

1
2 COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
3 COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
4

5
6 Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
7 Monday, November 28, 2011
1:20 p.m.
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9

PRESENT:

10 COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
11 COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
12

13 RESOLUTION 110158 - Resolution calling on the
City Council Committee on Education to hold
14 hearings on Prayer in Philadelphia Public
Schools.
15

RESOLUTION 110801 - Resolution calling for the
16 City Council Committee on Education to hold
Hearings on the School District of
17 Philadelphia Plan to Close Certain Schools
Facilities and to Make Grade Changes in
18 Others.
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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
3 afternoon. Let me thank everyone for
4 being here. We will now convene the City
5 Council Committee on Education. We ask
6 other members of the Committee who may be
7 in the building if they would come to the
8 Chambers. As these are two resolutions,
9 we will take the opportunity to begin.

10 We will now ask the Clerk to
11 read the number and title of both
12 resolutions.

13 THE CLERK: Resolution 110158,
14 resolution calling on the City Council
15 Committee on Education to hold hearings
16 on Prayer in Philadelphia Public Schools;
17 and

18 Resolution 110801, calling for
19 the City Council Committee on Education
20 to hold hearings on the School District
21 of Philadelphia Plan to Close Certain
22 School Facilities and to Make Grade
23 Changes in Others.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

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2 First we will invite Dr. Nunery
3 and whomever he would choose to accompany
4 him forward, and while he is coming
5 forward, we thank my colleague,
6 Councilman William Greenlee, for being
7 here, and certainly we want to make a
8 short statement with regard to both
9 resolutions.

10 Resolution 110158, prayer in
11 schools. Again, thank you for being here
12 today. In calling for today's hearing on
13 prayer in schools, we recognize that we
14 cannot change federal law, and we
15 appreciate all that the First Amendment
16 to the Constitution, as interpreted by
17 the U.S. Supreme Court, as it precludes
18 the District from instituting or
19 prohibiting prayer in schools. Our
20 purpose is to begin a conversation with
21 District officials, parents and teachers
22 on ways to support students who choose to
23 exercise their freedom to pray alone or
24 in groups, as long as the activity is not
25 disruptive and does not infringe on the

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2 rights of others.

3 Prayer can promote more
4 virtuous living and may have a positive
5 impact on student behavior in schools.

6 Parents encouraging students to not only
7 pray for themselves but pray for others
8 can cause students to think more of their
9 fellow classmates and help them lead
10 lives of thankfulness.

11 We support students who have an
12 interest in their faith, and we encourage
13 all students to use their faith in their
14 daily living and to keep a positive
15 attitude and give their best in school to
16 ensure a bright future.

17 Thank you.

18 Resolution 110801, School
19 District facility closings and
20 consolidations. School District
21 officials have recommended to the School
22 Reform Commission that nine City schools
23 be closed, including Levering, Harrison,
24 Sheppard, Drew, EM Stanton, Pepper Middle
25 School, Fitzsimons High, Sheraton West

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2 Academy and Philadelphia High School for
3 Business, with most closings at the end
4 of the school year. In addition,
5 District officials have recommended to
6 the Commission that grade changes be made
7 at 17 other City schools.

8 The School Reform Commission
9 intends to vote on recommendations early
10 next year, and, if implemented, this will
11 be the single largest number of school
12 closings in the District since 1981.

13 While the District plans to
14 host several community meetings to
15 explain the recommendations and gather
16 public input, a schedule of which is
17 included in Councilpersons' packets and
18 also on the table for anybody from the
19 public who would like a list of those
20 hearings and a list of those schools,
21 today's hearing is to allow the public to
22 voice their concerns about the District's
23 plans to their elected representatives on
24 City Council here in the people's
25 building.

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2 Thank you very much.

3 We'll now call on Dr. Nunery
4 with regard to both resolutions, first
5 Resolution 110158 on prayer in schools
6 and then the Resolution 110801 on school
7 facility closings.

8 (Witnesses approached witness
9 table.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

11 Welcome. Thank you.

12 DR. NUNERY: Good afternoon,
13 Councilwoman.

14 Councilman Greenlee, good to
15 see you again.

16 As to the first resolution, we
17 don't really have a particular comment.
18 Obviously we have to abide by federal
19 law. As a praying man, of course, I
20 would love to see more children
21 understand and get a moment of silence or
22 some meditative moment where they can
23 reflect on the day or what they're about
24 to do in terms of how they go about
25 school, but we don't have any formal

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2 position on this.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I

4 believe that when I asked about this

5 several months ago, I was forwarded

6 something. So you all have something in

7 writing. I didn't bring it because I

8 assumed that you would and that you would

9 talk about the issue and present it today

10 or else talk about it at least.

11 DR. NUNERY: Okay. Well,

12 unfortunately, I don't have that in front

13 of me. So my apologies to you. I don't

14 have that in front of me right now.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Then

16 we would request that something be

17 prepared and forwarded to this Committee

18 so that we may make it available to

19 anyone who asks, the schools, the parents

20 such as are here today and the press and

21 anyone else who would like to have a

22 copy.

23 DR. NUNERY: Okay.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

25 Councilman Greenlee.

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2 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
3 you, Madam Chair.

4 Good afternoon, everyone.

5 DR. NUNERY: Good afternoon.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Maybe
7 just to kind of frame it a little bit.
8 Could you just say, Dr. Nunery, what is
9 permitted right now, if any, as far as
10 prayer or silent meditation or anything
11 like that or what has been specifically
12 prohibited? Just to frame it a little
13 bit, is what I'm trying to get at.

14 DR. NUNERY: I'm going to ask
15 Penny Nixon, our Associate
16 Superintendent, to respond and then also
17 Rodney Oglesby, who is the head of
18 Government Regulations, to respond.

19 MS. NIXON: In terms of what's
20 prohibited in school --

21 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Maybe you
22 better identify yourself for the
23 stenographer.

24 MS. NIXON: I'm Penny Nixon.
25 I'm Associate Superintendent of Schools,

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2 the School District of Philadelphia.

3 In terms of prayer, we don't
4 have a formal policy where prayer is
5 permitted in school.

6 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.
7 Anything like a time for silence?

8 MS. NIXON: No. No.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I'm just
10 trying to get exactly where we're at
11 right now. Okay. Thank you.

12 MR. OGLESBY: I would only echo
13 what Ms. Nixon just said. There's no
14 formal policy in place.

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Okay.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Well,
17 I would hope you would go back. And I
18 have it in my office. I hope you will go
19 back and look at your records, because
20 you do have something there. I got it
21 from you.

22 MS. NIXON: Okay.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: You
24 talked about the very things I mentioned
25 in my opening remarks, about a student's

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2 ability to quietly pray, pray at their
3 desk or go someplace privately. All of
4 that I got from you. So you all have it,
5 because you sent it to me several months
6 ago when we first introduced the
7 resolution. So the School District has
8 it. You know, today you're not
9 mentioning it, but you have it.

10 MS. NIXON: Okay.

11 DR. NUNERY: Well,
12 Councilwoman, we'll commit to making sure
13 you have that and we'll get it
14 distributed, whatever that document is,
15 but I think you've heard from us that
16 there isn't any specific policy in place
17 right now.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you very much. What we would like to do
20 is with regard to this issue, we'd like
21 you to wait and let us -- before we go
22 into the other, have people who are here
23 to testify on prayer in schools. So
24 we'll ask you to let them speak, and then
25 we'll come back to the District closings.

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2 DR. NUNERY: Very good. Thank
3 you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you.

6 Mr. Barry Morrison, Regional
7 Director, Anti-Defamation League; Nancy
8 Barenbear, Associate Director,
9 Anti-Defamation League.

10 (Witness approached witness
11 table.)

12 MR. MORRISON: She's not here
13 yet. I'm Barry Morrison.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: That
15 will be fine.

16 MR. MORRISON: I have copies of
17 my testimony for anybody who needs it.

18 Good afternoon, Councilwoman
19 Blackwell and Councilman Greenlee. My
20 name is Barry Morrison. I'm the Regional
21 Director of the Anti-Defamation League.
22 Thank you for the opportunity to appear
23 before the Committee today.

24 The Anti-Defamation League, as
25 you may know, is one of the nation's

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2 premier civil rights/human relations
3 agencies fighting anti-Semitism and all
4 forms of bigotry, defending democratic
5 ideals and promoting civil rights for
6 all.

7 For almost 100 years, the
8 Anti-Defamation League has been deeply
9 committed to preserving and promoting
10 religious rights and liberties for all
11 Americans. We believe that the
12 constitutionally mandated separation of
13 church and state, as embodied in the
14 First Amendment of our Constitution,
15 safeguards religious liberties because it
16 enables Americans to practice their
17 various beliefs freely and boldly,
18 without government interference,
19 endorsement or support.

20 We understand that this
21 resolution that is being considered today
22 was well-intentioned. However, the issue
23 of prayer in our public schools is a
24 well-settled matter of American law.
25 Simply put, the Constitution prohibits

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2 school-sponsored or endorsed prayer in
3 public schools, making this hearing
4 unnecessary and potentially even
5 misleading.

6 Of course, students have the
7 right to engage in voluntary individual
8 prayer that is not coercive and does not
9 substantially disrupt the school's
10 educational mission and activities.

