I mean, I see Councilmember Harrity leaning up. I'm hoping I'm reading his mind. Councilmember Harrity said earlier that we want to make sure that the infrastructure issues are being addressed in the areas that need them the most. And I think what we're not seeing is we're not seeing information.

Councilmember Gilmore Richardson also asked how many students are in -- we all knew this was happening today. This is basic information that we have to essentially have answers to. I've been pushing this capital issue for some time now. So when I hear anything about any infrastructure

happening in schools, you got to automatically know that we're going to ask you what schools, what areas, what zip codes, especially when you think about the fact that you have so many District Councilmembers here who are going to want to know what's happening with the schools in their District.

So before we leave today, it would be great if we can get at least those eight schools that you're referencing and an answer to Councilmember Katherine Gilmore Richardson's question as it relates to how many children we serve.

Thank you --

DR. WATLINGTON:

Councilmember, let me just say that the Board of Education is responsible for just approximately 200,000 students in the District. 120,000 of those students are in the traditional public schools here that I have oversight for. There's approximately

80,000 children or so who the Board has responsibility for and we have a District Chief of Charters.

I'm not aware of what the projections were last year relative to the enrollment this year because I was not here. But since you've asked that question, rest assured you will get a very prompt response. And we'll do everything to make sure that happens before we end this call. We do have the data. I want to be clear we have the data.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you, and --

MR. McNEIL: And if I may, can I also answer that question in regards to the eight schools that I made mention of for the Guaranteed Energy Savings Act. So those schools are Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, Clemente High School, Ellwood Elementary School, Rover Washington Middle School, Hackett Elementary School, Heston Elementary School,

Kirkbride Elementary and also Locke.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Can you repeat that one more time? We don't write that fast and we're all taking notes. One more time for us, please.

MR. McNEIL: Benjamin Franklin, Clemente High School, Elwood Elementary, Rover Washington Middle School, Hackett Elementary School, Heston, Kirkbride and Locke.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you.

MR. McNEIL: You're welcome.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you so much.

And, Mr. Chair, I thank you for acknowledging that because my question was please do not hold the capital response and/or question against my time because that was not my specific question. I still need my additional allotment for my second round in this first round after Dr. Watlington's testimony. So thank

you for that acknowledgment.

I wanted to again for the record -- I know, Dr. Watlington, you stated that you all will get the enrollment numbers overall for this year. But for a later time if you can submit to the Committee, if you can break that down by school, the projected enrollment for that school, the actual enrollment now that leveling should have occurred at this point for each school so that we understand better school-by-school with some of the challenges and/or issues may be and we can kind of look at that. Also, my District colleagues can look at that from their District perspective.

My other concern is that -- and I've been hearing and talking to parents and teachers and, you know, I have children in the District -- it's around our paraprofessionals, in that there's a lack of staffing in our paraprofessionals. And I'll name one

school in particular, Dobson Elementary.

So if you could talk about the paraprofessional staffing challenges and how you all are seeking to rectify that. Again, a ton of the questions that I'm asking will go back to the need for additional revenue. My concern is that every time there's a conversation around additional revenue for the School District, it sort of lands in the lap of City Council, when I fully and firmly believe that you all aren't doing as much as you can around this enrollment issue and around ensuring your revenue and ensuring that therefore you're able to spend in a certain way.

And so, can you talk about the challenge with staffing around the paraprofessionals? I'm particularly interested in Dobson of course, but all the schools that are

lacking paraprofessionals.

DR. WATLINGTON: I'll say first that relative to our paraprofessionals, we're staffed about 87.5 percent when I last looked at the numbers. This was as of last week, about 87.5 percent. What I see as the first-year Superintendent here are two issues, barriers to use your word, that we've got to get better at.

One, I think that in some of the jobs the salary is an issue for the work that paraprofessionals do. Secondly, I've noted by looking at our data that we've got to speed up our onboarding time. From the time a hiring administrator says we want to hire Councilmember Gilmore Richardson, to the date that you actually show up in that school and you've been cleared through all the state and School District clearances, those are the two biggest barriers that I see, that I've identified.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you. So if we could just follow up and also understand the staffing challenges and which schools -- if we're at 87.5 percent, where is that 12.5 percent? Where are those vacancies, what schools --
DR. WATLINGTON: The --
COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
RICHARDSON: Pardon me. I'm sorry.
DR. WATLINGTON: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off. I'm sorry. My apologies. Go ahead.
COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
RICHARDSON: No, no, it's okay. I was just saying for the 12.5 percent, we just want to understand where those vacancies are located and what the remedy is for those schools.
And then lastly, I have to get this on the record because I've worked with my team to really try to ensure that the District fully understands what it is that we are

requesting. So I'm going to read this out and this will be my last comment and question for this round, and I will circle back to the next round.

For the school finder app, and I'm just going to go down one by one, we're talking about, one, a tech issue. The school finder tool has a GIS issue. I'll give you the example again. Blankenberg versus Mastery Charter School. When the address is put in, it says Mastery for K through 6th. Then it says the student will be routed to Blankenberg for 7th and 8th grade even though Gompers is the closest local public school, which is .7 miles away versus Blankenberg which is the 2.1 miles away.

But in my understanding though, if the catchment area is the Renaissance Charter School which is Mastery-Mann, then the feeder school for Mastery-Mann would be Shoemaker, which is also closer than

Blankenberg. Okay. I'm just using that as an example so you understand how this system is not working.

I was recently told that this issue was fixed. You know I checked right away. The issue is not fixed. So again, the reason why I'm harping on this is not -- it's not personal. Okay. It's not personal at all. My kids are in the correct school because we pushed for it. But I'm talking about all the other children across the District and all the other parents who would have no idea that they are being routed to the wrong place.

Number two, it's an information issue. The school finder tool should be easier to access so that the schools list that parents know the number of options that they have. Most families only receive one option. So I'll give you the example again. I'm a mother in Wynnefield. Catchment school is the Renaissance

Charter School Mastery-Mann, but I never see that I have an option to send my children to Gompers either, okay. So that option is never made available. So unless you live in that specific side of Wynnefield where Gompers is the only school available, if you're on the other side of Wynnefield, you have no clue about Gompers and your children being able to attend Gompers.

I'll continue. In addition to that, many families don't know that there is an option to then reach out to the District to apply to the closer local public school. Because when you call the school, to no fault of their own, they then route you to the District, which then routes you back to the information which is on the incorrect school finder app that has the GIS and technology issue.

And then from a longer-term perspective, I understand and fully understand that there are agreements

with the Renaissance charter schools that cannot be changed immediately. But I do have significant concerns that our neighborhood schools are losing resources due to the decline enrollment because of this technology issue.

And so, what I would like the District to do is ensure that we're also giving families every single option. So I just wanted to put that on the record publicly to further explain in a different way than I've explained over the past four years to the School District -- and obviously, Dr. Watlington, before your time -- to try to rectify this issue.

And then I will come back on the next round with additional questions, but I had to put that on the record so that I can say I put it on the record in addition to the work that we've continued to do with the District behind the scenes or years.

Thank you, Dr. Watlington.

And thank you, Mr. Chair.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, colleague. Chair recognizes Councilmember Bass.

Councilmember Jones, thank you for your patience. I appreciate you on this.

Councilmember Bass.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that. I'm having some technical difficulties. So, Councilmember Jones, I appreciate your indulgence as I've been trying to get recognized for a minute now.

So, Dr. Watlington, I just had a couple of questions for you. And I wanted to start with one, we've had a couple of conversations I think about this, and I wanted to just go a little bit deeper following up on Councilwoman Kathy Gilmore Richardson's questions around PSSAs and the reliance on PSSAs and the

preparedness that PSSAs provide to our students, because I don't know that they have been as helpful as we would like for them to be and being a determinant as to if our young people when they graduate are prepared, are qualified, are ready for college, the workforce, whatever.

And so, you and I had some conversation. I've had some conversation with your team about just recent events and my own experience with the PSSAs. And so, I'm wondering if you can talk about the District's reliance on PSSAs to make critical decisions about schools, admittance policy, how all of those things work and flow together. Because one of the concerns that I have is I just had a meeting just yesterday with the President of Temple University. He did a great briefing for us around, you know, what's happening on campus.

One of the things that he

mentioned is he talked about how young people coming to Temple University a lot of times are really just still not prepared. They're still not prepared. And so, I know that the PSSAs we rely on them heavily, but what do they prepare our young people for post-graduation if when many of them when they hit the doorstep of whatever college or university they want to attend are still not prepared for the curriculum that is being offered?

DR. WATLINGTON: Sure. I'll start by saying I'll take the former piece first in terms of how the District is going about making decisions about admissions to schools and where kids go. President Streater and I had a meeting last week with President Wingard as a matter of fact, and we talked about some similar things that you're talking about as well.

