

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, November 19, 2014
3:18 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE L. BLACKWELL - CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN - VICE
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR.
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good afternoon.

3 We will now call to order our Education
4 Committee with a hearing on Resolution
5 140666. We will ask the Clerk to read the
6 title of the Resolution.

7 THE CLERK: Resolution 140666,
8 authorizing the Committee on Education to
9 conduct hearings concerning the time and
10 financial cost of standardized testing
11 administered to Philadelphia public school
12 students as well as the effects of testing
13 on teaching and learning.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
15 much. Again, we thank all of you for
16 coming. And we are very proud that the --
17 let me note that there is a quorum here. To
18 my left, Vice Chair Councilwoman Blondell
19 Reynolds Brown, to my right Councilman Mark
20 Squilla who introduced the legislation and
21 who will be speaking first. To his right
22 Councilman W. Wilson Goode and Councilman
23 David Oh.

24 Thank you very much. Councilman
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1 Squilla.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you, Madam
3 Chair. I think this is an important issue
4 with standardized testing. We actually want
5 to find out from the District from the
6 people involved in schools, from educators
7 through other municipalities throughout the
8 region how testing are being implemented,
9 how they are being handled within the School
10 District, what resources are being used for
11 that.

12 And then after that, try to come up with
13 ways to see if the testing is used for other
14 purposes. It may be for, you know,
15 graduation purposes, for teacher
16 qualifications, for failing or passing
17 schools and other systems that the
18 standardized testing may be used for. We
19 have a great opportunity to learn from the
20 District and learn from people with
21 magnificent history in this subject and to
22 understand how this affects not only our
23 students but how it affects our schools and
24 how it affects the City moving forward

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1 through the education process where every
2 child deserves a quality education
3 throughout the City of Philadelphia.

4 So, I'm not going to speak real long.
5 We have some great testimony here. And I
6 think it's important just to hear all sides
7 and to see how we can move forward after
8 this hearing maybe to have another hearing
9 or to maybe understand how the District will
10 work with the community, with Council to
11 maybe change some of the ways that testing
12 may be implemented at this time.

13 So thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
15 much. Is there anyone else here who would
16 like to make an opening statement?

17 I have one that I'd like to make
18 especially from reading yesterday that this
19 testing cost somewhere in the tune of \$65
20 million for all the problems that exists.
21 So, we have a statement called Keystone
22 Exams: What We Need To Know.

23 It is important that we are gathered
24 here to discuss high stakes testing. The
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1 Keystone Exams for graduation have been
2 announced, but many of us are still baffled
3 as to why they are considered so necessary.
4 Information about these exams does not flow.
5 The general public and parents especially
6 don't learn about them until key decisions
7 have been made. In order to get acquainted
8 with the concepts and standards using
9 testing students, one needs to be computer
10 literate and have access to a computer
11 because everything is published online and
12 in very technical language that does not
13 clarify but rather muddles the details.

14 So, many parents who do not have
15 computers in their home for themselves or
16 for their children have problems. Yet
17 parents still have a very important role to
18 play in keeping their children ready to
19 learn. They have to pay strict attention to
20 their attendance, behavior, academic
21 performance and social adjustment. Parents
22 need all the help they can get about
23 critical issues such as graduating on time
24 and with diplomas.

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1 Teachers and parents need to be invited
2 to testify about the educational decisions
3 that affect their students from preschool to
4 12th grade. Their input is vital to an
5 improved system. There are too many
6 arbitrary manipulations from administrators
7 and not enough basic reference material
8 directed toward the core of educators and
9 their students.

10 I would be more comfortable with the
11 test if I felt that the students were being
12 adequately prepared in class to take them
13 and if they were being introduced in school
14 to the courses that will equip them to join
15 in the technology-based workforce, but I
16 know this is not true.

17 The Philadelphia School District is
18 grossly underfunded. Basic resources are in
19 low supply or absent in many cases
20 altogether. Teachers are spending their own
21 money to buy supply items that are needed
22 for teaching and learning. Nurses are being
23 shifted day by day from one school to
24 another. Libraries are closing. Schools

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1 and librarians are not afforded the dignity
2 they deserve as guardians of our collections
3 and inspirational reading motivators.

4 With all these shortcomings, how are
5 students going to learn effectively? How
6 will they be ready for college and
7 vocational opportunities? When education
8 funds are clipped, students feel the
9 deprivation and their performance suffers.

10 Classes are getting larger because so
11 many teachers were laid off due to budget
12 deficits. Larger classes make it difficult
13 for teachers to help struggling students.
14 And in this climate, discipline problems may
15 distract teachers from their primary
16 assignments. It is no secret that students
17 of color, students living in poverty,
18 students still learning English and those
19 students with disabilities are more likely
20 to be receiving an inferior education due to
21 discriminatory practices such as tracking,
22 poor school facilities, high teacher
23 turnover and frequent and expensive high
24 stakes mandatory exams that loom as

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1 stumbling blocks to graduation with a
2 diploma. What chance will these students
3 have to pass the exam at the proficiency
4 level?

5 An effective education is one that will
6 keep students moving and learning with
7 interest and enthusiasm, seeking knowledge
8 and understanding throughout a lifetime.
9 Today more than ever, school systems are
10 gravitating toward high stakes testing.
11 Perhaps it is driven by globalization. We
12 want our students to be competitive on the
13 international level, but perhaps we are
14 worried about robots taking over our jobs.
15 This is why we must make the connection
16 between high stakes testing and the job
17 market.

18 Without a high school diploma, many will
19 find it difficult to secure a good job.
20 Long term unemployment has economics and
21 social ramifications. What about pension
22 and social security or healthcare in the
23 futures of these individuals?

24 These are the innovations that I
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1 recommend to help us measure up to the
2 challenges ahead.

3 Number one, adequate funding for our
4 School Districts; two, greater investment in
5 teacher training, educational administration
6 and research; three, high salaries for
7 qualified teachers; four, high investment in
8 science and art curricula; five, active
9 engagement from parents and guardians in
10 their children's education of progress.

11 Parents stressing the importance of good
12 behavior and good study habits and excellent
13 communication from administrators to
14 facilitate the flow of information and the
15 acknowledgement of parents as partners,
16 counselors, nurses, librarians, sports, art
17 and music teachers training our students for
18 team work, independent and group projects,
19 research techniques, community service and
20 home engagement. Seven subject expert
21 subject teachers, introducing our students
22 to academic rigor and preparing them for
23 exam success.

24 I thank you all and thank you for your
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1 patience in listening to our statement about
2 where we are and where we must try to go.

3 All right. We will now call Panel One:
4 State Representative Mike Tobash, 125th
5 Legislative District; Jerry Jordan,
6 President Philadelphia Federation of
7 Teachers. I understand Donna Cooper,
8 Executive Director for Public Citizens For
9 Children and Youth had to leave. Someone is
10 making her statement.

11 You all may come forward and we will
12 begin your testimony. Second panel:
13 Mr. Chris Shafer, Deputy Chief-Curriculum,
14 Instruction and Assessment, School District
15 of Philadelphia, you will be next.

16 Thank you and thank you for your
17 patience. And we certainly invite you to
18 identify yourself and begin your statement.
19 In any order is fine.

20 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Musical chairs.
21 Thank you.

22 MR. JORDAN: It's a game that we play in
23 school.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: It's quite all
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1 right. Good afternoon. Feel free to begin.

2 Thank you.

3 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: So, thank you so
4 much for inviting us here today. We're
5 honored to be in your beautiful City Hall,
6 and we are happy the focus of your
7 resolution.

8 I'm Representative Mike Tobash from the
9 125th Legislative District, which is
10 Schuylkill and now Dauphin Counties. And
11 I'd like to introduce to you my chief of
12 staff, it's Ali Hobbs. Ali is our education
13 expert on staff. She is in the process of
14 getting her doctorate at Penn State
15 University, and it's on education. So, much
16 of the policy that we develop around
17 education has to do with the good work that
18 Ali has done and continues to do for our
19 office and really for the Commonwealth of
20 Pennsylvania.

21 I was interested, Councilman Squilla, to
22 see your resolution and to read it. And I'm
23 happy that you're focusing on the dynamic of
24 standardized testing in the Commonwealth of
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1 Pennsylvania. I can tell you, I was at a
2 small school district in my district just
3 last evening talking to a group of middle
4 school students, was an afterschool program
5 that they had. I brought up a point when I
6 started my conversation with them, and
7 there's a couple things that I believe you
8 need to be successful in education.

9 And number one, students need to learn.
10 It's very simple. I think it's simple here.
11 It's simple in Pine Grove. It's simple
12 throughout the country. Number two,
13 students, I think that they need to want to
14 continue to learn. I mean, our education
15 system has got to instill a desire for
16 students to continue to learn for them to be
17 successful. And if they are so fortunate
18 and lucky to gain knowledge that is valuable
19 in the marketplace, they really have an
20 opportunity to be successful.

21 And then when we talk about
22 standardization in our education system in a
23 Commonwealth as diverse as Pennsylvania in a
24 city as diverse as Philadelphia, there's a
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1 lot of red flags that go up. And again, I
2 commend you for your desire to understand
3 more about this standardized testing dynamic
4 that's taking place in the Commonwealth of
5 Pennsylvania and really across the nation.

6 As I read your resolution, there is a
7 number of things here that are interesting
8 to me. The first one starts out, and we
9 talk about funding and being
10 under-resourced. I am going to take a bye
11 on that because we are talking about
12 standardication, thank you.

13 The third item: Whereas, in this
14 climate of austerity -- and make no mistake,
15 we are certainly in the climate of
16 austerity -- standardized testing
17 requirements have continued to increase.
18 The cost associated with standardized
19 testing, development, administration and
20 technology for online testing may mean that
21 there will be fewer funds available for
22 classroom resources. I absolutely concur
23 with that opinion. Less resources, because
24 of mandates put on us by the Federal

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1 Government and on you by state government,
2 is absolutely a concern. I agree.

3 I'm here today to talk a little bit
4 about the process. To again, commend you
5 for the good work and the resolution and
6 your desire to know more and to encourage
7 you to continue down this path till we
8 really understand what the results of these
9 assessments are going to be. Phrase that we
10 commonly use is that we need to assess the
11 assessments before we go too far down this
12 path.

13 You know, this conversation, again, is
14 not a conversation that is unique to the
15 Philadelphia School District or to
16 Pennsylvania School Districts over all. But
17 to the -- to -- nationally, as well. You
18 know, we have gone down this path with
19 legislation No Child Left Behind. There is
20 a number of exams that have been implemented
21 in our School Districts for many years now.
22 The PSSA exams are exams that our students
23 have been taking for quite a number of
24 years.

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1 My daughter who is now a sophomore in
2 college took those exams. My daughter who
3 is a eighth grader in high school is taking
4 some of those exams. And now, in fact,
5 taking our Keystone Exams.

6 One of the problems as we have done our
7 work that we've uncovered is that the PSSAs
8 are very broad exams, shallow in content and
9 disjointed from the learning process. I
10 believe that's what we've heard. We have
11 heard that from educators and
12 administrators. I can tell you that the
13 term "teaching to the test" I think comes
14 from the analysis of PSSAs and the belief
15 and in the practical application that
16 children, students would gain some knowledge
17 and then they'd have to go back and relearn
18 that and take the test again taking away
19 valuable time for additional learning
20 through -- because of these assessment.

21 Now, we have heard and I believe that
22 this Keystone Exams that we have implemented
23 so far in the Commonwealth are better in
24 many respects than the PSSAs. Number one,
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1 they are an end-of-curriculum exam. And for
2 that reason, I believe that at the end of
3 that curriculum, the exam can be taken and
4 it does not require relearning material that
5 was learned before and going back and
6 teaching once again to the exam. I think
7 they're more focused, I think they are
8 indepth and have to do more directly with
9 the curriculum being taught. And, number
10 one, they are timely. Because as I
11 mentioned at the end of the curriculum, the
12 exam can be taken.

13 But make no mistake that they were
14 developed at great expense to the
15 Commonwealth. I heard Councilwoman
16 Blackwell mention a number of 65,000. Our
17 research shows something very similar to
18 that. So, the cost to develop these exams
19 within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I
20 believe has cost somewhere south of
21 \$80 million for their development and
22 countless additional dollars for the
23 implementation of the exams within our
24 schools and School Districts.

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1 The cost to change from the PSSAs to the
2 Keystone Exams are something that needs to
3 be taken into consideration as we look at
4 the overall costs of the tests. I can tell
5 you that is our belief that even though they
6 are better, too much of a good thing or too
7 much of a better thing can be problematic.
8 I think that's what we see with the
9 Keystones.

10 Right now we've got three Keystone Exams
11 and they are Algebra, Biology and English.
12 It's reasonable to think that a diploma in
13 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania should have
14 some consistency, that there should be some
15 understanding that when a high school
16 student graduates and has a diploma, that
17 they have learned reading, writing and
18 arithmetic.

19 I'm not an educator myself and I'm not
20 certain that the content, the material that
21 we're teaching to and the content of these
22 Keystone Exams are good for applicable
23 productive citizenship after you graduate.

24 That's an argument that I think we can talk

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1 about a little bit more with others here at
2 the table. I can tell you this, that last
3 year we had legislation that started to push
4 back on the implementation and development
5 of more of these Keystone Exams. Right now
6 we have got the three. We are on schedule
7 and slated to do two additional exams, and
8 they are Civics and Writing. So, somewhere
9 around 60 to 80 million dollars developing
10 the first three. Additional tens to
11 millions of dollars to develop more and than
12 implement those.

13 The place that we really took issue with
14 was after the five were implemented, we only
15 got three. Two more kind of on pace to be
16 implemented some time in the future. After
17 that, there were five more Keystone Exams
18 which were to be developed by the year 2021.
19 So, at great expense to the Commonwealth at
20 a tremendous amount of classroom learning
21 time, at that expense, there are going to be
22 ten Keystone Exams developed and implemented
23 in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

24 It was our belief that it was too, so we
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1 developed House Bill 1506. We said we got
2 to put the brakes on these Keystone Exams.
3 We need to assess the assessments, give
4 ourselves some opportunity to see if it is
5 really meaningful and the intent of the
6 exams are being realized after their
7 implementation.

8 You know, we constantly hear and it was
9 mentioned again by the Councilwoman that we
10 need rigor within our classrooms. And
11 rigor, I think, is important. It's a
12 worthwhile endeavor to get students to work
13 hard in the process of learning. But I'm
14 not so sure that these Keystone Exams
15 represent the rigor that we're looking for.

16 Mrs. Hobbs, she will tell you a little
17 bit more about the development of 1506, I
18 believe, and rigor within the classroom.
19 You've got some testimony that you'd like to
20 discuss.

21 MS. HOBBS: I do. Thank you for having
22 me here today.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please pull the
24 microphone closer to you and introduce
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1 yourself again.

2 MS. HOBBS: Thank you.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.

4 MS. HOBBS: Thank you, Councilwoman.

5 Thank you for having me here today. My name
6 is Ali Rhoads Hobbs. And I am the chief of
7 staff in Representative Tobash's office.

8 I am also a doctoral student at the
9 Pennsylvania State University in Education.
10 And I have spent an amount of time teaching
11 on both researching standardized testing.
12 It was -- I am a former public school
13 teacher. And at the time I left public
14 school teaching, was right after I took my
15 students through a path toward the PSSAs in
16 writing. And it was around that time that I
17 decided to go back to graduate school to
18 work on standardized testing and this
19 displaced rigor around it.

20 I have been working with Representative
21 Tobash on House Bill 1506. And it really
22 came from a grass root efforts in our
23 legislative district. Representative Tobash
24 and I spent countless hours meeting with
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1 groups in our district that were concerned
2 with the growing number of standardized
3 testing occurring in our public schools. We
4 met with groups of public school teachers,
5 public school administrators, public school
6 parents. We also took time to meet with our
7 higher ed leaders and our business
8 community. And the general consensus that
9 came from those meetings and the data we
10 collected at those meetings was that
11 standardized testing is not yielding the
12 intended or desired results that was
13 originally stated it would.

14 We have formulated a group that we call
15 the Teachers Coalition. And it is a group
16 of public school teachers that we meet with
17 regularly throughout the school year for the
18 purpose of communicating updated policy work
19 around education and for the teachers to
20 communicate to us how that policy is working
21 or not working or how it looks in their
22 classrooms. The ideas for House Bill 1506
23 and the halting of standardized testing and
24 further assessment of the test itself came
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1 from the work we've been doing with those
2 groups.

3 When we then shared the information from
4 the public school teachers and
5 administrators with the business and higher
6 education community and found the consensus,
7 the extensive and growing amount of time
8 spent on standardized testing and the
9 preparation for it, the general consensus
10 was it's not benefitting our students and
11 our future workforce. It was not really
12 looking for -- the outcomes of it really
13 weren't what that business community or
14 higher ed was looking for.

15 The main concerns around the
16 standardized testing that came from our work
17 was one of fiscal analysis that was needed,
18 which Representative Tobash already talked
19 about and the tens of millions of dollars
20 that it took to both create, implement and
21 change from the PSSA to the Keystone.

22 The biggest concern that all of our
23 groups has was to raise the question of
24 rigor. Is it actually rigor or displaced
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1 rigor? The idea that it narrows the
2 curriculum, that it's standardizing what is
3 taught and what there is no time to teach
4 because it might not be on the test is being
5 realized over the idea of embracing multiple
6 intelligences and practical learning for our
7 students. Many of our schools found that
8 they were offering less courses because they
9 could not hire additional teachers but were
10 taking teachers from maybe enhanced
11 curriculum or elected areas and putting them
12 in remediation offerings for students that
13 needed it. They also questioned that, yes,
14 lets offer remediation to students that
15 generally need it, but there was a problem
16 there figuring that out.

17 They also said that it kind of ignored
18 local and individual needs of students, so
19 that the test scores have become the most
20 important product of education and the focal
21 point of public schooling and that's what
22 1506 and the additional work that
23 Representative Tobash and I have been
24 working on to change that.

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1 While understanding the necessity of
2 measurement and accountability, we must be
3 careful not to allow standardized tests to
4 become the focal point of education, not to
5 waste taxpayer money, potentially tens or
6 hundreds of millions of dollars or more, not
7 to continue without knowledge of outcomes and
8 unintended consequences. We need to be
9 careful of assessing the assessment before
10 we implement more and not to narrow
11 curriculum to do away with classes that
12 effectively achieve practical learning that
13 leads to a broader and stronger workforce.

14 We need to support legislation at the
15 state level, too, that will give us the time
16 to make sure our costly accountability
17 measure promote the right kind of rigor in
18 our schools and that measuring and assessing
19 we do in our schools and to our children
20 supports them and promotes their best
21 interest.

22 Remember standardization does not
23 produce outstanding results individualism
24 creates outstanding results.

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1 Thank you.

2 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Great. And I
3 will wrap up our testimony with just a few
4 brief comments. I'm going to bring you up
5 to speed with what we are working on this
6 session. We are introducing a piece of
7 legislation that will put the brakes a
8 little but further and try and hold off
9 those last two exams until we really get a
10 grip on what the first three, what kind of
11 fruit they're bearing. We want to limit the
12 three exams.

13 And number two, we got questions about
14 the graduation requirement for the Keystone
15 Exams. We believe that School District
16 should have more autonomy. We think that
17 you can do it better in Philadelphia than we
18 can do it in Harrisburg, at least that's my
19 opinion. We're from Washington. We'd like
20 to put back in the hands of the individual
21 School Districts whether or not they believe
22 that this Keystone Exam should be a
23 graduation requirement but give them the
24 option to certainly do that.

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1 I have to tell you that you are astute
2 in noticing the fact that standardized
3 testing is driving up the cost of education
4 in Philadelphia. There are certainly many
5 issues that drive up the cost. I will make
6 an editorial note here. Aside from
7 standardized testing that we need public
8 pension reform in the Commonwealth of
9 Pennsylvania. That's a weight around the
10 neck of every School District that is going
11 to be difficult for us to bear, but that's a
12 different discussion for a different day.

13 I look forward to continuing to work
14 with you and all the School Districts within
15 the Commonwealth to make sure that we are
16 coming up with the best possible scenario to
17 give our students an outstanding opportunity
18 for great success within our borders well
19 into the future.

20 So, thank you very much. Appreciate
21 being here today.

22 MS. HOBBS: Thank you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
24 much. Before Mr. Jordan begins, let me note
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1 that we have Chair of the Education
2 Committee the Honorable James R. Roebuck.
3 We saw Dr. Roebuck yesterday. He was here
4 for hearings, as well. And we are very,
5 very happy to have him and thank him for
6 coming by this important hearing.

7 If at any point you would like to make a
8 comment, we certainly welcome you. Thank
9 you.

10 MR. JORDAN: Good afternoon.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes. Excuse me
12 one moment. Then we will have questions
13 after Jerry Jordan speaks, okay.

14 Thank you.

15 MR. JORDAN: Good afternoon. I'm Jerry
16 Jordan, President of the Philadelphia
17 Federation of Teachers. And I want to thank
18 City Council for convening a public hearing
19 on one of the most critical issues facing
20 public education.

21 I want to start off by addressing some
22 misconceptions about teachers and testing.
23 First, teachers are not against testing.
24 Quite the contrary, teachers use tests in
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1 the classroom as one way to measure their
2 students understanding of the content they
3 are expected to learn. Tests help educators
4 to see where they need to provide additional
5 emphasis and support for their students.

6 Standardized tests are certainly nothing
7 new. Like tests given in the classroom,
8 they can provide a wide overview of how
9 students in a school are mastering the
10 concepts they should be learning. When done
11 appropriately, testing is a tool that
12 teachers, students and parents can use to
13 discover new ways and opportunities for
14 children to be the best they can be. But
15 the current national fixation on high stakes
16 standardized tests has very little to do
17 with figuring out how to better teach our
18 children.

19 The supporters of the current testing
20 culture are looking for a quick and easy
21 shortcut for evaluating districts, schools
22 and teachers. Consequently, the results of
23 standardized tests are used not to improve
24 instructions but to place sanctions on

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1 schools and punish educators. Test scores
2 have become a weapon used by the Corporate
3 Education Reform Movement to fire teachers
4 and turn neighborhood public schools over to
5 privately run charter companies. And when
6 we as teachers speak out against the way
7 these tests are being used, we are attacked
8 and told we just don't want to be held
9 accountable for student achievement.

10 Let's be perfectly clear. Teachers feel
11 more accountable for their students' success
12 than any other stakeholder in public
13 education. Teachers hold each other
14 accountable more than any superintendent,
15 Mayor, Governor or legislator. Yet teachers
16 have less voice and fewer opportunities to
17 weigh in on the best way to evaluate student
18 learning. That's because properly educating
19 students is difficult and complex.

20 It's much easier for school leaders and
21 elected officials to layout cut scores and
22 assign arbitrary benchmarks then force
23 teachers to reach them. This is one of the
24 reasons the teaching profession finds it so

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1 hard to retain talented educators. Instead
2 of emphasizing creativity and innovation in
3 the classroom, teachers spend up to one
4 third of their instructional time doing test
5 prep for fear of a bad evaluation or some
6 other black mark on their record.

7 We teach because we love teaching
8 children. But these days, becoming a
9 teacher means putting yourself in the
10 position to be blamed for everything that is
11 wrong with public education. To add insult,
12 the blame most often comes from officials
13 who have never spent a moment in front of a
14 classroom.

15 The testing culture is also not good for
16 the students. Schools can be challenging
17 enough, but fear of doing poorly on a
18 standardized test is anxiety that children
19 do not need.

20 In Pennsylvania for the Class of 2017,
21 performance on Keystone Exams will determine
22 whether or not high school seniors get a
23 diploma. As a product of Philadelphia
24 public schools, I remember when school could

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1 be very tough at times. But school also
2 offered a range of options and ways for
3 students to excel and distinguish
4 themselves. Extracurricular activities and
5 career and technical training opportunities
6 showed all of us that there was more to
7 education than filling in dark circles on a
8 test. Students need to feel that way about
9 school again.

10 That starts with completely eliminating
11 the focus on standardized tests. To be
12 sure, our fixation on these tests has done
13 very little to improve the quality of public
14 education. In fact, it has hurt students by
15 narrowing the curricula. Students now enjoy
16 less music, art, language programs because
17 of the emphasis of scoring well on tested
18 subjects. Time has that even been taken
19 away from Social Studies and Science when
20 those topics are not being tested.

21 Even if high stakes test were a good
22 idea, students and teachers in Philadelphia
23 public schools don't have the resources
24 needed to help improve their performance. I
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1 sat in this room countless times and talked
2 about the paper, books and classroom
3 materials that the District does not provide
4 for educators and students. I have repeated
5 it over and over again not just because it's
6 criminal to deny our children these
7 resources, but to show that when it comes to
8 education, money matters. The same holds
9 true for performance on standardized tests.

10 Much has been made, and rightly so,
11 about the one billion dollar statewide cut
12 to public education. New research shows
13 that these kinds of cuts have a huge impact
14 on student performance on standardized
15 tests. A study from the Boston Consulting
16 Group reveals that spending an additional
17 \$1,000 per student can raise test scores by
18 almost half a percentage point. The same
19 study shows that states that spend more on
20 public education have better student
21 outcomes.

