COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

City Hall, Room 400
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, February 17, 2026
10:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCIL PRESIDENT KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU
COUNCILWOMAN NINA AHMAD
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE-RICHARDSON
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILMAN CURTIS J. JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN NICOLAS O'ROURKE
COUNCILMAN JEFFREY YOUNG, JR.
COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS

JOHN CHRISTMAS, THE CLERK

P R O C E E D I N G S

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good morning, everyone. Good morning, everyone.

Ramadan Mubarak to all of my Muslim brothers here today. This is the public hearing for the Committee of the Whole, 250895.

Mr. Christmas, will you please call the roll to take attendance.

THE CLERK: Councilman Squilla. Council Lady Gauthier.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: Present.

THE CLERK: Councilman Young.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Present.

THE CLERK: Councilman Driscoll. Council Lady Lozada.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Present.

THE CLERK: Council Lady

Bass.

COUNCILMEMBER BASS:

Present.

THE CLERK: Councilman

Phillips.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

Present.

THE CLERK: Councilman

O'Neill. Council Lady Gilmore-

Richardson.

COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

RICHARDSON: Present.

THE CLERK: Councilman

Thomas.

COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

Present.

THE CLERK: Councilman

Harrity.

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

Present.

THE CLERK: Council Lady

Ahmad.

COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD:

Present.

THE CLERK: Council Lady Landau.

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Present.

THE CLERK: Council Lady Brooks.

COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: Present.

THE CLERK: Councilman O'Rourke.

Council President Johnson.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Present.

Thank you. A quorum of the committee is present and this hearing is now called to order.

Mr. Christmas, would you please read the title of the resolution?

THE CLERK: Resolution 250895, authorizing the Philadelphia City Council Committee of the Whole to hold hearings to discuss the current state of Philadelphia school

facilities, how the School District evaluates those facilities and what the educational facility needs are for School District today and in the future.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Christmas.

Before calling our first panel, I have a statement for the record for myself, and I would also acknowledge the Chair of Education, Mr. Isaiah Thomas, as well.

Good morning, everyone. Today's City Council Committee of the Whole hearing will discuss Resolution No. 250895.

Councilmembers will examine the current condition of Philadelphia school facilities, how the School District assessed them and what educational facilities the School District requires now and in the future.

The resolution was

sponsored by myself and introduced by Councilmember-at-Large and Chair of Education, Isaiah Thomas.

Thank you to my colleagues, members of Mayor Cherelle Parker's administration, representatives from the School District of Philadelphia, educators, parents, students, community stakeholders for joining us today.

As President of Philadelphia City Council, I want to underscore the importance of this hearing on the School District proposed Facilities Master Plan.

On January 22nd, School District of Philadelphia superintendent, Dr. Tony Watlington, outlined his Facilities Master Plan, $2.8-million, ten-year strategy to modernize aging infrastructure and address over and under enrollment in schools throughout the city of Philadelphia.

Key actions include closing 20 schools, initiating 159 modernization projects, creating six co-locations, and shifting toward kindergarten through 8th grade models to improve academic equity.

The decisions we make about out school facilities are not just about brick or mortar, they are about opportunity, equity and the future of our children.

Our facilities must be safe, modern and conducive to learning. Every student in every neighborhood deserves access to high quality learning environment that support economic achievement, extra-curricular engagement and overall well-being.

Philadelphia City Council is doing our due diligence on the proposed School District Facilities Master Plan to make sure the voices of students, parents and community

stakeholders city-wide are heard and their issues and concerns are addressed.

The Board of Education has a duty to ensure fairness and transparency throughout this Facilities Master Plan process. Today's hearing is an opportunity for transparency and a accountability.

City Councilmembers want to understand the District's vision, the criteria guiding its decision, the neighborhood implications of the plan, and how community voices have been incorporated throughout this process.

I encourage an open and constructive dialog today. We are here to listen, to ask thoughtful questions and to ensure that the proposed Facilities Master Plan truly serve the students and families of Philadelphia today and

for generations to come.