I will say that cards on the

table face up. We know this is not Tony Watlington's opinion. This is a research fact. There is inherent bias --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

DR. WATLINGTON: -- and other bias built into standardized testing. Two, there is a bias toward Eurocentric Western thinking in American standardized tests. The PSSAs are no different. Now, if you ask me, Tony Watlington, what should we do about that, my professional and personal belief both as a parent of three former students myself as a dad and as a Superintendent is that we should never make important decisions based on one standardized test score, ever --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

DR. WATLINGTON: -- not in K through 12 education.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I would agree.

DR. WATLINGTON: We should

use multiple measures. We should use multiple measures for who gets promoted from one grade to the next. We should use multiple measures for what are the graduation standards and requirements. We should use multiple measures for who should get into, say, at colleges and universities where there's a two- and four-year institution.

Now, even in the School District I think we should use multiple measures for how we make really hard decisions about --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Sure.

DR. WATLINGTON: -- admissions to special schools given that PSSAs should not be the driver. I think you should make that one of several factors along with grades, attendance and some other measures, so that would be my short answer to the question.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. So --

MR. STREATER: Can I add something?

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Of course. One of my constituents from the 8th District.

MR. STREATER: Yeah, right in Germantown. But I think also as it relates to Harrisburg I think we all had bought into PSSAs and Keystones not being the end-all-be-all, but as it relates to persuading some individuals from certain political persuasions about funding us, often anyone wants to say show me the beef, how do we know that what you're doing is worth our investing of more state dollars. And I think the PSSAs and Keystones are often the tool that they throw in our face and say, hey, if you want more funding, do that.

So again, this is a very complicated issue with a lot of onions. I know that this is probably higher level than the questions you

were asking about special admits and stuff like that, but I'm just letting you know why it's still a thing in the District, and as the Board we kind of feel compelled to balance both interests as best as we can.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I hear you. I think that the fact that everybody here recognizes that the PSSAs and the standardized testing in general, that there are biases in the system, like we know this. It's not something that is questionable, that that in and of itself should really give us significant pause.

And so, I just really want to put that out there because we recognize that there's a problem here and whatever action we take long-term is going to be good for our students, and I'm trusting, Dr. Watlington, that it is on your radar to be addressed. I know you haven't been here quite for a year yet, but I'm certainly hoping that you and our new

School Board President and the entire Board and your leadership team plan on having some robust conversations around this issue.

DR. WATLINGTON: Councilmember Bass, I'll just say one other thing if the Chair will permit me to say it very quickly.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Sure.

DR. WATLINGTON: The question that we have to call though is with all the inherent bias in the Nation's Report Card, the NAEP test, out of 26 urban districts, why do most of them outperform the children in Philadelphia.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Mm-hmm.

DR. WATLINGTON: They got the same bias that we have built in the test. So on the one hand, I don't think it's either-or. I think it's both-and. So I am on the record with the Board, I do not believe that we ought to completely throw tests out of K-12 until higher ed. says

they will no longer have an LSAT for folks like President Streater and others who figured out how to master that to go to law school or GRE or the MCAT that people have to take to go to medical school, because I expect people from Philadelphia to graduate from us and go on to be lawyers and doctors and engineers --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Sure. Sure.

DR. WATLINGTON: -- and go to the various trades and do a lot of other things. So I think a couple of things that we can do to help mitigate some of that is, Board member Salley or somebody mentioned this earlier, we're taking a look at what we're learning on the research on high-dosage tutoring.

There's a growing body of research. I know a high-dosage tutoring in math in particular that's showing phenomenal improvement in some urban districts, so we're trying

to figure that space out at the same time.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. All right. Well, listen, I have an appreciation for the work that lays ahead of you in trying to address this issue and I too feel that our students should go on to be doctors and lawyers and all the great things that they want to be and that standardized testing of course is a part of the conversation along the way.

But I guess from what I've seen, it feels to me -- and this is just my own opinion -- that the PSSAs are very heavily relied upon in terms of making a decision and that there's no variation whatsoever within the District and that causes concern. And so, I'm asking that that concern is looked into and re-examined because there should be some additional opportunity to provide input in my opinion.

The other question, and I know I'm short on time -- the other question that I had was as I mentioned, I had a meeting yesterday --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Councilmember Bass.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes. Am I out of time?

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: No. Just for the record what I'll say, and Councilmember Jones is queued up next, just for clarity, Councilmember Bass did not get to ask any questions yet. So I do think it's fair that we do give you a little more time just so you can get your stuff in because you didn't get an opportunity and you were having technical difficulties, so please proceed.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you. Thank you. So I get an extra hour, right.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: You got to negotiate with your Majority

Leader for that.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: He seems -- okay, he said yes. He said yes. Okay. So, no, I have just a couple more questions really quickly.

So I was saying that Temple University yesterday I had a meeting with the President. It was a great meeting. But I wanted to double-back on what he spoke about in terms of preparedness from Philadelphia School District students and the lack of preparedness essentially and the fact that there's an additional cost that comes with that lack of preparedness.

You have to take essentially remedial courses to be able to get up to speed, and those courses cost the same amount as regular tuition classes that you can add towards your matriculation. So I'm wondering what are we doing to make sure that our young people when they hit those doorsteps that they're ready? I still don't feel like I've gotten

clarity on that.

DR. WATLINGTON: Sure. I think --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And progress, yeah.

DR. WATLINGTON: Absolutely. There are multiple things that we are doing. One, the number one thing that we have to continue to do is to be sure that we staff schools with highly qualified well-supported teachers, highly qualified well-supported principals. Not just anybody who wants to teach, let me be clear, highly qualified, how do we measure that.

Two, we are focusing in on making sure that students have 90 percent of attendance each month and that teachers have 90 percent each month. We are not there yet. We report out on that data every month to the Board of Education, and we're very clear to say to the Board we're getting better, we're about the same

or we're getting worse so that we keep that flashlight shined on teacher and student attendance.

Third, we're doubling down in the strategic planning process to make sure that kids have access to high quality curriculum. Here's how you know kids have access to high quality curriculum: First, there are groups nationally that evaluate it, whether it's the Clearinghouse, What Works Clearinghouse, or EdReports.

We want to make sure that every student has access to grade-level curriculum, grade-level materials a certain percentage of the day. Because what happens with poor Black and Brown children, we give them low-level work because we say they're not prepared to do grade-level work. And there's a way that we can bridge that gap because the bottom line is we will never remediate our way to excellence.

Then we're working on

professional development for teachers in particular and other school staff, what have we given people professional development on. We're going to go much harder on the Science of Reading so we teach literacy better as part of the strategic plan. We're focusing on making sure that teachers really understand the content that they're teaching.

This is really important because a lot of teachers nowadays don't have the benefit of having gone through a teacher education program and really learning to become really good teachers, so we have to supply a lot of that for our nontraditional teachers at the school level, and we're doing professional development on how do you engage students in the learning.

And then we're focusing really heavily on how do we provide other supports, and we're not there

yet in terms of high-dosage tutoring. Of those, the ones that we're focused on the most right now is teacher attendance and student attendance and getting our arms around the drop-out problem and the number of kids who are not in school.

MR. STREATER: Councilmember Bass, if I can step in here real quick --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

MR. STREATER: -- if possible, to add some context from the Board's perspective. It's almost as if you're at our action meetings, right. We are talking about student outcomes, preparing children for college and things like that. And whether it's on the District side or our public charter school side, this Board has a laser focus on ensuring whatever ways we can that children have the access to the educational experience, holistic experience that prepares them for whatever they want

to do in life, whether they want to be an Instagram influencer, right, or whether they want to go to college and become a lawyer.

And it does break my heart when I know a student has graduated -- I've talked to professors at Temple. Students who come from a public charter sector but also our public school sector where they can't write an essay, right, when they have to take 10th grade math in college --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

MR. STREATER: -- which sometimes can cause a child to say, I'm done with this, right. When in fact it's not the child, it's the adults who failed --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Right.

MR. STREATER: -- so many people are wondering why we're making the decisions we're making and maybe being more communicative about it, it's for that reason. We won't

anymore sit on the sideline and say, we did the best we could and it's okay for children to graduate and not be able to have the skills they need.

So I'm with you 100 percent, and I'm also aligned with you as it relates to standardized testing. I understand your concerns as well. So we're going to continue to remain pragmatic and laser-focused on our student achievement.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you. Thank you. And I see that the Chair has returned, so I guess I have to give up the mic.

But I do want to add one more thing really quickly, which is I did hear Dr. Watlington mention a number of other things that are happening in other districts and they're seeing significant results and yet Philadelphia's not. And I don't know that I've really gotten a clear answer as to why that is happening.

I guess I could take a lot of different answers and sort of cobble them together and figure, okay, well, there's a number of different reasons why we're not seeing those results here in Philadelphia. But if there's anything that you wanted to add over what you said that sort of crystallizes what you've already said, because I think that there's a lot of different things that go into why we're not seeing the results, whether it's staffing, whether it's other things that are happening personally with the student, whether it's environment, all of these things add up together to say that what we're offering isn't working.