22 Education spending plays an even bigger
23 role when dealing with high poverty student
24 populations. The Boston Consulting Group
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1 study plainly states that raising
2 achievement in low income areas requires
3 spending more not less. Here in
4 Philadelphia, the poverty rate is around
5 26 percent. 2011 studies by Sean Reardon
6 shows that the achievement gap between high
7 income and low income families has grown 30
8 to 40 percent since 2001.

9 Until we can honestly say that our
10 school children are getting all the
11 resources and tools they need, we should
12 scrap the entire notion of using
13 standardized tests to evaluate their
14 progress. How can a teacher even prepare
15 children to take one of these tests when
16 there are not enough pencils and paper to
17 even practice the concepts?

18 Under these conditions, the results of
19 these tests are almost totally useless. In
20 fact, research shows that even when students
21 improve on high stakes test, they often
22 struggle to demonstrate the same knowledge
23 of content in other formats. Our schools
24 aren't getting better in this climate. Our
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1 children are not learning at a more
2 impressive rate. Our teachers are under
3 constant threat of reprisal and termination.

4 As we look to the future, it's clear
5 that there are only two groups that benefit
6 from this test obsessed culture. The first
7 being the companies who created and
8 administer these tests for profit.

9 For example --

10 (Applause)

11 MR. JORDAN: -- Pennsylvania has a
12 five-year, \$201 million contract with Data
13 Recognition Corporation to administer high
14 stakes tests. The other beneficiaries are
15 the developers of correctional facilities
16 like the \$400 million prison that the State
17 opted to fund over public education.

18 Sadly, as more of our children that are
19 labeled as failures under this testing
20 regiment, the less opportunities they will
21 have in a 21st century economy which means a
22 healthy school-to-prison pipeline. Changing
23 the role of standardized tests won't
24 eliminate all of the challenges to public

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1 education, but it will go a long way to
2 broadening the discussion beyond passing and
3 failing and bring the conversation back to
4 what works in schools.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to
6 testify.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you for
8 the excellent testimony. Are there
9 questions?

10 Councilman Squilla.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
12 Mr. Chairman. And I know -- thank you both
13 for your testimony.

14 And we see the costs of -- we think what
15 the cost is 65 to 80 million dollars.
16 That's just, I guess, for the implementation
17 or coming up with the test.

18 Is there additional costs that you know
19 of maybe for each individual test that the
20 Districts has to buy, or are these tests
21 going to be given to the Districts? And
22 then how are they graded? And then, who
23 pays for the cost to, I guess, review the
24 tests?

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1 Anybody know that question?

2 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Well, as I -- we
3 had a brief discussion before the hearing.
4 I mean, there are certainly soft costs
5 associated with the implementation of
6 standardized tests. I mean, as you within
7 each classroom implement these exams and in
8 the process whereby the exams are brought
9 into the school and administered and graded
10 and tested, certainly takes valuable time
11 away from other learning. It's one of the
12 difficult things to get to.

13 We came up with a number originally of
14 about \$230 million the cost to implement and
15 develop these exams. You know, at the end
16 of the day when we got back to the actual
17 costs for development, we came in at that
18 number of somewhere less than \$80 million.
19 So, I think it's something that individual
20 School Districts upon implementation. At
21 this point in time, we develop the amount of
22 money that they are spending on the exam.
23 It's important information for us to know as
24 we move forward and make thoughtful

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1 decision.

2 But I do have to mention this, that
3 merely getting rid of three Keystone Exams
4 is not the answer. You have to understand
5 that these three Keystone Exams are
6 replacement for the PSSA exams. There is a
7 federal No Child Left Behind requirement
8 saying that we need to have this level of
9 testing. Now whether that's right or wrong,
10 I'm not here to testify on. But fact of the
11 matter is, the first three Keystones are a
12 federal requirement. So, we've replaced the
13 federal PSSA with these Keystone Exams.

14 Now the question becomes how much
15 additional resources and money will we spend
16 on developing additional exams that aren't a
17 requirement of No Child Left Behind? The
18 cost at this point in time from all the
19 information we tried to gather is uncertain.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. Now, you
21 mentioned the three -- Literature, Algebra
22 and Biology -- which is the three Keystone
23 Exams that we are going to have to take
24 starting 2017. We are taking them, but you
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1 have to pass them by '17, correct?

2 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Right.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And once we have
4 those in place, were those three
5 languages -- math, literature and biology --
6 chosen by the educators throughout the state
7 to say these were the three that we need to
8 know as an example of every student should
9 have this knowledge in order to graduate?

10 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: So again --
11 look, it's my belief and understanding that
12 these first three exams are replacements for
13 the PSSAs. And I think the curriculum was
14 dictated as a result of No Child Left
15 Behind.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Biology was one of
17 the ones we believe was dictated by that?

18 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: There was a
19 science requirement as well as a math
20 requirement and a reading requirement.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So if we go through
22 and have these tests, now we don't know --
23 further questions we'll ask along the way.
24 The passing grades that are calculated for
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1 these tests, and I understand that -- maybe
2 I'm mistaken -- but they're anywhere -- was
3 it 26 questions or is there a number of
4 questions that it's going to be permitted on
5 each test; do you know?

6 (Unknown Audience Member: "Test scores
7 are after the last exam.")

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: The answer was
9 saying that they will determine the cut
10 scores after the test were done and then
11 graded.

12 Who grades the test; do we know?

13 MR. JORDAN: They are sent out from the
14 schools. The schools do not do the grading.

15 MS. HOBBS: Right. There is high level
16 of security that's mandated by the schools
17 around the testing. And then I believe DRC
18 is then -- it's part of their --

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please pull
20 your mic. We just can't hear you.

21 MS. HOBBS: Sorry. Data recognition
22 corporation that has the contract for the
23 test in Pennsylvania then does some of the
24 grading of the tests.

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1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. Let me just
2 go back then to what you said. We have so
3 far, we believe, there may be two more tests
4 being implemented or developed at this time.
5 There may be legislation out there to slow
6 that down; is that correct?

7 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: That's correct.
8 It's going to be a bill we introduce in this
9 session that puts a break and holds it to
10 three exams until we assess what the results
11 of the first three exams are.

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Is there support in
13 Harrisburg for that?

14 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: I think there is
15 growing support surrounding this issue just
16 as you have recognized it in Philadelphia.
17 This recognition is taking place throughout
18 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and
19 throughout the country. We have growing
20 support for this.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Then the additional
22 legislation you had stated that maybe the
23 possibility of having Districts decide on
24 their own whether they want to use the
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1 Keystone as a graduation-type
2 implementation.

3 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Yes. But
4 remember at this point in time, you
5 understand the process, the legislative
6 process, it would take a legislative change.
7 The course that we're on right now has those
8 three Keystone Exams being a graduation
9 requirement.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. That
11 would be good to ask the District moving
12 forward. If that possibility was there,
13 what would they do moving forward.

14 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Again, I think
15 we get back to the fact that we need --
16 because we have search a diverse state
17 because you have such a diverse city and
18 School District here that we need some
19 autonomy and we need to -- each district
20 decides how to best teach their children.
21 Understanding, just as other testifier has
22 mentioned, I think it's unrealistic to
23 believe that there isn't some level of
24 testing that is reasonable.

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1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I think we all
2 agree. My philosophy was testing should be
3 a part of the education process. We're not
4 against accountability. You know, we need
5 to be accountable for our students. We want
6 to make sure they are educated. There has
7 got to be a way to do that. It seems like
8 we are going to a system of only tests can
9 tell us if we are educating our kids
10 properly. I don't know if that's the answer
11 right now, but it seems like that is where
12 we are going.

13 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Yeah. Our
14 concern really surrounds the fact we are
15 shrinking learning time and expanding
16 assessment time to an unrealistic level. I
17 think the ability to measure certainly
18 doesn't go away. The desire to have every
19 student in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
20 diploma -- the diploma that they graduate
21 with mean something and have some
22 consistency, I think is a worthwhile cause
23 and endeavor. We are just not so sure that
24 these Keystone Exams are getting to that

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1 end.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. Thank you.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Before I call
4 on Councilwoman Brown, let me say that we
5 think going from PSSA to Keystone is even
6 worse. That was an important statement you
7 made about spending more time on testing.
8 But we're making education more unattainable
9 than it was before. And it's interesting
10 Mr. Jordan said you don't even touch the
11 tests.

12 So, it's gone from bad to worse. And
13 there are many people in the communities who
14 feel now that there's a concerted effort not
15 to educate their children. I mean, when
16 half of -- depending on which data you
17 observe say that they don't pass them, when
18 we've gone from, I mean, my goodness as many
19 of you know, we don't even teach cursive
20 writing in schools anymore. We don't teach
21 things; and yet, we test, test, test. So,
22 people are wondering where we are going in
23 public education whether it be teachers,
24 whether it be parents, whether it be
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1 students and community. So, all that's
2 being said today is very, very important.

3 And again, I commend Councilman Squilla
4 for introducing this legislation.

5 Councilwoman Reynolds Brown.

6 COUNCILWOMAN REYNOLDS BROWN: Yes.
7 That's exactly where I wanted to start to
8 thank Councilman Squilla to bring us
9 together to focus on this like a laser beam.

10 In the years, that I've been here, I
11 can't recall where we put tests front and
12 center and why we need to look at them. And
13 it should be underscored that none of us, I
14 would suspect, are against accountability.
15 That comes with learning. But you first
16 have to have the learning that is given over
17 an extended period of time before you can
18 fairly measure where young people are.

19 I'm troubled by the fact that we have
20 another battery of tests that are going to
21 be imposed on our young people. And
22 hopefully, we'll hear through the testimony
23 that there is some evidence that suggests
24 that this is better for whatever reason than
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1 what we already have. I'm also hopeful that
2 we will know what the hard numbers are with
3 regards to administration, some of which
4 have already been alluded to and how this
5 stacks against tests that we've administered
6 in the past. A lot more information I'm
7 hopeful will be revealed. And the need to
8 look at this closely is big.

9 So, I thank Councilman Squilla, as well.
10 Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
12 much. Councilman Oh.

13 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very much,
14 Madam Chair.

15 So, I appreciate your coming in and
16 providing the testimony. I will have some
17 questions. I'd like to get your reactions.

18 School plays a critically important role
19 in preparing children for life, getting a
20 job, raising a family, being successful,
21 being happy. The issue is whether or not
22 the schools are meeting their
23 responsibilities to the extent that we
24 expect them to. And in our state, there is
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1 great inequities from School District to
2 School District. And they generally center
3 around the social economic status of one
4 geographic location versus another being
5 that one area that has higher property
6 values, has higher costs of living, has
7 higher levels of education, has better
8 schools, better equipped, more technology.

9 Poorer locations have sometimes horrible
10 schools with no technology, no music, no
11 musical instruments and very poor outcomes.

12 In this situation, the testing,
13 standardized testing affects each School
14 District differently. A School District
15 that has great teachers, great programs does
16 not want more testing to interfere with
17 great education. And in School Districts
18 that have a large dropout rate, graduate
19 students that can't read, write, get a job,
20 don't have music, art and other types of
21 afterschool activities are being challenged
22 with the idea of standardized testing to put
23 a level of minimum performance in terms of
24 what that school and school system can

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1 produce. It is a test of the students'
2 ability, but a test of the teachers and
3 administrators and government, being the
4 School District, of whether or not they're
5 achieving what they should be achieving.

6 If they are failing, then there is a
7 visible sign that they should be changed.
8 Hopefully, that greater resources would be
9 put into them, additional funding, more
10 money, more programs. But under the current
11 system, that isn't the way it is. It is
12 more likely that there would be penalties
13 and punishment for that School District and
14 not additional help or resources.

15 What is your reaction to that thought?
16 I don't know if it's true or not, but I'm
17 interested to get your reaction that rather
18 than dealing with this problem universally
19 for 500-some School Districts in
20 Pennsylvania, they are somewhat different.

21 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Well, obviously
22 from our testimony here today, we got some
23 concerns surrounding standardized testing.
24 If we get into the income statements and
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1 balance sheets of 500 School Districts
2 within the Commonwealth. It's absolutely a
3 complex issue. It's one we should talk
4 about on a different way.

5 We share your concern about the dynamic
6 of standardized testing and how it impacts a
7 diverse state, even a diverse school
8 district like the one in Philadelphia very
9 differently. So, because of the fact that
10 standardization takes away some level of
11 autonomy, a great deal of autonomy, and the
12 ability to deliver varied curriculum that is
13 important to different School Districts
14 throughout the Commonwealth, we share your
15 concern. That's why we develop legislation,
16 why we continue to listen to stakeholders
17 like you, like the School District of
18 Philadelphia, but also the School Districts
19 in rural parts of the Commonwealth of
20 Pennsylvania, certainly, the District that
21 we represent. And I can tell you that there
22 is some universal belief.

23 Number one, I have yet to be in a School
24 District that has not indicated to me that
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1 they need more resources to do the good work
2 that they're trying to do, whether it be
3 Philadelphia or Pottsville or Blue Mountain
4 or TriValley School District. They all
5 could use more resources to do their good
6 work.

7 There is also a common theme throughout
8 the Commonwealth and School District that we
9 visited that the standardization of our
10 public education system and these -- the
11 expansion of these standardized tests is
12 problematic.

13 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you. Could I
14 follow up with this question.

15 First of all, listen, I do appreciate.
16 I think as everybody does in this room, no
17 matter what our opinions are, what a
18 difficult job it is. And we appreciate your
19 tackling this problem. I'm asking these
20 questions because I'm fortunate to have all
21 of you in front of me to give some expert
22 advice here.

23 Underfunding. Because property taxes
24 are the basis of how school districts are

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1 funded, some school districts have great
2 resources. And because they tend to have
3 communities of well-educated, higher earning
4 people, they have great resources at home.
5 I'm not saying that's wrong. That's great.
6 But we have a education system that,
7 nonetheless, has to provide a minimum level
8 of education on an equal basis to people
9 that are poor, disenfranchised who have
10 great challenges.

11 And, you know, the issue that concerns
12 me is that when we are now looking at
13 dealing with the standard tests and their
14 application in this process, that
15 underfunding, which is a nut in of itself,
16 is a very critical part of it that no matter
17 how smart the kids are, no matter how well
18 intentioned the parents are, if they don't
19 have enough resources within their school,
20 let's say, not just school system, their
21 school, that they cannot do the best that
22 can be done.

23 A school system that has computers and
24 iPads and paint and clay and 3D printers is
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1 going to provide a better education, more
2 relevant, more substantial in terms of
3 preparing their children for jobs and
4 college and other things than a school that
5 doesn't have those things.

6 And with the equitable funding formula
7 that's now being worked out in Harrisburg of
8 which we are not as a city -- I'm just a
9 Philadelphia Councilperson. We are not in
10 that discussion in any real sense, in my
11 opinion, it appears to me that when the
12 funding formula is done, it will be divided
13 among the existing School Districts that
14 have elected school boards around
15 Pennsylvania. And every child will receive
16 more money, but overall Philadelphia will
17 receive less money than it has received in
18 the past.

19 Does that seem likely? Or is that
20 unlikely or is just unknown situation? What
21 do you think about trying to equalize
22 funding of School Districts?

23 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Well, I mean, I
24 just get back to this point that we're
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1 talking about, the expense associated with
2 standardized testing right now and our
3 desire to make sure we got a good, fair and
4 equitable system. The funding issue within
5 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and
6 individual School Districts is a difficult
7 thing. I know you have a new tax here,
8 cigarette tax in the City of Philadelphia
9 that was meant to really drive some more
10 revenue and put it back into your public
11 education system. I think it's a worthwhile
12 endeavor for you to continue to focus on the
13 needs of Philadelphia School District.

14 But as far as this hearing goes, our
15 focus on standardized testing is an expense
16 associated with that is really what our
17 focus is. We're going to have those budget
18 discussions. And I know that as a general
19 assembly, we continue to be concerned about
20 equitable funding for children throughout
21 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. And that
22 certainly goes to each one of the 500 School
23 Districts.

24 COUNCILMAN OH: All right. Thank you
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1 very much.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
3 much. We're going to also ask Councilman
4 Jones, we're going to also ask State
5 Representative Jim Roebuck Chair of
6 Education to join us at the Witness Table
7 and make a statement.

8 Jim. Councilman Jones, would you like
9 to ask your question now?

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: I would. I would.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Or you'll wait
12 for --

13 COUNCILMAN JONES: I'll wait until --

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All right.

15 Representative Roebuck, again, thank you for
16 being here.

17 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: Thank you very
18 much, Councilwoman. Thank you for allowing
19 me to just make a brief statement on this
20 subject. And I put this in the context of
21 having spent the last two days actually here
22 at City Hall looking at the issue of
23 educational funding. The commission which
24 was designed to assess how we as a
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1 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are driving out
2 dollars to School Districts met in
3 Philadelphia and we held a series of -- two
4 hearings that focused on different aspects
5 of the issue. And what becomes very clear,
6 as I'm sure that we all would agree, is that
7 it is the issue of funding which dictates in
8 many -- in reality academic success.

9 And I'm a believer certainly in academic
10 rigor. I believe that schools ought to be
11 preparing students for success in whatever
12 phase of life they choose to proceed --
13 choose to pursue whether it's indeed to go
14 to college or go out into the workforce
15 immediately, to go into military service, to
16 go into a career technical field. But the
17 foundation has to be laid in the K to 12
18 system.

19 Now, I'm a -- I sit on the State Board.
20 And the State Board adopted the common core,
21 the idea or the common core standards. But
22 when we did that, we also amended what we
23 were doing to incorporate into the common
24 core the Keystone Exams with the idea that
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1 these exams would allow us a way of
2 assessing how well the common core was
3 working. And this, in my mind, was a
4 mistake. I voted against the resolution
5 that incorporated or brought about that
6 incorporation. And there were others on the
7 State Board as well who argued, I think
8 persuasively, that if you had inequity in
9 funding of among the 500 School Districts,
10 then you have -- you create an unfair
11 system. Where students don't have the
12 opportunity to succeed because they don't
13 have the necessary resources in those school
14 systems to deliver educational services in a
15 fair way.

16 And that remains the problem. We don't
17 have a way -- a clear way of assessing
18 academic success. We measure students
19 success in the 11th grade. Many students
20 don't pay much attention to that. It
21 doesn't factor into their class standing,
22 into their final grade averages. It doesn't
23 really mean very much. But it is clear to
24 me from experiences that certainly we have
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1 to do a better job at educating, but also a
2 better job of making sure that students are
3 learning.

4 I sit on the board of Community College
5 of Philadelphia. I used to chair their
6 Academic Affairs Committee. And what the
7 academic -- one of the responsibilities of
8 that committee was, in fact, to do
9 assessments of how well we were delivering
10 educational service. We reviewed curriculum
11 on a five-year cycle. When the individuals
12 came before our committee to give a report
13 and how well they had done over the last
14 five years, almost invariably the first
15 words out of the mouths of the faculty, the
16 administrators and other who are making the
17 presentation was we have too many kids, too
18 many students, coming to community who need
19 remediation.

20 I would always ask the same question.
21 Do you know who the kids are? Yes. Do you
22 know them by name? Yes. You know who they
23 are, you know them by name? Yes. Do you
24 know what schools they came from? Yes.

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1 Well, then the next question I would ask is
2 do you ever go back to those schools and say
3 you're not doing a very good job? Dead
4 silence.

5 What we need to be about creating are
6 not more rich assistance of assessment, we
7 need to be about creating better systems of
8 the living academic excellence to our
9 students. There ought to be a seamless link
10 between K to 12 and higher education. There
11 ought to be a way where if indeed students
12 are coming to college unprepared, then there
13 is responsibility on the part of that
14 college to go back to the high schools and
15 say, what can we do to make this system work
16 better.

17 And this is not a Philadelphia problem.
18 I remember speaking to the School Board
19 Association probably now 15 years ago and
20 using that example. And someone got up from
21 Juniata County, which is in Central
22 Pennsylvania, and said, you know, we had the
23 same problem. We used to teach excellent
24 chemistry course. We knew our students knew
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1 chemistry. They go to the local college and
2 flunk chemistry. We couldn't understand
3 what was wrong. Then we went to the college
4 and said, look, what's happening here? They
5 say this is the way we teach it. They found
6 they were teaching it one way in high
7 school, another way in college. They got
8 the two methods in sync. It was a seamless
9 transition.

10 There has got to be a sense that
11 education is not divided into nice little
12 neat separate entities, but it's about how
13 we prepare kids to do better.

14 I just want to close with one final
15 example which hits very close to home for
16 me. I'm a product of the Philadelphia
17 School System. I graduated from Central.
18 And I -- what struck me was that a year ago
19 when the state did their assessment of high
20 school success, Central High School ended up
21 one-tenth of a point behind being the best
22 high school in the state according to the
23 state assessment. One-tenth of a point.

24 This year they fell to being at 300
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1 behind that point. I think it's regulating
2 the fact we are not funding schools
3 properly.

4 (Applause)

5 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: As long as we
6 don't fund schools properly, I don't care
7 what you use to assess academic success.
8 You are not going to see that a Keystone
9 Exam makes students better, but you will see
10 the lack of funding reduces opportunity for
11 success for all students.

12 Let me stop there. I thank you for the
13 opportunity to make those observations. And
14 certainly, would welcome any questions if
15 you might have them.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you,
17 Representative Roebuck. Very, very
18 important testimony. And we appreciate your
19 commitment to our public schools and to
20 community and all you've done in this area.

21 Councilman Squilla.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes, thank you. I
23 know Councilman Jones has a couple
24 questions. I just wanted to say one thing.

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1 Now we do -- we talk about the funding
2 issue and the lack of it; but yet, we're
3 looking to spend additional dollars for
4 accountability. So, that correlation almost
5 doubles the lack of funding that we have for
6 our local School Districts throughout the
7 Commonwealth.

8 And is there a reason or philosophy --
9 and I know mandated by the Federal
10 Government to do No Child Left Behind. We
11 have to do something. But in a way, does
12 that also limit our ability to then gain
13 additional funds for our districts
14 throughout the Commonwealth?

15 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: I would believe
16 it does. And I think that we are at the
17 point now, we are on the verge of having a
18 new Governor. And I think we are going to
19 look at the way we've been doing things.
20 And I think there's a good chance that some
21 of the things that are now in place will not
22 go forward. I would think there's a very
23 good possibility that the whole structure of
24 Keystone Exams is going to be reevaluated or
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1 an opportunity to look at going in a
2 different direction.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you very
4 much.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We sure
6 certainly hope so.

7 Councilman Jones and then Councilman Oh.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you, Madam
9 Chair. And thank you for having these
10 hearings on the issue of standardized
11 testing. I have a quick question and thank
12 you for your analogies on what's going on.
13 And I -- it drove it home. I agree with
14 everything you said except for the part
15 about Central, I think it was. I will let
16 that go. I will let it go.

17 My question becomes on standardize
18 testing. Is there -- how much does cultural
19 bias play a part in standardized testing?
20 I'm going to ask, that let you respond.

21 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: Absolutely.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: Then give an example
23 of how I think it applies.

24 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: Certainly,
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1 cultural bias does play into that. I think
2 any number of studies affirm that. Any
3 number of examples affirms that. That is an
4 issue, yes.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: For example, if I did
6 a algebraic equation and said calculate what
7 a dog leg right hook would be on a golf
8 course for some people -- see, I got a
9 response out of Councilman Squilla right
10 away. He understood what it meant. But in
11 some communities, in some neighborhoods that
12 may not be the, you know, your ability to
13 understand what that applied to would be
14 limited.

15 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: And I'm sure we
16 could design a test that we could give to
17 someone who was viewed as being highly
18 intelligent that could equally confuse them.

19 COUNCILMAN JONES: I was going to do
20 that. Since Councilman Squilla knew, I was
21 going to ask him what are chips? What are
22 kicks? And what are whips?

23 What are chips, kicks and whips? Would
24 you like to respond Councilman Goode?

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1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Chips are money.

2 COUNCILMAN JONES: Very good. What are
3 whips.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Cars.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: There you go. And
6 what are kicks?

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Shoes.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: There you go. But in
9 some --

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I thought it
11 was potato chips.

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: Well, see. But
13 different language, different cultural norms
14 apply in how you would use -- matter of
15 fact, whether you went to Central or not,
16 you know, you have to be from a particular
17 environment in order to relate to what the
18 question is applied to.

19 Thank you, Madam Chair.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
21 much. Councilman Oh.

22 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very much,
23 Madam Chair. Thank you very much State
24 Representative.

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1 So, I don't disagree with anything that
2 you said. But at the end of the day, here
3 we are and not all schools are equal and not
4 all schools have good teachers and that's
5 just the reality of life.

6 Central High School is a magnet school.
7 And well, I'm not saying it's a good or bad
8 magnet school. It's a magnet school. It's
9 not what the system is built on in the sense
10 that neighborhood public schools,
11 neighborhood schools, every family, every
12 child getting a good quality education.
13 And, you know, the issue that I'm wondering
14 is while the reality is that there is great
15 disparity in education. But nonetheless,
16 when the children graduate, there are the
17 same standards for jobs and for careers, if
18 they had vocational, for example, if they
19 had career opportunities or academic
20 opportunities.

21 And competing not just in Philadelphia
22 but whenever they compete, they are
23 competing unbeknownst to them with someone
24 in Singapore and someone in Poland because
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1 of the state of technology.