The Philadelphia City Council is an independent legislative branch frequently acting as a check on the executive branch, agencies and the School District of Philadelphia.

City Councilmembers will not just rubber stamp the current version of the School District's Facilities Master Plan introduced on January 22nd.

Council will provide important input and recommendations to Superintendent Tony Watlington and the Board of Education before any final School District Facilities Master Plan is approved by the Board of Education this year.

I want to thank all of you and look forward to a very productive hearing.

At this time The Chair recognizes Councilmember-at-Large

and Chair of Education, Councilmember Isaiah Thomas.

CHAIR THOMAS: Good morning and thank you, Council President. Good morning, colleagues, good morning to the listening public. So many people tuned in because schools is that type of issue, it's one of those things that touches everybody.

I want to start by thanking you, Council President, for your leadership and your support as it relates to this facilities crisis that we've been dealing with for probably as long as you've been in office, let alone I've been in office. So I appreciate your support, your leadership and your aggressiveness as it relates to tackling this issue and tackling it right now.

I do want to say thank you to Dr. Watlington as well as Colonel Hill, the School Board and the

entire team at the School District of Philadelphia. We do appreciate you being here today and appreciate the opportunity to have this conversation.

I also want to remind folks that today's conversation is about the current facilities plan. It's not about the vacant school buildings. So we've had a number of issues that specifically related to vacant school buildings, that's been a hot topic of discussion. Today we are not talking about the vacant school buildings, we are talking about the Facilities Plan that was recommended by the School District that will be introduced later this month.

In the mist of looking at the Facilities Plan, there are some things I like. I like the idea of there being no comprehensive neighborhood high schools being

closed. I think that's a good thing. There are some things I have questions about. There are some decisions that were made that puts us in a position where schools that currently don't have enough space in their building are going to be asked to add more seats.

Decisions that will put neighborhoods in a position where they might not have elementary school, so we're going to need those questions answered. And then there are things I disagree with like the closing of Conwell or touching the Parkway schools or anything that would put Philadelphia in a position where we wouldn't have a school named Paul Robeson.

I think the name of that school is important to our legacy and there are a number of examples of things that members disagree with and I'm not going to get into that

right now.

I just want to close out by saying that I truly appreciate all of the District Councilmembers. I already thanked you, Council President. But I just want to start by highlighting Councilmembers Gauthier, Young and Lozada.

If you don't 5th District, 3rd District and 7th District were the districts that were hit the hardest. And if you've been paying attention to those councilmembers, they've been doing their due diligence at community meetings, working with the Council President and myself as well as other folks to try to address those issues.

I also want to say thank you to Councilmembers Phillips, Jones and Bass. Phillips and Bass have been dealing with the Ada Lewis issue which everybody knows was significant when we watched what

happened to that sister and this facilities crisis touched the entire northwest and Councilmembers Phillips and Bass have been leading the charge.

And Councilmember Jones Overbrook, probably one of the most controversial buildings in the School District and everybody knows the legacy and history of Overbrook. And the reality is Overbrook probably would have been closed already had it not been for Councilmember Jones effort over the last couple of years.

As I close out, Council President, this is a tough position for the Councilmembers-at-Large to be in, but my colleagues have found a way to advocate for what they believe in. So Councilmembers Brooks, Landau, Harrity, Councilmember Gilmore-Richardson who isn't here yet, Councilmember

O'Rourke as well as Councilmember Ahmad, thank you all for the great work that you're doing. Thank you for insight. Thank you for being apart of so many meetings up to this point.

Last thing, this is a legacy vote. When you think about what happened years ago, we're still impacted by those decisions today. I'm not going to get into individual examples, but I want the general public to recognize that Council President Johnson's words were very important.

We are not here to rubber stamp anything, we are the checks and balances. And we recognize this could be one of the most important votes we'll take in our entire political career. And the crazy thing is we don't even have a vote. Right? We're using our bulletproofs to put us in a position to fight for

what the people are telling us they need as it relates to the city of Philadelphia.