11 Schools also have the right to teach
12 about different religions in a
13 comparative religion class. These are
14 well-established principles. However,
15 school and public officials cannot
16 promote or encourage personal prayer or
17 the use of one's faith in one's daily
18 living. Any governmental or school
19 promotion or endorsement of a student's
20 private religious activity may be
21 considered a violation of the
22 Constitution.

23 Given the body of well-settled
24 law on the issue of prayer in public
25 schools, there is no necessity for a

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2 hearing on the matter. In fact, we are
3 concerned that this hearing may confuse
4 and divide parents, teachers and students
5 along religious lines.

6 We recognize and fully support
7 the desire of the resolution's sponsor
8 and others to promote positive behaviors
9 by students and compassion and concern on
10 their part for others. This initiative,
11 however, is not the way to achieve these
12 admirable goals.

13 Our religious diversity is best
14 respected by refraining from
15 intentionally entrenching religious ideas
16 in the minds of children. Council
17 Chambers and teachers' desks should not
18 serve as pulpits for religious doctrine.

19 Thank you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much.

22 Robin Schatz, the Jewish
23 Federation.

24 (Witness approached witness
25 table.)

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2 MS. SCHATZ: Good afternoon.

3 My name is Robin Schatz and I am the
4 Director of Government Affairs for the
5 Jewish Federation of Greater
6 Philadelphia, an organization whose
7 mission is to mobilize financial and
8 volunteer resources to address the
9 community's most critical priorities in
10 Philadelphia, Israel and overseas.

11 Our community is diverse,
12 ranging from Orthodox to secular, with
13 equally diverse viewpoints. The
14 organized Jewish community has long
15 championed freedom of speech and
16 religious expression. However, as a
17 community, and particularly for those of
18 us within the community relations field,
19 we hold strong views regarding the
20 separation of church and state and prayer
21 in public schools.

22 While we believe that City
23 Council Resolution 110158 is
24 well-intentioned, the resolution does
25 raise concerns. First of all, there is

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2 no need for this resolution, as the First
3 Amendment grants everyone the right to
4 pray in school on a voluntary basis.
5 Individual, silent and personal prayers
6 have never been forbidden. Encouraging
7 students to pray, however, is quite
8 another matter. By encouraging children
9 to pray for themselves and their fellow
10 students, the schools are in fact
11 endorsing prayer with the unintended
12 consequences of making children of
13 minority faiths or of no religious faith
14 at all feel marginalized.

15 At the 1995 Plenary Session of
16 the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, a
17 public policy umbrella organization
18 representing 14 major national Jewish
19 organizations and 125 local, independent
20 community relations councils, a
21 resolution was passed that in part stated
22 its longstanding position in opposition
23 to all forms of government-sponsored
24 prayer in the public schools, including
25 silent prayer and so-called silent

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2 meditation. The resolution stated that,
3 quote, "The institutionalizing of prayer,
4 in any form, spoken or silent, fosters
5 what in essence is a religious exercise
6 that in a public-school setting can have
7 a coercive effect on a student. At
8 bottom, government-sponsored prayer
9 debases distinctive religious expression,
10 vital to maintaining pluralistic
11 religious beliefs."

12 The Union for Reform Judaism
13 and the Central Conference of American
14 Rabbis have both passed resolutions
15 opposing a prayer amendment to the United
16 States Constitution. The URJ, quote,
17 "cherishes the conviction that the
18 maintenance and furtherance of religion
19 are the responsibility of the synagogue,
20 the church and the home, and not any
21 agency of the government, including the
22 public schools."

23 Our public schools are for all
24 children, regardless of religious
25 affiliation. We applaud the desire of

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2 City Council to encourage positive
3 behavior in our children in exercising
4 compassion and understanding when dealing
5 with others, but this should not be
6 limited to just faith communities, nor is
7 faith and prayer the only path to
8 achieving these goals. The schools are
9 supported by all taxpayers and,
10 therefore, should be free of endorsed
11 religious observance.

12 I would like to close with this
13 quote from President Ulysses S. Grant
14 made in an 1875 speech in Des Moines,
15 Iowa. Quote, "Leave the matter of
16 religion to the family altar, the church
17 and the private school, supported
18 entirely by private contributions. Keep
19 the church and state forever separate."

20 Thank you.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you, Ms. Schatz. Nice to see you again.

23 MS. SCHATZ: Nice to be here,
24 even if I'm on the other side.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

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2 you.

3 Bill Ewing, American Civil
4 Liberties Union. Next will be Karen
5 Brown and then Ms. Bertha Simmons.

6 (Witness approached witness
7 table.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

9 Mr. Ewing.

10 MR. EWING: Thank you, Madam
11 Chairperson, Mr. Greenlee. My name is
12 Bill Ewing. I'm a member of the Board of
13 Directors of the Greater Philadelphia
14 Chapter of the ACLU. I'm also a
15 practicing Christian and, nevertheless,
16 concerned about the substance of this
17 resolution.

18 I think it's important to point
19 out, as the previous witnesses have
20 pointed out, that prayer is allowed in
21 school today. Anybody who wants to pray
22 can pray, as long as it's not school
23 sponsored. The idea that certain
24 interest groups in the country have
25 promulgated that by not allowing

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2 state-sponsored prayer we're throwing God
3 out of school is just totally -- it
4 disrespects God, is what it does.

5 We cannot throw God out of the
6 schools. God, by those of us who believe
7 in God, is there everywhere and all the
8 time, and to think that some people could
9 throw God out of school is to give the
10 forces of darkness too much power.

11 Now, I asked to be distributed
12 to you a copy of Thomas Jefferson's
13 letter to the Danbury Baptist, which he
14 wrote in 1802 when they had congratulated
15 him upon his election to presidency, and
16 in there he said, "Believing with you
17 that religion is a matter which lies
18 solely between man and his God" -- sorry
19 about the sexist language, but that's the
20 way it was then -- "that he owes account
21 to none other for his faith or his
22 worship, that the legitimate powers of
23 government reach actions only and not
24 opinions, I contemplate with sovereign
25 reverence that act of the whole American

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2 people which declared that their
3 legislature should make no law respecting
4 an establishment of religion, or
5 prohibiting the free exercise thereof,
6 thus building a wall of separation
7 between church and state."

8 What we're talking about here,
9 once we get school administration into
10 some kind of supporting prayer, is we're
11 substituting an arm of the state for the
12 parents and the child, himself or
13 herself, in deciding what kind of prayer
14 to make. For instance, suppose a school
15 decided we're going to support prayer
16 that addresses -- uses the name Allah for
17 God. This would upset a great many
18 people and perhaps make others happy, but
19 it is the wrong place to decide what kind
20 of prayer should be offered, and it's a
21 major problem with institutional prayer.

22 Are the parents going to decide
23 or is the teacher, the principal or City
24 Council what prayers should be offered?
25 It interjects the government between the

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2 parents and their children on the issue
3 of religion.

4 Even within Christianity -- and
5 I also distributed to you a copy of the
6 treaty with Tripoli, which was signed by
7 John Adams and ratified by the Senate of
8 the United States ten years after the
9 Constitution was written and adopted, and
10 it says, "The government of the United
11 States of America is not, in any sense,
12 founded on the Christian religion."

13 So it was clear back then to
14 those founders, and they were the people
15 who were around when the country was
16 founded, that this -- it's in Article 11
17 of that treaty. But even if we put it
18 aside and we said, Okay, Christian prayer
19 could be allowed, but it can't be
20 specific, well what Christian prayer?
21 The prayer of those who don't believe in
22 climate change? The prayer of those who
23 believe that homosexuality is sin? Or
24 the prayer of those other Christians like
25 myself who believe that everybody should

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2 be traded equally regardless of their
3 sexual orientation? Once you put the
4 state in the position of encouraging
5 prayer, it's a question of what kind of
6 prayer, and once the state is deciding
7 that, it is violating the freedom of
8 conscience and the rights of parents to
9 bring up their children.

10 Thank you.

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

13 Next we'll have Ms. Karen Brown
14 and then we're going to have Ms. Bertha
15 Simmons.

16 (Witness approached witness
17 table.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
19 Welcome.

20 MS. BROWN: I want to start off
21 by applauding both you and Councilman
22 Greenlee for taking this motion on. As a
23 mother, a Catholic school teacher for 24
24 years and a teacher who had the privilege
25 of teaching in both private and public

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2 and charter schools, I believe that this
3 motion should go through. And we are in
4 a position now where we're saying that
5 the state and the church should be
6 separate, yet for years we have in the
7 school calendar allowed for breaks for
8 the Christian holidays as well as the
9 Jewish holidays. It was part of the
10 school calendar, so how can we say that
11 the state and church are separate if
12 we're taking breaks from education so
13 that these children can worship their
14 holidays?

15 I believe with a lot of the
16 private schools that have religion base
17 in their studies closing and the charter
18 schools and public schools becoming the
19 option for parents in Philadelphia, if
20 you add to that the problems that are in
21 these schools apparently now, you're
22 offering the families a way to reinforce
23 positive attitudes towards their
24 children. And as long as the bill is
25 vague enough and is not subjective to

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2 certain guidelines where it has to be
3 certain prayer or certain religion, I
4 don't see any harm in allowing the
5 children to have a positive
6 reenforcement.

7 We've already subjected a lot
8 of issues into schools that shouldn't be
9 there. We are promoting condoms and
10 abstinence in the schools. In fact, our
11 own Mayor did a contest where he allowed
12 high school kids to design a cover for
13 these condoms. If we're going to that
14 level, how minuscule are we getting that
15 we're putting this motion under a
16 microscope?