2 The standardized tests, while we don't
3 want to go too much into a culture of
4 education based on standardized tests, but
5 to an extent don't standardized tests let
6 the student and the parents and the
7 community know where they stand? And if
8 they are short, they have an opportunity to
9 bolster themselves even if the school will
10 not.

11 What would be your reaction -- I will
12 put it this way. I come across honor
13 students. They are all A students. They
14 are barely literate. I think someone is
15 trying to do them a good service by letting
16 them have good grades, but they can't get a
17 job. And they certainly have not done the
18 best that they can with themselves. And I
19 don't blame them because they just thought
20 they did the best they possibly could
21 because they have all A's. But yet on the
22 standardized tests, they got very poor
23 grades. And wouldn't that indicate to
24 teachers, parents, family, church, somebody

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1 that these kids need help?

2 What would you say to that?

3 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: I would
4 actually go back and say I think that the
5 issue -- and I use Central because I am very
6 proud of my high school. In my mind, every
7 school ought to be Central. And --

8 (Applause)

9 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: When I was --
10 when I was in high school, really wasn't
11 that long ago, you know, I'm a West
12 Philadelphia guy. Lived in West
13 Philadelphia all my life, so the kids.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: 3rd District.

15 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: -- either went
16 to Overbrook or Bartram or West Philadelphia
17 High School. The reality was, we were
18 studying exactly the same things. We were
19 taking the same sequence of math, you know,
20 Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II,
21 Pre-Calculus, Trigonometry. We were reading
22 the same literature. Read the same endless
23 books of Shakespeare and all the other
24 thing -- all the other English literature

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1 books we read. We were taking the same
2 science and had the same in terms of
3 language studies. Schools were even. And
4 that's what we don't have anymore. Our
5 schools are simply not equal. That's wrong.

6 And so, we need to improve the delivery
7 of curriculum. Why should it be that if I
8 go to Central, I have a choice of several
9 languages; I go to West Philadelphia High
10 School, I have a choice of one? That
11 doesn't make any sense to me. That's not
12 fair. That's not right.

13 And also, I would say that the -- there
14 is, as well, the -- I think you asked this
15 thing about testing? Standardized tests I'm
16 trying --

17 COUNCILMAN OH: What I said is that
18 exactly what you just said. Is that in fact
19 while every school should be equal, they are
20 not. And because they are not equal,
21 standardized tests, which I understand the
22 difference between having a culture of
23 continuous standardized tests occupying all
24 this time instead of learning. But the
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1 standardized tests points out in reality
2 just how great the disparity is in terms of
3 performance of the child versus they could
4 see they don't have music. They could see
5 they don't have art. But the performance of
6 the child in core curriculums that is
7 considered, I believe, a minimum standard of
8 education that should be produced in each
9 school. And it even points out to us what
10 you just said now. The great disparity in
11 failings of this current system. It wasn't
12 for the standardized test, we wouldn't see
13 that as visibly as we see it today.

14 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: But I think you
15 got to have a common core curriculum. The
16 curriculum ought to be the same in any high
17 school you go to in the City of
18 Philadelphia. The opportunities for the
19 courses ought to be -- I just read an
20 article they dropped physics at Bodine.

21 How can that happen? How can you drop
22 physics at a magnet school? Or how do you
23 drop physics at any school not just a magnet
24 school? How do you drop physics at any
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1 school? How can you drop core curriculums
2 and say we are educating young people?

3 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. Thank you very
4 much.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
6 much. Any other questions?

7 Thank you very much Representative
8 Roebuck. We appreciate the job you do and
9 your commitment to it.

10 REPRESENTATIVE ROEBUCK: Thank you.

11 (Applause)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
13 much. Panel Two: Chris Shafer, Deputy
14 Chief, Curriculum Instruction and Assessment
15 School District of Philadelphia. We gave
16 you a lot to comment about. We're sure
17 you're excited about this.

18 MR. SHAFER: I'm okay.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.
20 Please identify yourself for the record,
21 then feel free to begin your testimony.

22 MR. SHAFER: Good afternoon, Chairwoman
23 Blackwell and Members of the Committee of
24 Education. My name is Christopher Shafer,
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1 the Deputy Chief for the Office of
2 Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for
3 the School District of Philadelphia.

4 I appreciate the opportunity to be here
5 before you and testify on Resolution No.
6 140666 on the impact of standardized
7 testing. The School District of
8 Philadelphia administers seven state
9 mandated test throughout the academic year
10 to a wide range of student cohort and
11 subgroups; ELL, special education,
12 kindergarten, et cetera, through the Office
13 of Curriculum Instruction and Assessment.

14 The first is the KEI, the Kindergarten
15 Entrance Inventory which is used to record a
16 student's demonstration of skills and serve
17 as an indicator of individual student needs
18 in the cognitive and noncognitive key
19 learning areas of social and emotional
20 development in language and literacy,
21 mathematics, approaches to learning, health,
22 wellness and physical development.

23 ACCESS. ACCESS provides a standardized
24 measurement of academic language
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1 proficiency, reading, writing, speaking,
2 listening and comprehension.

3 For ELL students, it allows for
4 monitoring progress of language proficiency
5 and is used as a criterion for exiting
6 students from our ELL programs.

7 The WIDA ACCESS Placement Test is an
8 English language proficiency screener test
9 given to incoming students who may be
10 designated as English language learners. It
11 assists educators with problematic placement
12 decisions such as identification in
13 placement of ELLs.

14 The PSSA, the Pennsylvania State System
15 of Assessment, is an end-course assessment
16 designed to assess proficiency in ELL --
17 ELA, math and science. The Keystone Exams
18 are end-course assessments designed to
19 assess proficiency in Algebra I, Literature
20 and Biology. They are state-mandated
21 graduation requirements for students in the
22 class of 2017 and beyond.

23 The PBA, the Project Based Assessments
24 are lined with modules for each Algebra I,
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1 Biology, Keystone Literature exam for
2 students who are unable to demonstrate
3 proficiency on the Keystone Exam or module.
4 Successful completion of the PBA shall
5 satisfy the Keystone Exam graduation
6 requirement.

7 PASA, the Pennsylvania Alternate System
8 of Assessment is designed for students with
9 most significant cognitive disabilities who
10 are unable to participate meaningfully in
11 the PSSA even with appropriate
12 accommodations. By administering the PASA,
13 the students with severe disabilities,
14 schools achieve compliance with federal laws
15 and the PA School Code that requires all
16 students to participate in statewide
17 accountability system.

18 In addition to the above-mentioned
19 state-mandated assessments, the School
20 District of Philadelphia administers three
21 benchmark assessments in grades three
22 through eight, Algebra I, Biology and
23 English II courses. Benchmark assessments
24 serve as formative assessments to measure

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1 student progress relative to grade level
2 academic expectations. Result of these
3 formative assessments provide teachers with
4 timely data to inform their instruction
5 during the school year.

6 Thank you again for allowing me to
7 testify today. I am happy to answer any
8 questions that you may have.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.
10 Councilman Squilla.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you. We
12 appreciate your testimony.

13 Mr. Shafer, are you in charge of the
14 assessments in the Philadelphia School
15 District?

16 MR. SHAFER: For the most part, for the
17 majority of the assessments fall within my
18 Department of the Curriculum Instruction and
19 Assessment.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. But you are,
21 I guess, in charge of monitoring or making
22 sure the Districts give these standardized
23 tests?

24 MR. SHAFER: Correct. The
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1 implementation and the monitoring falls
2 within our department of most of the tests.
3 Outside of someone that I have, which would
4 be supported by our multilingual department
5 as well as our early childhood education and
6 test commensurate with our CTC students.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I notice besides
8 the standardized testing that is mandated,
9 the School District itself is now
10 implementing three new benchmark testing,
11 right?

12 MR. SHAFER: Correct.

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And what is the --
14 as the benchmark testing, is there a cost to
15 the District for the additional testing that
16 will be now implemented?

17 MR. SHAFER: This is the third year.
18 Last year, they were not administered. The
19 year before they were. This is the third
20 year of a three-year contract. I don't have
21 the exact costs with me. However, I can get
22 that and present that to the Councilwoman.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. We would
24 like that. If you can give it to the Chair,
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1 that would be great. Also, is this the last
2 year of the contract?

3 MR. SHAFER: Correct.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So then is that
5 contract going to be renewed for next year
6 or no?

7 MR. SHAFER: We haven't discussed that
8 at this point.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: You don't know if
10 you will continue the benchmark testing
11 moving forward?

12 MR. SHAFER: With the current provider,
13 have not discussed that or what decisions we
14 will make moving forward.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: How about the
16 philosophy of the District?

17 MR. SHAFER: I think one of the things
18 that I wanted to talk about that I brought
19 up is the idea of the benchmark assessment,
20 in particular formative assessment. And
21 hearing testimony, it seems that one of the
22 most common denominators I hear is no one is
23 opposed to accountability or monitoring our
24 progress.

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1 And the benchmark assessments or
2 formative assessments allow us to measure
3 our progress over time during the year. But
4 most importantly, it allows us to respond to
5 any --

6 (Audience member shouts out.)

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Guys, no hollering
8 out. Everybody is going to have to chance
9 to testify.

10 MR. SHAFER: -- deficiencies that we may
11 see. This will be in contrast to the
12 standardized tests that I have heard
13 testimony today that are typically given at
14 the end of the year and are summative in
15 nature. By the time the results come back,
16 it's too late to respond.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So are -- do we
18 know -- since we didn't do the benchmark
19 testing last year, we did it the year
20 before, correct?

21 MR. SHAFER: Correct.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Are we monitoring
23 the advancement from two years ago to the
24 kids that are taking it this year?

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1 MR. SHAFER: We will be able to. We are
2 in the opening window of our first benchmark
3 assessment.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. So --

5 MR. SHAFER: And I also -- when I
6 listened to the testimony before, it's
7 important to mention that there was a
8 transition also happening when we were
9 talking about the transition to the
10 Pennsylvania core standards. So two years
11 ago when this was developed, the School
12 District of Philadelphia was in a transition
13 phase.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. Do we
15 have a cost estimated for this benchmark
16 testing? Do we have any materials that need
17 to be bought, or is there anything that goes
18 along with this benchmark testing?

19 And is this testing going to be
20 different than the normal testing that's
21 done within the school, within the class
22 itself, by the teachers?

23 MR. SHAFER: The testing is all online
24 with the exception of some constructive
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1 response. And the responses are "graded,"
2 for lack of a better term --

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: By what?

4 MR. SHAFER: -- by a company and turned
5 around within 24 hours. It's an online
6 assessment. You would take -- and the
7 results would come back instantaneously for
8 the teacher.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So every student is
10 going to take an online test. Who --

11 MR. SHAFER: In grades three through
12 eight and in the Keystone-assessed courses
13 which would be Algebra I, English II and
14 Biology.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: If the keystones
16 then incorporate other curriculums, other
17 testings, would this change?

18 MR. SHAFER: The benchmark assessment
19 are aligned to the Keystone.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: If they had ten
21 tests, then you would also have benchmarks
22 for ten tests?

23 MR. SHAFER: No. We don't have ten
24 tests.

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1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: No. But the goal
2 for the Keystones was to have -- they were
3 going to create two more tests, correct, so
4 then it would be a total of five.

5 MR. SHAFER: That's what has been
6 presented in various state round tables.
7 However, the development would take time.
8 So, I mean, that's a difficult question for
9 me to answer in that there has been no time
10 frame at the state level that they have told
11 us about any potential Keystone Exams. So,
12 we are looking at just the three that we
13 have at this point.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I mean, you can see
15 now the potential that if they did go to
16 five, if you are going to monitor that,
17 these benchmarks would then go to five.

18 And then, what resources are going to be
19 used by the District to keep these
20 benchmarks in consistency with the
21 Keystones? Is there going to be additional
22 dollars spent from the District to run these
23 benchmark testings to, I guess go along with
24 the Keystones?

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1 MR. SHAFER: So, I wouldn't want to
2 speculate on that in that you are talking
3 about Keystone Exams that would be in the
4 future. But, yes, we would pay a fee, a
5 negotiated fee, for a number of, say,
6 licenses or testing. A number of students.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Who in the school
8 takes the tests?

9 MR. SHAFER: Students in grades three
10 through eight in math and ELA and students
11 enrolled in English II --

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Every student?

13 MR. SHAFER: -- Biology and Algebra I.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Every student.

15 MR. SHAFER: Correct in grades three
16 through eight in the three courses in the
17 high school.

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And special ed?

19 MR. SHAFER: Yes. Depending on the
20 accommodations and at what level.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Special ed and
22 English as a second language, I guess, that
23 also?

24 MR. SHAFER: Correct.
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1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: But they all would
2 be taking the same test.

3 MR. SHAFER: Correct.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: That's crazy.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Well, I understand.
6 Again, this is all for accountability and be
7 able to monitor students through the
8 education process. And we know the District
9 is short on funds, that's why I keep asking.
10 Since the contract is over, correct, after
11 this year, if we're taking the test this
12 year, you can't -- you don't have any idea
13 if the District would want to continue these
14 benchmark testing next year?

15 Wouldn't they have to decide that now,
16 or would they have to wait until next year
17 before --

18 MR. SHAFER: No. We'd have to make that
19 decision during the course of this year.
20 That would be correct. We are just in the
21 first window, we would have to reassess that
22 and take a look at how we feel the -- the
23 benchmarks are providing relevant
24 information that's in a meaningful way to
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1 our teachers.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: You don't know what
3 the cost was for the three-year contract?

4 MR. SHAFER: No. I don't have that with
5 me.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: You don't have
7 that, right? And the test that they take,
8 once they take the benchmark test, do the
9 teachers get the results right away and they
10 know what questions they got wrong? Is that
11 how --

12 MR. SHAFER: Correct. It's
13 instantaneous, yes.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Then the teachers
15 get to review --

16 MR. SHAFER: Exactly. Down to the
17 eligible contents so they can pinpoint the
18 needs within their classroom and figure out
19 where they need to reteach, if necessary.
20 It's a targeted response to education.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So then if the
22 benchmark shows that the child is not
23 progressing, what would be this next step?

24 MR. SHAFER: Well, with the -- if we are
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1 talking about a teacher, they may take a
2 look at a skills analysis report and notice
3 that there are a group, small group of
4 students that are not progressing on, say,
5 it's a particular piece of eligible content.
6 They might provide an intervention for that
7 group of students, whether they are meeting
8 with them individually as a small group
9 during the classroom or they're providing
10 additional intervention time in the school
11 day.

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And these benchmark
13 tests are reviewed by the District, I guess,
14 for content first?

15 MR. SHAFER: Exactly. Through my
16 office.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Through your
18 office. And you guys, I guess, did that
19 through --

20 MR. SHAFER: We reviewed every question,
21 and then we made changes to those questions
22 and went through checks and balances system
23 with our provider to make sure that the
24 question --

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1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Who is the test
2 provider?

3 MR. SHAFER: CTB.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: CTB?

5 MR. SHAFER: Uh-huh.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: At this point, I'm
7 just going to make a note, there has been no
8 talks of extending the contract or even
9 having benchmarks in the future?

10 MR. SHAFER: No. There hasn't been any
11 discussion about continuing a contract with
12 CTB or moving forward with a new one. I
13 mean, that -- you would be in correct in
14 that. That would be a conversation that
15 would need to occur this year.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: What are we going
17 to measure these tests that you are taking
18 now for the benchmark testing that is going
19 on now? What are you going to measure them
20 to next year if you're not moving forward
21 with or you don't know if you're going to do
22 it? It's a possibility that you may do
23 benchmark testing, but you're not sure. So
24 these -- all the grades that you are getting
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1 off this year's benchmarks will be used for
2 what? Say, you don't do it anymore.

3 MR. SHAFER: It will measure progress
4 toward grade level expectations. So, I feel
5 that we'll have a very good look at how well
6 the benchmarks are assessing our students'
7 academic performance. We have a variety of
8 the metrics that we may use. One being
9 student grades. We also have, you know,
10 other types of assessments in some of these
11 small subgroups where we take a look at
12 student reading levels. So, we would take a
13 look at some of those scores to triangulate
14 and see where we are at.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Are the benchmarks
16 used for any other reason besides monitoring
17 of students progress?

18 MR. SHAFER: No. They would also be
19 part of what I mentioned before. When we
20 take a look at the Pennsylvania -- the PSSA.
21 We see PSSA scores. But the PSSA also
22 provides projections for future tests, as
23 well. So, we can take a look at those
24 projections relative to the benchmarks and
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1 see if we start to notice any similarities
2 in order to identify students that may need
3 additional support.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So if you had a
5 test -- just say English as a second
6 language. We have a lot of immigrants in
7 our public school system. They take the
8 test and don't do well in that test, what do
9 we do at that point?

10 MR. SHAFER: Well, I think then, that's
11 what I talk about a variety of factors. We
12 have to look at various supports that we
13 offer our ELL students. I had the
14 opportunity to meet with the Asian American
15 United Group that will be speaking after me.
16 And we are very aware of the impact of
17 standardized tests on our ELL population,
18 which is around 12,000 students. That's why
19 it's important to look at other metrics, as
20 well.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Which is great.
22 That's what we're getting at. Because we're
23 worried. It sounds like and it looks like
24 we are going by two testing mechanism for
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1 failing schools or passing schools or
2 teachers that are good or teachers that are
3 bad or students that fail or students that
4 pass when there is a whole bunch of other
5 mechanisms throughout the school whether
6 it's grades, whether participation, whether,
7 you know, what they need remedial help
8 whether it's language or whatever it may be.

9 I think our fear is that you're saying
10 the District is not using -- going to use
11 these tests for whether students pass or
12 fail. They are going to use it to monitor
13 them to see what help they need, and we're
14 not going to use it to monitor schools if
15 they're good or bad schools or teachers that
16 are good or bad teachers.

17 MR. SHAFER: I think we will be able to
18 provide targeted response. Let me give you
19 an example.

20 Right now when we talk about much has
21 been said about the Keystone Exams.
22 Keystone Exams, for the most part, will be
23 occurring for students for the first time in
24 the classroom in May. There is a retesting
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1 period in January. But for this example, I
2 will use May. We will have two benchmark
3 assessments for students that will be taking
4 the Keystone Exams in May. And that will
5 provide realtime data and evidence for
6 teachers to respond to the kids in a
7 preemptive way in order to provide those
8 supports necessary prior to the Keystone
9 Exams versus in a reactive sense.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And those students
11 say that don't do well, are they going to
12 be -- have to take a remedial class or some
13 other type of class to get them up to be
14 able to pass that?

15 MR. SHAFER: Are you speaking about the
16 Keystone Exams?

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

18 MR. SHAFER: Yes. In Chapter Four
19 Regulations, it's been discussed. The state
20 mandated the Keystone Exams in the three
21 areas. If a student is below proficient,
22 they are to receive supplemental education.
23 If they are below proficient on the second
24 time, they would then receive or be eligible
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1 for the project-based assessment. And they
2 would need to pass the project-based
3 assessment in order to graduate.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: When do they get
5 this remedial -- when do they get this
6 remedial class or, I guess, a --

7 MR. SHAFER: The supplemental education?

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

9 MR. SHAFER: After the results come
10 back.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: No, I mean, is it
12 during the school day?

13 MR. SHAFER: It could vary. It could be
14 before school, after school, during school.
15 It could be a separate class. The frequency
16 would change. It would depend on the
17 resources that that particular school would
18 have.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So, if it's after
20 school, is there resources going to be put
21 into that for these remedial --

22 MR. SHAFER: We haven't received any
23 resources from the state in funding.

24 (Applause)
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1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. I'm
2 just trying -- I'm not putting you on the
3 spot.

4 MR. SHAFER: I don't feel like I'm on
5 the spot at all.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.

7 MR. SHAFER: I mean, I've heard from,
8 you know, taking some notes about what a lot
9 of people have had to say, and I agree. You
10 know, there's a lot of inequities that have
11 been talked about today. And that the
12 Keystone Exams do serve as a barrier exam
13 particularly for marginalized students. And
14 particularly in areas where we don't receive
15 the funding needed to meet those mandates.
16 And I absolutely agree with that.

17 I met with a group that I mentioned
18 earlier, and that's something that I talked
19 about, as well.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So if for some
21 reason or somehow it's passed through the
22 legislature that Districts could maybe opt
23 out of the Keystones as a pass or fail
24 graduation, is that something the District
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1 would consider; do you think?

2 MR. SHAFER: If the state gave us the
3 opportunity, the option to create our own?

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Not even create
5 your own, but just say that you don't need
6 to do that as pass or fail for high school
7 diploma. If they made that an option, if
8 the State from -- Mr. Tobash said they were
9 looking to introduce legislation that would
10 give each individual District the option
11 whether to use the Keystone State Exam as
12 their pass or fail for graduation rate,
13 would the District consider that?

14 Would they want to do their own tests?
15 Would they look at different options for how
16 to proceed? Because at the end of the
17 day --

18 MR. SHAFER: I think it would be fair to
19 say -- grant it, this scenario that you laid
20 out has not come up in any discussions.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right.

22 MR. SHAFER: You know, to say that we
23 would exercise our options and talk about
24 it? Yes. In fact, you know, Jerry Jordan
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1 had mentioned that teachers are not against
2 testing. And, you know, I have witnessed a
3 lot of great teachers. I observed a
4 fantastic eighth grade group from Disston
5 Elementary working on their benchmarks
6 exams. We have a wonderful group of
7 teachers in the Districts. I have no doubt
8 that they could come up and collaborate to
9 come up with a great assessment if the
10 scenario that you laid out was reality.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: It's not right now
12 because we don't know.

13 MR. SHAFER: Correct.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Then it comes into
15 you're mandated to have these remedial
16 classes with no additional resources.

17 MR. SHAFER: Supplemental education.

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Supplemental
19 education, not remedial. Right.
20 Supplemental education if they fail or do
21 not --

22 MR. SHAFER: If they're below
23 proficient.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Is the District
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1 coming up with a way to do that now. Isn't
2 that going to be a reality?

3 MR. SHAFER: Correct. It's the Chapter
4 4 mandate is for our current seated
5 sophomores.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right.

7 MR. SHAFER: At this point since I
8 started in August --

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Oh, you just
10 started.

11 MR. SHAFER: Right. I just started.

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I'm sorry.

13 MR. SHAFER: No, it's all good. It's
14 all good. I'm fine. I'm happy to be here
15 because, you know, what we have is advocates
16 for education. And it really should be
17 packed, so.

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: But since August,
19 you been, maybe trying to work on --

20 MR. SHAFER: Since August I've gone out
21 to every learning network and met with every
22 single high school principal. I've got one
23 more to go. We talked about -- I brought
24 them up to speed on all the Chapter 4
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1 graduation requirements. We've talked about
2 supplemental education and project-based
3 assessments. I've been there to -- I pulled
4 data for every single high school on every
5 single student to find out every single
6 student who is below that needed
7 supplemental education and project-based
8 assessment. So, this is something that we
9 are working on and we know that it is,
10 pursuant to Chapter 4, a monumental task
11 that we have not received any additional
12 resources for the state, for supplemental
13 education, for project-based administration,
14 for the extra assessments that we talked
15 about. The Councilwoman mentioned the PSSA.

16 This is 20 years in education for me.
17 When we started out and I was a high school
18 person, it was just the 11th grade PSSA.
19 So, now we have three Keystone Exams, so.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right.
21 Because, I mean, as you hear about the
22 resources and we know we don't have the
23 resources. Our fear is worrying about if
24 we're spending resources on implementing the
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1 testing, especially our own. I'm not
2 talking about Keystone or state mandated
3 testing now. Talking about our own District
4 benchmark testing. Since that is now being
5 implemented and we think maybe it be this
6 year, maybe you will continue to do that,
7 there is going to be additional resources
8 that are needed to also do that testing,
9 right?

10 MR. SHAFER: For the benchmarks?

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

12 MR. SHAFER: When you say additional
13 resources for it, we have the resources
14 right now for the assessments that were
15 given. And it is nowhere as time consuming
16 and as intrusive as the assessments that you
17 have spoken about here as far as the time
18 that goes into it.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Do the benchmark
20 testing that you're taking, is it going to
21 be done on a computer, or is it going to
22 be --

23 MR. SHAFER: Correct, yes.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Each one of these
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1 three benchmarks from grades three to eight,
2 all the classes are taking these tests on
3 computers.

4 MR. SHAFER: Correct.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Those resources
6 have been worked out with each individual
7 school to figure out how they are going to
8 get to the computer lab. Some schools have
9 computer, some don't.

10 MR. SHAFER: Exactly. At no time in our
11 recent history as a School District of
12 Philadelphia, known the resources and the
13 capability from an infrastructure standpoint
14 that we have had. We spent two and a half
15 months making sure that all those resources
16 were reevaluated, looked at and up to par so
17 the students can not only use them for the
18 benchmarks, but would have access to those.

19 And so, that is also an instructional
20 tool that students are now able to get. But
21 as far as what you mentioned before, it
22 depends on the school as far as some of the
23 schools have mobile labs.

24 For instance, Chrome books. We have a
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1 lot -- I couldn't give you the amount, but
2 we have a lot of Chrome books. Teachers are
3 actually able to use computers within the
4 classroom. Technology is not an
5 obstruction.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: That would work
7 well, I'm sure.