So, Council President, thank you for allowing me to give a few brief remarks and look forward to listening to the conversation today, as well as robust answers to the questions that are going to be asked. Thank you, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. The Chair recognizes Jeffrey J. Young.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank you, Mr. President. Just for point of information for my colleague, Councilman Thomas. There is a catchment high school that is scheduled to be closed in my district, which is Penn Treaty High School. So we want to ensure that those families understand what's happening as well. Thank you,

Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes Councilmember Quetcy Lozada.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Council President, I also want to thank you and Councilmember Isaiah Thomas for your leadership and for your guidance in this process. But I also want to recognize the presence of many of the families who are from my district who are being impacted.

I'd like to ask them to stand because they've taken a very active role. They've made sure that we've heard their concerns, they've made sure that they organize and offered options for what could potentially happen in their neighborhoods. And their options have been some really great options that I think that we could work

together with the School District to consider.

So I'd like for the parents from Moffet, Stetson, Conwell, Harding and Welsh to stand up. Thank you for your advocacy. Thank you for being here today. Thank you so much. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. The Chair recognizes Jamie Gauthier.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I'm in line for questions.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You're queued up already? We haven't heard this testimony yet.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: Can you put me back in line, please?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Absolutely.

The Chair recognizes Councilmember Jim Harrity.

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I, too, want to thank you for your

leadership and our education chair and my Councilwoman Quetcy Lozada.

I just want people to take notice of the districts they plan to shut these schools down in. Me, I'm for one tired. Every time cuts come, they come from a certain neighborhood.

You know, I live there in Kensington, in the 7th District. I talk to these kids, they're good kids. They deserve everything that other kids in other neighborhoods are getting.

And, again, I say strongly that we have to think as my colleague said of legacy. Right? Legacy. You can see that this isn't what our people want. And as Councilman Thomas said, I'm infuriated that we don't get a say. Right?

But Council President, you and I both know, we do get a say

because budget is coming and we will be looking at that. So mindful is the word I would use for the day. Be mindful.

Thank you, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. I'm going to ask for -- as the other members are queued up to reserve your comments for after the presentation. Is that okay? So we can get down to actually questioning and the purpose of why we are here.

So at this time I'm going to ask for Mr. Christmas to please call the first panel.

THE CLERK: Would Mr. Reginald Streater, Dr. Tony Watlington and Deborah Carrera please come up to the desk here. And then one of you can sit at the chairs just forward of the rail.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Good morning. Good morning.

First and foremost, I want to thank you for being here today and look forward to your testimony. I have a good working relationship with all of you. And as we discuss the future of our young people here in the city of Philadelphia, I look forward to hearing your testimony.

So I would ask for Dr. Tony Watlington to please start.

Mr. Chairman, I was told you're going to go first, excuse me.

CHAIRMAN STREATER:

Yes, I would like to go first, Council President.

Before I get started I would be remiss if I didn't say thank you to you, Council President, for allowing us to have this conversation today. And it is true, we do have great working relationship, Council President.

I also want to say a shout

out to a good brother, Isaiah Thomas, Chair of Education, majority whip as well. Majority Leader Katherine Gilmore-Richardson, my new neighbor in Councilmember Jones district.

I also want to say hello to majority leader Kendra Brooks. As well I want to make sure I give honor where honor is due in your house. Thank you all for allowing us to be here today.

Before I get into my comments I would be remiss if I didn't introduce myself. I'm Reggie from Germantown. A graduate from Germantown High School, a graduate from Leeds Middle School. A father, a son, a husband, a proud Black man from the city of Philadelphia, who along with the other eight board members sacrifice time, energy, sweat equity, blood, tears, yes, tears to ensure we do the best we

can with the resources and the energy in the space we have.

So I want to say thank you all for allowing us to be here and for giving Reggie from Germantown, who happens to be president of the Philadelphia Board of Education, and my duty is to ensure the will of the board which is channeled through all the energy we get and engagement we get is implemented. So thank you.