17 This is something positive that
18 this City needs. And as a mother and an
19 educator for 24 years, I applaud you and
20 I support you, and my civic group, both
21 of them, support you as well.

22 Thank you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you, Ms. Brown. Thank you. Question for
25 you.

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2 MS. BROWN: Sure.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
4 you, Madam Chair.

5 Good afternoon, Karen. How are
6 you doing?

7 MS. BROWN: Good afternoon.

8 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I guess
9 just to be on the record just so
10 everything is clear, with all due
11 respect, I agree with the other
12 witnesses. I don't think we should be
13 having prayer in schools. I'll be
14 perfectly honest. I want to be clear on
15 that.

16 MS. BROWN: That's fine.

17 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: And
18 obviously everybody has their opinion on
19 that.

20 I guess my only question is a
21 very general one. We do have a legal
22 problem here. Even if we promoted that,
23 wouldn't we -- it does seem like it's
24 probably against the law to promote
25 prayer in the schools right now.

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2 MS. BROWN: Councilman, but
3 don't we have a legal problem -- why are
4 we allowing the school calendar to go
5 around religious holidays? Wasn't that a
6 legal problem, too? When we're taking
7 off for Christmas --

8 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I think
9 that's a little different.

10 MS. BROWN: No. How is it?
11 Are we not saying that this religious
12 belief is part of their school calendar?
13 You would take off for Rosh Hashanah, Yom
14 Kippur, Christmas and Easter. Are we not
15 promoting religious faith in the calendar
16 of the academic year? And it's a public
17 school that does this. Charter schools
18 do it as well.

19 So, I mean, there's a fine gray
20 line and I know you're crossing it.
21 We're also promoting condoms, that the
22 whole abstinent program in fact became
23 something that the Mayor took on and made
24 a major project out of. That's not the
25 school's place either. They're

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2 somebody's children, and it's the
3 parents' place to decide that for them.

4 When we're promoting other
5 issues, why are we fighting over this
6 issue? This is something positive that
7 our youth can use, because our youth is
8 totally out of control.

9 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Again, I
10 don't want to go into a long back and
11 forth on this, but, as I said, I think
12 the other issues are separate. I think
13 there is a constitutional issue in there.

14 I support certainly people
15 having the discussion on this, and that's
16 why I think this hearing --

17 MS. BROWN: I believe a
18 discussion was warranted a long time ago.

19 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Yeah, but
20 I just want to get on record --

21 MS. BROWN: That's fine.

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: --
23 because you said you support us in this.

24 MS. BROWN: I support the
25 motion. What I meant is, I support the

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2 motion.

3 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I just
4 want to be clear, I don't necessarily
5 agree on the issue. I agree that there
6 should be a discussion, that's all.

7 MS. BROWN: And I agree with
8 that, too. I believe there should be a
9 motion and all factors should be heard
10 before a decision is made, and that's
11 what I support.

12 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: But --
13 last thing. I'm sorry to take up the
14 time. When you say a decision, I mean,
15 let's face it, we can't make a decision
16 one way or the other on this. We're just
17 kind of airing the issue out here, I
18 think. So I don't think -- even if
19 everybody decided there should be prayer
20 in schools, the City Council -- which
21 wouldn't happen, but if it did, we
22 couldn't change that anyway.

23 MS. BROWN: And that's a sad
24 factor that you can't --

25 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: It's also

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2 the law. We all have to operate under
3 our own legal restrictions.

4 MS. BROWN: You know what?
5 Then where in the law does it allow for
6 breaks for religious holidays?

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Well, it
8 doesn't either allow or prohibit.

9 MS. BROWN: But we've done it.
10 That's what I mean.

11 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I think
12 they're a little apples and oranges, but
13 okay. I respect your opinion. Thank
14 you.

15 MS. BROWN: I was a Catholic
16 school teacher, taught in a public school
17 and I was off for the Jewish holidays.
18 I'm Catholic, but I respected the fact
19 that the Jewish beliefs needed their
20 break to celebrate their holidays, and I
21 get that. In fact, even in our
22 government, we give -- we're allowed
23 to -- I worked in the City. If you were
24 Jewish, you were allowed to take off for
25 Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and it was

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2 not part of your vacation, because we're
3 respecting the fact that they have a
4 religious belief. So why can't we
5 respect the fact that the families would
6 like their children to have a religious
7 belief that goes with them to school?
8 Just because they can't afford to put
9 them into a school that celebrates their
10 religious beliefs in this economy, they
11 should be able to carry those beliefs
12 with them and their children when they go
13 to school, and that's what I am glad this
14 motion is having.

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: All
16 right. We have a little difference of
17 opinion. Okay. Thank you.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you, Ms. Brown. Thank you.

20 Ms. Bertha Simmons.

21 (Witness approached witness
22 table.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you for coming and being here,
25 Ms. Simmons.

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2 MS. SIMMONS: Good afternoon,
3 everyone.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
5 afternoon.

6 MS. SIMMONS: Especially to my
7 daughter, Jannie, and her companion
8 that's there beside her. So glad to see
9 you two sitting there talking about
10 prayer in school, because I hope you all
11 had prayer in school. I know Jannie did,
12 because I raised her with prayer in
13 school.

14 We all need prayer in school.
15 We all need prayer at home. Pray every
16 night before you go to bed. Wake up the
17 next morning and thank the Lord for
18 waking up to let you see another day.
19 How do you think you are living? You're
20 not living by yourself. There's a God up
21 above that watches over you morning, noon
22 and night. I know about it.

23 When I went to school, we
24 didn't just have a prayer just for one
25 person. Everybody prayed their own

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2 little prayer. We had a separate area.
3 Everybody went and prayed their own
4 prayer. I do not know how you pray your
5 prayer, you might not know how I pray
6 mine, but everybody went to school and
7 prayed a prayer. It wasn't but two
8 minutes or three minutes. Then we went
9 into the classroom and had class.

10 Prayer need to be everywhere,
11 everybody, in your home. I'll be on the
12 bus sometime and being praying and
13 forgetting my stop. I have to go to the
14 next stop and get off, because I'm
15 praying for the kids who I meet on the
16 street, who I need to pray for. I pray
17 for all color people. I wish my momma
18 brought me up to pray and do for
19 everybody regardless of who they are,
20 where they are. They need prayer.

21 The kids I see in the street,
22 they'll stop me in church and says,
23 Nobody never speak to me. You don't have
24 to have a whole conversation. Wave to
25 the kids and say, How are you today?

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2 The kids need that
3 encouragement. Because I talk to them
4 everywhere. I'm down here two or three
5 times a week. I'm on Broad Street, on
6 the buses. I was raised up to meet,
7 greet and talk with all nationality of
8 people.

9 I used to raise babies. I was
10 a nurse in JFK Hospital. That's what
11 motivate me to take care of everybody.

12 So everybody in here, please
13 let us get the prayer back in school.
14 They don't have to have it in the
15 classroom. Have a little area where
16 everybody can go in and say their little
17 separate prayer. That way, they'll be
18 encouraged. They'll keep their kids
19 encouraged. They'll keep their own
20 family encouraged. And don't forget,
21 prayer, prayer is the one that's going to
22 bring you through, because if you don't
23 have prayer, how would you think you
24 would exist if you don't have something
25 to back you up, something on your mind to

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2 keep you motivated? Because I tell all
3 of you, I want you to pray, because I
4 tell you, I don't want no trouble at the
5 river.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Amen.

7 Thank you, Ms. Simmons.

8 That's our Mother Simmons, and
9 she's right. She was there. She helped
10 raise us all, and we did have prayers in
11 school, and I think it made me a better
12 person. I thank God every day.

13 So we thank you for your
14 comments. We thank you for being here.
15 We thank you for being the impetus behind
16 us introducing this resolution.

17 And I say to all of you who are
18 here, would you like to see Mother
19 Simmons at your office three days, four
20 days a week saying, What about this
21 resolution on prayer in schools?

22 MS. SIMMONS: I raised you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: That's
24 right. Yes, ma'am.

25 But we love her and we're

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2 grateful to have the discussion.

3 MS. SIMMONS: Thank you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you.

6 We have Councilwoman Blondell
7 Reynolds Brown who is here.

8 Now we're going to ask -- thank
9 you all for the discussion on the issue.
10 We're now going to resume our testimony
11 with regard to Resolution 110801 on
12 school closing and consolidation.

13 Dr. Nunery, would you and your
14 team come back forward. Thank you.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you again.

19 DR. NUNERY: Thank you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And
21 all of you know I'm a better person
22 because of Mom Simmons, because she's in
23 my life. We thank her.

24 Dr. Nunery.

25 DR. NUNERY: Thank you,

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2 Councilwoman. Again, my name is Leroy
3 Nunery. I'm Acting Superintendent and
4 CEO of the School District of
5 Philadelphia. I'm joined here at the
6 table with, to my immediate right,
7 Danielle Floyd, who is in Capital
8 Programs, has been the Project Manager
9 for Facilities Master Planning effort,
10 and to my farther right is Penny Nixon,
11 our Associate Superintendent of Schools.

12 Thank you, Councilwoman
13 Blackwell, for calling us together.
14 Councilman Greenlee and Councilwoman
15 Brown, we're glad to see both of you as
16 well.

17 I'm privileged here to present
18 some ideas around our Facilities Master
19 Plan and also to represent almost 200,000
20 children who attend our public and
21 charter schools.