8 MR. SHAFER: Correct. There are some
9 schools that have labs. I can't give you
10 the exact number off the top of my head.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right.

12 MR. SHAFER: But students would need to
13 go into the labs.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Usually, those
15 schools are the ones that are a little more
16 depressed of the schools that have
17 resources. Now we have to find time for
18 each one of those classes, third grade
19 through eighth grade, to take tests in those
20 labs.

21 MR. SHAFER: That would be correct. But
22 I can't speak to what schools, because there
23 are perhaps there may be some elementary
24 schools that may have a computer lab course

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1 where the students go in.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I know.

3 MR. SHAFER: But I couldn't give you the
4 exact number there. But the students here,
5 correct, would need to go into a computer
6 lab in that case.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Each classroom if
8 you have, say, two grades of each grade,
9 correct? The third grade would have to go
10 in there, take the tests, right, one after
11 another?

12 MR. SHAFER: Well, not -- however the
13 principal would --

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yeah, determine it.
15 That lab may be full all the time for
16 testing, correct?

17 MR. SHAFER: We provide the schools with
18 a third testing window. So, however they
19 develop something.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Find a way to do
21 it.

22 MR. SHAFER: Correct. Correct.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: It's up to the
24 principal to come up with a strategy.

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1 MR. SHAFER: Right. Some schools have
2 the enrollment and schools differ.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I have a couple
4 more questions. But if anybody has a
5 question, I will let them go and then come
6 back. Thank you for your time and welcome
7 to City Council.

8 MR. SHAFER: It's no problem. Thank
9 you.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yeah. We note
11 that Councilwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez is
12 here. We will call on Councilman Oh and
13 then Councilwoman Sanchez. And we note that
14 it is very sad that we are sure how we
15 students fail twice, but we're not sure how
16 they succeed one time so they can move
17 forward. It just is not there.
18 Unconscionable in my mind.

19 Councilman Oh.

20 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very much,
21 Chairwoman.

22 Let me first thank you for joining the
23 School District.

24 MR. SHAFER: Thank you.
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1 COUNCILMAN OH: I appreciate your being
2 here and your hard work. Anyway, it's a
3 difficult situation. So, I think it's fair
4 to say that this body does not have much
5 ability to make you do anything. And so, we
6 are asking you questions. And we are
7 certainly very interested in your answers on
8 behalf of the School District.

9 Two of the best School Districts
10 globally are Finland, South Korea. There
11 are many others. They don't have a
12 test-centric system; yet, when they take the
13 test, they are number one and number two in
14 the world, something like that. I am
15 assuming you already know that. I'm not
16 telling you anything new.

17 But the issue that has occurred with
18 reforms in education systems like Shanghai,
19 Hong Kong probably Poland and others is that
20 they have kind of identified that they are
21 teaching to self-sufficiency, teaching to
22 best ability and not teaching to regurgitate
23 answers for a test that has been found by
24 even some pretty good School Districts to
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1 not be the best practice. And, in fact,
2 even though they seem to do well, the
3 students were unable to get jobs in a global
4 economy and then they reform to creative
5 innovative best practices and have done much
6 better.

7 What is the reason that the Philadelphia
8 School District is moving to more and more
9 tests? And I will preface this by saying
10 that at least from what I can tell, there
11 seems to be two general philosophies. One
12 is that there is an assumption that there
13 are bad teachers, and that is marked by a
14 underfunded, poorly managed, poorly governed
15 School District. And it's very
16 bureaucratic. Or there is assumption that
17 the teachers are good; and therefore, those
18 School Districts generally have better
19 results and they have more teaching more,
20 more autonomy in the classroom and generally
21 are well funded, well managed and have a
22 creative process.

23 What is the reason the School District
24 is going towards -- is it the School
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1 District? Is it the State? What is this
2 move towards more and more kind of like
3 testing to see where everybody is at any
4 given time?

5 MR. SHAFER: Let me take the -- answer
6 your question about the School District of
7 Philadelphia first.

8 And I would say that my office, as we
9 take a look at a coherent system, has been
10 charged with decreasing the assessments that
11 we have to eliminate any redundancies. I
12 think that it's fair to say that an
13 education as we take a look at some of the
14 best practices, that I take the standpoint
15 that we have not good teachers, we have
16 great teachers.

17 And in fact, we have seen -- we have
18 seen growth in our students. So, I know our
19 teachers are making impact. But it's also
20 our job to provide teachers with the support
21 that they need and the evidence that they
22 need about how their students are
23 progressing. And that's important so that
24 they have the opportunity to make changes

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1 and figure out where perhaps pockets of
2 students or there is patterns within their
3 classroom or falling short so they can
4 provide realtime support to those students
5 versus taking a look at some of the
6 assessment results that happen at the end of
7 the year after its too late.

8 COUNCILMAN OH: Could I interrupt you
9 just to say that -- what I said was there's
10 a difference between teaching the child to
11 be the best the child could be versus
12 teaching the child to get the answers right
13 on the upcoming test. Two different things.
14 And what you're kind of saying, as far as I
15 can tell, is that by doing these tests, you
16 are able to identify who is not giving the
17 right answers. And yet I -- am I mistaken?

18 MR. SHAFER: No. I don't --

19 COUNCILMAN OH: Can you explain that?

20 MR. SHAFER: I think that that would be
21 a misrepresentation. If I conveyed that, I
22 don't want that to be conveyed.

23 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay.

24 MR. SHAFER: What I was conveying is
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1 providing teachers with evidence that they
2 would need to respond in the form of what I
3 was talking about before, the benchmark
4 assessments.

5 Do I believe that our teachers are
6 teaching to the test? No. I feel that the
7 eligible content, which is what the PSSA and
8 the Keystone Exams are based on, is the
9 minimum assessment range. We teach so
10 more -- so much more to our students.

11 COUNCILMAN OH: That would be one test,
12 for example. And then the rest of the time
13 would be devoted to teaching and providing a
14 learning environment and that type of thing.
15 But from what you said, unless I'm mistaken,
16 there are more tests in the current system
17 than there used to be and more time for --

18 MR. SHAFER: It would be accurate to say
19 given the Keystone Exams and some of the
20 mandates that there are more assessments.
21 That would be correct.

22 COUNCILMAN OH: What is the rank of the
23 Philadelphia School District right now in
24 Pennsylvania?

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1 MR. SHAFER: I don't have that. I
2 couldn't tell you out of all the School
3 Districts in the state.

4 COUNCILMAN OH: Yeah. I don't know if
5 this is right. I have 446 out of 458. So,
6 the assessment, it just seems that more time
7 teaching, more time -- less time assessing
8 would fit with best practices. And you
9 know, I'm not.

10 (Applause)

11 COUNCILMAN OH: Not really sure why
12 we're moving to more and more assessments.

13 The reason -- are you instructed to do
14 this? Do you have a decision making
15 ability? Is that somewhere above you? Are
16 you able -- who is -- is there someone in
17 the School District that is in charge of
18 making this decision, or is that dictated
19 from Harrisburg?

20 MR. SHAFER: The state tests would be
21 dictated from Harrisburg along with the
22 testing window.

23 COUNCILMAN OH: PSSA or the --

24 MR. SHAFER: PSSA, Keystone Exams and
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1 some of the other exams.

2 COUNCILMAN OH: Then the question that
3 Councilman Squilla said, do you have the
4 option to opt out of those tests? Not the
5 PSSA for example, but the --

6 MR. SHAFER: The Keystone?

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Benchmarks.

8 COUNCILMAN OH: Benchmarks.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: They're not
10 mandated.

11 COUNCILMAN OH: They're not mandatory?

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Point of
13 information, the benchmarks aren't mandatory
14 by the State or the Federal Government.

15 MR. SHAFER: That's correct. That's
16 correct.

17 COUNCILMAN OH: Is it in your office's
18 authority to say --

19 MR. SHAFER: That would not be a
20 unilateral decision from my office.

21 COUNCILMAN OH: But it is something that
22 the SRC could decide?

23 MR. SHAFER: That would be a
24 collaborative decision. But yes,
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1 ultimately, I mean, the SRC would be --
2 would require a resolution.

3 COUNCILMAN OH: It would make a policy
4 decision that we are going to do the
5 benchmark test or we're going to spend more
6 time teaching in the classroom, for example.
7 I'm not sure that's a fair way to put it,
8 but that's the way I'm characterizing it
9 right now.

10 MR. SHAFER: I can't provide you with
11 who exactly would make that policy decision
12 right now.

13 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay.

14 MR. SHAFER: I don't want to speculate.

15 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you for your
16 testimony. And I really appreciate you
17 coming to Philadelphia and doing this job.

18 Thank you.

19 MR. SHAFER: Thank you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Councilwoman
21 Sanchez.

22 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Thank
23 you and welcome, also. Baptism by fire
24 here.

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1 Can you for the record very succinctly
2 describe how the Keystone Exams are going to
3 impact language minority students? Because
4 I want my Council colleagues to understand
5 the impact of that.

6 MR. SHAFER: Sure, I will. After me,
7 you will probably get a much better
8 response. So, I am going to provide you
9 with information that I received when I met
10 with a group of nine student leaders and two
11 organizational leaders for Asian-Americans
12 United.

13 They talked about their experiences with
14 the assessment. And being difficult is not
15 --

16 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: They are
17 going to be very articulate. I want to know
18 the policy. They are going to be very
19 articulate about what they --

20 MR. SHAFER: Correct. So --

21 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: What is
22 the policy for language minority student in
23 terms of what the Keystone Exams are going
24 to require from them?

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1 MR. SHAFER: They have to take it. If
2 you're here for less than one year, you do
3 not have to take the Literature Keystone.
4 However, you would need to take the Algebra
5 and Biology for participation, okay. And
6 then if you were here longer than a year,
7 you would have to take all three. And there
8 are accommodations which phase out after
9 three years.

10 So for instance, a dictionary but it's
11 just a word-for-word translation or an
12 interpreter. Those are the ELL
13 accommodations from the State.

14 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: So, has
15 your office prior to you coming here and as
16 you've assessed this, have you determined
17 that this is going to be detrimental to
18 those language minority students?

19 MR. SHAFER: I can't speak to what has
20 occurred before. But certainly what in
21 talking with the students and my colleagues
22 in the multilingual, we do believe that it
23 is detrimental. That it takes an inordinate
24 amount of time. That it's very frustrating
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1 and --

2 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Has
3 there been a formal request by the School
4 District of Philadelphia to the Pennsylvania
5 Department of Education to waive these
6 requirements for any -- for me it would be
7 for the whole implementation of Keystone
8 Exams? Has there been a formal request that
9 lays out how complicated this is for the
10 kids who are being impacted?

11 MR. SHAFER: Not that I know about. I
12 know that there had been discussions with
13 the superintendents around the State at the
14 Pennsylvania Department of Education about
15 this.

16 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: I would
17 hope that -- and, you know, obviously
18 whenever you take the rest of the testimony
19 that for me as a member of the Education
20 Committee and language minority community
21 that we the School District put forth an
22 official request to get a waiver from
23 Keystone Exams. We can't challenge the
24 system --

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1 (Applause)

2 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: -- where
3 we do not lay the framework so that we can
4 officially opt out. This would not be the
5 first time. You are new to Philadelphia.
6 This would not be the first time that
7 Philadelphia told the state we're not going
8 to do something.

9 I would think that the stakes are so
10 high on this, particularly as it relates to
11 young people, that this is one of those
12 areas where we want to force the State to
13 force us to do something.

14 (Applause)

15 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: On this
16 one. And I say that because of -- there's a
17 lot of moving parts as it relates to this,
18 you know. And we hope that in January we're
19 going to have a Department of Education
20 that's a little bit more amenable. But they
21 are not going to give us what we don't ask
22 for. And they're not going to see the
23 impact of this until we go through several
24 generations of it.

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1 And I'd publicly like to request that
2 the School District and the SRC consider
3 that and they consider that very closely.
4 This Council, while we can't make you do
5 anything or make the State do anything, we
6 can definitely create a political
7 environment by which we are saying we are
8 not doing this. We are no longer to
9 continue to label our kids' failure --

10 (Applause)

11 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: -- in an
12 industry that in Pennsylvania I've heard is
13 upwards of \$600 million in testing. That's
14 big business. That's big business.

15 Having said that, how much money do --
16 are we currently investing in this testing
17 situation for the School District? What's
18 our current testing budget?

19 MR. SHAFER: I don't -- I don't have
20 that. Are you talking for our -- our
21 whole -- our whole budget for assessment?

22 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: Uh-huh.

23 MR. SHAFER: You know, I don't have it.
24 We don't pay -- the State assessments are
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1 funded by the State. It was said earlier --
2 I don't have the soft costs, but certainly I
3 would tell you that they are expensive.
4 That -- I have two staff members for
5 assessment. And the amount of time and
6 effort needed to support the PSSA and
7 Keystone Exams. And when I say support,
8 from a technological standpoint, the amount
9 of data that was required to the monitoring
10 of all the schools during that is -- again,
11 I have not been here to observe a testing
12 cycle. So, the information I give you is
13 based on what I talk to them about. But
14 certainly, the monitoring is intense and the
15 support for the assessments is intense.

16 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: And the
17 tension around it. We all know testing is
18 not best practice. We all know testing does
19 not measure a young person's skills or
20 ability. I was horrible at testing.
21 Horrible. Hated a test. Tell me to write a
22 paper, I'll write you a 30-page paper. But
23 we all know that.

24 I think that given the limited resources
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1 and all of the other pressures that the
2 School District of Philadelphia is facing, I
3 think this is one of those where we all have
4 to stand up and say enough is enough.

5 (Audience applauds saying: "I'll stand
6 up for that. I'll stand up for that.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ: I think
8 this Council would join the School District
9 and the SRC in saying we are not going to do
10 this. If you want to force us to do this,
11 you either get us the adequate resources --
12 and we really do have to capture what those
13 costs, the technology pieces, all of those
14 pieces.

15 But I can tell you from a language --
16 limited language perspective, there is no
17 way that the Pennsylvania Department of Ed
18 gives the District enough money to do this
19 and to do it right and to prepare these
20 children right. I think this is one of
21 those items where we really have to say no.

22 Thank you, Madam Chair.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

24 And I just want to piggyback a little
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1 bit on Councilwoman Sanchez.

2 When we look at that and that's the
3 Keystone part of it and we can't say no, we
4 do have the ability for the benchmark part
5 of it to decide. And when we have that
6 ability for the benchmark testing, we know
7 the resources that are going into it.
8 Somebody knows somewhere. Maybe you don't
9 know, but somebody within the District
10 knows, somebody in the SRC knows what that
11 is actually costing. What it's going to
12 cost in the future. We are still talking
13 about limited counselors, nursing and all
14 the other things you heard about. We are
15 spending our resources on this benchmark
16 test.

17 I understand you said there is other
18 means to come up with accountability and
19 understanding the possibility of a kid
20 progressing and students progressing and
21 things like that. We can still use them
22 until we get additional resources to maybe
23 implement these type of things. But when
24 you said that you wanted to give teachers,
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1 you know, the tools they need in order to
2 show them how well their students are doing,
3 we are only giving them a part of the tool
4 which is the test.

5 We are not giving the resources to help
6 the kids do well in the test. We are not
7 giving resources if the kids fail the test,
8 what we need to do. We still don't know
9 when these additional classes will be made,
10 whether it's before school or after school.
11 If the teachers are going to do them, are
12 they going to be mandated to do them? Are
13 they going to get paid to do them? We don't
14 know any of these things.

15 So, there's a lot of questions. And it
16 seems like we don't have the answers. You
17 don't have the answers. I'm not asking you
18 to come up with an answer because you don't
19 know. But somebody in the District knows
20 that. There is a -- s it Mr. Dickey the
21 chief officer for that?

22 MR. SHAFER: Yes. The Chief Academic
23 Officer.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right. So he's
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1 really over you?

2 MR. SHAFER: Yes.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. So, he's the
4 guy that would then do this. I'm sure it's
5 not his final decision whether to move
6 forward with this. It would have to be Hite
7 and Green, SRC to make that final decision
8 on how to move forward this way. We need to
9 also have access to them. We invited them
10 or to send somebody here. They sent you and
11 we're thankful for that.

12 Maybe you're not as thankful --

13 MR. SHAFER: No, I am.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We're glad we had a
15 chance to listen to your comments. And you
16 have -- I can see in our face when you're
17 talking, you have some concerns, also. So,
18 there are questions that we need answered.
19 And I can badger you with a whole bunch of
20 more questions that you probably don't know
21 the answers to.

22 MR. SHAFER: I really appreciate you not
23 doing that.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: It's -- it's not
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1 fair. It's not fair to you and it's not
2 fair to the schools, the teachers and the
3 principals. We are asking them to do more
4 with less, and we're saying we're giving
5 them a tool because they can know greater
6 how their students are progressing. Yet,
7 we're not giving them resources to use that
8 tool. And it just makes it very
9 difficult --

10 (Applause)

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: -- for us. And
12 listen, we know the School District comes in
13 here for funding. We have raised taxes. We
14 did things that weren't popular. Lot of
15 school advocates are here, happy we raised
16 taxes for schools. There's other people
17 when we do, kill us. We get emails and, you
18 know, we have to take that, also.

19 When we do those things, we do that
20 because everybody here cares about education
21 just like you do. We want resources. We
22 want accountability. We want our kids to
23 have a quality education. But we also need
24 to have a open dialogue between the SRC, the
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1 School District and Council and the parents
2 and the teachers so everybody is in the same
3 boat. You guys are mandated to do certain
4 things by the State and we understand that.
5 But the things that you can control, I think
6 that's when we can have a relationship and a
7 conversation about.

8 So, I am going to bypass on a couple of
9 these other questions. I just want to thank
10 you for your time. Hopefully, we can keep
11 the dialogue open and have you back or maybe
12 Mr. Dickey back or maybe Mr. Hite or Green
13 or whoever from the SRC who can answer some
14 of the monetary questions, what it's costing
15 and things like that.

16 MR. SHAFER: Well, I thank you for the
17 opportunity. I do.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Let me say
19 finally on this issue, that it is apparent
20 that all of us in this room are united when
21 it comes to this whole testing issue. It's
22 wrong. It's a problem, and we want it all
23 to stop.

24 Thank you very much.
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1 MR. SHAFER: Thank you.

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Next panel:

3 Robin Roberts, Philadelphia Parent; Meredith
4 Broussard, Philadelphia Parent; Asian
5 Americans United, Keystones; Asian Americans
6 United, an adult representative and Tiffany
7 Bhavnani, ESOL teacher from Horace Furness
8 School.

9 As they're coming forward, our next
10 panel will be Mark Miller, Network for
11 Public Education, Centennial School Board;
12 Larry Feinberg, Haverford School District,
13 Keystone State Education Committee; Agustin
14 Moroles, President-Holyoke Teachers
15 Association; and Josh Kershenbaum, Special
16 Ed lawyer. That will be the next panel
17 after this. And after that, there will only
18 be one more.

19 Thank you all for your patience.

20 Good evening. Thank you, and you may
21 begin in any order. Just identify yourself
22 for the record.

23 MS. BHAVNANI: Thank you so much for
24 having us. My name is Tiffany Bhavnani.
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1 It's spelled wrong, but it usually is.

2 That's fine with me.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I'm sorry. I
4 said it all wrong.

5 MS. BHAVNANI: It's not, it's everybody.
6 It's fine. We had the pleasure of having
7 Mr. Oh actually speak at our commencement
8 two years ago. It was a very memorable
9 speech. It's a pleasure to address you
10 again today.

11 I'm one of the most privileged teachers
12 in the School District of Philadelphia
13 actually because I'm a teacher for these
14 students who are learning English as a
15 second language or a third or fourth or
16 fifth.

17 (Applause)

18 MS. BHAVNANI: And I work at Furness
19 High School at 3rd and Mifflin. My students
20 are intelligent, they're creative, they're
21 their enthusiastic students whose native
22 language just happens not to be English.
23 We're a neighborhood school whose population
24 includes a great deal of political refugees.

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1 We have a lot of undocumented, unaccompanied
2 minors. We have immigrants from over 20
3 countries. We have many students with IEPs,
4 which are the individualized learning plans
5 for students that we traditionally call
6 special ed. And the rest of them are
7 comprised of the students that are ejected
8 from charter schools, from Catholic schools,
9 from other public schools and from special
10 admit schools but for whom our doors are
11 always open.

12 (Applause)

13 MS. BHAVNANI: English language learners
14 account for 57 percent of Furness High
15 School's population of 682 students.
16 57 percent of our students. That means as
17 you have seen today and, clearly you guys
18 are on our side and we very much appreciate
19 it, that 57 percent of our student
20 population is not -- these tests are not
21 designed for them.

22 All of their traits and their
23 characteristics and all the richness that
24 they bring will never be measured by those
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1 tests. And those tests don't show what we
2 as a school can achieve and what we do.

3 Even our principal himself was a refugee
4 from Cambodia and he was a former ESOL
5 student at Furness High School where his
6 ESOL teacher is currently still a teacher.
7 And our secretary was an ESOL student at our
8 school and is our secretary now.

9 (Applause)

10 MS. BHAVNANI: So, our population is
11 57 percent. Do you know what the population
12 is of Central High School? 1 percent. They
13 have 2,300 students, 1 percent ESOL. And
14 those ESOL students that I'm about to tell
15 you are not Level One and Level Two many
16 times with limited education that we have.

17 Masterman has zero percent. CAPA has 1
18 percent. Engineering and Science has
19 3 percent. Science and Leadership has
20 3 percent. And why do you think these
21 students are not welcome at those schools
22 and they're virtually absent is because
23 English language proficiency has a profound
24 impact on standardized testing.

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MS. BHAVNANI: The widely researched and accepted facts show that it takes five to seven years of English instruction to gain academic English, which is what we need for school. That is, if the students were literate in their first language and they have content knowledge from their native education which is far from the case with many of our ELL in Philadelphia, these same students are expected to become native level proficient in English after one, two or three years in ESOL and content area of coursework in Philadelphia public schools.

23 It is utterly inappropriate
24 academically. And as a practice, that
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1 repeatedly makes these wonderful students
2 feel deficient and defeated despite the
3 gains we can show on measures such as the
4 ACCESS test, which is designed for language
5 learners.

6 Put yourself in the position that they
7 are in for just a moment. You are
8 Philadelphia legislatures. You go to
9 another country for just one year. It's
10 different than anything you've ever known.
11 You have no family with you or maybe one
12 sibling like many of my students. The food
13 and water don't agree with you, you have
14 skin problems, upset stomach. You have to
15 choke down the lunch every day because it's
16 something you've never seen or desire to put
17 in your mouth before. The environment is
18 hostile especially when you're coming from
19 one extreme climate and going to another.

20 We have students that have been seen in
21 the warm weather wearing full coats. They
22 came from the Democratic Republic of Congo.
23 They do not take their coats off when its
24 60. You can imagine how they feel today.

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1 The environment is hostile. You are
2 going from one climate to another, maybe
3 from a village to a crime-ridden city. Your
4 whole support network of friends and
5 neighbors that you relied upon before in
6 your country now consist of strangers who
7 shout at you when you don't understand them
8 or respond as they expect you to. You have
9 spent seven hours a day in classes in a
10 foreign tongue with a different form of
11 writing, and you don't know how to write a
12 single word.

13 Imagine every time anyone in your
14 household has to communicate in this new
15 language, it's your responsibility. The
16 bills, the doctors, shopping, when the
17 school calls for your younger siblings.
18 Then midway through your school year, you
19 are going to be given standardized tests in
20 language proficiency, in algebra, in
21 biology.

22 Do you think you as an educated
23 professional literate in your first language
24 could pass any assessments at a high school

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1 level in your new language in one year?

2 So, imagine if we take all those
3 advantages that you enjoy as a literate
4 professional person, if we take that all
5 away, that's what's disappeared, then you
6 would be one of my students. And then when
7 you look at an assessment test, it's going
8 to look like that to you. And in one year
9 you're supposed to answer that question.

10 Do you think you can do it? (Holds up
11 sign in another language.) I doubt it.

12 Common sense tells you second language
13 students don't have a fighting chance to
14 score proficient on standardized tests
15 developed and normed on native
16 English-speaking test populations. But even
17 our American born students, and I have had
18 the pleasure of teaching them too, some of
19 them are not better off than our refugee
20 students.

21 Their English-speaking educated peers
22 struggle to perform at a proficient level in
23 a District with no reading specialist, no
24 librarian, no libraries to go to, many cases
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1 no books to have.

2 (Applause)

3 MS. BHAVNANI: And students who live
4 below the poverty level where we know what
5 the impact has by 36 months of age on their
6 vocabulary development. English-language
7 proficiency has a profound affect on these
8 assessments and their outcomes. The tests
9 are not appropriate for English-language
10 learners. They do not adequately assess
11 their progress in learning not only the
12 English language but also the grade-level
13 content.

14 These assessments are not accurate
15 measures of their true achievement. My
16 students remain at school and continue their
17 education despite the many academic cultural
18 and economic challenges they faces on a
19 daily basis.