So again, good morning, Council President and members of City Council. Again, I really want to say thank you for the opportunity to be here to testify in front of you today.

My name is Reginald Streater, as I mentioned before, president of the Board of Education for the School District of Philadelphia.

As the proud product of public education and the parent of

two children who attend district schools and more on the way in the School District of Philadelphia. A 207-year-old institution that has had to deal with a lot of struggles. Whether it's the great migration when our ancestors came to Philadelphia or whether it was when immigrants were infusing into the city of Philadelphia, this School District has striven to do what we can with the resources we have and the energy we have and the support we know we can get from our village.

I know like you, like me, you all believe that public education is a public good just as important as running water. A civil right, a human right and that the School District of Philadelphia has the duty to ensure all of our babies, all of our children have access to quality public education and they don't have to go halfway

across the city to get it, if they so choose.

That is what I believe and I believe that's what this board believes, and that's what I believe Dr. Watlington is trying to do as we go through this process, which is indeed a process.

This public good must be intentionally designed and continuously improve and iterated to serve the children and families of Philadelphia. Long ago we would use the pressure model, schools were designed to be what some would argue like an assembly line. But what the School District and the Board of Education is trying to do is to prepare a system and set forth the process through our resolution last year to ensure that we continue to iterate and reimagine all of our schools under our purview.

This means ensuring our

children have the opportunities and the support and resources that we know they need while fulfilling the civil right that our Commonwealth court opined on and said clear as day that our children have, the civil right, to a quality public education.

For our children to truly thrive, our village, and I mean that, our village which we know is a collection of villages must provide schools that are safe, welcoming and properly equipped.

I also want to say I come here in good faith, no malfeasance. I say that also as an officer of the court allowed to practice law in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. And I wouldn't be able to do it without my public education that I received at Germantown High School.

Unfortunately, y'all, many of our school buildings fall short

of these standards. The Board of Education will be the first one to admit that and we're leaning into that and we're trying to not kick that can down the road. Understand that there's still work that needs to be done before there is a plan the board feels comfortable voting on.

And you all do have a say. I heard the earlier, you do have a say. You are very persuasive on the decisions we've made and I hope you see other decisions that we've made that have been responsive to the energy, the request and advocacy that you have done for everyday Philadelphians.

As I said the average school facility is 73 years old. Actually I think it's older than that now and requires significant resources to maintain to ensure the safety of our students and our staff

and our village. These challenges are not the result of neglect, but I would argue rather decades of inadequate, unpredictable and chronic under funding.

And it's not just the School District of Philadelphia saying that. There is a bipartisan commission that did a report that stated the School District of Philadelphia is under funded to the tune of about 1.2 to $1.4-billion. Much love and respect to our state delegation and the work the governor has done to increase those funds, but we are not yet at adequacy, but I have hope we will get to adequacy.

And also thank you to this body that continues to put its money where its mouth is to support public education. We appreciate you more than you can ever know. These challenges are not from neglect, but from inadequate, unpredictable and

chronic under funding.

At this time we're not the only ones, like many urban cities across the nation, the District has faced significant and enrollment declined. Even though we had an increase of about 1,800 last year and potentially another increase this year that was impacted, we believe, due to issues with SEPTA. Dr. Watlington, I believe you can attest to that.

With that being said, over long longitudinal times we've had issues with enrollment with more than one-third of the families enrolling their students in their choice of brick and mortar charter schools across the cities, the District has experienced declining enrollment.

The current enrollment realities present misalignment between our building capacity and

the number of students that we have the duty to serve. Doing this will make sure that we are thoughtful with our limited resources that are aligned with the needs of our students and our city.

Underlying both of these challenges is the current system of funding of public education in Pennsylvania, which places districts like our in a difficult position of deciding not what we should do, but what we can afford. Chronic under funding, Council President, has forced us to stretch limited resources across the needs often delaying investments to students success.