So I don't know if there was anything else that you wanted to add, you or Mr. Streater, wanted to add on that.

DR. WATLINGTON: I'll just say -- I don't know about President

Streater. I'll just say that part of the reason why we have a Steering Committee and advisory groups engaged in developing the strategic plan is we're taking the time to look at other districts to study them in-depth.

It's kind of like if you ask someone why does State A have more cancer -- incidence of cancer than another state. You got to take the time to dig into the data. And then when you think you know the right answer, you have to test it to say is that really what's causing the outcome. And we're taking the time as part of a strategic plan development work to really study those districts and the research and the data.

What we know for a fact though is out of 26 urban districts that took the NAEP assessment, we outperformed two. The others outperformed us, and that's been a

trend over time. We also know that 3rd grade reading has been flat. We know states like Mississippi has significantly improved early grade reading, by Science of Reading. So some of the answers I can tell you that we just know some of the things we need to focus on, but we want to take the time to go really deep with that.

But while we're doing that, we're not just twiddling our thumbs. We're focusing very heavily on making sure the teachers and students have good attendance, which has proven to be a pretty tall order by itself, but we're going to double-down and get that done. And we're committed to getting better in that regard.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Watlington, and thank you, President Streater. I appreciate that.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank

you, colleague. Appreciate you.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Jones. And those were great questions too, colleague.

Majority Leader Jones.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And those were great comments, Member Bass, ones that we will take into consideration.

I just want to say, Dr. Watlington, I am going to use and attribute to you, cards on the table face up. I am going to use that. That is a pretty good metaphor of being forthcoming and I like it. I'm going to take that for my lexicon of one-liners. It's in my playbook now.

I want to thank you and your team for Cassidy. I'm excited about the new construction. I believe it's one of two schools being newly constructed. And I believe at the end of the day it will be where the Jetsons would have wanted to send their kids, and they're using

makerspace, there's a weather station that's going to be in there, there are outdoor classrooms in case of high instances of pandemic-related flus. So it's being designed with the future of our children and career paths in mind. So for that, I am truly grateful.

There's a TV and radio station that's going to be a part of it, so it's exciting to me. But I will push back gently to my colleagues to say that the reason the School District picked that location to do new construction was because of the condition of the building.

It was a toxic environment. Asbestos, lead in the water, and just totally price-wise said it is cheaper to tear down and build new construction. Not because the neighborhood was underperforming in a drastic way, it could do better, but it wasn't the worst. But by way of fairness, you also have to consider

the buildings that our children are forced to and the teachers are forced to operate within, so I'd like that to be balanced out to the greater consideration as well.

With that in mind, with the prospect of Cassidy, that is a good school that I want to feed into a historic school, which is Overbrook. We have endured the lack of investment, capital investment in that school for a while. The last time we did something meaningful was our multi-media studio of $2.5 million was invested to bring a state-of-the-art TV, radio and communications program in there. But what we were also assured would be the other shoe, was that there was going to be an auditorium that they could do performances, that they could do productions right out of.

Right now they have a box where they bring up for the microphone and it's inadequate to do

anything, no lighting systems. The stage was there when I gave my first speech in public office, you know, running for the class office. So it's been a long time. And what I see happening is that we'll kick the can down the road and then a new Superintendent will come, a new set of staff will come. And all of the promises and commitments that were made, people scratching their heads, well, that wasn't me, let me look into it, which begins another clock which is unacceptable for the kids that go through that school that aren't getting what they should have.

So what we're getting at Cassidy we should be mindful that the fourth and fifth floors of Overbrook have been abandoned since they had a great music program. So ideas like a CTE component to Overbrook are what we would love to hear about.

We have the Mann Music Center and Live Nation that have

partnered to bring some of our young people from Overbrook down to gain valuable experience in the performing arts, behind the scenes. And if we could somehow incorporate that meaningful mentorship to some actual studios and actual technical classes in Overbrook, we could increase our enrollment which at one time at its height was like 1500 students, which is down now to 400, which is un --

(Dog barking.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: -- even my dog doesn't agree, which is unsustainable to have that much infrastructure.

So we've been asking about a plan to save Overbrook. We've been asking about a capital plan to invest in Overbrook. And each year we don't do that. That's another group of young people that wind up with less than desirable outcomes. And we need -- I always talk about we don't have a lot of time. We can't defer

generations of law students so we need some expedition on our planning, and more importantly, our execution of good ideas and a consistent improvement plan.

So the question, the wind-up question is, what's going to happen to my alma mater Overbrook High School?

DR. WATLINGTON: I heard you say, Councilmember Jones, something about you got a new Superintendent and I've got to look into it, look into this, et cetera, so I hear your voice in my head. So I just want to say to you that I also heard you say that the student enrollment of 1500 at Overbrook declined over time to 400, very fine stately building built in a different time with a different at least number of population. I think that speaks to a lot of challenges across the District in terms of as the numbers decline in some buildings, how do you make the

most wise and student-centered decisions about building utilization so that you don't have some schools very underutilized and perhaps in some districts some overutilized.

The short answer to your question is while the construction for Cassidy and the other projects are continuing as planned, the operations team is continuing to put air-conditioners in places where they have the resources and the bandwidth to get that done, the decisions about what will happen in the facilities planning process relative to schools like Overbrook, et cetera, we put that on -- recommended to the Board that we put on pause until we get the academic strategies built out in the strategic plan.

So my thinking is we will pick that back up very shortly after we get the strategic plan finalized, because we want to know how many advanced placement labs do we need to

have, science labs do we need to have in every high school, how many CTE labs and what kind of CTE labs need to be built in the schools.

It would be premature for us to walk down the road and say, well, let's just start doing this with this school until we get that figured out. And so, I personally think it's really important that we build out the academic strategies and the strategic plan, and then from there, we pick the facilities planning process back up right after we get that academic strategic plan approved by the Board in May. And then we'll have more direction and answers to where we go specifically to Overbrook and other schools in the District. That's my long and short answer to your question.

COUNCILMAN JONES: I --

MR. STREATER: Councilmember Jones --

COUNCILMAN JONES: Go ahead.

MR. STREATER: I was just going to say I think you're asking a very important question, right. How do you balance the future and the now, right. I think for those in the public who don't know what we're doing is we looked at places like Washington, D.C. that took the time to be very strategic to rebuild their infrastructure, where to rebuild buildings, where to knock ones down and build new ones, where to retrofit buildings for 21st century learning. That's what we're doing.

But you're right, that doesn't mean necessarily that we have to stop doing all investments. So schools like Cassidy, right, is an example of even though we're thinking about the future now, we can try our best to walk and chew gum at the same time. So I just wanted to put that context out there. This is not meant to say what you said had no value. I think it has a lot of value. It's

just for fact -- just for people to understand the facts of what is the Board thinking about and why some things may take a little longer than others, but I digress.

COUNCILMAN JONES: So I'm going to use that adage cards on the table face up. I have been a supporter of the School District, a reliable vote on taxes in tough times and good times. I go back to when me and then Councilmember Jim Kenney sat in the room and he was a firm supporter of the School District then, took tough tax votes, and that's why I respected him.

I'm not going to sit back and let time just keep going by Overbrook. I am not. And I speak for not just some of my colleagues that know Overbrook's plight, have visited Overbrook with you. I speak for my colleagues at the State, Senator Hughes, Representative Cephas who represents Overbrook High School.

We're not going to sit around and let our young people suffer the fate of school-to-prison pipeline. They have a disproportionate amount of people with IEPs, we get a disproportionate amount of people who, sometimes young people, run afoul of the law. I have to give them, and I'm talking about home investors like Mr. Santana who spent a lot of money on his house, but to give them a reason to enroll their kids in local schools and not have to pay that extra tax of sending their kids to nonpublic schools.

So I want to give you the runway you need. But let me say this, and cards on the table, I am running out of patience because I've been promised this. And you've taken that tour, you've seen the abandonment. And my principal over there is fighting a good fight. She's fighting for those young people who have problems when they walk in

that school.

But if we put some really nice programs in there, we will attract more residents to feel confident to take their children to Overbrook. But if we follow this and kick the can down the road, it will continue the course it's going. And so, I want to give you the runway, but it's not infinite.

I mean, I want to be a good vote, but I'm going to make sure that none of my schools are left behind. So that's not a question. That's a comment. Thank you.

DR. WATLINGTON: I would like to note for the record if I might, Councilmember Jones, that since my arrival we have moved on some plans to support students in the near term at Overbrook High School, which is a high school we care about very much just like others. And the 21st century model, that we've implemented some programming in that

school to help students to have some great opportunities when they graduate.

If I can just ask Tomas Hanna, who is the Associate Superintendent for High Schools, if he can just take 30 seconds to just say a quick word about that. I think that's really important.

MR. HANNA: Can y'all hear me this morning, gentlemen?