20 What do we do to them? We force them to
21 take test after test that they're not ready
22 for, that are not able to succeed at, and we
23 know it when we go in. We make them cry in
24 frustration -- and I have had kids cry,
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1 scream, yell, get up, throw tests down. We
2 ask them to reach a proficient level on
3 these standardized tests knowing that our
4 American students often aren't able to do
5 that. And then, these test scores are what
6 has labeled my school, this one I work out
7 now, the one I worked at before, every
8 school I worked at, as low performing even
9 though they are attending really truly one
10 of the best ESOL programs in the State of
11 Pennsylvania.

12 (Applause)

13 MS. BHAVNANI: If you were able to visit
14 our school, and I honestly invite you to and
15 I would be happy to give you a tour or one
16 of these guys would be proud to do that for
17 you, you would see students of all
18 nationalities, religions, political
19 persuasions with rich and varied histories
20 collaborating as they navigate this new
21 world together. You will see them
22 volunteering thousand of service hours for
23 Build On, which is in our building, and does
24 wonderful projects including taking our ESOL
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1 students to Haiti and Mali.

2 You will see them apply to, get accepted
3 by and receive scholarships at quality
4 universities all over the state that do not
5 require Keystone as one of their entrance
6 considerations. You will see ESOL students
7 working with American students in their AP
8 classes after only being here for a few
9 years. You will see students sharing their
10 culture, their lives and their academic
11 endeavors with each other and their
12 teachers. And you will see the true meaning
13 of proficiency, not one judged by the
14 Keystone but by one judged as you would
15 yourself as a sentient human being.

16 You will see those true meaning of
17 proficiency success, academic achievement
18 and social responsibility. And then you
19 will consider us to be a high performing
20 school and the students would be more than
21 proficient, they would be advanced.

22 The Keystone will not show you any of
23 that. It's only going to show you how we
24 failed as a school, they failed as students.

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1 We are now assessed and failures as teachers
2 despite gains of more than one year of
3 English movement, which is more than anyone
4 can ask for. Our students are below basic,
5 the teachers are unsatisfactory. A test
6 which robs our students of weeks of
7 instructional time in our school for
8 Keystone, it's 12 days of Keystone. That's
9 not counting the benchmarks tests all at the
10 costs of millions of dollars fully knowing
11 that the students will not be proficient.

12 I know this now. I know this before I
13 take the test. Our ESOL students are not
14 going to be proficient. A lot of our
15 special ed students are not going to be
16 proficient. The students who have been
17 ejected from the places that had the option
18 to eject students so that they can be sent
19 to the neighborhood schools, we know they
20 are not even going to show up for the test,
21 and we're still trying to get them to take
22 the test seriously because that burden is
23 now on us.

24 (Applause)
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1 MS. BHAVNANI: The cost for this year in
2 Pennsylvania to administer the PSSA and
3 Keystone test is \$58 million for the State.
4 Imagine what that money could do if you were
5 actually trying to educate the students
6 instead of showing us what we already know.

7 (Applause)

8 MS. BHAVNANI: So in closing, I just am
9 curious who I could get to come with me?
10 And anytime someone wants to tell me how
11 wonderful these tests are at measuring and
12 what information it's giving a teacher, I
13 would love to win the Powerball some day. I
14 would love to take them to Fuzhou, China.
15 And in one year I am going to give them this
16 question. And I am going to ask them if
17 they can pass this test or not. This
18 question is not even nearly what it looks
19 like on the actual test.

20 Do you think I'd have any volunteers? I
21 don't know. I'm sure that the Inquirer and
22 the Notebook, though, would love to publish
23 those scores because they don't mind
24 publishing our scores and telling us how

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1 much we are failing.

2 (Applause)

3 MS. BHAVNANI: But I hope they start
4 studying soon, because it's not easy to
5 learn this many characters by March.

6 Thank you very much for your
7 consideration.

8 (Applause)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Any questions?
10 Thank you very much.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I'm sorry. Just
12 real quick, Tiffany -- and I loved your
13 testimony. It was great.

14 MS. BHAVNANI: Thank you.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And I live right
16 around the corner from Furness. I have been
17 there several times. It's a great school.

18 MS. BHAVNANI: It is. Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Understanding what
20 goes into it and what disadvantages you have
21 with the resources that you have, now to put
22 another mandate just seems -- I don't know
23 if people live in reality when they make up
24 these things.

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1 MS. BHAVNANI: No.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: They come up with
3 these ideas of how they're going to be able
4 to benchmark and show accountability and all
5 these other not really knowing the whole
6 full picture. You just gave a full picture
7 of what life is in one school, and I think
8 that's important. I think it's something we
9 need to make sure that our District hears
10 before they decide whether to move forward
11 or not.

12 MS. BHAVNANI: I wish they would. Thank
13 you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
15 much. Whoever would like to go next, please
16 identify yourself and proceed. Thank you.

17 MS. ROBERTS: Hello. My name is Robin
18 Roberts. I'm a parent of three children in
19 Philadelphia public school. I have a son
20 who goes to high school in Engineering
21 Science and two who to Henry in Mount Airy.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Could you move
23 the mic closer, we can't hear you well.

24 MS. ROBERTS: How is that?
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1 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.

2 MS. ROBERTS: I want to thank you
3 Councilman Squilla and Council for inviting
4 me today to share some of my experience and
5 knowledge on this subject. I hope today is
6 a first step in gaining some answers and
7 providing context and clarity to this
8 discussion. Together we can see that all of
9 our students get the education that will
10 allow them the opportunity to prosper and
11 achieve their dreams and goals.

12 I'm a product of strong public schools.
13 I participated in honors classes, foreign
14 languages, played varsity sports throughout
15 the year. I played in the high school band
16 and orchestra. I was safe and secure and
17 well cared for. And we had a state test.
18 It lasted about a day, and it really wasn't
19 a big deal. My K-12 experience prepared me
20 academically, socially and emotionally
21 through college where I have earned two
22 Masters and a Doctorate degree.

23 I am now the mother of three children
24 who are in the School District of
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1 Philadelphia. By the end of today you will
2 have heard many people who know about the
3 statistics, the metrics and the global
4 impacts of this testing. I believe that
5 there needs to be a way to assess the
6 quality, efficacy and education that the
7 students are receiving and a way for
8 assisting students when that information is
9 being missed that is not punitive.

10 That process also needs to be evidenced
11 based and have a valid and reliable
12 standard. I like to spend my time to
13 present why last year I refused the test for
14 the PSSA Keystone for our children.

15 (Applause)

16 MS. ROBERTS: Last year the educational
17 environment was dismal in Philadelphia.
18 More budget shortfalls leading to more cuts
19 to essential personnel. More cuts to valued
20 programs, less concern about the safety,
21 health and welfare of our students. This
22 was also the third grade year for my son
23 Cameron.

24 Cameron is a bright, curious, active
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1 child. He has a megawatt smile, loves music
2 and arts, and he loves school. He had a
3 creative, wonderful teacher and he was also
4 surrounded by teachers who are experienced,
5 knowledgeable and observant of their
6 students.

7 Cameron, like my other two children,
8 received additional support in the lower
9 school. The programs for my older two
10 children were sponsored by the District.
11 And now both of my children are high quality
12 learners, high level students who are
13 confident problem solvers. Cameron's
14 support has been more sporadic due to
15 staffing and budget cuts. We were aware
16 that the PSSAs were happening in spring and
17 we didn't feel that he was ready to go
18 through this testing process.

19 In the past years, school that did not
20 meet AYP, Adequate Yearly Progress, received
21 additional supports. Our school received
22 parents ombudsman and additional guidance
23 counselor. Last year there were no
24 additional supports when we did not meet
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1 that standard again.

2 Students do not receive any additional
3 instruction to ensure that they learn what
4 was missed. What does happen is that some
5 kids, most of the kids, see their PSSA
6 scores as a measure of their academic
7 achievement. And many internalize their
8 scores.

9 What happens to the child who scores say
10 that they are less proficient? What do they
11 begin to think about their achievement?
12 What does it do to their self-esteem and
13 their confidence? We're talking about eight
14 and nine-year-olds here.

15 My son is just like tens of thousands of
16 the children in Philadelphia's public
17 schools. They are bright and curious and
18 active. They want to achieve, learn and be
19 smart. They want to play and laugh,
20 experiment and explore. Why does the
21 District keep our children from learning as
22 optimally as possible?

23 Meanwhile, this test is a heavily
24 weighted metric used to determine a school's

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1 success and now a teacher's strength. There
2 is little acknowledgement of the exploding
3 class sizes or the lack of personnel in ur
4 school buildings. No one seems to talk
5 about the very real effects of poverty,
6 special education needs or English-language
7 learners. No one talks about the level of
8 homelessness, food and security or violent
9 stress and anxiety that will surely affect
10 the test scores in education as a whole.
11 Yet the scores are used as ammunition to
12 science school failure, student failure and
13 teacher failure.

14 Knowing what I know now and seeing the
15 awful impact of testing used to undermine
16 quality schools, erase public schools from
17 struggling neighborhoods and lead children
18 to a desolate future, I could not continue
19 to have our family support this inhumane and
20 uneducational practice. In the days leading
21 up to our testing, our school looked very
22 different. Everything had to be taken down
23 or covered up. Awards, signs, notices,
24 bulletin boards, book shelves in classrooms

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1 and hallways were covered. Signs were
2 highlighted cooperation and respect posters
3 that were 12 feet off the ground needed to
4 be removed or covered. The only visible
5 signs were the ones identifying the
6 bathrooms and room numbers and our school
7 looked like a prison.

8 Looking at the PSSA specifically, I was
9 astonished with the amount of time dedicated
10 to administering this test. My children
11 were due to tested six days for 3rd grade,
12 nine days for 5th grade and eleven days for
13 8th grade. As I recall, between high school
14 and graduate school, I took the ACT, the
15 GRE, my professional boards and the Gmats.
16 I tested 16 hours over 12 years to gain
17 higher education and a career. It seems
18 unconscionable that the students are now
19 being tested between 12 and 25 hours a year
20 without a real purpose.

21 I decided that there was so much else
22 more to do for that time then spend it on
23 the test. I sent the superintendent my
24 letters exercising my right to opt out of
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1 the test. We picked up our children at
2 9:00 a.m. and brought them back at 11:30
3 after testing was completed. At home, we
4 home schooled them. We worked on their
5 math, their reading, their school project.
6 They researched their science fair
7 experiments. We did critical thinking and
8 logic work. We went on trips to Morris
9 Arboretum and the Franklin Institute. And
10 they also completed rather a complicated art
11 project, something that they would never be
12 able to do because art is so scarce in
13 schools now.

14 It was time very well spent, and it was
15 interesting when they returned back to
16 school most of the rest of the day was spent
17 watching movies and having snacks so the
18 kids could unwind from the stress of taking
19 the test. Only a few teachers were teaching
20 in the afternoon. This wasn't just Henry.
21 This is what I've seen and heard from many
22 schools during PSSA testing. It's a
23 colossal amount of lost school time even
24 beyond the two or three hours dedicated to
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1 testing in the morning.

2 We spend millions of dollars in a broke
3 School District on testing that could and
4 should be used to prioritize -- for
5 providing basic safety in our schools,
6 quality personnel and supplies,
7 extracurricular activities, sports clubs,
8 art, music, science kits and lab facilities
9 and the novel cultural projects and programs
10 that add value to our students education.

11 In essence, we are opting out of
12 creating the stimulating nurturing learning
13 environment that all students should have
14 access to and parents and teachers strive to
15 develop. I am glad that my children have
16 the opportunity to learn and progress in
17 their education the entire month instead of
18 testing. There is no reason to have them
19 attach any bit of self-esteem or confidence
20 to this score.

21 I look forward to more conversations
22 about the role and prominence of
23 standardized testing in our public schools.

24 I think every parent should give serious
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1 thought about the degree of testing in our
2 schools and begin to ask questions about the
3 practice that has done harm instead of good
4 to our children, our schools, and our belief
5 in learning. Thank you.

6 (Applause)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
8 much. Please identify yourself and begin.
9 Thank you.

10 MS. BROUSSARD: Hello. Thank you for
11 having me. My name is Meredith Broussard.
12 I'm a Temple professor. I'm a journalist
13 and I'm a parent. Today I would like to
14 tell you a story about what happened when I
15 tried to use data-driven decision making to
16 help repair Philadelphia public schools.

17 I failed. And the reasons why I failed
18 have everything to do with why the current
19 system of Americans standardized testing
20 will never succeed.

21 A few years ago I had -- I started
22 having trouble helping my son with his first
23 grade homework. I'm a data journalism
24 professor at Temple University. And when my
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1 son asked for help on a worksheet one day, I
2 ran into an epistemological problem. My own
3 general knowledge and the internet told me
4 that there were many possible correct
5 answers. However, only one of these answers
6 would get him full credit on the assignment.
7 I need to write down natural resources, he
8 told me. Air, water, oil, gas, coal I
9 replied. I already put down air and water,
10 he said. Oil and gas and coal aren't
11 natural resources. Of course, they are, I
12 said. They are nonrenewable natural
13 resources, but they are still natural
14 resources. But they weren't on the list the
15 teacher gave in class, he said.

16 I knew my son would start taking
17 standardized tests in third grade. If the
18 first grade homework was this confusing, I
19 was really worried about he or how any kid
20 was supposed to figure out the tests. I'd
21 been spending time with civic hackers, the
22 kind of people that build software and
23 crunch government data for fun. And I
24 decided to see if I could come up with a

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1 best the test strategy derived from a
2 popular SAT prep course that I used to
3 teach. In essence, I tried to game the
4 third grade PSSA.

5 Along with a team of professional
6 software developers, I designed artificial
7 intelligence software to crunch the
8 available data. I talked to teachers. I
9 talked to students. I visited schools, and
10 I sat through School Reform Commission
11 meetings. After six months of this, I
12 discovered that the test can be gamed. Not
13 by using a beat-the-test strategy, but by a
14 shockingly low tech strategy: Reading the
15 textbook that contains the answers.

16 This is because standardized tests are
17 not based on general knowledge. As I
18 learned in the course of my investigation,
19 they are based on specific knowledge
20 contained in specific sets of books, the
21 textbooks created by the test makers.

22 (Applause)

23 MS. BROUSSARD: All of this has to do
24 with the economics and logistics of
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1 standardized testing. Across the nation,
2 standardized tests come from one of three
3 companies: CTB McGraw Hill, Houghton
4 Mifflin Harcourt or Pearson. These
5 corporations write the tests, grade the
6 tests and publish the books the students use
7 to prepare for the tests. Houghton Mifflin
8 has a 38 percent market share according to
9 its press materials. In 2013, the company
10 brought in 1.38 billion in revenue.

11 Pennsylvania currently contracts with a
12 company called Data Recognition Corporation
13 to grade the PSSAs. DRC is partnered with
14 McGraw Hill as part of a consortium managing
15 \$186 million federal contract to write and
16 grade standardized tests for the entire
17 country. McGraw Hill also publishes a best
18 selling curriculum called Everyday Math,
19 which is the required curriculum in grades K
20 through 5 at most Philadelphia public
21 schools.

22 Put simply, any teacher who wants his or
23 her students to pass the tests, has to give
24 out books from the big three publishers. If
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1 you look at a textbook from one of these
2 companies and look at the standardized tests
3 written by the same company, even a third
4 grader can see that many of the questions on
5 the tests are similar to the questions in
6 the book. In fact, Pearson came under fire
7 last year for using a passage on a
8 standardized test that was taken verbatim
9 from a Pearson textbook.

10 However, most Philadelphia schools and
11 most schools in other large cities don't
12 have enough money to buy these books. My
13 calculations show that the average
14 Philadelphia school had only 27 percent of
15 the books required to teach its curriculum
16 in 2013. And it would have cost \$68 million
17 more to pay for all the books that schools
18 needed then.

19 Because the School District doesn't
20 collect comprehensive data on its textbook
21 use, this calculation could be an
22 overestimate. But more likely, it's an
23 significant underestimate.

24 Consider the 8th grade at Tilden Middle
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1 School in Southwest Philadelphia. District
2 records show that in 2013, Tilden had only
3 42 of the required 8th grade reading
4 textbooks for 117 students. Those students
5 largely failed the State's standardized
6 tests. Their average reading score was
7 29.4 percent compared with 57.9 percent
8 district-wide. One problem is that no one
9 is keeping track of what these students need
10 and what they actually have. Another
11 problem is that there is simply too little
12 money in the education budget.

13 The Tilden 8th grade reading textbook
14 Elements of Literature, cost \$114.75.
15 However, Tilden and all the other middle
16 schools were only allocated \$30.30 per
17 student to buy books that year. That amount
18 which was barely a quarter of the price of
19 one textbook was supposed to cover every
20 subject not just one. At the end of the
21 2013 school year, the book budget was
22 eliminated altogether.

23 Philadelphia schools were allocated \$0
24 per student for textbooks in 2014. The book
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1 budget is also \$0 per student for the
2 current school year. It may be many years
3 before Philadelphia's education budget
4 matches its curriculum requirements. In the
5 mean time there are few things that the
6 District and other flailing School Districts
7 in America can do. Stop giving standardized
8 tests that are inextricably tied to specific
9 sets of books.

10 (Applause)

11 MS. BROUSSARD: At the very least, stop
12 using test scores to evaluate teacher
13 performance without providing the items that
14 each teacher needs to do his or her job.
15 And most of all, avoid basing an entire
16 education system on material so costly that
17 big urban districts can't afford to buy
18 them.

19 (Applause)

20 MS. BROUSSARD: Until these things
21 change, it will be impossible to raise
22 standardized test scores despite the best
23 efforts of the teachers and students who
24 return to school this fall and found no new
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1 books waiting for them.

2 Thank you.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Councilman Oh.

4 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very much. I
5 do appreciate all of your testimony, and I
6 think that at least what has been made clear
7 is that we all share concern about
8 over-testing or focusing education on
9 testing rather than learning.

10 I will say on my part I do believe that
11 there is a valuable role of having a test
12 and even best practices and best school --
13 public school systems do take the PSIA, for
14 example. But I would say that what
15 standardized tests do show beyond, for
16 example, simply saying that a student
17 performs poorly or that a teacher performs
18 poorly or that a school system performs
19 poorly, it also shows that if a society does
20 not invest in education to the extent it
21 should -- and we can then compare for
22 example Philadelphia or the U.S. to other
23 countries that are doing quite well -- the
24 amount of money and importance that they are

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1 putting on education far outstrips what we
2 are doing.

3 I think that a part of standardized
4 testing when we are failing can also reflect
5 that our society or our community needs to
6 put more as much as other successful
7 societies, and that could be very positively
8 helpful for all of us to actually create a
9 better education system.

10 Thank you.

11 MS. ROBERTS: Can I just comment?

12 COUNCILMAN OH: Sure.

13 MS. ROBERTS: I appreciate what you have
14 said. And I agree with you. There needs to
15 be some way to make sure that we are not
16 failing as a society. But what the
17 standardized tests don't do and what the
18 manufacturers don't go back and figure out,
19 not even our district does, is why the kids
20 are not doing as well.

21 You are not going to Furness and saying
22 it's 57 percent English-language learners
23 here. It's that difficult. The data is not
24 being followed when it comes to the
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1 purveyors of these tests. When we give the
2 tests to our children, we are assuming that
3 everyone is on a level field and they're
4 not. We have got third graders that cannot
5 read. We have got teachers that are
6 teaching math a whole different way than
7 even the parents know how to do it.

8 So, how is it that we're supposed to
9 help our children achieve? I completely
10 understand. I want America to be the
11 forefront -- at the forefront of education
12 and be the leader of the world. But you
13 have to look at why other countries are
14 ahead of us. Why is Finland ahead of us?
15 Why is China ahead of us? Because some of
16 these societies choose not to educate all of
17 their eligible students. They chose to have
18 them learn different things.

19 So, or are we comparing apples to
20 apples? Are we negating some of the best
21 practices of other countries because it's
22 more expensive to do it that way? I mean,
23 we really have to look at the whole picture.
24 It's not about doing well on a standardized

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1 test. It's really -- we have to focus on
2 why other countries are doing better, why
3 certain students are doing better. What we
4 are really finding out is the test doesn't
5 tell what the children know. It tells what
6 level of income they come from.

7 (Applause)

8 COUNCILMAN OH: Well, I do appreciate
9 your -- we may disagree you and I. What I
10 will say is this. That in Finland, they
11 have a high quality of teaching nationwide,
12 one system nationwide. And if there is a
13 teacher that has a student that has a
14 language need, a additional teacher is
15 brought into the classroom. And they spend
16 a lot of money on education.

17 And what the standardized test has shown
18 is that when you have poor performance, you
19 need more resources. And that more
20 resources and more money will produce better
21 results. We may not be disagreeing at the
22 end of the day. What I'm simply saying is
23 that we have standardized tests. And I'm
24 not advocating that we don't take any of
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1 them. But what I do think is that we can
2 use the information in a way that will
3 provide us with the ability to put more
4 resources where they're needed in a wiser
5 and smarter manner.

6 MS. BROUSSARD: Let me also say that we
7 have talked a lot about teaching to the
8 test. But the flipside of that is that you
9 have to test what you teach.

10 And so, one of the problems is that our
11 standardized tests because they are
12 developed by company and then just given to
13 teachers, they don't match up with what
14 teachers are doing in the classroom. And
15 it's actually impossible to design a test
16 that is going to work for every single child
17 in America. I mean, it's just impossible.

18 As an educator, I mean, I think about
19 this a lot because I write tests for my
20 students. And I test them on the material
21 that we have covered in the class. And it
22 wouldn't be fair to test them on material
23 that I had not covered in the class.

24 (Applause)
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1 MS. BROUSSARD: So, that's the
2 disconnect that is happening here. And
3 that's kind of why -- that's one of the
4 reasons why I started with this project in
5 the first place. Because I -- I never
6 really minded taking standardized tests when
7 I was a kid. I grew up in the era before
8 the current era of standardized testing.
9 And the standardized tests were -- they were
10 fine. They were easier than regular classes
11 for me. And so, I wondered what would it
12 take if I were a kid now if I actually
13 wanted to pass these tests, could I? And
14 the answer was no. I could -- I did not.

15 If I were a kid in the Philadelphia
16 public school, I would not actually have the
17 resources to get educated or to educate
18 myself according to the common core state
19 standards using the materials available in
20 the school. So, I could not pass the test.

21 COUNCILMAN OH: Sure. But what that has
22 pointed out I think is that Philadelphia
23 does not have enough resources. Without
24 that test, we can't go to the State and say

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1 we don't have the resources. We don't have
2 the books. We don't have the technology.
3 I'm not just defying the test.

4 What I'm saying is that I'm not sure if
5 what you're saying is that we shouldn't have
6 any tests until -- I don't think that's what
7 you're saying. But what I'm trying to
8 understand is while I think we agree about
9 not over-testing, that what I find from
10 standardized tests guides, for example, or
11 should guide the State of Pennsylvania
12 particularly since we don't do the budget
13 here, that we need more funds, more
14 technology, more resources in order to
15 educate. And when we find schools like
16 Furness with 57 percent, that they need
17 additional supports, more English language
18 and other things so that they can reach a
19 level of achievement appropriate for the
20 people of the students that they find in
21 their classroom.

22 Anyway, that might be a kind of
23 philosophical discussion. I don't know.
24 But I know you're going to say something, so
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1 please do.

2 MS. BHAVNANI: I really want to say one
3 thing because it's been touched on the level
4 of poverty that we are talking about with
5 our children, but I don't think it's a
6 reality to people when in a room like this,
7 the level of poverty we're talking about.
8 We have students that come to school for the
9 free breakfast and lunch and only that. I
10 have students that I regularly buy clothes
11 for that I help out in ways that every other
12 teacher I know does the same thing.

13 When we're talking about poverty, give
14 the test. If you want a standardized test,
15 that's fine. Give 1, not 12 days. Give a
16 test. And then when you hold them up to
17 Finland, look at Finland's child poverty
18 rate.

19 (Applause)

20 - - -

21 MS. BHAVNANI: I'm not exaggerating. I
22 am not exaggerating when I tell you that
23 some of my students that came from refugee
24 camps in Thailand and in the Bhutanese camps
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1 in Nepal had it slightly better than some of
2 my American students in this country. And
3 that's a shame and that's a blight on us as
4 a nation.

5 COUNCILMAN OH: Sure.

6 MS. BHAVNANI: It is a poverty question.
7 It is not a standardized testing question or
8 the cost of standardized testing question.
9 Everything that we have mentioned and we
10 have talked about today, all of it traces
11 back to poverty. There are oodles of
12 research, and I have it for a handout for
13 you, some of it. It is directly correlated
14 to the education and the income of the
15 parents, their performance on standardized
16 tests. That's a fact.

17 If you want to raise standardized test
18 scores in Philadelphia or anywhere else,
19 raise their income, raise their education of
20 their parents, give them vocabulary beyond
21 what we can -- we need reading specialists.
22 We don't have any.

23 COUNCILMAN OH: Right.

24 MS. BHAVNANI: Our kids are coming
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1 illiterate in 9th grade. You want us to not
2 graduate them, I understand that. You don't
3 want to give a 12th grader a diploma who
4 can't read. But is it fair to say, no, you
5 can't graduate when the society failed them?
6 I don't think so. I don't think that the
7 answer is to not graduate them using the
8 Keystone data. I don't think that's the
9 answer.