If the District were fully funded we could prioritize our investments in improving academic success for our students while simultaneously addressing safety concerns and ensuring schools are

fully staffed. Instead we must make strategic and painful choices because the pie is simply not big enough.

Despite these challenges, as a Board, we remain grounded in our goals and guardrails which establish clear measurable goals for student achievement and define the conditions that must exist in every school to ensure progress towards these goals.

Guardrails 1 and 2 in particular directly connect the facilities planning work to students success by requiring that schools provide safe, supportive physical environments and the spaces necessary for enriching well-rounded learning experiences.

Imbedded within Accelerate Philly, Council, the District's strategic plans are clearly defined phases and strategic actions for the

facilities planning work, recognizing that modern, safe and appropriately utilized school buildings are a foundational condition for improving student outcome and ensuring the equitable access to opportunities across our city.

And as the board president, I can say to you clear, right now the way we are constructed, our footprint, our gray bands, we are unable to deliver in the way we know we can with the resources, the talent and everything we know is available in the city of Philadelphia, if we were to attempt to continue doing the same thing expecting a different result.

It is with these challenges in mind that the Board adopted a resolution, September 24th. The Board directed Dr. Watlington to complete Phase 8 of the Facilities

Plan reflecting our belief then and now that this work is essential to advancing student achievement and improving outcomes for all students throughout the city.

Council President, it's very important for the Board to understand that while it's important for our children to be a firm and have a well-rounded education, we want to make sure our children have the skills, such as reading, math and science, so they can interrogate what this world means to them and have the skillset to navigate the ever-changing economy. The economy I know you all are working really hard right now to create for our students. We are trying to do our part and we believe the Facilities Plan can fit nice with that.

It is with these challenges in mind we adopted that resolution. And in that resolution we called for

a thoughtful, partially data informed and qualitative community center planning process that result in recommendation to do the following:

And again, this was last year.

Maximize the use of district school buildings and students rostering to expand equitable access to rigorous academic offerings, pre-kindergarten opportunities, access to high quality arts and music, physical education, career and technical opportunities, address enrollment trends and have created financial operational inefficiencies, and identify district schools and facilities to be modernized, co-located, repurposed, or where necessary, closed.

The Board signaled this process was on its way and the

process isn't done, but this is where we are today. Over the past year -- over the past two years the District has and continues to treat community engagement as a non-negotiable component of its work. For example, I, myself have been to eight of the community meetings that the School District has had as an active listener, listening to the concerns of the village, hearing them directly in my ear and other board members have as well.

Our goal is ensure that every student has equitable access to the district facilities and educational opportunities they deserve while also addressing enrollment trends. And have created financial and operational challenges so that the district resources are used reasonably, efficiently and equitably.

When asked, as the Messiah asks: How are the children? We want to and inspire, Council President, to be able to answer that they are well and have access to the programs, supports and opportunities they need to thrive. And they don't haven't to travel halfway across the city with an infrastructure that's not designed for children to travel halfway across the city for an AP course or for access to Algebra in middle grade so their children can do and realize the future they desire.

Within the vision in mind, Council President, the Board effectively handed Dr. Watlington the football. This is where we are now. The Board through the resolution handed him the football, giving him a clear directive to carry this work forward in partnership with families,

educators, staff and community members across the city.

And at the Board's February 2026 Action Meeting at the Constance E. Clayton Education Center which we renamed in honor of Constance E. Clayton. I no longer call it 440. Dr. Watlington will present to the Board at his Action Meeting his facilities recommendations, whatever they will be.

I will not today opine on what the recommendation appear to be right now because I believe that will be governmental malpractice to do so as Dr. Watlington and the village continue to bake the cake. But once the cake is baked, the Board will have its say.

The Board will not be voting on the recommendations at that meeting either, rather we will hear from Dr. Watlington and his team and begin a thorough review as

The Board of Education of the proposed recommendation carefully considering community feedback as a critical component of our decision.