COUNCILMAN JONES: Yes.

MR. HANNA: It's good to see you, Councilman Jones. I'm no longer living in your District, but it's a pleasure to see you. You don't remember me because I didn't have this before.

COUNCILMAN JONES: You can come back.

MR. HANNA: No worries, my friend. So 30 seconds. So as you're aware, the 21st century grant opportunity allows us to work specifically with Overbrook High

School, West Philadelphia High School and Bartram. And the kind of work we're looking to do there now as we engage in strategic planning, but the commitment is to engage 9th graders moving forward in areas of entertainment, issues you called out, digital media, fashion, not just a craft, but the business of it, because not only do we want our young people to engage in preparing things, we want them to be the owners of the businesses, right. And I think that's what you're looking for.

And also just so you're aware, we're going to be sure that special ed. students will also walk out with vocational, with CTE training, right, so that they have a credential and an opportunity to leave us with options in this work. So I just wanted to chime in there because I know this is something that's been very near and dear to your heart.

And I would call out that as was mentioned earlier on our CTE work, Dr. Malika Brooks has been very, very instrumental providing that support for us, number one. And number two, earlier we talked about our CTE Director, Michelle Armstrong. So they're all lockstep in doing this work.

So I just wanted to call that out as this is sort of, brought to your point, continue this as part of the runway as we sort of look at the bigger opportunity because when the strategic work happens, we want to be sure that we're incorporating that which works from this grant opportunity so that that can be scaled up. And again, we're not just talking Overbrook, but West Philadelphia and Bartram. So with that, I'll just step back.

COUNCILMAN JONES: I appreciate that, for the record I do. But look at it from my lens: Daroff

closed, Bluford life-support, a number of charter establishments in my District closed, options shrinking. I'm beginning to think you got something against the 4th District. So disproportionately, we are losing our education options. And I have to stand up for the parents and young people that this impacts. So please give some consideration to that.

And in closing, there's not a CTE program on my side of the river, west side of the river that they can go to. The closest one is West. That's in the 3rd. And I appreciate the crown jewel of CTEs, Randolph, but that's on the other side. And our young people have to travel too far to get to the educational options that they need. So thank you for your consideration. And I --

MR. HANNA: If I might, Dr. Watlington. In my previous role

at PDE prior to returning, we have been having a conversation about where dual enrollment needs to be happening across the Commonwealth including in Philadelphia, we're undertaking here within the District as we come in where are our CTE programs, where are the traditional vocational programs and what does access look like across the City. So we are there and it is part of this conversation.

So I appreciate you. We have nothing against the 4th. Trust me. We have nothing against the 4th. So I appreciate that. Thank you, Dr. Watlington, and I appreciate the time.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Mr. Leader.

Chair recognizes Councilmember Gilmore Richardson, and then I think then followed by myself.

And then I think I will be the last one to close us out for today.

Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

And thank you again to all the team at the District for your help and support today, and I'm looking forward to receiving the information that we've requested at today's hearing, recognizing that we're at the end.

And so, I wanted to start where Councilmember Jones left out. Everyone knows that I deeply care about career and technical education in the City of Philadelphia. It is something that I've tried to focus on. It is something that my colleagues have supported me on relative to ensuring that our CTE students even have a point preference when they apply for civil service

work here in the City of Philadelphia. So I want to pause there to thank Michelle Alexander and her entire team for all of their hard work.

I wanted to pick up though where Councilmember Jones has left off. How are we -- and if you can give us this information for the record. How are we looking at all of our Career and Technical Education programs and how are we then aligning them with the jobs that we know are in our labor market forecast for the City of Philadelphia, both short-term and long-term? And I'll specifically highlight the advanced manufacturing jobs, the jobs that are available in the life sciences industry and a number of other industries that we know are burgeoning here in the City of Philadelphia.

So how are we have re-aligning some of those CTE programs to meet the jobs that are

here, but also the jobs that we know will be here in the future? And if we can take a moment to talk about that. And I really wanted to get that on the record because I'm introducing a resolution tomorrow in Council that will ask the District to come before us again for hearings around the creation of a high school that's specifically focused on career and technical education in several of those issues. That's the first thing.

Secondly, I wanted to thank that office for working with us as we continue to work on the regs with the Administration around the implementation of that point preference for our students. And then finally, the learning loss that our young people have experienced. I don't think we've spent enough time there.

Particularly as a parent of young people in the District, I have

a son who's in kindergarten, I have a daughter who's in 2nd grade and another daughter who's in 11th grade. And so, I recognize sort of what's happening with the students across the District at different schools, whether they're neighborhood schools versus special admission schools.

And so, can we talk about the learning loss and what we're doing specifically to help young people around reading because I'm very concerned that the AARP program has now been removed from the schools?

DR. WATLINGTON: I'll say two things, Councilmember Gilmore Richardson. First, as a part of the strategic planning process, we're doing a review of all of our CTE programs, the content, what are we currently offering relative to traditional what some people refer to as trades, I've heard some people in the City say the old vocational

education, et cetera, but more traditional CTE programming.

We're also trying to take a look at what are some of the more current or new opportunities related to things like advanced manufacturing, coding and life sciences that you referenced and that's absolutely true, it's a burgeoning area, particularly here in Philadelphia that I think has an infrastructure with the colleges and universities in part with the University of Pennsylvania and other higher institutions.

Number two, I'm doing a tour of CTE programs across the District with Dr. Guy Generals, President at the Community College of Philadelphia, because we're trying to think through as we do the strategic plan work, how do we survey what we currently have across the District, A; and B, how do we make sure that we have geographic representation to

Councilmember Jones' point.

For example, the first school I went to look at was in the Greater Northeast at Swenson High School. It's no surprise my next visit with Dr. Generals will be at Dobbins High School. And we're going to ask ourselves what does the CTE programming look like across the District, where are these programs located, how many kids are earning industry certifications in higher-paying jobs and we want to map that out so it's not anecdotal, but we know actual information.

And then finally, one of the reasons why we brought in an Associate Superintendent for High Schools in particular was to shine more attention on the high schools. So I'm going to ask Mr. Hanna, Tomas Hanna, if you'll take another 30 seconds to say something about the workforce development strategy that he's been tasked with helping us to

implement.

MR. HANNA: Thank you so very much, Dr. Watlington. And, Councilwoman Gilmore Richardson, thank you for your interest as well as Councilman Jones. I want to just for the record because I just want to be clear, the person you've been referring to I think you mean Michelle Armstrong, not Alexander who's on the --

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: I apologize.

MR. HANNA: No worries, no worries. I just want to make sure. She's doing a great job and will be part of the Superintendent's team as we go out and visit the CTE programs. Part of the work that we've done that I've had the pleasure doing at the state was bringing together folks to a commission that was written into the school code -- not a commission, a committee.

So we actually had a

committee meeting here in Philadelphia where we highlighted the paraprofessionals, the teacher program, right, about 100 some-odd paraprofessionals going into the teaching field and ESSER dollars that helped to support that. So as we look at our teacher issues, vacancies, we're looking at paraprofessionals to fill those vacancies, number one.

Number two, part of that work included the creation of a program of study in the field of education, which the Department of Education in Pennsylvania has authorized, has approved and will be available for use by high schools to engage young people in wanting to teach early. And so, we know of five high schools that want to engage in that program. Now, we're going to put it out there. Michelle Armstrong, under her leadership, we're going to be sort of taking a

look at what that means.

What a program of study means, Councilwoman, is that there's what's called a task and standards list which basically has been created by folks to say what is it that our students need to know and be able to do as they think about engaging in the profession.

Some would argue we need to be doing this -- I think I heard earlier, we need to be doing this work earlier in the middle schools because Sharif El-Mekki actually has been part of that committee to put this together and his team. He will say that many times men of color, particularly Black men, don't learn about the teaching profession until they're in college, right, and don't know that it's an issue, right.

And so, we want to be really sure that -- meanwhile White women are learning in 3rd grade that it's an option. It's not a problem, it is

what it is. And guess what, that's who the preponderance of our teachers are. They're phenomenal. We need them in our schools, but we need them to be culturally competent as we do this work. And that's the kind of work that we're looking to engage in.

So lastly, part of the reason for making it a CTE opportunity is that it enables the state to engage PDE -- not PDE, the State's Department of Labor so that we can register these as apprenticeships.

Imagine our paraprofessionals who have jobs. That job can serve as their apprenticeship so that we can then leverage dollars so that the opportunity for our teachers, for our prospective teachers is at no cost to them, and so that we eliminate two things: One, we attract prospective teachers, mostly teachers of color, number one, and do so without debt if

we're able to do this through these partnerships from the Department of Labor. So we're really committed to doing that work.