22 We want to thank City Council
23 particularly for the continued support
24 and interest in our public schools, and
25 in my tenure as Deputy Superintendent and

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2 now Acting Superintendent, I have had the
3 privilege of engaging in informative
4 discussions with members of Council on
5 important issues such as alternative
6 education, school climate and safety, and
7 career and technical education.

8 In addition, I want to
9 acknowledge Mayor Nutter's call for an
10 Education Accountability Agreement and
11 say that we are grateful for the City's
12 expressed concern and request for greater
13 involvement. We view ongoing, heightened
14 levels of accountability and transparency
15 as positive and necessary steps to fiscal
16 health and public trust. As you know,
17 this Education Accountability Agreement
18 was authorized by the School Reform
19 Commission in June 2011, and since the
20 signing of that agreement, the State, the
21 City, the School Reform Commission,
22 District staff and our two executive
23 advisors have quickly gotten to work to
24 review the budget, establish a working
25 group to suggest strategies to achieve

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2 operational efficiencies and also to
3 determine how the District can deliver on
4 its goal of creating a system of great
5 schools.

6 We are here today to provide
7 members of Council with an overview of
8 our activities related to the Facilities
9 Master Plan. You will recall that one of
10 the major initiatives under Imagine 2014,
11 the District's existing plan, called for
12 the creation of a comprehensive,
13 expandable and adaptable five-year
14 facilities planning model for the
15 District. The goal is very simple: to
16 create an efficient use of school
17 facilities that allows programs and
18 resources to be aligned in a way that
19 most benefits the education of its
20 students.

21 The Facilities Master Plan
22 creates a framework to allow the District
23 to achieve the following. There are five
24 key points. First is to standardize
25 grade configuration to improve K to 12

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2 academic pathways, to provide equity in
3 programmatic offerings and to create
4 predictable and manageable transitions
5 for students; to reduce the excess
6 capacity through building closures and
7 consolidations, termination of leases and
8 closure of annexes and to also reach the
9 national average of 85 percent occupancy
10 or utilization; thirdly, to develop a new
11 capital program that addresses deferred
12 maintenance and excess capacity; fourth,
13 to develop a plan for surplus real estate
14 and an opportunity for community
15 engagement; and then, fifth, to generate
16 revenue from the sale of surplus
17 properties to be applied to debt service
18 or capital funding.

19 Over the last year, the School
20 District, including a team of consultants
21 led by URS Corporation, examined many
22 factors, including building conditions,
23 enrollment history, capacity and
24 utilization, location of specialized
25 academic programs and demographic trends,

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2 to develop the Facilities Master Plan.

3 On November 2nd, 2011, the School

4 District released the Facilities Master

5 Plan publicly and announced a list of

6 proposed actions to be implemented over

7 the next two years. These proposed

8 actions included grade configurations or

9 reconfigurations, surplus property to be

10 listed for sale -- there are existing

11 eight properties and there will be others

12 listed for sale -- and some school

13 closures. Our current proposals -- and I

14 underline "current" -- if approved, would

15 result in reduction of 14,465 seats, or

16 20 percent of our excess capacity, and

17 would improve our District-wide

18 utilization from 68 percent to 71 percent

19 over two years.

20 We are continuing our

21 commitment to engage the public in

22 decision-making processes. Two weeks

23 ago, we initiated the start of parent and

24 community engagement meetings to gather

25 public feedback on our proposed actions.

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2 These meetings will continue over the
3 next three months prior to the School
4 Reform Commission taking action by spring
5 2012. We acknowledge and we recognize
6 that these proposed actions and these
7 changes, particularly school closings,
8 are difficult and greatly impact the
9 lives of our parents, our students and
10 school staffs. We also recognize that
11 schools play an enormous role in our
12 communities. However, with the growing
13 demands that we have on programming but
14 also our limited financial resources, as
15 you well know, we must begin to make the
16 best use of our school buildings to
17 provide our children with the quality
18 education they deserve.

19 As background for the members
20 of Council, I want to quickly highlight
21 the work that's been completed over the
22 last year.

23 First, beginning in July of
24 2010, we issued a request for proposals
25 seeking a consultant to assist with the

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2 creation and implementation of a
3 Facilities Master Plan. Eight firms
4 responded, and URS Corporation, along
5 with its team of sub-consultants, was
6 selected as the Facilities Master Plan
7 Program Manager. The SRC approved the
8 selection in September of 2010.

9 From August 2010 through
10 October 2010, the District contracted
11 with the OMG Center for Collaborative
12 Learning to conduct feedback sessions
13 with advocacy organizations, charter
14 school operators, elected officials,
15 civic and community organizations and
16 others with the intent to gather
17 perspective on criteria that should be
18 applied to school closings and
19 consolidations, also on strategies on how
20 to inform the public about closures and
21 potential reuse for school buildings once
22 they close.

23 In October 2010, District staff
24 and School Reform Commission spoke with
25 members of the School Board and senior

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2 leadership teams in Kansas City and in
3 Pittsburgh to learn about their
4 rightsizing efforts. We also talked with
5 members from Detroit, Chicago, New York
6 City and DC as part of our research.
7 These school districts were selected
8 because of their large number of school
9 closings in recent years that were
10 implemented and the factors that
11 influenced their decisions mirror the
12 District's current state.

13 The District announced publicly
14 on November 10th, 2010, roughly a year
15 ago, the launch of the plan. The
16 presentation covered the rationale for
17 developing a long-range plan and the need
18 to right-size facilities to support our
19 instructional reforms. Immediately
20 following this announcement, the District
21 initiated a year-long, multi-phased round
22 of community meetings to share data and
23 inform stakeholders about the purpose of
24 our work. In total, the District
25 completed 23 meetings engaging over 1,400

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2 participants, and those were just the
3 formal meetings. We had several informal
4 gatherings as well.

5 Following the completion of
6 tasks under Phase I, the SRC and the
7 District established a state of core
8 planning principles, planning assumptions
9 and data inputs to guide the creation of
10 rightsizing options. Moreover, an
11 internal executive committee was formed
12 to provide the educational framework and
13 direction for a long-range plan. From
14 January 2011 to March 2011, the Executive
15 Committee established planning guidelines
16 for grade configuration, school size
17 range and preferred program delivery
18 models for early childhood education,
19 special education, English language
20 learners, and career and technical
21 education, and we're still at that work,
22 refining the programming so that we will
23 have a robust curriculum and program in
24 the years to come.

25 In April 2011, just a few

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2 months ago, the District released its
3 draft Facilities Master Report.

4 Additionally, we announced immediate
5 rightsizing actions to be implemented for
6 the 2011-'12 academic year, this current
7 year. Finally, the School Reform
8 Commission initiated a period for public
9 comment on a newly adaptive -- newly
10 created Adaptive Reuse Policy and
11 Facilities Rightsizing Policy. Now, the
12 Adaptive Reuse Policy will govern the
13 process for any properties that are
14 closed and listed for sale under the
15 Facilities Master Plan. And it's in
16 place. It also identified three tiers of
17 potential users. Required users will
18 have to submit an RFQ and RFP, and there
19 will be evaluation teams formed from a
20 wide variety of audiences to review user
21 proposals and to make recommendations to
22 the SRC on a building's reuse.

23 The Facilities Rightsizing
24 Policy expanded on the original policy
25 that we had by increasing the number of

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2 and type of rightsizing actions that the
3 District could implement, specifying
4 rightsizing criteria and establishing a
5 timeline for those actions. Following
6 public comment, these policies were
7 approved on June 13th, 2011.

8 Finally, as our long-range
9 planning process continues, we look
10 for -- we continue to look for
11 opportunities to maximize effectiveness,
12 create new partnerships, refine our
13 support system so as to provide
14 stakeholders with the best service and
15 the most useful information possible. In
16 short, everything that we've done is
17 posted online at our website. Working in
18 concert for the benefit of all,
19 especially our schools and our students,
20 we expect to exceed limits and to find
21 innovative ways to improve the
22 organization and achieve our academic
23 goals.

24 Thank you again for the
25 opportunity to submit written testimony,

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2 and we'll be glad to take any questions
3 you may have.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you very much.

6 This Adaptive Reuse Policy, as
7 you know, and I'm sure especially
8 District Councilpeople are getting calls
9 as well, we have -- in fact, I was in a
10 meeting just today about Drew School
11 that's in my area, and we have some
12 people who have been meeting with Drexel
13 University, we have other people who --
14 I've had two or three plans submitted to
15 me for that structure.

16 So the Adaptive Reuse Policy
17 that includes submitting an RFP or RFQ,
18 can you tell us a little bit about that,
19 what it is, when people can apply and how
20 we should access that system and any
21 necessary meetings with regard to these
22 buildings, as well as West Philly High
23 School. I've had people asking for that
24 since before it closed. So I have a lot
25 of interest in those in my district.

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2 DR. NUNERY: The policy is
3 again on our website, and we can give you
4 copies of it. We have hard copies here.
5 I'm going to talk a little bit about the,
6 if you will, the general issues around
7 the policy, but have Danielle Floyd talk
8 more about some of the specifics.