I want to recognize the extraordinary leadership and dedication of Superintendent Dr. Tony B. Watlington, Sr., Deputy Superintendent Oz Hill, and Senior Advisor Claire Landau, who over the past two years have guided this complex process with rigger, care and commitment to equity.

We know these processes are difficult. We know that, but they are necessary to ensure that all students have access to the opportunities and resources they deserve and we know you all know they deserve.

This work is not only about closing schools, it's about strengthening our city-wide educational system and increasing

access to high quality learning environments across Philadelphia so every child in every neighborhood can thrive.

Before ending my remarks I want to express my gratitude for the partnership, support and advocacy of Mayor Parker, Council President, Chairman Thomas, and city and state officials throughout this process.

Your guidance which has been baked in from Phase 1 until now and I hope you all can see parts of the plan being responsive to the things that you have set along the way of these eight phases, even though we are not done with the final plan, that you all see yourselves in the work.

It is my hope that we can carry this work out, that we can count on this body's support to help us with addressing some of the many concerns that I heard, such as

public safety. I know we have the Safe Path program which is a partnership with the district in the city so we can quail some of the concerns I heard from village and I know that you all are hearing from the village right now.

This work is more about the buildings, it is about ensuring that every student across every neighborhood, I know I'm sounding repetitive, but it's important to state that every student from every neighborhood, that little Reggie at Germantown High School could walk five minutes down the road from Germantown and Walnut Lane to Germantown and High Street and have access to high quality education and a holistic educational experience.

That I believe is part of the vision that Dr. Watlington is intending to put before The Board of Education. That is why we are here

and hopeful for your continued support and partnership as we carry this work forward and I am here to answer any and all questions to the best of my ability in good faith with no malfeasance in mind. Thank you very much.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for your detailed testimony. I just have a couple questions and I'll turn it over to my members. And I believe that every last one of us in this room is deeply interested in making sure we get this right. Right?

Pretty much everyone inside this room, most of us, were born and raised in the city of Philadelphia, educated primarily through the public school system. Here, I'm a graduate of Childs Elementary School. It was on the chopping block a long time ago, but it still

thrives today and is part of this plan. A graduate of Barratt Junior High School, where the late great Dr. King also just visited. Dr. King came and spoke and gave a speech about the blue print about your life.

And also a graduate of Edward Bok High School, where I took a trade to be a machinist. I thought I was going to work at Boeing. And decided to go to Mansfield University where I got a degree in criminal justice and sociology. Came back home, went to University of Pennsylvania, studied government. And also did some course work in Harvard Business School in non-profit leadership and broad management.

We all know that here in America, the great definers make sure you get a high quality education. For me it's the great

equalizer on why this is so important for our young people. And our young people don't have lobbyist walking the halls City of Council, advocating fighting on their behalf. They have us.

And I know all the work you have done and working with you in the past, I believe you are approaching this with a sense of sincerity. We want to address the devil in the details, right, because this is a process. So my line of questions are within that spirit.

I just want to get an idea, first of all, of how you utilize the data that determine what schools stayed open, what schools close, what schools co-located. And I also want to get an idea of the timing of how that data was collected in terms of on-site assessment that allowed you to determine if a school stays open, if a school closed or if a

school is co-located.

And also, I know we talked briefly, Dr. Watlington, in our brief presentation when you and I met with my team. Just also for the right of the public talk about schools in this plan that expand academics versus schools that may have to be shut down based upon lacking infrastructure. Like a school might by built for 1, 000 students and you closed it because there's only 200. Versus we're co-locating schools because it's in the best interest of expanding more academic seats for our students. So that my first question.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: So currently the football is still in Dr. Watlington's hands. The only thing I'll add before he responds is that nothing you just said just now as a consideration violates the spirit of resolution. And the Board

expects Dr. Watlington to honor the spirit of the resolution that I believe everyone would agree with. Action item 27 passed on November 19th, 2024. There's room for that type of analysis and that consideration.