And guess what, we have to ask students what they want to do and show them where the vacancies are and where the opportunities are. The opportunities are in the School District of Philadelphia, teaching and doing all kinds of other things. So I just wanted to put that out there. Those were my 30, Tomas Hanna's 30 seconds. My apologies, Superintendent.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Okay. I just want to jump in here really quickly and thank you for that response and thank you for the clarification because that was really a moment, but thank you to Michelle Armstrong at the District who we worked with very closely.

Mr. Hanna, you talked about middle years exposure. That's what

it is, exposing our young people in middle school to these opportunities. You also talked about the CTE programs. And for me, it's the re-alignment of those programs to match the jobs that in our labor market forecast, both short-term and long-term.

And I appreciate that you all are thinking about how you work with DOL to ensure these programs are registered apprenticeship programs. And I'm sure depending on the field you all are working with the Building Trades on that as well as similar to the program at Strawberry Mansion.

I'd like to mention just a couple of things that I have to get on the record, particularly because I'm not on the Education Committee. But the PDE, I know we work with Governor Wolf who had agreed when Dr. Hite was here to work with us around our application to PDE for any new CTE program, so I would implore

you all to reach out to the Shapiro Administration to ask for that assistance as well.

In addition to that, I wanted to mention two other things, the implementation of Tier 1 conflict resolution in all of our schools. We worked with Dr. Gray and her team on the implementation of the Tier 1 opportunity and I just want to make sure that that is still happening and that every school has the opportunity to select a Tier 1 conflict resolution program that is paid for by 440 and does not impact the revenue of that local and their ability to hire other professionals as deemed necessary by their administration and the school staff.

And then lastly, I wanted end with thanks, in thanking you at the District in the transition from Dr. Hite and Dr. Watlington for submitting the application to the federal government for the water

infiltration system upgrades for the District.

I am a member of the United States Environmental Protection Agency Local Government Advisory Committee. I asked the School District to apply for this grant opportunity that was from EPA and would be directly to the District. We worked out some challenges in the meantime and you all did apply for the grant opportunity.

It's almost $5 million that has been awarded to the District around the water infiltration system installation at each of the schools. And so, I would just ask if we can get an update on that in writing to see how many more schools we'll be able to service as a result of that grant money that we received from the EPA.

And then I'm interested in learning how you all are interfacing to figure out what other grant

opportunities are available. Obviously, all the opportunities I get from EPA I send them directly to the School District and/or said City agency and their department. But how are you all looking to ensure that you are not missing any opportunities with this sort of once-in-a-career lifetime infrastructure package availability that we have from D.C. thanks to President Biden?

And then finally, I look forward to continuing to work with all of you on a number of issues that we know will be important, particularly our capital plan around our school buildings and again, back to the enrollment issue so that we can finally get that rectified before we conclude this budget process this year. Thank you.

And thank you, Mr. Chair.

DR. WATLINGTON:

Mr. Chairman and Councilmember Gilmore Richardson, yes, it's my

understanding that Tier 1 conflict resolution is continuing as you communicated. I'll ask Chief Karyn Lynch, Chief of Student Services, just to take 30 seconds, we won't go into detail. We'll just ask her to give 30 seconds verification of that information, and we'll be happy to submit more detailed information in our follow-up.

MS. LYNCH: Yes. Thank you, Dr. Watlington. Yes, Councilwoman, Dr. Gray is very much committed. We are still very much at it. We are now in the process entering into the phase where schools get to select. And so, we're looking forward to giving you additional updates on what we're doing and how well it's going. Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you. And I'll look forward to those updates to ensure that each school has that program because that was the

agreement we made with the District last year.

MS. LYNCH: Yes.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Councilmember, are you good to go?

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: Yes. I just wanted an update on the federal infrastructure dollars.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Mr. Superintendent?

DR. WATLINGTON: Anything in particular that you wanted me to speak to, Councilmember Gilmore Richardson? I can tell you that the first focus area for those dollars related to student learning loss and there was $350 million allocated for that purpose. Area 2, there was a focus on improving facilities in the District and the legislation as I recall in a previous district related in mitigation of or prevention of COVID or airborne problems, and I recall this District allocated $325

million for that purpose.

The third focus area was related to social and emotional needs of students, which was absolutely appropriate given the significant impact of the pandemic and $150 million was originally allocated for the District. I'll make sure that we provide more detailed follow-up related to the budget expenditures that's a matter of public record in our written follow-up.

COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE RICHARDSON: That would be great. I just really want to know if there are any additional opportunities that you all are going to apply for to try to augment and supplement some of the revenue challenges we know that we anticipate.

I know and recognize the wonderful work that you all have been doing, but I just wanted to have sort of a forecast in what your plans are for some of the other federal

projects that we may or may not even know about right now because they're coming down the pipeline so quickly so that we can try to augment our revenue process?

Lastly, I got to get this on the record and then I'm done. Girls' High, the Philadelphia High School for Girls, my alma mater, they were asking for a charter bus. I had a summit with the girls at City Hall on safety. They are having a safety conference at La Salle University I believe in April, and the girls just gave a very robust presentation to all the Members and were with us for a Council session.

They're asking for a charter bus or the charter bus with Central to be extended up to and have availability for the girls at the Philadelphia High School for Girls. But I wanted to put that on the record because I did meet with the girls directly at the school to

ensure that they received some type of support directly from the District. Okay. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank --

DR. WATLINGTON: To your point, we'll follow up on Girls' High, Mr. Chairman. And also, the short answer is, yes, we're going to continue to recommend to the Board of Education that we apply for federal dollars for which we're eligible to help augment our budget, our underfunded budget, yes, absolutely.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Mr. Superintendent. Thank you, colleague.

I want to close this out with a couple of questions. I want to start with a question from one of my colleagues. So looking at some of the issues that we have around safety, one of the issues around safety is staffing issues. So I'm

wondering if the School District would be able to give us the total number of vacancies for teachers as well as noninstructional staff members.

If we can get a list of how many vacancies we have for these critical positions. We're talking about counselors, assistant super -- assistant principals, we're talking about other climate staff, counselors, things of that capacity, if we can just get a breakdown of the vacancies and get a breakdown by position, if that can be sent to me, I can be assured that members of the Education Committee as well as other Councilmembers get that information.

And I know you guys sent us a report around capital planning. If we can get a list of the new construction that's taken place, we got the eight schools that was discussed today, but if we can get the list of new construction that's

taking place and what's going to be happening in the pipeline as it relates to that $2 billion over the next six years, with as much detail as possible, that would also be very much appreciated.

Sticking with school safety --

DR. WATLINGTON: Duly noted. Will do, Mr. Chairman.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Mr. Superintendent. Sticking with school safety, last week I held an education debrief conversation which helps inform myself and other members of the Education Committee as it relates to issues that schools are facing. And one of the issues that was communicated to us is working cameras.

Do you have an idea of how many of our comprehensive high schools as well as our middle schools do not have working cameras? It's a huge safety concern that teachers

communicated to us. And I'm going to be honest with you, I was outside a school yesterday that I'm not going to name, and I personally didn't feel safe leaving that school around 5:30, 6 o'clock and some of the School District staff already know some of my concerns because I communicated to them last night. But one of the biggest issues of exiting that particular school was lighting.

So first cameras, where are we with cameras, especially in our comprehensive neighborhood high schools and middle schools and what are we doing about some of the lighting problems that we have as it relates to our facilities?

DR. WATLINGTON:

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to defer to Chief of Safety Mr. Kevin Bethel.

Mr. Bethel.

MR. BETHEL: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman, good afternoon. As it relates to cameras, I've shared this

with the team. In 2019 when I arrived, I realized we had a significant issue with cameras. Almost 170 of our cameras are still analog cameras.

So as a result of that, we were really going through a process of piecemealing trying to put together a system that was ultimately failing. You know, taking parts of one system to put onto another system. A year ago I met with the capital team and they invested in giving us the ability to audit the entire system exactly what the state of the cameras were. And to no surprise, it came back very telling the level of deterioration we've had in our camera systems going back decades.

And so, from that process, from that report we were able to make a determination that's a multi-million dollar capital budget project that we will be presenting to the

capital team on the capital call to start the conversation around making significant investments in our camera systems. We have up to this point been able to use grant money, money from the state, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

We've been able to use very few internal dollars. As I moved to more restorative work in our office, we didn't have those dollars to invest in cameras. So up to this point, we've been able to update them. I'll give you a list, Chairman, of all the schools we have done recently and the schools that are in the pipeline that we are doing now.

We're just able to get some additional dollars, investments, to be able to hire vendors for the first time to support our work. We have about 110 reports of cameras that are not working and we're working diligently to address that. I'm

thankful to Reggie McNeil. We had an issue with bucket trucks to get out into the exterior of our cameras because they were so high, we were able to invest in that and get that bucket truck from the facility team this year, so we are moving forward.

Just want to caution you, that the cameras around our school were never built to be community cameras. They were really built to be looking internally. Often times at our best door and our doors, we see the entrances and exits are not really facing out into the community.