10 COUNCILMAN OH: Well, I don't disagree
11 with you. But I will say because I find it
12 interesting when people have something to
13 say about Finland, which is doing a great
14 job, Finland was a very poor country with no
15 natural resources and extensive poverty.
16 What has gotten them out of poverty has been
17 a commitment to a good public education
18 system. If anything, Finland would be a
19 good example of what we should be doing.
20 Not an exact system, but the level of
21 commitment to public education.

22 And that's been true of pretty much the
23 other systems that the societies and the
24 nations have said public education is a

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1 priority for our country. And I think we
2 should do that here in Philadelphia.

3 MS. BHAVNANI: I agree. I think we all
4 agree.

5 COUNCILMAN OH: All right. Thank you
6 very much.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
8 much, ladies. Thank you. Thank you for
9 your patience. We see Helen gym there.
10 Thank you for your work in this area, in the
11 area of education.

12 All right. Whoever would like to begin
13 please begin so we can move forward.

14 MS. VHAN: Hi, everyone. My name is
15 Vhan. I am a senior at Academy of Palumbo.
16 I came here six years from Vietnam. I am
17 part of the Chinese Youth Organizing
18 Project, a youth program under Asian
19 American United.

20 Beginning in March, decided to interview
21 110 Chinese immigrant students from
22 different high schools across the City.
23 Some have been living here for as short as
24 four months -- about the experience,
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1 including the experience with the Keystone
2 Exams. We find that many students were not
3 told what the Keystone Exams were, what its
4 purpose is and consequences were. Some
5 students do not understand the right of the
6 immigrant student and therefore did not
7 inform any of the students about their right
8 for full range of accommodations, which
9 include a word-to-word translation
10 dictionaries, a qualified interpreter or a
11 sight translator in Standard English
12 Keystone Algebra I and Biology exam.

13 A 9th grade student from Furness High
14 School say the first time she took the test
15 was when she only been in the U.S. for just
16 three months. She did not know that she had
17 to take the exam until a couple days before
18 the exam through a friend of her who speak
19 Chinese.

20 None of the students reported having a
21 qualified interpreter at their test site.
22 Some were not even given the option of
23 having approved dictionary. Even those who
24 had the translation device did not help them

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1 on the exam. One of the sophomore from
2 South Philadelphia High School who came to
3 the U.S. less than two years say dictionary
4 was useless because it took a long time to
5 look up one word and need to understand the
6 meaning of the -- after translation.

7 For example, it took about 20 minutes to
8 look up five words. What inadequate
9 accommodations many students reported
10 spending as little as half an hour on the
11 exam while others spend ten or more hours on
12 each exam. No break, no lunch time, only
13 candies say a senior at Constitution High
14 School.

15 A lot of the student we interviewed also
16 experience many material on the test they
17 never learned before. Many interviewed also
18 say they had a negative experience with the
19 Keystone Exams and are worried about how
20 Keystone Exams will affect their graduation.
21 If I fail this test, can not graduate, then
22 where is my future. A sophomore from South
23 Philadelphia High School asked, if I cannot
24 pass, why do I need to study? Why do I need
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1 to go to school.

2 According to the School District of
3 Philadelphia, 84 percent of immigrant
4 students failed Algebra I Keystone Exam.
5 90 percent failed Literature Keystone Exam.
6 And 97 percent failed Biology exam. Out of
7 every 10 immigrant students you see, at
8 least 8 of them did not pass the exam.

9 These are serious statistics, but our
10 life are not just numbers. We live this
11 every day. And you do not figure our
12 solution -- a solution for us. With the
13 recent budget cut and such limited resource,
14 student and staff member are expected to do
15 more than ever before to be successful on
16 these exam. But it is not only a matter of
17 success or failure on this test, but a
18 matter of whether or not student will be
19 able to graduate two years from now.

20 I asked leaders in our City to urge the
21 State government and the School District
22 leader to seriously look into the impact of
23 the Keystone test and come up with a plan
24 for both immigrant and nonimmigrants to
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1 graduate from high school.

2 Thank you.

3 (Applause)

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you for your
5 testimony. State your name for the record
6 and continue with your testimony.

7 MR. SOLIN: My name is Solin. I'm with
8 Asian American United. I'll be interpreting
9 for the student Shihong, the student who is
10 speaking today.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

12 (Begins interpreting)

13 MR. SHIHONG: My name is Shihong. I am
14 a sophomore at Furness High School. I've
15 been in US for two and a half years. And
16 I'm ELL, English Language Learning, student.
17 I took Algebra I and Biology in my first
18 time Keystone test.

19 I didn't know anything about Keystone
20 test until my friend told me that we cannot
21 graduate if we don't pass it. No school
22 teacher or school staff told me or sent me
23 letters about the Keystone test.

24 I treating the Keystone test very
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1 seriously. It took my nearly seven hours to
2 take Algebra I. And when I took it, I
3 answer all the questions I understood. But
4 there are many questions I cannot understand
5 due to language barrier including applied
6 questions and most of multiple choice
7 questions.

8 The school provided dictionary, but it's
9 not really helpful. The dictionary is
10 word-to-word dictionary with very limited
11 vocabulary. Many vocabulary were not
12 available in the dictionary. I felt
13 helpless when I took the test. The
14 dictionary wasn't helpful. I didn't
15 understand the questions and nobody was
16 there to help me. I feel like the test was
17 really unfair because immigrant students
18 were not given adequate language
19 accommodations.

20 I didn't pass Algebra I not because I
21 didn't know how to solve problem, it was
22 because of language barrier, a problem
23 immigrants students always face. I have two
24 friends who had a similar experience as

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1 mine. They had only been in the U.S. for
2 five months when they had to take the test.
3 They didn't get any help except for the
4 dictionary. However, the dictionary was not
5 really helpful due to the reasons I stated
6 earlier. They didn't have time to study for
7 the test either. How could we expect these
8 students who have only been in this country
9 for five months to pass the test without
10 much help.

11 I also took Biology in the Keystone
12 test. I knew I wouldn't pass Biology before
13 even I took it because Biology is much more
14 difficult. I only took Biology class for a
15 few months before this test. During the
16 test, I found that many questions were
17 related to the content I had not yet
18 learned. It was hard for me to understand
19 the content in English anyway. I didn't
20 understand 95 percent of the content.

21 Dictionary was not helpful. Many
22 vocabularies were not found in the
23 dictionary. It took ten minutes to find two
24 to three words. Even if I understood a few
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1 words in English, it was hard for me to
2 understand the question. After half an hour
3 on the test, I gave up and took a nap like
4 other students in the class. I didn't know
5 what else to do. How could you expect me to
6 pass a test that I was not taught or able to
7 understand?

8 I feel like this test is really unfair.
9 There wasn't any help, any tutoring before
10 the Keystone test. Our school didn't have
11 much resource to begin with. We didn't even
12 have enough school supplies for all the
13 students. During the test, no sufficient
14 language accommodations were provided.
15 That's why I think in the Keystone test are
16 very unfair for immigrant students. Many
17 non-ELL students didn't even pass the
18 Keystone test. How could you expect ELL
19 students to pass?

20 If we can't pass the test and won't be
21 able to graduate, where is our future? I
22 hope the School District and the leaders
23 responsible for the Keystone test try to
24 understand how immigrant students feel. I

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1 hope that the leaders in the school -- in a
2 School District and leaders responsible for
3 the Keystone test are accountable to every
4 student.

5 Thank you.

6 (Applause)

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
9 much. We note that in '01 we created the
10 Mayor's Commission on African and Caribbean
11 Immigrant Affairs. And 15 years ago, Echos
12 of Africa. We get it from all immigrants.
13 We represent 35 countries there and meet
14 every second Wednesday. And so, we
15 understand from many immigrants who are here
16 who aren't able to understand and pass these
17 tests.

18 Helen.

19 MS. GYM: I just wanted to be very
20 quick. Helen Gym with Asian Americans
21 United. And I want to thank Council,
22 Councilman Squilla, Councilwoman Blackwell.
23 I want to thank APPS, the Alliance for
24 Philadelphia Public Schools for encouraging
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1 this hearing and for everyone who is in the
2 room today.

3 Really couple of quick points. There
4 are 12,000 English-language learners
5 throughout the School District of
6 Philadelphia, 9 percent of the population
7 and growing. If there is one place in which
8 charters, privatization and choice have not
9 served, it would be among them English
10 language learners, special need students.
11 This is where our public schools matter.

12 The second thing is that Shihong and
13 others took the Keystone Exams for the very
14 first time in May. He was just informed at
15 a meeting with the School District that he
16 had on Monday that he would be taking the
17 Keystone Exam again in January, but that had
18 never been informed to any of the students.
19 But the students effectively failed in May
20 would have to take the exam again in
21 January.

22 What needs to be made very clear to
23 everybody in the room is that nothing has
24 happened between May and January to help
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1 address this situation. There have been no
2 supplemental education forms. There has
3 been no notification to Shihong or his
4 family or other members that this is a
5 serious situation for them. Instead, you
6 know, we appreciate the School District of
7 Philadelphia's staff person who is here
8 Mr. Shafer, but he said it was a
9 participatory exam. Seven hours is not a
10 participatory exam. Retaking the test in
11 January for another seven hours is not going
12 to be a participatory exam.

13 This has direct immediate impact on
14 students learning right now. It's ongoing,
15 and it has consequences. They are regressed
16 out of their traditional ways of -- you
17 know, a traditional pathway for learning.
18 There is also no other metric for
19 graduation. When they talk about that there
20 can be other metrics for English language
21 learners, if you have mandatory graduation
22 exam, you must pass all three graduation
23 exams. There is a 97 percent failure rate
24 for ELLs in the Biology exam. That means
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1 there will be a 3 percent graduation rate.

2 There is no other metric that they can
3 use to offset that unless there is a waiver
4 that we would be partnering with. You know,
5 obviously we had a meeting with the School
6 District of Philadelphia. We know that
7 there was a huge push around the teachers
8 contract, 15 million of it allegedly "went
9 back" to schools. But we were told at the
10 meeting with the School District that the
11 next set of \$15 million will go towards
12 remediation of the Keystone.

13 And I don't think that that's where we
14 wanted money to go. We don't want the money
15 to go into remediation of a ridiculous test.
16 Whose ridiculousness is only emphasized by
17 what is happening with ELL students and it's
18 certainly ridiculous across the Board. But
19 the School District is actively talking
20 about \$15 million towards remediation
21 instead of \$15 million towards counselors,
22 towards nurses, towards what we actually
23 need.

24 Then the final statement that I will
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1 make is as you can tell today, the tests are
2 not something that the School District of
3 Philadelphia will be our advocate on. We
4 think that they are in the right place, but
5 because they are a state takeover district,
6 they will be incapable of being the
7 appropriate advocate for young people. And
8 that is in part why we appreciate the
9 audience that you give us today. That City
10 Council leaders, that civic leaders and that
11 the City of Philadelphia really needs to be
12 a vocal standup organization and community
13 that's going to carry this to the State
14 level and other ways.

15 The School District is incapable of
16 being that vehicle for us even if they
17 should be. They're a state takeover agency.
18 They are not going to do it. So, I
19 appreciate everything that you have done. I
20 appreciate this hearing. Thank you to all
21 the advocates. And our report will be
22 available publicly to everybody, as well.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
24 much.

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1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you, Madam
2 Chair. And I want to say, I want to thank
3 everybody for testifying but especially the
4 students. How important it is to hear what
5 you have to go through and realizing how
6 this was not thought out all the way, and
7 how the District who says they want to do it
8 do not have the resources to even help them
9 when they fail. It's just a lose-lose
10 situation that we have here with the
11 Keystone.

12 So, I'm hoping that we can partner with
13 the District. That we need to work
14 together. We need to understand that they
15 have to be -- they can't say, yeah, they
16 want to do it and then us going to the State
17 and say we don't want them to do it. We
18 need to partner with them. If we send two
19 different messages, it won't get done.

20 We need your advocacy. We need the
21 students, teachers, parents, Council and the
22 District to all work together hopefully in
23 the same direction to make this happen.

24 Thank you.
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1 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you. And
2 what a way. There's so much we need in the
3 School District, but to spend the money this
4 way, uhh, unconscionable. Thank you very
5 much.

6 Mark Miller, Network for Public
7 Education, Centennial School Board; Larry
8 Feinberg, Haverford School District,
9 Keystone State Education Committee; Agustin
10 Moroles, President Holyoke Teachers
11 Association; Josh Kershenbaum, Special
12 Education Lawyer. After that, it's only one
13 panel.

14 We'll bring everybody up. That is Susan
15 Gobreski, our friend, Education Voters, PA;
16 Dr. Yohuru Williams, professor from
17 Fairfield University; Elliot Seif; Daun
18 Kauffman; Julian Graham and I saw PD Brown
19 leave. Also, Inez Reyes of Community
20 Activist. That should be all of us.

21 If somebody else wants to testify, just
22 let Chris know on my left side and we'll
23 allow you to testify. That should be
24 everyone.

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1 All right. Thank you for your patience.
2 Feel free in any order.

3 MR. MILLER: I'm Mark Miller. I'm
4 Director of the Network for Public
5 Education.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

7 MR. MILLER: Vice President of
8 Pennsylvania School Board Association and
9 elected school board member in Bucks County,
10 Pennsylvania.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.

12 MR. MILLER: Apologize for my colleague
13 Larry Feinberg, he had another commitment,
14 as do I. I'll pay for it later. But thank
15 you.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We appreciate you
17 hanging in there.

18 MR. MILLER: Someone was going to get me
19 a clicker for the PowerPoint. While we're
20 waiting, I was impressed with the group from
21 Furness High School, particularly because my
22 father taught at Furness Junior High School
23 from the time I met him in 1950 right
24 through 1968.

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1 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: That's
2 wonderful.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Does someone else
4 want to start and testify while.

5 MR. MILLER: I can start testifying. I
6 was going to say, they don't have teachers
7 from Finland.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: They don't have
9 what?

10 MR. MILLER: Teachers from Finland.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Oh, okay.

12 MR. MILLER: I think you've heard enough
13 about notes I left behind on how this gets
14 started. I am going to jump right into
15 this. I was asked to get this down to five
16 minutes. And, you know, we couldn't scratch
17 the surface in five hours.

18 (Begins presentation with PowerPoint)

19 So plain and simple, you do not need a
20 test to know that this cow is smart. Middle
21 of the winter, the cow found a way to get
22 warm. Judging by the car, the cow also has
23 good tastes. This is what an experienced
24 teacher can do with a student. An
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1 experienced teacher can determine through
2 observation whether or not a student is
3 smart or needs help. I'm going to come back
4 to this one or time two times through my
5 presentation.

6 What is the purpose of these tests?

7 Tests should be diagnostic. These are not.
8 Tests should help the teacher figure out
9 where students are in their learning. Those
10 states, the teachers never get to see the
11 actual results of the test. All they get to
12 see is the score. These tests are used to
13 determine in some cases what other tests
14 they should take.

15 And the Councilman was very good in
16 questioning the representative from
17 Philadelphia about Keystone exams and
18 benchmark tests. Why do we need tests to
19 determine where we are on the test? Do
20 these tests promote skills our children and
21 economy need? No, they do not. The most
22 popular form of tests today are multiple
23 choice tests. These do not allow you to
24 gauge where a student is on creative

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1 thinking. All they tell you is whether or
2 not the student knows the answer.

3 President of the Network for Public
4 Education is Diane Ravitch. She did 180
5 degree turnaround on No Child Left Behind.
6 And she is also founder of Network for
7 Public Education. She will tell you Bill
8 Gates is wrong. American education is not
9 broken, neither is Philadelphia education.
10 Education policy is broken. Testing
11 children until they cry is a bad idea. It's
12 educational malpractice.

13 Her questions is, are these tests being
14 given to children who are too young?
15 Absolutely. Children are taking these tests
16 and again, Network for Public Education is a
17 national foundation. So, I'm talking about
18 things that happen all over the country.

19 Children in Chicago in kindergarten
20 unable to read, unable to write, don't know
21 how to use a pencil properly, get four sets
22 of standardized tests a year every 90 days.
23 We have Arnie Duncan. Arnie Duncan wants to
24 be able to tell children by the time in 2nd
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1 grade, if they are in 2nd grade, whether or
2 not they are going to go to a good school or
3 not. And he just lost his sidekick Michelle
4 Ree. This is cover of Newsweek Magazine
5 back in 2010 when she was pushing for
6 testing so hard and putting the penalty so
7 high that teachers were forced to change
8 answers to tests. I don't know how she
9 skated being indicted herself. But look
10 what happened in Philadelphia with
11 administrators being brought up on charges
12 for falsifying test results.

13 She is done fighting. And she just
14 recently joined the board of Scotts Miracle
15 Grow Fertilizing company, so I guess she's
16 not done spreading manure.

17 Again, what is the purpose of these
18 tests? Teachers do not get to see how a
19 specific student answers a specific
20 question. They represent a score, they
21 don't represent teaching.

22 The quality of these tests are suspect.
23 I don't know if you heard the story of the
24 hare and the pineapple. This was a question
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1 on the standardized test in New York. The
2 premise is ridiculous. This is a mystical
3 forests where animals can talk, fruits and
4 vegetables can talk. Pineapple challenges a
5 hare to a race. I am going to skip all the
6 pertinent facts but the moral of the story
7 is, while they -- the hare thought the
8 pineapple had something up its sleeves. The
9 moral of the story is, pineapples don't have
10 sleeves.

11 The entire Board or Regents could not
12 answer the test question satisfactorily.
13 They finally pulled it from the test. How
14 much money does it cost? Councilman, you
15 asked that question and you asked it
16 appropriately. We will never know. I can
17 tell you that for the \$201 million, the
18 State that you heard Representative Roebuck
19 testify to that has put into testing, that's
20 just the State's portion. Every School
21 District, all 500 School Districts have to
22 pay to support these tests.

23 My school district, a lot smaller than
24 the School District of Philadelphia spends
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1 \$600,000 a year just to administer and
2 report the results of the tests.

3 Are there conflicts of interest in the
4 testing policy? You have very good
5 testimony. I'm not going to get into that
6 again. Pearson, McGraw Hill, Harcourt, they
7 are making all the money. How good are the
8 tests? We covered that. They're not good.

9 This is a letter from Pearson Education
10 explaining to the Board of Regents in New
11 York after they removed the hare and the
12 pineapple question as to why they should
13 leave it in. Councilman, you asked another
14 good question. Who grades these tests?
15 They're cheap to grade. Pearson would love
16 to be able to give these tests out because
17 this is who they have grading them. (Refers
18 to Powerpoint picture.)

19 Are the tests culturally biased? Of
20 course, they are. These are standardized
21 tests. Your last panel explained to you how
22 difficult it is for them. You have to take
23 the Keystone Exams one year and one day
24 after you start in the School District. I
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1 was always curious why did they say one year
2 and one day. But it made sense to me when
3 somebody was explaining we give them more
4 than a year to be prepared for the test.

5 My School District has 41 different
6 languages we support. Of course, a
7 culturally biased test is going to be
8 different for a student who can't read the
9 language. It doesn't just go to culture.
10 Students with disabilities are also
11 affected. There is a case on the books from
12 two years ago in Florida where they tried to
13 force a student in a hospice in his last
14 days to take a test because they wanted to
15 know what the score was. True story.

16 You cannot give the same test to every
17 student. One size does not fit all. The
18 purpose of the test, these tests enrich
19 private enterprise. These are all the
20 things that these tests do not measure.
21 Only a teacher in a classroom can measure
22 what the student is capable of producing.
23 The real cost, Councilman, is the
24 opportunity costs for what we could be

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1 teaching our students instead of testing
2 them.

3 Does testing harm teaching? Of course
4 it does. Teachers used to be able to teach
5 this much in the classroom. Now because of
6 all the time they lose to testing, we are
7 down to this much (refers to slide).

8 Was it legal for the U.S. Department of
9 Education to do this? This is where the
10 national opinion comes in. Of course, it's
11 not. They forced states into compliance
12 through games like Race To The Top. Race To
13 The Top did not create ten states who are
14 winners. Race To the Top created 40 states
15 who are losers. Testing is not teaching.

16 Here is something that does work. You
17 may have seen this game when you were
18 younger. It's been made in electronic game
19 now. This game is used for practice and
20 immediate feedback of math skills.

21 Repetition works. Immediate feedback works.
22 You should have solved this by now right
23 because seven -- eight minus seven is 1 3
24 times 8 is 24, 1 times 24 is 24. Student
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1 already knows the answer. Student has a
2 minute in the electronic version to finish
3 the test and they get immediate feedback
4 whether or not they were able to solve it.
5 If they're not, the teacher is able to say
6 well, how did you try to solve it. Here is
7 the answer.

8 Cleveland uses -- first in math, the
9 electronic version of the game 24. Blue bar
10 shows the improvement in one year first year
11 they used the test. Little closer to home,
12 Pittsburgh. I asked the maker of the game
13 because they are working with us at PSPA.
14 We've been able to come up with funding for
15 a hundred thousand licenses across the
16 state. I said, does School District of
17 Philadelphia use the test? I'm going there.
18 Can you give me some data.

19 From 2000 to 2011, this is a pattern of
20 growth of test scores, the PSSA for math,
21 for students who are using a real method. I
22 don't have data for this year because
23 funding was not available for this. It's
24 going into testing.

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1 Rita Pearson to her dying day was an
2 advocate for public education. Probably the
3 first bad ass teacher there was before
4 anybody knew what they were. I put a
5 picture in here because I want to thank you.
6 Network For Public Education has been
7 fighting for congressional hearings on these
8 tests. You started it here. We are going
9 to try to take it across the country.

10 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you from
11 Network For Public Education. Everybody
12 stand up for public education.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

15 MR. KERSHENBAUM: Good evening.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good evening.

17 MR. KERSHENBAUM: My name is Josh
18 Kershenbaum. I am an attorney. I represent
19 children and parents mostly in matters
20 having to do with educational law, mostly to
21 do with special education law in particular.

22 I'm a parent of a public school student,
23 a former public elementary school teacher,
24 also a product of the New York City public
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1 schools myself. I have nothing to say about
2 Central High School at all.

3 MR. MILLER: I went there.

4 MR. KERSHENBAUM: I also am a former
5 adjunct professor at Temple Law School
6 teaching Special Education Law. One of my
7 jobs as a lawyer is to try to make
8 complicated and confusing things more
9 accessible. It would be nice if the lawyers
10 who wrote the laws didn't make them so
11 confusing in the first place. If they
12 didn't, most of us would be out of work and
13 you would be out of jokes.

14 Here is my attempt at translating this
15 law into something we can all get with.
16 Imagine we adults are standing on a ship in
17 the ocean and all of our children are
18 floating around in the water. Some are
19 treading water, others are swimming to the
20 boat, others are drowning.

21 How did they get in the water you ask?
22 Well, we pushed them in when they were
23 around seven years old. Why did we do that?
24 Because kids need to learn how to swim if

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1 they are going to survive in this cruel
2 world whether adults push their children
3 into water. But we are not monsters. On
4 the boats we have life jackets, lots of
5 them, maybe even enough for every kid. Just
6 to make sure it's fair, we have made sure
7 that all of the life jackets are exactly the
8 same size. What size? Average size, of
9 course, all of them. Why? Because we
10 believe in equality.

11 So, we begin throwing these life jackets
12 into the water but just out of reach to
13 almost all of the children. Swim, we tell
14 them, swim to the life jackets. For we know
15 that without one almost all of you will
16 drown. And yet we also know that it is
17 important for your character that did not
18 make it too easy for you to get to them.

19 Now we also know, though we don't really
20 like to think about it, that even if all of
21 them manage to get a life jacket, many will
22 find that it does not fit them. They won't
23 know how to put it on. So those "odd kids"
24 will be far more likely to drown than the

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1 average ones even if they do manage to get
2 one after several failed attempts.

3 We also know that many of the kids, the
4 ones who were furthest from the boat, will
5 have to swim much further than the others to
6 get the same life jacket. How come some of
7 the kids are further from the boat we ask?
8 Shame on us for asking, because we put them
9 there.

10 There isn't a person in this room who
11 thinks this is fair, but this is exactly
12 what our laws are doing from the United
13 States Constitution on down to the
14 Pennsylvania Education Code. And the sad
15 thing is we think we're doing this in the
16 name of equality and equal opportunity.

17 Our great Constitution is silent. The
18 words school and education appear nowhere in
19 it. And our federal courts have noticed
20 that all too well. You might be surprised,
21 as surprised and horrified as I was when I
22 first learned in law school that there is no
23 federal constitutional right to education in
24 this country. States could, if they wanted,
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1 simply not educate our children at all. In
2 fact, it's what many of them are doing.

3 The best we get from our Constitution is
4 the requirement that if states do choose to
5 educate our children, they cannot do it in a
6 way that discriminates based on certain
7 sacred categories: religion, race, sex,
8 national origin, disability. Even with
9 regard to the sacred categories, the
10 Constitution only really forbids intentional
11 discrimination which is almost impossible to
12 prove, or unintentional discrimination that
13 has a disparate impact on protected class,
14 even closer to impossible to prove.

15 So if you're thinking the Constitution
16 will save our drowning children, think
17 again. It is, at best, a distant lighthouse
18 that needs four new bulbs, maybe five if
19 Justice Kennedy is having a bad day. Help
20 will not come from the Federal Government on
21 this issue. It will come from us or will
22 come not at all.