9 But essentially what we didn't
10 have in the past, Councilwoman, was a
11 vigorous process which would essentially
12 allow anybody interested in a Drew or
13 West Philly or Gillespie or any of the
14 buildings that have been closed to come
15 forward, put a formal written proposal on
16 the table and have that considered as
17 part of a systemic decision-making
18 process, and that's really important.
19 We're the only seller of school buildings
20 in town other than maybe the Archdiocese
21 if they decide to close and sell. The
22 capital markets right now are not in
23 terrific shape, so, quite frankly,
24 considering proposals, we'll have to take
25 into account the ability for somebody to

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2 afford to do what they claim to do, but
3 also to make sure that it fits at least
4 one of what we think are three
5 constructive uses so that these buildings
6 don't sit dormant, boarded up and
7 vandalized over time.

8 The first tier are educational
9 users, and it can cover any number of
10 organizations, from institutions of
11 higher education, charter schools,
12 alternative schools, adult education.

13 The second tier would be
14 community development corporations or
15 community organizations which may see a
16 building as an asset that they can
17 activate for their particular purpose.

18 And the third would be private
19 developers.

20 So we are also hearing from a
21 number of people in any one of those
22 categories. It is totally feasible that
23 a winning proposal could include all
24 three of those categories. Assume, for
25 example, a university that pulls private

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2 developers in with community groups and
3 decides to repurpose a building that we
4 no longer need because of excess
5 capacity.

6 So we think there are a lot of
7 opportunities and combinations that can
8 come out of this process, all for the
9 good of making sure these buildings don't
10 go dark and just become dormant.

11 I'm going to turn to Danielle
12 Floyd for more detail on this and then
13 we'll respond to any other questions.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you.

16 MS. FLOYD: Good afternoon.
17 Danielle Floyd in the Office of the
18 Superintendent.

19 To answer your question,
20 Councilwoman, where we are in the process
21 and what are the next steps that need to
22 be taken, as you recall, in April we
23 announced eight properties that we
24 intended to list for sale, and in
25 November we announced an additional four

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2 that we intend to move forward with
3 listing for sale. We have completed
4 eight appraisals for the properties that
5 we announced in April and will be
6 identifying working with a pre-selected
7 group of appraisers to do walk-throughs
8 of the four facilities that we've now
9 recommended to list for sale.

10 In addition, we have identified
11 brokers to represent the School District
12 for each one of these properties. We
13 went through a competitive solicitation
14 process to identify a group of brokers to
15 work with the School District on
16 successful -- on being able to attract
17 potential buyers and ushering members of
18 the public, whether it be a community
19 organization, private developers, through
20 the process. And so that work has been
21 completed.

22 So where we are right now is to
23 finalize the request for qualifications
24 so that a member in one of these
25 different tiers of users are able to fill

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2 out a very quick application. And
3 basically all we're asking to know is who
4 you are, what type of availability or
5 access do you have to finance any
6 capital, what properties are you
7 interested in, and then also we are
8 asking for them to identify ahead of time
9 do they have any current working
10 relationships or business relationships
11 with members of either the SRC or members
12 of the School District of Philadelphia
13 that are currently employed there.

14 Once that RFQ is out, we
15 anticipate to have it out for 45 days.
16 Following that, we will pre-qualify a
17 group of users to then submit a formal
18 proposal on what they would propose is a
19 reuse for the property.

20 And I guess I would say the
21 last piece is really about identifying
22 these RFP evaluation committees. The
23 policy was set up in a way that it
24 comprised members of the School District,
25 a representative from the Council -- a

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2 representative from someone on City
3 Council if the property is within their
4 councilmanic district, a representative
5 from the City Planning Commission. We're
6 specifically looking and targeting those
7 community planners that have that as part
8 of one of their planning districts to
9 have it, again, correlate and align as
10 much as possible with the Philadelphia
11 2035 long-range plan, and then
12 identifying members of the public,
13 whether it's through a civic organization
14 or community organization, to also assist
15 in reading proposals and making a
16 recommendation to the SRC.

17 So the RFQ process, we're
18 looking to finalize that and have it
19 released after the holidays, and then the
20 recruitment and formation of the RFP
21 evaluation committees would also happen
22 in parallel. I think we are looking --
23 and we'll continue to work with the City
24 as well as members of Council -- on
25 trying to identify who are those

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2 community organizations that are active
3 in neighborhoods that want to be involved
4 and engaged in what may be a very
5 demanding process and time-consuming
6 process. And I will also note that one
7 of the other pieces that we included,
8 because we understand that people who
9 live in neighborhoods may not be able to
10 participate at this deep of a level, but
11 still have an interest and still want to
12 know what's going on and be informed,
13 that the District is committing to
14 holding a public meeting in the area once
15 we know who the qualified users are and
16 have more formal proposals so that these
17 users or team of users can make their
18 presentation or pitch, for lack of a
19 better term, to the general community and
20 have an opportunity to engage in
21 questions, very similar to what happened
22 with the renaissance schools process
23 where the different providers were able
24 to come out, talk about their strengths
25 and what they were looking to do with the

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2 school turnaround and take questions from
3 the community.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Did
5 you say that the appraisals were already
6 done for the first eight?

7 MS. FLOYD: That's correct.
8 For eight. And we will be moving forward
9 with doing the four. So the old West
10 Philadelphia High School still needs to
11 be appraised. I'm trying to remember the
12 other three that we listed for sale. The
13 old Willard School still needs to be
14 appraised and -- I apologize. I'm
15 blanking on the other two. But those
16 appraisals will be underway very shortly.
17 We have a group of appraisers that have
18 been pre-qualified to do that work.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Now,
20 you said that this committee that hears,
21 an RFP will be issued and that will be
22 returned to a committee consisting of a
23 Council district representative for the
24 closed property, City Planning, community
25 organization. And how large will that

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2 group be?

3 MS. FLOYD: We're anticipating
4 at a minimum nine members. I realize
5 that in certain parts of the City it
6 could be larger or depending on the
7 property it could be larger. We tried to
8 structure at least the balance of the
9 committees to be about 30 percent School
10 District employees and 60 percent members
11 of the outside larger community.

12 DR. NUNERY: And, Councilwoman,
13 if I may, part of the reason we're going
14 through this obviously is to make sure
15 each proposal as it comes in, after it's
16 gone through a request for quotation or
17 request for interest, if you will, then
18 gets to RFP, that it's vetted by people
19 who could be most directly affected by it
20 or who know the neighborhoods better than
21 we would at 440, but also to make sure
22 that it's a sound proposal. What you
23 don't want is to go through months and
24 months of work and then find out that
25 either, again, the financing can't be

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2 done -- we already have that experience
3 with one building that we've sold.

4 Somebody was waiting for New Market Tax
5 Credits, which didn't materialize, and
6 now you have to restructure the entire
7 deal.

8 So this is really important
9 that we do it methodically. This is
10 also, quite frankly, a corollary to what
11 we've been saying from the very start and
12 what the Pew Charitable Trust said, in
13 that for individuals who expect that by
14 just closing buildings, you can
15 immediately sell them and turn them into
16 cash, monetize the assets, may not be as
17 quick or as swift as they would expect.
18 These are long deals that have long
19 cycles. They could take as much as two
20 years in order to really get to closure.
21 You've got zoning issues. You've got all
22 kinds of other permissions that have to
23 be allowed. A number of the buildings,
24 they would have to be remediated for one
25 particular issue or another. It could be

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2 asbestos. It could be lead paint.

3 So what we're trying to do here
4 is be as methodical as possible, as
5 careful as possible, but also
6 progressive. And what we would need from
7 City Councilmembers, as we get to each
8 particular concept, is recommendations
9 for representatives from civic or
10 community groups that Councilmembers feel
11 really can stand up to this kind of work.
12 They're doing it based on what they can
13 bring to the table.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Great.

15 Councilman Greenlee.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
17 you, Madam Chair.

18 Good afternoon, everyone,
19 again.

20 DR. NUNERY: Good afternoon,
21 sir.

22 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Doctor, I
23 just want to touch on just generally --
24 first of all, I want to acknowledge all
25 the thoroughness you're trying to have on

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2 all these hearings. I mean, it seems
3 just looking at the list here that you're
4 touching almost every part of the City,
5 and I know that's important.

6 Now, just judging by -- I was
7 not there, but at the reports, news
8 reports I saw on the first hearing you
9 had, certainly the issue -- and this
10 isn't surprising -- of school closings
11 probably, it took up a lot of the time.
12 And I know nobody -- or a lot of people
13 don't want their school closed, but you
14 guys have tough decisions to make. I
15 guess just generally -- and I'm not
16 talking about one particular school
17 here -- is there some -- how would I call
18 it -- issues or items that people can
19 raise that might particularly be
20 cognizant in this? Because rather than
21 saying, I like my school, don't close it,
22 you know. Like, for example, I know at
23 Fitzsimons they raised some safety issues
24 of transfers to Strawberry Mansion and
25 that kind of thing.

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2 So I'm just wondering, are
3 there particular things that either you
4 heard at the first meeting or that you
5 have in mind that might be particularly
6 important for people to raise?

7 DR. NUNERY: I think we can tag
8 team. Go ahead and jump in and I'll
9 follow you and, Penny, you can jump in.

10 MS. FLOYD: I think probably
11 the first thing to preface all of the
12 work that we're doing here is, as much as
13 it's about school closings, it's really
14 about setting educational framework and
15 rationale for why we need to do the
16 things that we need to do.