Our new modeling and the new digital work we're using gives that ability, but I would share with you that we're working diligently to try to upgrade. But it is going to take a period of time because this system has been allowed to -- and I understand that. This is an educational system and the dollars were not there to be able to invest

in those cameras. But we're looking for other dollars now, capital dollars, grant dollars to really bring our system up online.

We have a Google Doc that all principals are allowed to invest in and notify us when they have a problem with their cameras. As far as lighting, I think that would probably be more of facility questions. I've not been asked at this point from any of the school leaders around lighting around their schools, but I'm sure those may have been coming through the facilities portal with my colleague Chief McNeil.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Mr. Bethel. And I just want to take a moment since you came on just to commend you for all the work that you've done and how responsive you've been to myself as well as this legislative body. Your work is very much appreciated.

If someone can get back to us prior to the next time we talk when we convene around the budget, we would like to know not necessarily the schools where you have done these improvements, we would like to know all of the schools who have issues around cameras, how much it cost, how long do you think it would take us to fix these issues. Because at the end of the day if you don't have the money in your budget, I'm sure that we can find some dollars and resources to make sure that we have cameras.

Mr. Bethel, I understand exactly what you're saying as far as the difference between the exterior focus of cameras compared to the interior focus. So just let me be clear, I'm talking about the interior focus of cameras that look specifically at schools, and I'm also talking about athletic facilities where I've communicated a number of

different times have safety concerns because of lighting.

So when I'm talking about lighting, this isn't the first time I've brought this up. I've been to a number of our facilities that are just not up to par that do not have the proper lighting. We unfortunately can't do a lot of night athletic activities because of lighting issues.

And when there are lighting issues and we do have athletic activities, Mr. Bethel, your team is often spread very thin because you're forced to police areas that you don't necessarily have to police if the lighting was there. And I'll specifically reference the Northeast High School Supersite again. If the lighting was there and it was appropriate, we wouldn't need as many school police to staff the events that take place at that particular supersite.

So if we can get a list of schools that are having this internal lighting issues as well as schools dealing with infrastructure issues specifically looking at athletic activities, if we can get that information prior to the budget as well as an estimated timeline as it relates to how long it would take for those exact same schools to get the materials that they need if the money were to be granted, that would help us do our job and be supportive in the work that you're doing.

MR. BETHEL: Yes, sir. Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Next question: So one of the other things that came up at our education debrief last week were concerns around schools who have multiple ways to enter and exit and the fact that their doors have to remain open and they don't have enough staff.

So earlier I asked you about

vacancies as it relates to climate staff. The reason I asked that question is because again it starts with the enrollment numbers being low, staff numbers get low. We have these buildings and facilities that we don't want to see closed. But what we're seeing is we're seeing some levels of concern from facilitators, from administrators as it relates to keeping buildings safe because the number of entrances and exits that the buildings have and because they don't have enough staff to monitor all of those entrances and exits. So what is the plan to address that particular issue?

MR. BETHEL: Chairman Thomas, I'll speak to the issue of the doors and I think Chief McNeil may jump in as well. I mean, that has always been a challenge for our schools. I mean, we have some schools that have upwards of 150 doors. And even with the staffing,

it's always and consistently will be a challenge because of the fire codes and the issue of not being able to stop the exit of those doors.

We are looking at some new technology with the cameras as we go into that installation process. I most recently visited a company up in New York that would be able to share some kind of other things we could be using helping to secure those doors. I did meet with my colleague Reggie McNeil to have a conversation around, he most recently started doing an assessment of some of the doors to see exactly what they look like and what we could be doing to those doors, but it has and will always be and even from a staffing perspective a great challenge just because of the number of doors -- I mean, a school with 150 exit doors, that is challenging and a daunting task, particularly when kids are hell-bent on getting out of the building and

finding a door that is the least in the public eye.

I don't know if Reggie wanted to come in and talk about his work around the doors. But we are walking down that process to determine what's the best way to make that a secure door without undermining the safety concerns and the fire codes that we have to comply with.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Sure. Absolutely. And I mean, I don't want to belabor the point, but think about Lean On Me, right. This is a movie that came out in 1989 that had this exact same problem, right. And at the end of the day, one of the solutions that I'm hearing, you know, Joe Clark the principal, I'm hearing his voice right now as I'm listening to you.

One of the solutions that came out of our education debrief conversation last week was apparently

they have some schools that have magnetic locks. Apparently, what happens with the schools that have magnetic locks is that they can easily open and close their doors at the switch of a button without having those concerns around fire safety and fire hazards that you just communicated.

So I'm wondering from an infrastructure perspective have we looked into this idea of investing in these magnetic locks that some schools in the City of Philadelphia already have that gives administrators the opportunity to be able to address this issue?

Is that a part of our capital planning? Are we looking at implementing something like that as I see that as being a possible solution to all these entrances and exits as it relates to our schools?

MR. McNEIL: Council Chair, so this is Reggie McNeil. Just to

answer that question, simply to say, yes, we are looking at magnetic locks. We've completed an exterior door assessment in all of our high schools in collaboration with Chief Bethel. We just got that report back, and that is something that we will use to drive the prioritization of the work in the School District in regards to the capital funding.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So when we revisit this conversation as it relates to budget, that's one of the things that we're going to hopefully have some more in-depth information on when we're thinking about the crime and public safety issues.

I heard the School Board mention some of the safety of our teachers. I think if I'm a teacher and as a former teacher, yeah, it is concern walking from my car to the actual school, but there's also concern of what happens in that day and who's able to come freely in and

out of the building.

So I will put this up there just as important as the issue around parking spaces, if not more important, so we can make sure that the people who are actually in our facility are safe and we'd love to look forward to an actual plan as it relates to what we can do around the entrances and exits.

I'm going to move on from safety because I think that we're going to continue this dialogue as it relates to the conversations that we'll be having moving forward. And I'm going to move to curriculum. One of the things that we've talked about today is this idea of literacy and literacy rates in the City of Philadelphia.

I'm wondering from a curriculum perspective, what grades are you focusing on as it relates to improving the literacy rate? As a former teacher, I know we can't just

talk about literacy across the board. We have to have some targeted investment and targeted goals as it relates to literacy.

So where is our focal point as it relates to really moving the numbers around literacy and what are we doing to address this crisis as it relates to our students not getting a quality education?

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Board of Education has been very clear in its Goals and Guardrails, that it expects the District to get better in 3 through 8 English language arts. Now, there's a couple ways that we're focused on doing that. One strategy must be hardwired focusing on that K-2 area and before kids actually even get to us.

Most school districts pour a lot of resources into the K-2 and -- well, I'll say a lot of school districts. I won't say most because

I don't know that to be the case. A lot of school districts pour a lot of resources into K-2. I just want to remind us though that all of the brain research on young children tells us that a lot of those dendrites and things have some activity around the age of 3.

So we've got to not just focus on the K-2 strategy or the middle grade strategy, we've got to in the strategic plan process figure out how do we connect with kids before they even come to kindergarten or PreK.

Through public-private partnerships, there are some that actually have young kids in school buildings sharing space learning just like K-5 students, so that's one. Two, we're taking a hard look at what we might do to increase our training and work around the Science of Reading. And three, we're taking the time to audit what's working and

what's not.

If we have a decade at flat reading performance at 3rd grade, and I believe Councilmember Jones said it better than I can, about what happens when kids can't read or don't read on grade level as measured by some kind of standardized assessment at 3rd grade, what that portends for the future.

We need to take the time quite frankly and the Board has given me time to really dig into what are the reasons for our lack of improvement at 3rd grade, and I'll have more to say about that as we complete that work in the strategic plan.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: That's great because I'm very curious to hear the report and the scores as it relates the critical dive you're doing. Because at the end of the day, what I haven't really heard is any modification in curriculum. Like

when I look at the impact that technology has had on what education looks like post-pandemic, I'm wondering what are we doing as it relates to teaching technology across curriculum to put us in a position to try our best to address some of these issues.

We talked about the learning gap. We know we still have issues as it relates to truancy and attendance. So I'm wondering are we using technology to supplement some of this stuff and I'm wondering what curriculum modifications have taken place in order to put us in a position to do a little bit better. So as you continue to do a deeper dive, I look forward to hearing that.

And I have to take a step back to safety for one second because there was an important question that came out of the debrief last week that I didn't essentially get a chance to ask. How often are you

aware of or anybody on your team is aware of when an incident takes place at a school and the administrators or the teacher, dean, whoever it may be, they call 911 and they do not get a response? Is that a practice that happens significantly?

That was communicated to us last week. And I'm wondering how many complaints like that have you gotten from your schools as it relates to an incident taking place -- and I'm not talking about a serious incident like a shooting or something like that. I'm talking about a fight.

DR. WATLINGTON: Chief Bethel.

MR. BETHEL: Yes. Chairman, so there are incidents, times -- I won't say there are not times when our school leaders call the police and they're not able to come. But I would say that for the most part those are very, very limited. We

have fortunately as you know, I don't know the exact numbers, but several police officers assigned specifically to our schools to support us on a daily basis.