With that being said, Dr. Watlington.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So let me -- let me do a little housekeeping real quick. So Dr. Watlington, you have testimony, correct?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, I do, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And Dr. Deborah Carrera. Let me hear your testimony first, and then we'll get into our line of questions. Excuse me.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you so much, Mr. President. I think we will answer very clearly the two

questions that you just posed as part of our testimony.

Mr. President, as a prelude or opening to the Facilities Master Plan background, let me first thank you, Majority Leader Richardson, Council Chair Thomas and all members of council for the opportunity to be here with President Streater and Dr. Carrera. Certainly we appreciate this Council doing its due diligence and very much look forward to your ongoing participation and helping us as we make informed decision.

Second, later this morning we'll be joined by Deputy Superintendent for Operations Colonel Oz Hill and Senior Advisor for Strategy Claire Landau, who are co-chairs of the working group.

I also want to note, No. 3, there's no such thing as a perfect Facilities Master Plan. And I want

to say related to that, we're going to ask that Council continue to be our partners and recommend we take a position that we won't make good the enemy of perfect given the tough circumstances that we find ourselves in as Education Chair Thomas said earlier, because of a number of decisions made over a number of years.

And also, I do want to note that we are listening. And so our thinking is continuing to evolve and will continue to evolve between now and February 26th, when we bring final recommendations to President Streater and The Board of Education on February 26th.

And finally, I want to set the context for this Facilities Master Plan presentation:

The School District of Philadelphia, which is located as you know in the sixth largest city,

eighth largest school district is making significant progress.

We've made improvement over the past three-and-a-half years in 10 out of 12 goal areas that we're laser focused on, test scores are up in a number of areas. No big city in the nation has made more progress in the nation's report card in 8th grade math. No big city in the nation has made more progress than Philadelphia, and that's the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Our teachers and kids and leaders are doing some fantastic work. One hundred percent of our high schools are accredited for the first time in history. The graduation rate is up and our drop out numbers have been cut by more than half. Really significant progress happening.

And so I want us to think about that how we accelerate that

progress as a part of this recommendation.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm going to always keep it real, right, and give you your props and give credit where credit is due. Because that level of academic achievement and progress is what we need as a city. So thank you for acknowledging those key points of progress.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Mr. President. Slide, please.

I just want to remind members of Council that this work is part of eight phases of work. Those eight phases began in the summer of 2022, as we began the process of developing Phase 1 of developing a strategic plan. An aggressive five-year strategic plan entitled Accelerate Philly that President Streater referenced earlier. That plan is making a difference, but we

need to double down, use our resources to drive five times faster progress because our children of Philadelphia absolutely deserve it. We are at the conclusion of Phase 8.

It will be fairly brief, Mr. President. We are not going to read all those slides. We know how you roll, Mr. President. Been here a couple times, figured it out. I'm learning the Philly way.

Slide, please. I just want to remind you there's been broad participation in this process over three years with the project team with diverse members. I certainly want to thank Education Chairman Thomas for being a part of that team. We've had nine advisory groups representing 170 Philadelphians, a number of community conversations, and nearly 14, 000 people have weighed into this process via survey.

Slide, please. Let's talk about -- take a moment to get to the desired outcome here.

Mr. President, members of Council, we're going to continue to make the case that in order to drive more high quality academic and extracurricular programs into every neighborhood into ever zip code across the city of Philadelphia, we've got to make some decisions about how we are using our limited resources as a historically underfunded School District.

That includes our time, it includes the budget we get from City Council, which Councilmember Harrity, I think I told us to be mindful. We are very mindful of that budget from the City Council that we need this year, the Board of Education needs this year.

Time, budget, and we got to be really thoughtful and intentional

about how which use our buildings. And so when we do that we can double down and drive faster progress in six areas.

Number 1, we can do a better job of supporting communities and student achievement. In 2012-13, when we went through this progress students in displaced schools, what happened was student attendance and academic went down. We know how to do this different and better now, and we are committed to both going up, not down.

We also know in 2012-13, when there were schools that closed there were a number of vacant buildings that sat for more than a decade. We know how to do that differently this time and we're going to suggest not to let that happen again.