17 In terms of things that get
18 brought up at the community meetings that
19 help inform the work that we -- so we
20 have a lot of hard data. We have
21 information on enrollment. We have
22 information on students who live in the
23 boundary and attend the school. We have
24 information on the number of students who
25 attend charter schools, but we know what

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2 their neighborhood schools are. We have
3 information on building condition and
4 what the needs are in those particular
5 facilities. And I do think that at the
6 first meeting that we had, there were
7 certainly -- one of the concerns that was
8 particularly raised was about the
9 dynamics in terms of the changing of the
10 neighborhood, and one of the things that
11 we are seeing and we saw in our data, but
12 also it was nice to see that confirmed
13 with members of the public who decided to
14 attend, was that it was a neighborhood
15 where historically and traditionally we
16 had seen a lot of flight from the
17 neighborhood schools and over the last
18 several years, you're now starting to see
19 parents get much more engaged in their
20 neighborhood public schools, especially
21 at the elementary school level. So we're
22 seeing already right now that we're going
23 to need to make some adjustments and
24 space for neighborhood children, for
25 instance, to be in those particular

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2 schools.

3 So I think that one of the
4 pieces of information that's been helpful
5 and informative when we went out for our
6 first meeting that I know will come up at
7 some others is some of the changing
8 shifts and demographics and information
9 just that people are seeing and observing
10 in their everyday life living in the
11 neighborhood.

12 And I think the other piece
13 that came up, at least speaking
14 specifically about the first meeting, was
15 that the School District has not gone
16 through a progressive process around
17 looking at its boundaries and looking at
18 how the boundaries are drawn to either
19 help schools with enrollment or not help
20 schools with enrollment. And that was
21 one of the particular concerns that was
22 raised in the meeting that we had two
23 Saturdays ago, was, well, if you look at
24 some of the boundaries here, if you were
25 to move a couple this way and move a

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2 little bit this way, that might actually
3 help all of us out. At the end of the
4 day -- and one of the pieces of
5 information we shared, though, is that
6 the enrollment declines that we have seen
7 in some of our schools are staggering and
8 they are significant, and having a school
9 of 180 students or 160 students
10 educationally is difficult, financially
11 is very difficult. You know, schools
12 that have half empty still have full-time
13 costs. And so part of it is, we have to
14 be better financial stewards, but we also
15 I think -- one of our guiding principles
16 in this was looking at the other
17 educational options available and being
18 able to say we're providing equal to or
19 better than what you currently have,
20 whether it's on the facilities side,
21 program side or with having more students
22 in the building, it yields a full-time
23 art teacher or it yields you additional
24 services that you wouldn't otherwise be
25 able to afford. It gives you the

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2 opportunity for support staff and
3 personnel.

4 So issues of safety I think are
5 definitely going to be important and I
6 know that they will be raised. I think
7 we're trying to look at and come from a
8 different perspective to say what can we
9 do and how can we co-plan, District,
10 parents, teachers, community members, so
11 that this is successful. I don't think
12 we went about this trying to hurt people
13 in the process, but really think and be
14 mindful of, yes, we understand that there
15 are community issues and dynamics that
16 are going on here, but at the end of the
17 day, having 800 students or a thousand
18 students in a high school means
19 something. It means something in terms
20 of education. It means something in
21 terms of program offerings. So when you
22 think about the things that students are
23 afforded, when you have that economy of
24 scale, yes, you got to kind of go through
25 this very difficult process in order to

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2 get there.

3 DR. NUNERY: I'd add something
4 else. I mean, we're not saying it, but
5 this is about Philadelphia at its core,
6 what neighborhoods mix or don't mix. So
7 what you hear about Fitzsimons closing
8 and kids going to Strawberry Mansion and
9 an article gets written and calls out the
10 potential for -- if not gang, I'll say
11 some activity amongst the youth, we've
12 got to solve the problems of education,
13 but we can't solve everything from the
14 School District's perspective. We need
15 City Councilmembers. We need the Police
16 Department. We need community groups to
17 understand, look, we can -- certain
18 things, Councilman -- what I heard you
19 ask is what will change our mind, and
20 there are certain things that would
21 influence a final decision, like
22 transportation. You don't want kids
23 going on three buses in order to get to
24 school. That means they probably won't
25 go or they'll leave the District. And

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2 quite frankly, part of what we've got to
3 do is shrink excess capacity not only by
4 getting rid of buildings that are
5 inoperable, but also bringing kids back
6 into school. So career and technical
7 education for me is a huge, huge issue.
8 That's what you'll hear about more from
9 me and from us over time, a high school
10 plan that is robust that actually invites
11 children back to fill those seats, STEM
12 education.

13 But ultimately people want to
14 protect what they have, and we get that.
15 That's also why the speed of closure is
16 really important. It's the debate of the
17 time. How fast you go is going to be
18 influenced by how much change you can
19 afford to make. And we're now doing
20 calculations on what the actual costs are
21 for filling an empty seat, and that means
22 a fair amount of dollars per building
23 just to get a building educationally
24 ready. I think that's the term we're
25 generally using.

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2 So this is complicated
3 calculus, and that's why people get
4 upset, but we are going to try to explain
5 more and more about the technical aspects
6 of it.

7 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: I
8 appreciate that. By the way, just to be
9 clear, I'm not criticizing this list or
10 anything like that. And I guess just to
11 amend your statement a little bit, I
12 wouldn't say what would change your mind
13 but what could change your mind.

14 DR. NUNERY: Very good.

15 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: That may
16 be the best way to say it. Because I
17 know -- I guess we all know -- that
18 school closings is always an emotional
19 issue. Even if all the criteria makes
20 sense, if it's your child in the school,
21 you don't want to see the school close
22 because the child may be -- your child
23 may be doing well or is happy there.

24 So I just throw that out there,
25 because I know that's going to be -- and

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2 those same folks will probably come back
3 to folks like us saying what can we do to
4 help. So I'm just trying to figure out
5 what would be like the real issues that
6 people need to really address at these
7 hearings rather than just saying, I don't
8 want my school closed, because my kid
9 likes it, you know.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Might
11 I note as well that then we have the
12 opposite end of that spectrum with a
13 school like Penn Alexander that everybody
14 wants. You have twice as many people
15 wanting to apply as can attend.

16 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Just for
17 the record, I've lost three committee
18 people who moved from my neighborhood to
19 yours so they can go to Penn Alexander.

20 MS. NIXON: I think the only
21 other thing that I would like to add is
22 that the one question that parents should
23 always ask is about the academic program
24 of the school that they would move to.
25 So the questions are -- Danielle already

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2 stated that we're trying to offer
3 something that's equal to or better, and
4 I think parents need to know what is
5 that, so that if my school closes and I
6 move to another school, what academic
7 programs are you offering my child. And
8 I think that's the key question, because
9 this is about the quality of academic
10 programs.

11 And the other thing I want to
12 add is that the School District is
13 currently engaged in enhancing our core
14 curriculum document so that our goal is
15 for all of our schools to have robust and
16 rigorous academic curriculum that
17 prepares kids for college and career. So
18 you'll hear more from us about what we
19 call college and career-going anchors,
20 and what we're really doing is, we're
21 going to be able to communicate to the
22 public clearly that this is how we define
23 success in the School District of
24 Philadelphia, and the definition will be
25 based around what does it take to really

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2 get a kid to a very competitive
3 university. And what we're working on
4 now is really back-mapping our curriculum
5 from kindergarten all the way to 12th
6 grade and we'll have indicators that
7 ensure that our kids are on track for
8 college and career. And all of this will
9 sort of tie in to the Facilities Master
10 Plan as well.

11 So that's the most important
12 thing, the quality of the curriculum.

13 COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank
14 you. I appreciate that.

15 Thank you, Madam Chair.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And
17 how are we finding that the new academies
18 we've started -- we started some this
19 year, like at Audenried and a few places.
20 How are we finding that they are working
21 out?

22 DR. NUNERY: Well, the three
23 new promise academies at Martin Luther
24 King, West Philadelphia High School and
25 Germantown High School are doing okay.

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2 They're not doing great yet, and part of
3 the reason is, A, we went through a lot
4 in terms of whether or not to go with
5 more or fewer. So a lot of decisions had
6 to be made. But, B, high schools -- and
7 this is part of the argument for a
8 methodical approach. It doesn't mean you
9 go slow, it just means that you think
10 about it more carefully. High schools
11 are so much harder to turn around.
12 That's why there are very few turnaround
13 organizations around the country that
14 take high schools on. It's a unique
15 animal. When you get kids who are older,
16 you've got a lot more programming. They
17 are more expensive to run.

18 So I think maybe, Penny, you
19 want to address some of the specifics.

20 But we think we're making
21 progress there, and we're trying to
22 solidify the promise academy model so
23 that it becomes more appealing for
24 parents when they decide, you know what,
25 I'll keep my kid in Philly schools, but

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2 which one. And we want them to
3 understand that these promise academies
4 are, as we released the other day, as
5 competitive with charter schools as many
6 think charter schools can be.

7 So you want to address that.

8 MS. NIXON: I think you
9 included everything.

10 I think in light of the budget
11 deficit, we're only running a partial
12 model at the new school, so it's not a
13 full model. And also with the lawsuit
14 with the PFT, the timeframe got pushed
15 back a lot, so they weren't able to plan
16 and prepare like the promise academies
17 did in the previous years.

18 So I will echo Lee that they're
19 just doing okay. There's still much work
20 to be done. We're hoping that we can
21 move toward a full model for those
22 schools next year hopefully, if the
23 budget allows.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

25 Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds Brown.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you,
3 Madam Chairwoman.