And so, many of your school leaders are able to call those police officers directly versus calling 911. We also provide -- we have office hours every two weeks with myself and Commissioner Joel Dales where we give the opportunity in the newsletter any principals having any problem with police response or any concerns around my staff or overall safety, they can call into that num -- come into the room and we have those discussions.

Are there times that there are challenges, yes. The 911 response is not as quick as possible. We encourage our school leaders then to call our dispatch so we can deploy. In many cases we're deploying our personnel in lieu of

the police officers responding or we'll call directly because they're at least with the police department. We can call into their administrative line.

So just as anything else -- as you know they get ranked as they come into the call center. A fight in and of itself is going to get a very low ranking unless it's something significant because there may be something more emerging happening particularly during our dismissal times and the like. But we do work in collaboration with the police department, identify some of those times when they're not -- follow up with the captain in the police department when they don't to try to minimize that as much as possible, but there always are times where just like anything if they call for a low-level offense, they may not got an immediate response.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Can we

get specific data around this? Like you said you're keeping a database. Can we get access to information so we understand how often this does or does not happen?

And also, Mr. Bethel, I know you have a lot of credibility, a lot of respect in the City, you've worn a number of different hats. I'm curious, when do shift changes happen with police officers?

MR. BETHEL: Usually it happens right after our let-out, you know. It's a very critical time. I guess for the -- I know this is a public session, but I would just say that often times when those men and women are -- now, I'll say the school officers have pretty much set their time around the school day so they are out a little bit longer. But as it relates to the other responding personnel, the shift change normally is happening at the same time our schools are letting out.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So, Mr. Superintendent, what time a day do most of our schools let out especially -- yeah, what time of day is that? What would you approximate most schools are dismissed at?

DR. WATLINGTON: None of our schools let out at the exact same time. So when you made some adjustments over time to school days, I want to make sure that -- I think Chief McNeil can give us the exact end times from operations, because they know exactly what time they have transportation available for kids who use the public transportation.

MR. McNEIL: Yes, so that's a range. So I can tell you it's a range from around 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay. So schools start letting out around 2:00 p.m. So during that two-hour window is when most of our schools are being dismissed, starting at

2:00 p.m. and approximately ending at about 4:00 p.m. And that I'm assuming is around the same time that we do shift change as it relates to our police officers.

I'm going to go ahead and task us with that homework assignment to see what we can do to do a deeper dive into making sure that we have more hands on deck and more people available as it relates to the time that our schools transition out.

And I know that you talked earlier about the Safe Corridor program that puts us in a position to have community members help be a part of the dismissal process. But from a systemic perspective as a city, that's a huge issue that we have all this crime and all this violence in the City, and we have all these transitions taking place between 2:00 and 4:00. That makes us a little bit vulnerable and it leaves our children as well as the adults that are

involved as sitting ducks.

So I'm hoping that we can collaborate around that particular issue and maybe come up with some innovative ideas and practices about what we can do to keep people safe between the hours of 2:00 and 4:00 when students are being dismissed and adults are asked to be out there to try to help troubleshoot some of the concerns that may exist.

Because of time purposes, I'm actually not going to go back to curriculum. I'll save those questions for another time. I'll just close out with a couple of things real quick. One of the issues that was communicated to us at our debrief as well as in other spaces -- I'm sorry. Councilmember Harrity, did you want to ask a question?

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: (Shook head).

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay. I'm sorry. One of the issues that

was communicated to us is just transparency. Transparency around data sharing. Transparency around what's going on with our schools outside of conversations like this, a working relationship with your unions that represent our workers.

So what's the District's plan around transparency, communication and making sure data and information is readily available to teachers, to the unions that represent our workers, to parents, stakeholders as well as elected officials?

DR. WATLINGTON: Mr. Chairman, you said what is -- would you repeat that? I didn't hear the last part. I've got a connection issue going on here.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Sure. I'll apolo -- you know, one of the issues that was communicated to us in our debrief as well as other complaints that come to my off --

concerns, I shouldn't say complaints, concerns that have come to my office is just communication and transparency.

And I'm sure you've gotten some pushback as well. I'm sure School Board members have gotten pushback as well too. So I'm just wondering what is the plan to address some of the communication and transparency concerns as it relates to dialogue with parents, as it relates to dialogue with students as well as the unions that represent our workers?

DR. WATLINGTON: I will tell you that we have a small group, including myself, of senior leaders and myself that are meeting regularly, that began to meet regularly with many of our unions. Have not gotten to all of them yet, but are committed to getting to all of them because, remember, we want to work in partnership with unions,

communities, parents, lots of other folks.

Secondly, part of my reason for hiring Alexandra Coppadge as the new Chief of Communications and Customer Service for the School District, she's in the process of developing and will roll out several additional strategies for transparency and communication, she and our District spokesperson Monique Braxton. We've also brought aboard a new Director of Community Engagement to help us be out in the community, Mr. Edwin Santana. And so, between the work of those three people, they're helping us to rethink strategies across the District.

Ms. Coppadge, do you want to add anything else specifically to transparency and communication from a communications standpoint?

MS. COPPADGE: Sure, I can. Good afternoon, everyone. In terms of transparency, we are trying to

strengthen communications by updating our protocols, our procedures and mainly focusing on how we build those bridges that Dr. Watlington talked about, so making sure that our key stakeholders are informed first before media or any person externally.

So really trying to hone in on making sure that internally whether it be the Board or union leaders, our staff, students and families have all the relevant information that they need in order to whether it be an initiative like school selection or urgent matters like inclement weather or things that are determinant by the pandemic, whether it be masking policies.

So all of those different issues we're trying to make sure that our key stakeholders have timely information and that they are looped in and informed as our primary audiences. So that is one way that

we're doing it, but also executing some of the recommendations from the transition team. So whether that be a two-way customer service-focused communications platform.

So if you are a parent, if you are a student, if you are a teacher, if you are an elected official or community stakeholder, you can directly reach out to the District different from the face office. This is really going to be a customer service-facing platform model where we will be able to track your inquiry or your compliment or your question and respond to it as quickly as possible.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you. As we close out our conversation today, the last thing I'll -- and I'll make sure I'm doing this correctly -- oh, Chair recognizes Councilmember Jones, Majority Leader Jones.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Yeah. I

just want to thank you for your indulgence. Big ships don't turn quickly in big oceans and it takes time. I respect and understand that. But with all that's at risk, you feel and hear our Members urgency about advocating for the process to move as swiftly as possible.

I want to thank you for your open communication. I can always reach you. I can always reach Mr. Santana when I have a concern or a comment. So I acknowledge and appreciate that. We will be working with you as closely as possible to try to answer some of the questions, deal with some of the concerns and close some of the gaps for our students.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for being as patient with all of us as you have been.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you, Majority Leader. I appreciate it.

As we look to close out our conversation today, I could not be who I am without having a brief conversation around sports and athletics in the City of Philadelphia. We as a legislative body recently advocated and fought for $50,000 to go to the PIAA District 12 to help address some of the safety concerns as it relates to athletic play.

But one of the areas that I've been continuing to push is for the District to put together some capital plan and investment as it relates to facilities, for our facilities are modernized and a little safer, and I'm looking forward to continuing that dialogue.

But here today one of the bills that I introduced in Council a little while back is the NIL Protection Act, looking to make sure that we have the different mechanisms and support systems in place for

young people across the City of Philadelphia. The PIAA recently voted in December to allow for named image and likeness opportunities for student athletes across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Mr. Superintendent, what are you and your team doing as it relates to this new NIL legislation, how many student athletes in the School District have received NIl deals and how do you anticipate this impacting interscholastic athletics?

DR. WATLINGTON:

Mr. Chairman, transparently, I'm not fully up-to-date on the NIL legislation and the subsequent data for our students. I will ask if Mr. McNeil or perhaps Ms. Karyn Lynch, who oversees athletic and student services, has any additional information that I may not be able to share.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay --

MR. STREATER: If I can

just -- this also might be something that might require a policy as far as looking at our policy, so thank you for singling that out as well for us to guide the District on how we move forward on this because this is kind of a fast-moving train. The Supreme Court came down and said college athletes can have named image likeness, thank goodness, and our student athletes should benefit from that as well, so -- that thinking as well. So thanks for bringing that to the floor, Chair. But go ahead, District --

DR. WATLINGTON:

Mr. President, I'm not sure if Dr. Jimmy Lynch, our District Athletic Director is here with us. Dr. Lynch, are you with us? Or, Karyn Lynch, are you prepared to speak to that? If not, we're happy to take that as a home assignment, Mr. Chairman.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: That's

fine. We can table it for another time. We can continue this dialogue at another time. I don't want to put folks in a position to have a conversation about something that they weren't necessarily prepared to discuss right now. I know I kind of threw a curveball with that question, but I did just want to put it on the record to see where we are and what we're looking to do moving forward. Well, we can just make sure that we have some type of response when we have our monthly meeting with the Education Committee. That will definitely be ideal.