23 Unfortunately, right here right now our
24 law is a total mess. Our one size fits all
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1 approach is both unfair and ineffective. It
2 moves the boat even farther out of reach to
3 the students who are already least likely to
4 reach it and least likely to fit into the
5 average life jackets we now require them to
6 swim for. Imposing the same requirement on
7 every student is not equality because our
8 children are not all the same. But our
9 society has not yet figured out how to
10 construct and implement a public education
11 system that can provide our children with
12 anything even close to an individualized
13 education.

14 The closest we have come is the
15 Individuals with Disability and Education
16 Act, the IDEA. A federal law that does
17 establish a right to an individualized
18 education but only to some particularly
19 vulnerable children, those with certain
20 types of disabilities that impact their
21 learning. These exceptional students do, in
22 fact, have exceptional rights. This is a
23 powerful important law that aims to correct
24 a long, dark history of simply letting those

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1 children drown more or less on purpose.

2 So, it is no surprise that the law that
3 gives us the Keystone Exams with its one
4 size fits all mandate finds itself in
5 hopeless conflict with the IDEA which
6 requires individualization. The Keystone
7 law is also locked in hopeless conflict with
8 other important societal demands. No where
9 is this more evident than in the rather
10 strange carve out that tries to reconcile
11 concern about religious freedom and public
12 education. How else can we explain the
13 peculiar exemption from the exam from those
14 who profess a religious objection to the
15 content of the exam.

16 Yes, anyone can simply by their own say
17 so ask to see the exam before it is
18 administered and then opt the child out of
19 the exam simply by professing that the
20 content of the exam violates their deeply
21 held religious beliefs. Apologies to all
22 the atheists and those who object to the
23 exam on secular moral grounds. The law only
24 recognizes religious objections.

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1 Though no note from your Rabbi, Priest,
2 mom or other clergy is required. What does
3 this get you? A sneak peak at the exam?
4 Yes. An exemption from the graduation
5 requirement? Well, that is not exactly
6 clear. It means your child gets to do a
7 project-based assessment instead, which is
8 most accounts much harder than passing the
9 test. And unless it's testing different
10 content, it's presumably no less offensive
11 to your deeply held religious beliefs than
12 the exam you objected to.

13 It's a total mess. I will say this, one
14 reading of the law is that a religious
15 exemption should be granted to the
16 project-based assessments. But apparently,
17 the Pennsylvania Department of Education
18 doesn't think so because on its website it
19 says that the religious exemption only
20 applies to the exam, not to the
21 project-based assessment. But this has not
22 been decided in the courts yet.

23 As troublesome as this law is for all of
24 us, its passage will prove to be a good

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1 thing if, as it appears to be doing right
2 here tonight, it motivates enough of us to
3 jump out of the boat already and start doing
4 the really hard work of teaching all of our
5 kids how to swim and to seriously question
6 the sanity and morality of forcing them to
7 grab life jackets that were never even made
8 to fit them in the first place.

9 Thank you.

10 (Applause)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Excellent.

12 Excellent presentation. Thank you.

13 MR. MOROLES: As you can see, I got
14 notes all over the place. And I learned
15 that from my teachers without ever having a
16 standard written on the board or objectives
17 or any high stakes test.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Give us your
19 name.

20 MR. MOROLES: I'm Gus Moroles. I'm from
21 Holyoke, Massachusetts. I will be reading
22 my statement in a few minutes, and then I
23 will be going over some of the notes I took
24 while I was listening. It was a privilege
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1 to be here. I drove five hours to be here
2 because this is that important.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Wow.

4 MR. MOROLES: Before I even start with
5 this, to the Philadelphia teachers, the
6 Philadelphia students, the Philadelphia
7 parents, I stand with you guys in
8 solidarity. I want to preface my following
9 statement by saying how adamantly I oppose
10 the high stakes testing, standardize
11 curriculum, standardized learning and the
12 idea that all children can be assessed using
13 the same measure.

14 To paraphrase Albert Einstein,
15 standardizing the production of automobiles
16 is a good thing, but to standardize human
17 beings is to walk a dangerous path.

18 All over Massachusetts you see bumper
19 stickers touting my state as the leader of
20 the pack when it comes to standardized
21 testing. For better or for worse, we are
22 the envy of all states because we do testing
23 better than anyone else. And I can't stand
24 it. But even if you use the rigorous
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1 standard put forth by the rote minded robot
2 performers, the way to measure and hold
3 teachers accountable is to the austere past
4 of high stakes testing, Massachusetts is
5 tops.

6 And what exactly is the reward for the
7 teachers that have lived up to the
8 expectation of the testing machine?
9 Lifelong probationary status is what they
10 get for their service. You see, in the
11 infinite wisdom of those who either have
12 never in their lives taught or those who
13 have spent too little time in the classroom
14 to develop an appreciation for the art of
15 instruction, the idea is to tie student test
16 scores not only to teacher evaluations but
17 to their licensure, as well.

18 What does this mean for teachers in my
19 state and other states where this is being
20 proposed? In no uncertain terms, this will
21 cause an exodus. Teaching has always been
22 difficult. There were times where
23 personalities clashed and someone was let go
24 and went to a different district. While

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1 this proposal was defeated due to strong
2 opposition in Massachusetts, if this is
3 allowed to pass in any state, teachers won't
4 just lose their job. They will lose their
5 license and with it their ability to teach
6 in the respective state.

7 Already I have to deal with teachers
8 telling me on a daily basis that they just
9 can't do it anymore. I have spouses of
10 teachers telling me that they just can't do
11 it anymore. I have teachers telling me that
12 they have anxiety attacks at school. They
13 tell me that they are taking medication to
14 go to school, more at lunch to get through
15 the day and more at home just to be able to
16 function in their own homes.

17 Why should anyone give a damn about how
18 teachers are doing? Why should anyone care
19 that we will see a rise in the attrition
20 rate of educators? Why should anyone care
21 that teachers are under attack?

22 To put it simply, the teachers working
23 conditions are the students learning
24 conditions. I'm the President of the
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1 Holyoke Teachers Association in Holyoke,
2 Massachusetts. I couldn't be more proud to
3 be from Holyoke and to represent some of the
4 greatest teachers to ever hold a teachers
5 manual. Apply some simple logic to the
6 situation and understand that to make a
7 teachers life miserable is tantamount to
8 assuring that teacher cannot be successful.
9 The two are very inextricable. One's
10 condition depends on the other's condition.

11 Let us not fall victim to the widespread
12 lies being cast about teachers unions being
13 the that holds Black and Latino children
14 from excelling. To illustrate this, why not
15 look at the performance of states with
16 strong unions and those without and see if,
17 in fact, it is the unions that are holding
18 progress back. Or, and I suppose I am going
19 out on a limb here, we could discuss the
20 incredulous disparities in funding in
21 extracurricular activities from the haves
22 and the have nots.

23 Even Bill Green, Chairman of the School
24 Reform Commission during yesterday's
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1 education fund hearings admitted that
2 Philadelphia schools were not being
3 adequately funded to appropriately meet the
4 needs of children living in poverty and
5 English language learners. Maybe that
6 conversation is just too difficult to have,
7 and it is just easier to cancel all the
8 teachers contracts and put the blame
9 squarely on their shoulders. I think what
10 we really have to talk about, what we really
11 need to get into is the undiagnosed mental
12 condition of a nation that's lost its mind.

13 (Applause)

14 MR. MOROLES: This country suffers from
15 a delusion that testing will somehow narrow
16 the achievement gap. We are afflicted with
17 a disorder that makes us think that the
18 children of this great nation are just gong
19 to soak it all up, show some "grit" and have
20 that happy ending promised so long ago.

21 I'm Puerto Rican. I grew up in a city
22 that is full of Puerto Ricans. For the last
23 three years I taught in the same city I grew
24 up in. The "rigor" that I hear so much

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1 about is the same venom that has poisoned my
2 schools. Listen to me when I tell you this
3 because it's something I have said time and
4 time again, but I'm not sure the people
5 hearing me are understanding what it is I
6 need to say. Were this the environment, the
7 culture of the schools when I was growing
8 up, I would have dropped out. Of that I am
9 certain.

10 I don't treat my students with no
11 excuses attitude because a lot of the time I
12 wonder how any of us would do under some of
13 the situations that my students face. I
14 truly believe that most people would crumble
15 under the weight that these kids bare. They
16 come in tired. They come in hungry. They
17 come in with emotional issues that shake my
18 core as a human being. They come with
19 stories so sad that it becomes hard to have
20 happy moments and still they show up every
21 single day.

22 So, you'll forgive me if I along with
23 the great teachers of Philadelphia don't put
24 any stock in the test and the metrics. What
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1 I see in front of me is a child, not a test
2 score, not a data point but a real live
3 human being.

4 (Applause)

5

6 MR. MOROLES: And if you will let me go
7 over my notes now please. Thank you.

8 It seems clear to me in order to fix
9 your schools, the solution is already there.
10 You already canceled your teachers
11 contracts, kudos to you. I don't mean you
12 personally sir or ma'am. I mean, this City
13 has really lost its mind canceling the
14 teachers contracts. So that's step number
15 one.

16 Step number two is have all the testing
17 on computers and make Bill Gates even more
18 rich. That seems appropriate at the time.

19 What we just found out is that the
20 context of the test are nothing that is
21 actually measuring teaching. And this goes
22 back even to the teaching test that I took
23 to become a teacher. I remember when I took
24 my teacher certification test, I wrote to
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1 the Department of Education that day after I
2 got my scores and passed all the test and
3 told them what a ridiculous waste of time
4 that was. They basically stole \$150 from me
5 just to become a teacher. That's
6 essentially what we're doing with the kids.
7 These tests aren't measuring anything --
8 anything worth noting.

9 ELL suffer because of language. And you
10 heard some of the students say that. And
11 they suffer because of language because of
12 something we are not addressing. When I was
13 growing up in Holyoke, and I am assuming a
14 lot of people have the same experience.
15 When I was growing up in Holyoke, math was
16 numbers based, believe it or not. Today is
17 math is no longer numbers based, math is
18 English based. So if you don't know
19 English, you will not pass math. That is
20 the bottom line and that's inappropriate.

21 We have to talk about that. I have
22 researched articles to really promote the
23 idea that I'm talking about here. I forget
24 the Councilor's name Oh. He mention that we
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1 need standardized tests and I just, I
2 couldn't disagree more with that. I wish he
3 was here so I could argue with him
4 personally.

5 We don't need standardized tests on any
6 level. And he talks about we need some
7 standardized tests to see where we need the
8 resources. But we're spending the resources
9 on the stupid test. So, it's a circular
10 argument that completely eats itself. I
11 wish, like I said, he were here so I could
12 explain that to him.

13 There was a study done over 20 years by
14 one of the greatest college institutions in
15 this country Bates College. It's a very
16 liberal arts school. It was over 20 years.
17 Now this study, 123,000 students over 33
18 colleges and universities, and over a
19 three-year time span. I mean, the specific
20 study. It was done over 20 years but
21 specifically the data comes from three
22 years.

23 And what this resulted in is something
24 that teachers in this room and teachers all
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1 across the country knew. GPA is a much
2 better indicator of life success than any
3 standardized test. That is something we
4 need to address. The gentleman that was
5 here from Philadelphia talking about
6 supplemental education, that was a bunch of
7 garbage. And the reason I'm saying it's a
8 bunch of garbage -- I'm very direct about
9 how I feel. I don't know if you noticed
10 that yet.

11 I had a third -- seventh grader two
12 years ago. This seventh grader had been in
13 supplemental remediation reading classes
14 from the time she was in third grade. So
15 third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh
16 grade. Five years in remedial reading
17 instead of art or music or anything else.
18 Five years from the time she was 8 years old
19 till she was almost 14 years old never
20 having art, music, nothing else. That's the
21 remediation they're talking about.

22 I just wish he had gotten that step
23 further and really admitted what he was
24 talking about. They want to take away the
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1 specials from these kids, they want to
2 basically anything away from them that is
3 not mandated, and we really need to address
4 that.

5 Rigor, I'm not trying to insult anybody,
6 but there are dictionaries. And if you look
7 up the word rigor, it is not what you guys
8 keep saying it is. There is absolutely no
9 need for rigor. I spent half my life in the
10 military. There was rigor there. Life and
11 death. There should be no rigor in the
12 classroom. The word means austere and
13 severe. I don't know if anybody is aware of
14 that, that keeps using the word rigor.

15 I'm not trying to be insulting, but
16 really we need to know what word we're
17 using. I think the word you mean to use is
18 challenging. In my classroom, it's a very
19 challenging environment. Not rigorous by
20 any means. I don't use the word rigor
21 because I know what it actually means. I
22 looked it up in the dictionary.

23 Let's see what else. Local control.

24 You guys are victims of loss of local
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1 control. That's another conversation that
2 needs to be had. I'm wondering why we're
3 not having more of that conversation. You
4 guys were taken over 12 years ago and what
5 do you have to show for it? Absolutely
6 nothing. A degrading school system,
7 everything has gotten worse especially for
8 the minority populations. Every since the
9 implementation of the standardized test,
10 minority populations are getting kicked in
11 the rear. I am wondering if that was done
12 on purpose. I am starting to think it was.
13 As a Hispanic male in the country, I am
14 starting to think they are trying to push
15 people out of the way and make more room for
16 other people.

17 The school-to-prison pipeline, it's
18 real. I got a school in my city that's
19 90 percent in poverty. 90 percent. I'm not
20 exaggerating here. If you'd like the
21 statistics, I will email them to you gladly.
22 In that same school, one-third of the
23 students or homeless. What we care about,
24 though, are how they do on the standardized

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1 tests. Here is my big issue with it.

2 This is something I would like for him
3 to be here, as well. There is a direct
4 correlation between socioeconomic status and
5 how they perform on the test. How do I know
6 this? Because in my district we did the
7 numbers. We put up a chart on the wall.
8 And on that chart were the scores for all
9 the kids. Starts here, goes all the way up
10 there. Then we plastered another one on top
11 of it that was the socioeconomic status of
12 all the kids. Guess what, it lined up
13 almost perfectly.

14 For anybody to tell me that the
15 standardize test scores do anything but tell
16 me that my kids are poor and not living in
17 the greatest conditions is a waste of my
18 time and an insult to my intelligence.

19 Smaller class sizes would probably help.
20 Teaching 30 to 40 students, not a good idea.
21 You know, you got 30 to 40 motivated
22 students with a parent at home that is able
23 to work with them, that might work. I'm not
24 dealing with 30 or 40 students that are

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1 motivated. I am dealing with 30 to 40
2 students that are hungry, they're not
3 motivated. As a matter of fact, they are
4 the opposite of motivated. They want to do
5 anything but work. It's not their fault.

6 The correlation between the test, in the
7 Washington Post article, where in
8 Philadelphia, okay, this is not a -- this is
9 no longer an abstract thing we're talking
10 about. In Philadelphia, one principal at
11 elementary school received \$160 budget for
12 the entire year. \$160 for 400 students.
13 You couldn't take them to McDonald's with
14 that money. What is it -- what's the
15 message we are sending to your teachers and
16 to everybody else especially to the
17 students. If I'm a student in Philadelphia,
18 I'm pretty much thinking nobody cares about
19 me. You're throwing me to the wolves.
20 You're letting me just pretty much going to
21 end up in prison.

22 That's a sad reality especially coming
23 from a roomful of professionals. We can do
24 better than this. I'm not putting the blame
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1 on the teachers. Of all the people I'm
2 going to blame the least, it's the teachers.
3 They are in there day in and day out. They
4 had their contract taken away and they're
5 still showing up to work, which is more than
6 I would have done.

7 God bless the teachers of Philadelphia
8 and the students of Philadelphia and the
9 parents of Philadelphia. And let's all work
10 together and fix this. Thank you.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
12 much.

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I want to say, I
14 love your passion.

15 MR. MOROLES: Thank you, sir.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: It's really
17 admired, understanding. We are just, I
18 think, touching the surface of this. Like
19 you said, maybe this should be done in every
20 city throughout the United States who have
21 Congress hold hearings on it. Whatever we
22 can do to help that, please let us know
23 because we would love to be a part of it.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
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1 much. Thank you all for your excellent
2 testimony.

3 MR. KERSHENBAUM: I apologize. If I
4 may, may I make one more point?

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

6 MR. KERSHENBAUM: I really appreciate
7 it. It's very hard to add something new to
8 all that's been said, but there are two
9 things that I want to add to this because
10 I'm here as a lawyer, I'm here as a special
11 education lawyer. I would be remiss if I
12 didn't.

13 One of the hidden costs in there which
14 goes into the not calculable column which I
15 want you to take away from this and
16 understand because you are going to be
17 having more conversations with other
18 decision makers about this and nobody is
19 talking about this.

20 Right now the law as it's written only
21 carves out exceptions and accommodations and
22 modifications and possibly exclusions for
23 kids that have IEPs, kids that are protected
24 under the Individuals with Disability and
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1 Education Act. But there are a lot of kids
2 with disabilities all across the state and
3 certainly in Philadelphia who do have
4 disabilities that would impact their ability
5 to take these tests but do not have IEPs.
6 They might have simply not been identified,
7 which is the most common thing. They might
8 have been denied the IEP for various reasons
9 or they might have been given what's called
10 a 504 accommodations plan.

11 This may sound like gobbledegook to you
12 from what I'm saying. But I'm telling you,
13 this is an extremely important thing. If
14 the only way -- if a family feels the only
15 way to get out of these tests and the only
16 way to get out of the graduation
17 requirement -- and this is a hot legal
18 question right now -- is to have an IEP and
19 to have the IEP team say you don't have to
20 take this test, there is going to be a lot
21 more people needing that IEP. And people
22 like me who represent parents to get IEPs
23 are going to be very, very busy. Because
24 the pressure this is going to create to wake
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1 people up to realize that the 504 Plan that
2 they have is inadequate, that the lack of an
3 IEP that their child has is now going to
4 keep them from graduating high school is
5 going to create enormous pressure on the
6 special education system that is already
7 absolutely destroyed in Philadelphia.

8 So, I'm pointing this out because I can
9 tell you whether it's Philadelphia or Radnor
10 or anywhere in the state, the people who are
11 in charge of special education in the
12 schools don't understand this law at all.
13 They don't understand what the role of the
14 IEP team is in providing accommodations and
15 providing alternative testing or perhaps
16 excluding kids altogether from the test for
17 kids who have IEPs. And that is a huge
18 problem.

19 It's a huge problem for the kids that
20 have IEPs. It's a huge problem for kids
21 that should have them but don't. And it is
22 going to be absolutely gigantic unfunded
23 costs that the School District is going to
24 have to bear because of people like me. I
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1 am giving you a heads up on this to go deal
2 with this.

3 The second thing is, and nobody talks
4 about this but I am one of the few people
5 that has had the misfortune that had to read
6 this law from beginning to end several
7 times. If you are looking to cure sleep
8 problem, I highly recommend that you try
9 reading this law from beginning to end. But
10 one of the things that's in here is
11 everybody talks about the graduation
12 requirement.

13 Did you know that it's not a graduation
14 requirement necessarily? I'm guessing not.
15 Because it's almost impossible to decipher
16 from this law. But actually the law gives
17 districts three choices. One of which is
18 the Keystone Exams. There is another choice
19 altogether which I have never heard a single
20 person talk about anywhere, which is
21 districts are actually allowed to come up
22 with their own assessment that meets certain
23 requirements and the state is supposed to
24 fund half of that.

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1 Now, if the State cannot fund the other
2 half or will not fund the other half, it has
3 to accept the District's assessment as being
4 valid. I put to you, maybe some of the
5 very, very bright lawyers that work for the
6 City or that work for the School District
7 could look at this. Because actually the
8 Keystone Exams is only one of three choices.
9 It happens to be the one that everybody is
10 picking because it is one that is being
11 offered more or less for free by the state
12 because they paid \$65 million to get the
13 test from big corporation.

14 So, I put it out to you that there is
15 more in this law than meets the eye. It is
16 complicated and confusing. It was written
17 on purpose to be so. And that we need to
18 really start digging deep into what this law
19 actually says and what it doesn't say, so
20 that we can perhaps undo it by its own
21 doing.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you. That's
23 a valid point. I did not know that.

24 MR. MILLER: Actually, I need to address
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1 that. Because School District of
2 Philadelphia is a member of Pennsylvania
3 School Boards Association. It's likely that
4 only a District of the first class -- there
5 are two in the state, Pittsburgh and
6 Philadelphia -- have the resources to
7 develop an alternative method of assessment.
8 But the reality is, we don't want an
9 alternative method of assessment. We want
10 to stop testing. Testing is not teaching.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you. And I
12 would agree with you there. I'm talking
13 about the law because eventually you have to
14 fight the law. The law might defeat itself
15 if people try to look at loopholes.

16 You said three. The Keystone Exams was
17 one. The own-developed testing is two.

18 What's the third?

19 MR. KERSHENBAUM: I will tell you this.
20 We don't have enough time to go through
21 this, by I will give you the citation if you
22 want. We can certainly talk more at length
23 about this. It would take me longer than
24 you have to go through and explain all this.

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1 I will say if you look at Section 4.24,
2 which is the high school graduation
3 requirement section of the PA Education Code
4 and you look at Section, I believe it is C
5 and then little triple, you know, little
6 iii, Roman Numeral three and then Capital B,
7 it lists the three different valid local
8 assessments.

9 I want to just say for the record, I
10 agree. I'm not for more believe me.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right.

12 MR. KERSHENBAUM: Sometimes you can
13 cause enough mayhem --

14 MR. MOROLES: Yeah.

15 MR. KERSHENBAUM: -- through legal means
16 by saying listen --

17 MR. MOROLES: Let's do it.

18 MR. KERSHENBAUM: All right. We're
19 going to go this route. Guess what guys, we
20 are suddenly finding ourselves religiously
21 conflicted with this situation. Suddenly,
22 you know, I can't really see giving my kid
23 this exam. Well, that's a problem. Some
24 people call that civil disobedience.

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1 Actually, it's civil obedience because the
2 law says we can do it. I put that to you
3 because you have the resources and the
4 wherewithal to perhaps be able to run with
5 something like that and make something of it
6 and actually put the brakes on this thing.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Because I know I
8 think Representative Tobash had stated they
9 were looking to give schools an option to
10 opt out in new legislation for the state.

11 MR. KERSHENBAUM: That would be new
12 legislation.

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: That would be new
14 legislation. But right as of now, the
15 School District could create their own or
16 use their own.

17 MR. KERSHENBAUM: Sure. But then you
18 would -- the theory is they could. The nice
19 part about this is it's not just a question
20 of the District doing it's own thing. The
21 law says the State would have to fund half
22 of that.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Right.

24 MR. KERSHENBAUM: If it was just the
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1 School District saying we will do our own
2 thing, nobody would care. If it's going to
3 mean, hey, this is going to cost
4 \$30 million, we will put up 15; alright
5 state, give us the other 15, they might not
6 be so happy about that. Just saying.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Good point. And
8 the IEPs, if that does happen and people
9 start getting more and more IEPs throughout
10 the District, isn't that additional dollars
11 that would cost the State for education?

12 MR. MOROLES: If they give it.

13 MR. KERSHENBAUM: Yes. But here is the
14 thing. These are -- this -- IDEA is an
15 absolutely underfunded or, some would say,
16 unfunded mandate. It happens to be a real
17 good one because without it you would have
18 kids with disabilities getting absolutely
19 nothing in school. This law is extremely
20 important.

21 Yes. If, in fact, this gets more people
22 to be qualified for IEPs, it is going to
23 put -- it is going to be more of a strain on
24 the School District. Absolutely, and that

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1 would be money well spent.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Which would be
3 another reason the State may back off of the
4 Keystones thinking that everybody is getting
5 these IEPs and would cost us more money not
6 only to fund the education person, which we
7 need for that, but they are looking at their
8 cost -- they are already paying for these
9 Keystone Exams.

10 MR. KERSHENBAUM: No one single argument
11 is going to make this thing fall. It's a
12 combination of things. I think that it's
13 important to have it be from the very
14 philosophical to the very specific. When it
15 comes right down to it, law makers care a
16 lot about dollars and cents when it comes
17 right down to it. While I completely agree
18 with what you said about we don't need
19 another test, if it's a choice between a
20 test that's made by a School District to
21 test in its own way and a way that makes
22 sense for its student and that meets the
23 needs of the ELL students and all those
24 other things, and a choice between one that
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1 just goes to make McGraw Hill rich, I would
2 vote for the other one.

3 MR. MOROLES: I don't see it as a
4 compromise. I see it as a stepping stone in
5 the right direction of getting rid of them
6 altogether.

7 MR. KERSHENBAUM: Absolutely. By the
8 way, I can't say avoid this opportunity. I
9 have to say this. This was not planned. We
10 don't even know each other. But my very
11 first -- I was a public school teacher in
12 Newton, Massachusetts. And my very first
13 teaching experience was in Holyoke.

14 MR. MOROLES: It's a great city.
15 Birthplace of volleyball, by the way.

16 MR. KERSHENBAUM: It was the place that
17 inspired me to become a teacher. And my
18 experience as a teacher in Massachusetts was
19 right when the MCAT test came out. I was
20 the very first teacher in my school to teach
21 a fourth grade class that had to take the
22 fourth grade MCAT. And that process is part
23 of what pushed me out of being a teacher and
24 made me go to law school.