4 Good afternoon, everyone.

5 DR. NUNERY: Good afternoon.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: My notes
7 and questions are all over the place, so
8 you'll have to forgive me.

9 First let me start with saying
10 that many members of Council fully
11 recognize the enormity of the task before
12 you. It is one of those -- it's not even
13 a project. It's an initiative that you
14 have to slow walk every single step of
15 the way and then examine each step that
16 you take along that walk.

17 Secondly, I think it's
18 brilliant that you have decided to do
19 what you call calculate the cost to fill
20 an empty seat. I've never heard that
21 before, but what I can think is that will
22 help to defend or justify why you ask for
23 X number of dollars going forward.
24 Because if that number gets huge, then
25 it's an executive manager who says we

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2 have to look at how we shift the
3 paradigm. So I understand that. I join
4 the members on Council who get that.

5 Let's back up to this process
6 around the RFP. A prevailing interest of
7 members of Council is ensuring that all
8 entrepreneurial, small business activity
9 efforts reflect the look of the City and
10 at every single step of the way. And
11 Councilman Goode, who is a member of this
12 Committee, is not here, but I can tell
13 you we sing a chorus when it comes to
14 making sure that women and people of
15 color are getting a fair shake.

16 So when it comes to appraisers
17 and brokers, what does the composition of
18 that mix look like?

19 MS. FLOYD: When the -- we did
20 a competitive solicitation process for
21 both the brokers and appraisers. They
22 were required to have M/WBE
23 participation. The brokers were required
24 to speak for the M/WBE participation. So
25 each one of them -- one is 100 percent

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2 M/WBE and the other four brokers are 30
3 percent M/WBE participation. So most of
4 them are partnerships, with the exception
5 of Concordis Key Advisors, which is 100
6 percent M/WBE. Centara I know is
7 partnered up with an organization. So
8 each one of them had to identify an
9 M/WBE -- a woman-owned business or
10 minority-owned business, our brokers, for
11 listing -- to represent the School
12 District for listing of properties.

13 On the appraisers, I believe we
14 have one -- I know we have one
15 woman-owned business, Eileen Lynn, who
16 does appraisals, who is working with us,
17 and then we have two others. I'm
18 blanking right now on their names. I
19 apologize. Richard Owens, I know Owens
20 and Lukens. Lukens is the other
21 appraiser that was approved through our
22 process.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Well, your
24 answer reflects the fact that that was
25 factored in as a part of this assessment

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2 gathering information process.

3 MS. FLOYD: Yes.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: And this

5 is not a requirement, but we'd like to

6 make sure that Philadelphia residents who

7 pay Philadelphia taxes get opportunities.

8 So what's the mix in terms of whether or

9 not they are Philadelphia-based companies

10 or no?

11 MS. FLOYD: I need to get back

12 to you on locations.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: If you

14 could.

15 MS. FLOYD: I can do that.

16 DR. NUNERY: But I think it's

17 pretty high. If you look at Centara,

18 Concordis, they're -- we should be in

19 pretty high percentage. And even in

20 terms of the firm that -- URS with its

21 sub-consultants, we have McKissock and

22 McKissock involved, Portfolio Associates.

23 MS. FLOYD: They're local.

24 DR. NUNERY: So it's been a

25 very conscious effort to make sure that

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2 the diversity -- and, actually, I think,
3 Councilwoman, it's yielded some
4 interesting benefits, because when we go
5 out to the public hearings for the public
6 sessions, you hear something different
7 than what you otherwise might hear.
8 Portfolio Associates run by their CEO,
9 Beverly Harper, has been through this
10 drill before.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: For 35
12 years.

13 DR. NUNERY: For 35 years. So
14 when she listens in, she hears something,
15 she captures it differently and relays it
16 back. So I think we've benefited from
17 having her perspective and her
18 experience.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: All right,
20 then. So that was the question around
21 the mix.

22 You said that the RFQ process
23 will be released or finished after the
24 holidays?

25 MS. FLOYD: Released.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Released,
3 okay.

4 With regards to the future use
5 of the buildings and the priorities you
6 stipulated - educational use, CDCs and
7 private developers - I'm just curious, is
8 there any -- have you given any thought
9 to possibly the role of the Philadelphia
10 Planning Commission, which has a duty to
11 stay on top of trends and the like so
12 that they can at least weigh in on what
13 you're doing?

14 MS. FLOYD: Yes, we have. For
15 the first eight properties that we
16 decided to list for sale, the community
17 planners from CPC actually gave us an
18 analysis of what their zoning was, if
19 they were on the Historical Registry,
20 whether it was for Philadelphia or
21 national. And then one of the things
22 that they also identified or made
23 recommendations to say is, this is a
24 community, for instance, that's lacking
25 in green space or lacking in access to

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2 fresh fruits and vegetables, like a
3 supermarket would make sense to have
4 mixed retail here, or this is a heavy
5 residential area, so having some type of
6 recreational space would make sense as
7 part of looking at long-range plan for
8 that particular planning district that
9 the community planners are looking at.
10 They did give us like a one-page synopsis
11 on what currently exists and what's
12 missing --

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Very good.

14 MS. FLOYD: -- to help advise
15 and us thinking about what we need to do.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: I'm
17 pleased to hear that. So that you have
18 different systems talking to each other.

19 MS. FLOYD: Yes.

20 DR. NUNERY: Right. And we're
21 also, Councilwoman, talking to the
22 Mayor's Office, Parks and Rec, the Trust
23 for Public Lands, the Water Department --

24 MS. FLOYD: PWD on storm water
25 management.

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2 DR. NUNERY: On storm water
3 management around Green 2015, because we
4 think -- in fact, we just won a LEED
5 Platinum -- a Silver award, I'm sorry, a
6 Silver award for Willard School just the
7 other day, because now we're addressing
8 issues of how storm water affects -- our
9 buildings affects storm water runoff and
10 all of that.

11 I think what we're trying to
12 aim for is to make these schools better,
13 not only because of what's inside in
14 terms of education, but better facilities
15 that last for a long time.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Surely.
17 Sustainable.

18 DR. NUNERY: So that an average
19 age of 65, 68 years, there's a lot inside
20 those current buildings that needs to be
21 fixed and addressed.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Sure.

23 DR. NUNERY: So we think this
24 is a great way to go about it to plan
25 ahead.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: It's a
3 huge undertaking.

4 Along the same lines, I've
5 learned as a result of this recent
6 census; in particular, paying attention
7 to the district of Councilwoman
8 Quinones-Sanchez, that populations are
9 growing in certain ways as well. One of
10 them is seniors. Now, we know that
11 Pennsylvania is, what, number two when it
12 comes to seniors, and we know -- well,
13 what I've learned is that there is not
14 enough housing for seniors. And so the
15 question is, has the thought of senior
16 housing -- when you think of the purposes
17 and you mention private developers,
18 within that category have you considered
19 a subcategory of here are where our needs
20 are for special populations? Seniors is
21 one. Housing for victims of domestic
22 violence is another. And those are the
23 two that come to mind as I listen to
24 residents and citizens who come to us
25 throughout the year where there's simply

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2 not enough beds in those two particular
3 categories.

4 DR. NUNERY: We think that --
5 and that's actually that Tier 2 we talked
6 about, community and non-profit users,
7 but also Tier 3, private and commercial
8 developers. There may be a marriage
9 there. If somebody looks at a structure
10 and they think that they can do the
11 conversion or the rehabilitation into
12 appropriate legal senior housing, that we
13 are all -- we're all ears for that. I
14 think the challenge for anybody taking
15 over an old school building, though, are
16 the conversion costs, because you have to
17 do inside.

18 The Life Building in West
19 Philly is a perfect example.
20 Councilwoman Blackwell, as you know how
21 long that sat dormant when I was at Penn,
22 because it takes a while to put the right
23 ramping in, the right lighting, all the
24 emergency --

25 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: To meet

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2 codes.

3 DR. NUNERY: To meet codes.
4 But we're also open to that, because I
5 think in areas that we've seen some
6 emptying out, there's an opportunity to
7 activate communities if there are the
8 right leaders to take charge on that.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Indeed.
10 Indeed. So that covers the planning
11 part.

12 Are there other municipalities
13 you may have looked at that are at the
14 same place in terms of reduction in
15 student population; therefore, have had
16 to figure out how they work smarter with
17 existing infrastructure that can be used
18 or looked upon as models of best
19 practices, municipalities who got it
20 right?

21 MS. FLOYD: That's a very good
22 question, because one of the things that
23 we wanted -- we asked that very question
24 before we started on this process,
25 because -- to the credit of our SRC, you

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2 have sort of two cohorts when you make a
3 decision around closure. You have
4 families that you need to deal with in
5 terms of reassignments, but then you have
6 people who live in that neighborhood and
7 are going to have a question about, Well,
8 what are you doing when this building is
9 closed, because I got to look out my
10 window and look at it when it's
11 shuddered.

12 When we talked to some of the
13 other school districts that had gone
14 through a downsizing process, there's
15 been mixed results on what they've been
16 able to do. So, for instance, Kansas
17 City did not have sort of an adaptive
18 reuse policy or repurposing policy or
19 process when they went through -- they
20 closed about 28 schools two years ago.
21 They are now working on identifying --
22 actually asked us for a copy of our
23 Adaptive Reuse Policy to start to put in
24 place for them. They've identified a
25 repurposer to start to help market their

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2 properties. And, again, they're in a
3 very similar situation to us, growth in
4 charter schools, but the difference there
5 is that their charter schools can grow in
6 the suburbs, so a lot of them are looking
7 to revitalize or reopen school buildings
8 in the city because they have greater
9 flexibility on location.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: They
11 closed 28 schools in two years?