Mr. Superintendent, what I would like to do is pass it to you for any closing remarks. Anything you feel like wasn't discussed today, just give you and your team or President Streater an opportunity to address anything that you didn't get an opportunity to or communicate anything that you didn't get a chance

to communicate.

DR. WATLINGTON: I'm happy to follow after President Streater, sir.

MR. STREATER: The only thing I will add is just a big shout-out to the parents and also, I'm going to ask parents to engage with us. I know that some schools, some teachers now have virtual mechanisms where you can do parent-teacher conferences through Zoom, you can do -- I know everybody doesn't have access to technology. But any and all opportunities where the District is asking for engagement, we actually do listen.

I know there's a perception in the past that the District just does what it wants to do irrespective of engagement, but Dr. Watlington and the Board is committed to moving to a space where policy and the big shifts are -- we hear from the public and hear from parents and all

stakeholders. So that's the last thing I wanted to do, kind of like please reach out and please engage with the process. So while we're making the cake, we can make sure we're putting the right ingredients in it.

DR. WATLINGTON: And to Board President Streater's point, I just want to say really excited to continue to work under the leadership of our Board of Education.

And I would say to you, Mr. Chairman and Council, we'll ask you to continue to support our staff. They're working hard. We know we have a lot of work to do. We're committed to doing it. So I'm just going to ask on behalf of our 19,000 employees and families that we support our staff and continue to support our budgets. Do all you can to support us and we will certainly appreciate that.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank

you. Thank you both, and thank you for your leadership.

Are there any other questions or comments from members of this Committee for the witnesses that we have here today?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing none, seeing none, this public meeting and public hearing are recessed to the call of the Chair. I want to thank you --

THE CLERK: Mr. Chair, this is John Christmas --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes, sir?

THE CLERK: We will now at this point recess the public meeting and move into the public hearing where I think we had two people sign up for public comment so --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay.

THE CLERK: So we can adjourn the meeting and move into the public hearing, you know, following

your lead.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So seeing that we have no other comments and no other questions, this concludes the public meeting of the Council Committee of the Whole and the Board of Education. We will now go into our public hearing.

Those who are not members of the Committee may disconnect. And again, we want to thank you for being a part of our conversation today.

THE CLERK: Mr. Chairman, our first witness was Ms. Lisa Haver.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Lisa, are you there? Are you available?

MS. HAVER: Hello?

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Lisa, are you there? Are you available?

MS. HAVER: Yes, I am.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good afternoon. Please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. HAVER: Good afternoon,

members of City Council, Chair Thomas. My name is Lisa Haver. I'm Co-founder and Coordinator of the Alliance of Philadelphia Public Schools. We are a grassroots organization of parents, educators, retired educators and community members. We've attended Board meetings and before that, SRC meetings for over 10 years. Many City Councilmembers receive our monthly reports.

We begin this year with a new Board President, a new Superintendent, a new Chair of City Council's Education Committee and several new Councilmembers. Next year we'll have a new Mayor. So the question that we bring is with all of this new leadership, will that bring any real change for the City's public schools or will the status quo be maintained as it has for so many superintendents and so many changes in governance?

Will the spending priorities of the Board change so that fewer dollars go to outsourcing and consultants and more to classrooms or will District leadership just keep blaming Harrisburg? Will education be better for the City's children? This Board was reinstated in 2018 after 17 years of state control. What substantial and meaningful improvement has been seen in our schools?

The Board and the District talked about Goals and Guardrails. You've heard them mention it about 50 times today. Goals and Guardrails monitor data. Data means standardized tests. Testing means less instruction and less creative and enjoyable learning. That means maintaining the status quo.

Two hours of data analysis at every public meeting means two hours of not listening to the public and not coming up with solutions to

issues. Will this Board bring true accountability to the highly-compensated operators of privately-managed schools?

We hear that charter schools are public schools but there are no public hearings on five-year charter renewals. It was good to hear President Streater take some steps toward that last week, but we need a lot more accountability for those schools. This Board leadership has already begun talking about the possibility of closing public schools.

Council must take a strong stand against the Board taking even one more neighborhood school away. A lot of what was talked about here at this meeting today, I've been listening since the beginning, is safety. At the last Board meeting, an item for more police presence around schools was passed and funding was approved for that.

One reason our children are less safe is that many of them have to travel farther to school after the mass closures of 2013. When the Board says it will advocate for the public schools, what does that mean when they also say they want to depoliticize education? How does the Board advocate for what the community wants when it shuts the community out?

The first step that this new Board leadership can take as it repeatedly invokes parent and community engagement is to restore full speaking rights through the public. Lift the arbitrary caps and restore the full three-minute time for people to be heard. What is it going to take really to change the status quo?

I think for people listening to this hearing all day we really haven't heard much of that, but some very real concrete things: Smaller

class size, bringing back certified school librarians, hiring more support staff, bringing back reading specialists. Those changes would mean a real change in the status quo. Thank you.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you for your testimony today.

Mr. Clerk, will you please call our next witness.

THE CLERK: Ms. Stephanie King.

MS. KING: Yes. Hello? Hello?

THE CLERK: Yes --

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes, please state your name -- we can hear you. Please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. KING: Hi. You can hear me?

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes, we can hear.

MS. KING: Hello -- okay.

Good afternoon, Councilmembers, and thank you for having speakers today. My name is Stephanie King, and I'm the President of Kearny Friends at General Philip Kearny School in Northern Liberties where my children are in 7th and 3rd grade. For those of you who are new to Council or to the Board, I've been coming to speak at these meetings since my eldest was in kindergarten. Because Northern Liberties still has completely segregated schools in 2023, I've watched as my children have gone through repeated years of leveling and underfunding.

I'm here today because I'm hopeful that with a new Superintendent and new direction for the Education Committee we might see some action to actually support the public schools in this City. You cannot have a functioning prosperous city with opportunity for all residents if the people in charge

only care about people who went to the Prep or Friends Select and now send their children there.

You cannot have a functioning relationship between Council and the District when the only time the Education Committee holds a meeting is when Councilmember Oh calls one for privileged parents to whine and complain about how their kid is no longer guaranteed a spot at Masterman or Central.

It's great that Abbott Elementary is tearing up the ratings and winning awards, but it's no laughing matter to me that the most unrealistic part of the show is that their school has a library or that they have consistent staff, while my kids never know if the teacher they start with in September will still be there in December.

Privileged schools like Alexander and Henry and Meredith have bands and orchestra and a school

musical. My kids don't have a music teacher and their classmates have to put their names in a hat to use one of the school's violins. All anyone cares about is the magnet schools and the Goals and Guardrails report, but nobody actually does anything about any of it.

You can't just keep shouting improve, improve, improve at schools when you're not giving them enough teachers or air-conditioning or buses. You can't complain about learning loss if you're not giving us the resources to come back from it or curriculum if there aren't enough bodies in the building. The schools this City cares about get instruments and AP classes and everyone else gets security cameras.

I want the members of Council to do something for me the next time you're looking at a Goals and Guardrails report. Look at the demographics of the ontrack schools

versus the off-track schools. This City knows exactly who it's giving "good schools" too. Everybody here cares about the top 10 or so elementary schools and maybe 5 magnet high schools and that's it. That is, when the City is not handing millions of dollars over to charter school companies so that they can buy bus wraps to sell us the idea that they're a solution to the problem they helped cause. I'm tired of it. All the information is right in front of you if you look.

If the new Councilmembers and the new Mayor care enough to say that public schools are a public good and necessary to make our City strong, if instead of constantly wringing our hands about the violence on our streets, we admit that this City isn't giving our kids a light at the end of the tunnel to look forward to, I hope that Council would use its renewed interest in education to

listen to some of the voices who have being speaking out all this time and getting shut down by the Board and not just committees full of insiders handpicked out of 440 or the same 10 Center City schools that care more abut banning masks than whether kids in other parts of town have enough teachers.

There are a lot of people who care about all of our City's public schools and we need more Councilmembers to start being among them. Thank you very much for your time.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Clerk, will you please call the next witness to testify.

THE CLERK: There are no other witnesses for public comment, Chairman.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Seeing none, this public meeting and public hearing are recessed at the call of

the Chair. I want to say thank you everybody for attending today. It's very much appreciated and I look forward to continuing this conversation and continuing the good work for the people of Philadelphia, but most importantly for our children.

Thank you, Mr. Christmas. Thank you to the Tech team, and please try to get yourself some lunch. It's been a long morning. Thank you, everybody.

THE CLERK: All right, Mr. Chair.

COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Have a good day, everybody.

(Committee of the Whole concluded at 2:09 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence noted are contained fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken by me in the foregoing matter, and this is a correct transcript of the same.

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TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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