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1 I will also say that we gamed that test
2 like crazy. But I told my fourth grade
3 students who had never seen a standardized
4 test before in their life and neither had
5 we. We had no idea what was going on to be
6 on the test. I said to them, you are not
7 going to know one thing on this test, and it
8 doesn't matter. I want you to do two
9 things. I want you to write neatly, and I
10 want you to write a lot. And I don't care
11 what you write about.

12 You know what, my class had the highest
13 score of a fourth grade class of the entire
14 state of Massachusetts on the MCAT test. I
15 have not idea what they wrote about. If you
16 are someone who is grading a thousand tests,
17 you're going to look at the ones with neat
18 handwriting and wrote a lot and you're going
19 to give them a high score.

20 So that's --

21 MR. MOROLES: If we are looking for a
22 specific way to beat this, you can ask the
23 question of, you know who's really good at
24 figuring out where kids are and identifying
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1 who needs help? Teachers. That's what they
2 get paid for. They go to school to learn
3 these things. And also, of all the people
4 in this room, who took standardized tests
5 from growing up? And I didn't. And I'm
6 only 35 years old, so I imagine some of the
7 peoples -- no offense to anybody who's older
8 than me -- but I imagine that the people who
9 are pushing this nonsense didn't have to
10 take tests to graduate high school.

11 And for me, I find it really
12 hypocritical for someone who is out of the
13 system, out of the game, to all the sudden
14 start changing the rules for everybody else.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you. Thank
16 you so much for your testimony.

17 MR. MOROLES: Thank you.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We're going to
19 ask our last panel to come forward, but we
20 have to give the stenographer a break for a
21 second.

22 - - -

23 (At this time, a brief break was taken.)

24 - - -

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1 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
2 much for your patience. God bless you all.
3 And in any order we welcome you.

4 MS. DUFFY: My name is Eileen Duffy.
5 I'm a school nurse with the School District
6 here. I usually have a lot to say on my own
7 account. Today I'm speaking for Dr. Yohuru
8 Williams. And because of the time, I'm
9 going to cut down a lot.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I remember you.

11 MS. DUFFY: I'm going to cut down a lot
12 of what he had to say. But I want you to
13 remember this name and going to be emailing
14 you and all the members of Council a video
15 that he gave ten days ago to the Caucus of
16 Working Educators. He gave what I consider
17 historic talk on what we can do to create
18 the schools our children deserve.

19 He is amazing. He is phenomenal. He is
20 a scholar of Black History, of Black
21 American History. He is a Howard University
22 Grad. I just want you to remember the name
23 and I won't speak further on that. This is
24 going to be a little cut -- I'm cutting it
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1 up. He gave it very smoothly done, but I'm
2 not going to give the whole thing.

3 (Reads Yohuru Testimony) In the early
4 2000, I facilitated professional development
5 programs for history and social studies
6 teachers through the Department of
7 Curriculum and Instruction in the City. I'm
8 therefore deeply aware of how dedicated and
9 innovative Philadelphia teachers have been
10 in creating new and imaginative ways for
11 students to learn. I've always been
12 impressed with the range of academic
13 offerings in this city and the myriad of
14 ways in which curriculum was delivered. The
15 adoption of high stakes test as a measure of
16 student achievement will not be a step
17 forward but a step back.

18 I am here to ask you to use your
19 influence to check the expansion of high
20 stakes tests in this city. High stakes
21 testing is destructive to schools an
22 communities. It is most destructive in
23 cities like Philadelphia where poverty is
24 high and where there are high concentrations

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1 of people of color. As education historian
2 Diane Ravitch observed, the crisis in US
3 education is not general and national. It
4 is concentrated where there is poverty and
5 segregation. Testing does not address
6 either problem. By allowing schools to be
7 converted into testing laboratories,
8 districts are undermining the functions of
9 schools as centers of community involvement
10 that offer a range of exhibition of student
11 achievement tied to their learning.

12 These occur not only in athletics but
13 also in music and the arts and civic
14 engagement. When schools are closed and
15 labeled underperforming or low performing,
16 communities are adversely affected. The
17 loss of these centers of social and
18 political engagement further alienate those
19 most in need of substantive connections to
20 the type of afterschool programs, community
21 projects and community-to-campus initiatives
22 that many of these schools support.

23 Finally, high stakes testing promotes
24 segregation and stratification. High stakes

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1 testing allows students to be divided into
2 two camps based on test scores. Those who
3 do not test well find themselves pushed to
4 the side. Since many students of color do
5 not perform well on standardized tests, they
6 are routinely marginalized within the
7 system. More importantly, school closures
8 further penalize those students who most
9 benefit from a broad curriculum but are
10 saddled with testing mandates that
11 jeopardize not only their own futures but
12 also the future of the schools they attend.

13 It is for all these reasons that I
14 strongly urge this body to work toward an
15 end to high stakes testing. Philadelphia
16 students deserve better than this.
17 Philadelphia teachers deserve better than
18 this. The people of this beautiful and
19 historic city deserve better than this.
20 Help them restore a system of teaching and
21 learning with real value that truly promotes
22 college and career readiness through a range
23 of academic courses and ample opportunity
24 for other means of intellectual engagement

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1 beyond the complement of test.

2 Let what happens here in Philadelphia be
3 a model for the nation. Show parents,
4 teachers and students that their voices have
5 been heard, that our democracy works and aid
6 them in their efforts to put on end to the
7 use of high stakes tests.

8 Thank you.

9 (Applause)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.

11 MS. MCDOWELL: Hi, yes. My name is
12 Allison McDowell. I'm a public school
13 parent and a member of the Alliance For
14 Philadelphia Public Schools. On our behalf,
15 I just want to say thank you so very much
16 for hosting this hearing today.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you, too.

18 (Applause)

19 MS. MCDOWELL: Just a couple things
20 before I begin. I did want to mention
21 regarding the high stakes testing issues,
22 these are not taken by students in private
23 schools. I think it hasn't yet been said.
24 If you can afford 30 to 40,000 dollars for
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1 private school education, your child is
2 exempt from all of these requirements. I
3 think that that's important to note.

4 I'm going to -- the other piece is I
5 have spoken with John Weiss who is the head
6 of Assessment and Accountability for the
7 State Department of Education. And in a
8 conversation we had this summer, he said
9 that with the new PSSA, they will be aligned
10 to the PA core. And he fully expects far
11 fewer students to be proficient on these new
12 rigorous tests. I say this to you now so
13 that next summer it will not come as a major
14 surprise when there are steep declines in
15 test scores because it's been planned. It's
16 been planned since this past summer. You
17 heard it here first.

18 This brief testimony, this is actually
19 from a fellow member of the caucus of
20 working educators. He's an elementary
21 school teacher and he posted it to Facebook
22 this morning to encourage people to attend.

23 He said: Please consider going to the
24 hearing tomorrow Wednesday on standardized
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1 testing. I can't go but I hope you will. I
2 am hoping especially because today I watched
3 some of my students cry while taking a PSSA
4 benchmark exam. Which asked my third
5 graders to write a response to a poem, which
6 according to Fletch Kinkaid is written at a
7 sixth/seventh grade level.

8 That's actually selling it short. I
9 struggled to understand parts of the poem.
10 I consider myself a "good test taker" but
11 honestly don't know that I could have
12 figured out what kind of answer the test
13 writers were expecting. Remember this isn't
14 just about should we test or not or what
15 should we do with the test results, this is
16 also about who writes these tests and what
17 impact those tests have on children in
18 classrooms.

19 Watching my students take today's test,
20 what I felt was guilt that I was introducing
21 them, this was their first real standardized
22 test to a system that is not going to help
23 them and is not designed for them. It's
24 just not. And that's sickening.

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1 (Applause)

2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: You mentioned
3 that private schools don't have to take
4 these tests. Do they have the same core
5 curriculum?

6 MS. MCDOWELL: Private schools don't. I
7 think some Arch Diocese schools may develop
8 some elements of it. But actually, what
9 will likely happen, I can see in 2017 you
10 will have an exodus of the public schools
11 into the Catholic schools so kids can spend
12 their senior year and graduate for those who
13 can afford it.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.

15 MR. JONES: My name is Mr -- my name is
16 Carl Jones. I am a concerned citizen about
17 the Keystone Exams and the problem of
18 standardized tests.

19 I've been -- off and on, I look
20 researching about this and reading about the
21 Keystone Exams over the last two years. And
22 one serious question I have that was already
23 raised is the lawmakers that enacted, that
24 voted for this Keystone Exams. Question is,
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1 did they take an exit exam to get a high
2 school diploma? That's a question I think
3 that should be raised. And also, I was
4 looking at the Keystone Exams. There's a
5 sample part there about the algebra. It's
6 about 15 pages. And it would be very
7 interesting or it would be very good for the
8 Pennsylvania citizens to ask these lawmakers
9 to maybe get a professional testing service
10 and get a room somewhere in Harrisburg or
11 whatever and take the algebra exam to see
12 how they doing it.

13 This is the exam they want the high
14 school students. You know what, in the
15 urban areas, they have this saying, "show me
16 what your working with." You know, so they
17 should show us how they did on the Algebra
18 part of the exams that they want these
19 students to take. Did they take it when
20 they graduated from high school. People are
21 very concerned about that.

22 And it was mentioned earlier about
23 Massachusetts being the leader of these exit
24 exams. And I happen to read that in 2010
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1 there research by John Pappe and Richard
2 Mermy and John Willis found that low income
3 urban students who barely failed the math
4 portion of this they call MCAS Graduation
5 Exam in Massachusetts, they barely failed.
6 But students outside of that urban area in
7 Massachusetts barely passed. So, it would
8 seem that the students from a different
9 economic area in Massachusetts barely
10 passed, but they "barely" passed. And the
11 students in urban areas that had to take the
12 exam, they barely failed.

13 So, you have what is, in other words,
14 they almost passed and almost only counts in
15 horseshoes and hand grenades. And that's
16 what they have, horseshoe and hand grenade
17 situation there. They were put in an unfair
18 competitive disadvantage with these
19 standardized exit exams.

20 And that's about it. All I say as far
21 as what's going to happen to the students, I
22 would say there in 2011 -- 2017, that most
23 of the students in Philadelphia won't have
24 high school diplomas. They'll have

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1 certificates. They're not going to pass it
2 because they don't have enough time. And we
3 bring these kind of discussions up at the
4 Leon Williams group that meets every Sunday.
5 They're not endorsing my position, but I say
6 if anybody wants to come by there and
7 discuss this and any other pertinent issues,
8 they are welcome to do so.

9 (Applause)

10 MR. JONES: It's on Spruce Street. 316
11 South 13th Street every Sunday at
12 eleven o'clock. We welcome, y'all.

13 MR. BORDA: Hi folks. My name is Lewis
14 Borda. I'm a school teacher here in
15 Philadelphia. I have two children in high
16 school also. I am here for Ms. Liz Taylor
17 who had to leave to take care of her three
18 children. I just want to read her
19 testimony.

20 (Reads testimony) Thank you for
21 convening this hearing today to gather
22 evidence on the effect of standardized
23 testing on our children. I speak today as a
24 parent and a teacher, but mostly as a
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1 parent. I have three children, ages 6, 4
2 and 8. My eldest is a first grader at
3 Houston Elementary School in Mt. Airy. This
4 year the budget crisis has impoverished the
5 school vastly, degrading the quality of
6 education that the children there receive
7 and I can no longer be silent about this.

8 My son and his classmates do not have
9 access to textbooks. Why not? Because it
10 wasn't in the budget. I'm appalled that a
11 textbook is no longer guaranteed to our
12 children. Instead, his teacher pays for
13 paper on which she copies every page of the
14 book for every student every day. In this
15 school, we have no books and no paper. My
16 son has very little access to technology, so
17 his teacher cannot ameliorate -- she uses
18 better words than I do -- the problem by
19 using computers. There simply is not enough
20 support staff. So at times, there is no
21 recess. When there is recess, it's really
22 short.

23 The teachers are very skilled. The
24 principal is very hard working, but that's
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1 not nearly enough. Guess what Houston does
2 have several times a year? Standardized
3 tests, benchmarks to prepare for PSSAs and
4 PSSAs themselves. Standardized tests that
5 aren't used to help students learn more in
6 the end. These aren't diagnostic tests that
7 ensure that teachers can go back and reteach
8 areas where students struggle. These are
9 tests that are only used to grade the school
10 and to punish the teachers.

11 And how valid is this measure that
12 purports to assess what students learn when
13 we don't even have textbooks and paper. I
14 wonder sometimes if these tests are just
15 given so we can figure out how to justify
16 dumping the losers as Mr. Gleason in the
17 Philadelphia School Partnership want.

18 (Applause)

19 MR. BORDA: I call upon Council to use
20 your authority to reduce or eliminate the
21 amount of standardized testing in our
22 schools. Every extra dollar should be used
23 to buy children books, paper and computers.
24 I call upon you to standard fearlessly
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1 against the money interest that abuse and
2 degrade our children to increase their
3 profits.

4 Then she says, I welcome your questions
5 but you don't have any questions, please.

6 I say this because Liz is the most
7 phenomenal teacher I know. And she wouldn't
8 want me to tell this but she'll probably
9 have to leave teaching to move out of the
10 city because she says, quite frankly, how
11 can I do this for the next twelve years.
12 One of her children are not even in first
13 grade yet. She's like I can't fight this
14 battle for the next twelve years hoping that
15 my kids have a book.

16 And every other day I'm telling her no,
17 no, no, you can't. You have to stay. You
18 have to teach our children and we'll figure
19 it out. But I can't figure it out. I can't
20 figure it out. It's just de moralizing.
21 So, you have to help us because you guys
22 can.

23 Thank you.

24 (Applause)
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1 MR. KAUFFMAN: I'm Daun Kauffman. An
2 educator in North Philadelphia for 14 years
3 now. I'd like to thank the Council for the
4 hearings, for your stamina, for your
5 engagement. I've been in much different
6 hearings with the SRC. And I like to thank
7 Allison McDowell for inviting me.

8 My component of discussion is I don't
9 think has been touched on directly yet.
10 Will end on something unique. My component
11 is childhood trauma, the power, the
12 prevalence and the price.

13 One of my students Danny sent me. And
14 if we were here at midnight and it was only
15 us three, I would still be here for Danny.
16 There's no better use of my time or energy
17 than to give Danny a voice. All those in
18 Danny's story are real. From an earlier
19 school, only the names are changed.

20 I do have a couple of slides with the
21 effect of testing on trauma, trauma impacted
22 children and the effect of trauma on
23 testing. They interact. (Shows slide)

24 It's all neuroscience and public health
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1 research that doesn't see much light of day
2 so far. But the point is, high stakes
3 testing results are predictable. The data
4 says that children with unaddressed trauma
5 are shown to have lower attendance, have
6 cognitive impairment, have social
7 dysfunction, have lower test scores. This
8 is data from scientists and research folks,
9 not from me.

10 The results are meaningless for an
11 individual trauma impacted child. When you
12 aggregate the results, the aggregated
13 results are meaningless unless you correct
14 for the difference in trauma rates between
15 geographies. All the while, trauma impacted
16 children's needs are ignored. The elephant
17 in the room. Why, is a question for another
18 hearing. And maybe the most important
19 question is why are we here? Why are we in
20 this position?

21 Events that can become traumatic:
22 Abuse -- so we're speaking the same
23 language; abuse, emotional/physical/sexual;
24 addiction or mental illness of a household

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1 member, witnessing household violence,
2 neglect, parental absence whether it's from
3 separation, divorce or incarceration.
4 There's one or both parents missing. There
5 is another source of it. In general, you
6 can use a term over -- the terms
7 overwhelmed, helpless, unpredictable,
8 uncontrollable, terror. The research folks
9 use the term sometimes adverse childhood
10 experience and the acronym ACE.

11 The neuroscience of trauma -- let me go
12 back one. Too fast there. Fight, flight or
13 freeze survival mode. This nature or the
14 brain's defense. Stress hormones, cortisol
15 and adrenaline are released. Cognitive
16 function in the prefrontal cortex are muted
17 to deal with immediate threat. Academic
18 functions and testing are physiologically
19 impossible. This is science. This is not
20 Daun Kauffman.

21 Ultimately, the physical brain changes.
22 The physical brain changes. Change is
23 directly linked to education. There is much
24 more I could share, but I'm trying to keep
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1 it under five hours.

2 The social defenses: Trauma impacted
3 children are not bad kids. They are not
4 sick or injured. Memory becomes locked in
5 from a trauma injury. They are on high
6 alert, suspicious and it can go in two
7 directions -- hyper aroused aggressive
8 direction which you hear about the most.
9 They can also disassociate, which is a
10 psychological splitting from the environment
11 one that's often ignored, by the way,
12 because they are much quieter. They are
13 very logical defenses based on experience
14 with complex trauma and they are easily
15 triggered.

16 Back to Danny. Danny's parents
17 struggled to find steady jobs and income for
18 their family. They were still dealing with
19 stress from immigration. They moved to a
20 North Philly neighborhood full of crime and
21 drugs. Danny's dad was violently murdered
22 when Danny was very young. During his early
23 years, he was told his dad was away.

24 Danny's mother Maria left alone to support
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1 three children became despondent and
2 desperate. Drinking and meds dulled her
3 grief and stress. Her own attempts to
4 survive financially led to her
5 incarceration. Danny was left with no
6 parent.

7 His older siblings had a different
8 father who had taken custody while Maria was
9 incarcerated. When she was released, Danny
10 witnessed anger and violence between mom and
11 now reunited siblings often and eventually
12 Maria sent them back to their dad. More
13 sadness and more loss for Danny.

14 All alone with Danny now, mom confided
15 that his father was not really away, but he
16 had been murdered. Confusion and grief
17 tortured Danny. It was at that point at
18 eight years of age that Danny walked into
19 our classroom.

20 Some days at first he seemed resilient.
21 Danny could share a great toothy smile that
22 stretched from ear to ear. He loved
23 learning and sharing about his family's
24 culture. He loved to run seemingly as free

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1 as a bird in those moments. Danny was a
2 talented artist, too. At times losing track
3 of his surroundings while he created other
4 worlds on paper. On his good days, Danny's
5 academic ability was on par or ahead of his
6 classmates, and his street smarts were well
7 above average. Those were precious rare
8 days.

9 Underneath Danny's smile was a learned
10 mistrust of adults and refusal to attach.
11 Danny's mother was using alcohol again.
12 He'd been told that dropping or spilling any
13 of his mother's alcohol would result in
14 punishment, standing naked in an extended
15 icy cold shower.

16 His mistrust created misunderstanding
17 with other kids, too. He spent recess alone
18 as often as he joined the others. Danny
19 once told me that his favorite toy and game
20 was guns so that he'd be practiced and ready
21 when he was able to find his father's
22 killer. Although Danny's chronological age
23 was only 8, his life story was already
24 defined by fear and loss. His hyper aroused
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1 scanning for any threat he might perceive in
2 the classroom created a wall between Danny
3 and the others. His traumas could be
4 re-triggered by a classmate just slight
5 shift in position or an innocent look.

6 When his fears were triggered, Danny
7 could go off track quickly with a loud
8 nervous laugh or a threat yelled across the
9 room. He would rip up his classwork, throw
10 his books, dump his desk and run for the
11 hall screaming with angry tears. His
12 classmates watched gripped in fear. At
13 other times, Danny kept his panic hidden
14 emotionally dissociating and be drawing or
15 reading something off topic but experiencing
16 the same fear.

17 At least twice during the
18 disassociating, Danny quietly but tensely
19 broke a small plastic pencil sharpener.
20 When confronted, he quickly put a jagged
21 piece on his tongue. And when approached
22 further, he swallowed. On another occasion,
23 he threatened to swallow a loose blade. Our
24 school didn't have other spaces or adults

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1 available to allow Danny to deescalate. I
2 couldn't leave the other 25-plus children to
3 be with Danny.

4 Our counselor was on long term leave
5 with no replacement. Our school was not
6 staffed with a nurse daily. Maria was
7 informed about the seriousness of Danny's
8 state and her initial response was to claim
9 that Danny was just having a bad day and to
10 go home and inflict corporal punishment. It
11 will go away, is what she said.

12 Danny's story, the saddest part of this
13 is that Danny's story is not an aberration.
14 Danny didn't know it, but I could tell you
15 stories from eleven other children in the
16 same classroom. Stories of life full of
17 trauma, but back to the science and
18 research.

19 The initial ACE study or adverse
20 childhood study had 17,000 participants. It
21 was huge. Mostly suburbans, mostly middle
22 class, college-educated, mostly white
23 employed people with health insurance. The
24 findings were stunning. 22 percent had

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1 experienced three or more ACEs. Significant
2 because three or more ACEs correlates with
3 double the risk of depression, double
4 adolescent pregnancy, double lung disease
5 and liver disease, triple the risk of
6 alcoholism and STDs, a five-time increase in
7 suicide. Let me put that back. Went too
8 fast there. Sorry. (Referring to slide)

9 That was in suburban southern
10 California. There was an urban ACE study
11 done right here in Philadelphia with a much
12 more shocking 37 percent of the population
13 experiencing four or more ACEs, tens of
14 thousands of children. If you're
15 conservative, at least 25,000 children. In
16 North Philly where I live, the prevalence is
17 devastating, 45 percent with four ACEs.
18 These are children. Essentially half of
19 them with four ACEs.

20 For some scale perspective, I take
21 nothing away at all. In fact, I agree with
22 everything I heard about ELL learners and
23 IEP students. But the ACEs number at
24 37 percent on average across the city dwarfs
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1 the IEP number at about 10 percent. The ELL
2 number at about 14 percent. Combined,
3 24 percent IEP and ELL students. Children
4 with four or more ACEs are 37 percent.
5 That's more than 50 percent greater than
6 IEPs and ELLs put together. It's the
7 elephant in the room that we don't talk
8 about.

9 It's not a deficit perspective. These
10 children are not bad or sick. They are
11 injured. It's a brain injury. I wish we
12 had more time to talk about. Research
13 documents many impacts -- I could tell you
14 in general and I will write a bibliography
15 if you'd like. Impact of three-plus ACE in
16 a classroom include worst health, lower
17 attendance, more frequent suspension, lower
18 standardized test scores, more frequent
19 designation of special ed and 250 percent
20 more likely to be retained in grade failed.

21 Back to the beginning. For trauma
22 impacted children, it doesn't matter how
23 good the curriculum. Doesn't matter how
24 good the teacher. The test design, the
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1 cultural fit, the age appropriateness, none
2 of that matters. They're all irrelevant. A
3 developing child's trauma impacted brain
4 shuts down cognition to deal with the
5 threats they perceive. It's normal. It's
6 nature's way of increasing survival.

7 We won't have a successful education
8 paradigm. I'm going to use the word
9 paradigm, not process, not policy but a way
10 of thinking about it. We won't even
11 accurately be able to interpret success
12 while ignoring traumas overwhelming presence
13 especially in urban areas. I do want to
14 step to the side for a second and say that
15 22 percent in southern California is nothing
16 to take lightly either. It's one out of
17 every five children. It's not only an urban
18 issue, but it's a much larger urban issue.

19 Conversely, many education reformers,
20 most not having been in our classrooms, are
21 oblivious to the child's injuries and to
22 their continuing fear and stress. Ignoring
23 or not caring, they continue to push and
24 push for more standardization, more testing.

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1 They push on effectively bullying the
2 children even though the test content itself
3 is in question. You heard it earlier. They
4 bully even though the data says enduring the
5 test itself adds to trauma. Meanwhile, the
6 test ignorantly masses together all our
7 epidemic numbers of trauma impacted children
8 with other children into one single score
9 for the whole city, for the school and the
10 city and then misleadingly compares that
11 school to other schools. The numbers give a
12 false sense of reliability, a false sense of
13 reality. The approach is very unsafe for so
14 many of our children.

15 I have a lot more to say. In closing,
16 the ultimate injustice is then to classify
17 or to label individual trauma impacted
18 students like Danny based solely on the
19 results of a test. The process is not safe
20 to Danny. The process is not fair. They
21 cannot equally access their education. They
22 cannot equally access their education. They
23 can not equally access the test. It is one
24 aspect the counselor mentioned that ought to
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1 be looked at a lot closer, also. Children
2 have a right to be safe when they come to
3 school. In all meanings of that word, and a
4 right to equal access to education. I
5 choose to confront the bully for Danny.
6 Help us, please.

7 Thank you.

8 (Applause)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very
10 much. Whatever happened to Danny?

11 MR. KAUFFMAN: Danny is two grades
12 higher now. He's getting along.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Wonderful.
14 Wonderful. Well, God bless you for your
15 efforts and for caring.

16 (Applause)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Anyone else?
18 PD Brown, do you want to testify?

19 MR. BROWN: I gave my time up.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All right.
21 Fine. Wonderful.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I just want to
23 thank you. Thank you for everybody hanging
24 in here for the whole night. You guys did a
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1 great job. Alice and Lisa, thank you for
2 all the work and effort you put into making
3 this happen. We really appreciate your
4 help.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you all
6 and God bless you.

7 This hearing is recessed to the call of
8 the Chair.

9 (Committee on Education recessed at 7:42
10 p.m.)

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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 that this is a correct transcript of the same.

ANGELA M. KING, RPR
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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