12 MS. FLOYD: They closed 28
13 schools in one year. One year they
14 closed 28. Pittsburgh I believe closed
15 12 or 13 in one year, and they had
16 moderate success in reuse. There's still
17 a number of properties that they own
18 and -- that they have to own and maintain
19 that they haven't been able and
20 successful with repurposing for other
21 purposes -- repurposing.

22 I think Washington, DC was
23 another district that we talked to. It's
24 a little bit different there, because the
25 city manages school district property,

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2 not -- the school district doesn't have
3 to be responsible for repurposing and
4 relocation or thinking about potential
5 reuse. That's at the jurisdiction of the
6 Mayor and members of Council on what
7 happens with different district
8 facilities.

9 So it's been difficult to
10 really see other school districts,
11 especially large urban school districts,
12 who have had models of best practice that
13 we could have referred to or used to help
14 inform the work that we were doing.

15 I think one of the criticisms
16 that we typically got from members of the
17 public was that we allow fair-market
18 value to drive our decisions around reuse
19 and the highest -- whoever the highest
20 bidder was, that's who it went to, and
21 that the District did not take an
22 aggressive role in courting and
23 identifying and say, Hey, we want your
24 ideas; yes, we understand it might take
25 longer, but if this is something that

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2 meets the need of a community, we're
3 willing to work with you to get to a
4 mutual goal.

5 And so the reason that we did
6 this reuse policy was to try and strike a
7 balance. Yes, we like to make a profit,
8 we like to get buildings off of our
9 books, but we also recognized and
10 understood that it was also our
11 responsibility to acknowledge and to work
12 through what a responsible reuse would
13 be. And so actually we were invited to
14 participate and present on our plan at a
15 conference in Florida a few weeks ago,
16 and several districts actually came up to
17 us and asked us about -- they were
18 interested in the process that we were
19 going through.

20 And I think the only other
21 thing to note is that this is a much more
22 intense, labor-intensive and
23 time-intensive process when you're
24 bringing people to the table. It's the
25 right way to go. It just takes longer.

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2 And so the type of speed that Dr. Nunery
3 referred to earlier, getting the deal
4 done in six, seven months, eight months,
5 it's going to take longer than that,
6 because people really care about this and
7 want to be able to ask questions and ask
8 follow-up questions and read documents,
9 and I think what we acknowledged is that
10 through other processes where we modeled
11 our community engagement that way is when
12 we had the most success. And so that's
13 the reason why we decided to approach
14 things this way.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Surely.

16 MS. FLOYD: So it's been hard
17 to find some other districts who have
18 been successful. Detroit has 92 empty
19 buildings right now that they are holding
20 on to and they haven't been able to
21 resell.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: That might
23 be a great idea for a Ph.D. student, a
24 Ph.D. seeking a Ph.D. in education to
25 take this and just run with it and do the

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2 research so that they can produce a
3 document that sort of outlines this is
4 the right way to do it.

5 Lastly, I was struck by Page 6
6 of 6 where you opted to -- and I'm sure
7 for good reason -- to phase out a school,
8 which gives a community X number of
9 months and/or years for parents to
10 prepare, because there are parents who
11 start looking 24 months out for where
12 their little one has to be 24 months
13 later. So how did that school end up in
14 that way?

15 MS. FLOYD: Primarily for the
16 recommendations that we made for middle
17 schools and high schools. That was a
18 practice that when we had phased out and
19 closed middle schools under the
20 previous -- when Paul was here and he was
21 creating K to 8's and closing middle
22 schools, I think what we acknowledged is
23 that sometimes you want to make -- for
24 people who are in the building, they've
25 already established a culture and there's

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2 a climate and you don't want that to be
3 disrupted, especially at the middle
4 school level. Those students are now
5 thinking about high schools --

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Especially
7 at the middle school level.

8 MS. FLOYD: -- and applying to
9 high schools. They've developed
10 relationships with counselors. They've
11 developed relationships with teachers.
12 And so while it may not be the most
13 financially -- makes sort of the budget
14 folks happy in terms of how we do this,
15 because the last year tends to be the one
16 that costs you, but when you think about
17 the human element and you're talking
18 about students and if they're there,
19 don't displace them, that was the reason
20 why we decided to do a phase-out model.
21 So that way, you're not talking about
22 maybe displacing 200 students and 20
23 teachers. It may end up being three or
24 four a year, but there's no more students
25 going in, so if you haven't been there

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2 already, you're not impacted, and we can
3 figure out other directions for you to
4 go.

5 And then at the high school
6 level, again, students who have started
7 to apply to college again have to develop
8 those relationships, that the phase-out
9 we see as both manageable from a District
10 and from HR, from budget, from the
11 academic side of things in doing
12 transition. But then also when you think
13 about just stability for students and not
14 having an 11th grader having to go to
15 another high school and try and figure
16 out someone to advocate for them when
17 they're applying for college. I mean,
18 those are real -- that's the reality of
19 those students.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Sure.

21 MS. FLOYD: And so as
22 Dr. Nunery mentioned before, the speed
23 and the pace of it, it really does depend
24 on the school, because in certain
25 instances, we might need to be a little

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2 bit faster than what we had originally
3 proposed. We can't do that at the
4 elementary school level, so I know that
5 that's the one where it looks the most
6 disruptive. We don't have nine years to
7 phase a school out, so it is that
8 situation where everybody has got to go
9 at one time, but I think that was
10 something that we were very sensitive to.
11 In other closings we had done
12 historically at the middle school and the
13 high school level was that the phase-outs
14 tend to be accepted a little bit easier
15 too when you roll that out as a proposal.
16 If people haven't been in the building,
17 they're a little bit less attached than
18 those who are there.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Sure.

20 MS. FLOYD: And you give
21 students an opportunity to kind of create
22 a culture on their way out, for lack of a
23 better term. So that was kind of the
24 thinking and impetus behind why we
25 decided to go that route.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you
3 for that explanation.

4 So let me close where I
5 started. I fully appreciate the very
6 meticulous, thoughtful, methodical, to
7 use Superintendent's word, because it's
8 essential when we are confronted with --
9 the harsh reality is shaking up families,
10 helping them understand they have to do
11 some things differently. But the climate
12 that we live in from a management
13 standpoint mandates, requires you to do
14 things differently, and the challenge
15 becomes to keep parents and caregivers
16 and students informed and neighboring
17 community-based organizations as well as
18 clergy, because they can help in this
19 message delivery as well.

20 So I thank Chairwoman Blackwell
21 for the early meetings around this in the
22 Caucus Room and appreciate the progress
23 that you've done. Thank you for your
24 testimony.

25 DR. NUNERY: Thank you,

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2 Councilwoman, and we'll be back and on a
3 regular basis. We're receiving calls
4 almost on a daily basis from somebody who
5 has an interest or a particular building
6 that they're concerned about. We're
7 trying to signal as a team -- and I do
8 mean a team -- a different approach than
9 maybe what people have experienced with
10 the District in, let's say, recent months
11 or years. We are trying to be as
12 analytical as possible, not spend money
13 that we don't have, to be focused on, as
14 Penny said, so well a new way of
15 expressing the curriculum so that there's
16 a greater chance for a young person to go
17 to college or start a career as opposed
18 to just going out and buying a whole new
19 curriculum because that's the fad.

20 The District already has an
21 amazing number of teachers and principals
22 and staff folks who know how to teach,
23 and we have kids who want to learn.
24 They're every day demonstrating it. But
25 what I think we have to do is clear the

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2 clutter out of the way so that they can

3 succeed. So we're not trying to be

4 conservative or liberal or anything.

5 We're just trying to do the work, and we

6 think that particularly this Facilities

7 Master Plan is a bit of a challenge

8 because we're doing it at a time with at

9 least 3,800 fewer people inside the

10 District. We are half the Central Office

11 size that we were last time we sat here.

12 So we're doing a lot of this with fewer

13 resources on board, but we will do it

14 with your support, with your

15 encouragement, and we hope that what

16 you'll enable us to do is come back and

17 talk to you individually informally so we

18 keep the dialogue going. We want to

19 learn as we go, but we can't make a lot

20 of mistakes and cover for them later.

21 We've got to do this right the first

22 time.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Your

24 remarks reminded me of the one comment I

25 also made, career tech education.

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2 DR. NUNERY: Big deal.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: A focus on
4 that.

5 DR. NUNERY: It's a huge deal
6 for us.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: It really,
8 really is. And to know that that's on
9 your radar screen and a priority helps
10 another whole segment of young people who
11 only see this as an option or see this as
12 an only option.

13 DR. NUNERY: That's right.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you.

15 Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: You're
17 welcome.

18 Are there additional questions?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Is
21 there anyone here who would like to
22 testify who hasn't had the opportunity?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Having
25 said that, we thank everyone for coming,

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2 and this hearing will be recessed subject
3 to the call of the Chair.

4 Thank you very much.

5 DR. NUNERY: Thank you,
6 Councilwoman. Appreciate it.

7 MS. FLOYD: Thank you.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you.

10 (Committee on Education
11 concluded at 2:45 p.m.)

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