Number 2, we want to maximize our building utilization.

At present about 35 percent of our buildings are not utilized. And that's not efficient in terms of heating, air conditioning, it's not efficient in terms of cleaning, square footage, et cetera. And so we want to significantly increase our building utilization.

Third, we want to provide more access to Pre-K opportunities in district operating schools. In fact, we want to double it from percent of Pre-K opportunities to be 50 percent in district-operated Pre-K schools.

I want to note, for the record, the District is not the only provider of Pre-K. Dr. Carrera will tell you that the city provides Pre-K and there are other Pre-K providers as well.

Number 4, we want to use our resources in a better way, more efficient way so that we can drive

more high quality, rigorous learning curriculums, so that all our young people, like you, Mr. President, have a chance to go to that phenomenal Fels School, University of Pennsylvania and Harvard.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And that was before I got elected.

DR. WATLINGTON: Before you got elected. Duly noted, sir. And we want to tackle clear and up front the disparity that currently exists in Philadelphia. Depending on your zip code and where you live, you may or may not have access to algebra in your middle grades in 5, 6, 7, 8. About 53 percent of our students do at present. We want to change that to 100 percent.

Why is that important?

A, algebra in all middle grades, which requires to use our resources differently. If the district had the resources to do it,

we would have done it a long time ago.

But it's important because, A, algebra in middle school is the gateway in which kids will get in the higher math track in high school and matriculate and persist in college. B, if you want to apply to a criteria-based high school in the School District of Philadelphia, whether that's Carver Engineering & Science or Palumbo, Masterman, Bodine down the line, you've got to have algebra.

About half of our kids cannot even apply, even if they're the smartest person with the highest grade point average in their schools, they can't apply because we don't offer the same access to algebra in the middle grades.

A similar story exists with advanced placement courses in our high schools and we'll be able to

level the playing field there as well.

The fifth area is we want to provide more high quality arts, music and physical education across all schools in the district.

And then finally, we want to grow our career and technical education and building trade programs across the city.

Slide please. Some of the other key district-wide investments in this plan will result in -- this is really important, members of Council. If this $2.8-billion plan once it's in its final iteration and we bring it to President Streater and his Board of Education on February 26th, if this gets funded, we have a once in a lifetime, and I want to underscore, once in a lifetime opportunity to reduce the number of schools in our city, district-operated schools in our

city that have poor or under satisfactory ratings from 85 schools to zero. Once in a lifetime opportunity. I do not believe we will get this opportunity again in our lifetime.

We will also be in a position over the next decade to modernize 159 schools. When we think about those new schools that got built, like TM Peirce and Cassidy and Thomas Holme and AMY at James Martin within the past four years, on time and on budget, by the way, state of the art schools. And when we think about a school like Frankford High School that we had to close to do some asbestos abatement, that Colonel Hill and his team were able to go in and do a $29-million refresh renovation of that building, where I was at just last week, we are to dream big and take full advantage of this opportunity after

we've gone through the process of hearing all your feedback and potential edits we ought to think about.

We will certainly offer algebra in our middle grades, we'll increase the number of schools, we will decrease the number of grade bands from 13 to 6 to push in more high quality resources through the schools. We will also be in a position to make significant ADA improvements for students with disabilities throughout the district and will address significant under and overcrowding in our schools.

Slide, please.

Mr. President, if you look on the left side of this map, you'll notice some key investments that our Board of Education approved based on staff recommendations on the left side. On the right side you'll also see a map of Philadelphia that shows

some key investments that will occur over the next decade if the final $2.8-billion master plan is approved.

What I want you to notice on the right side is that similar to the left there are some significant investments given the limited resources we have. But I want you to see that geographic distribution and the note that's geographic distribution of some of these key investments. And I want you to note that while it costs for building a new high school in the northeast part of the city, you'll see a distribution of key investments across every councilmatic district in the city of Philadelphia. And we'll talk more later about what those numbers look like.

I also want to note that the colored dots represent the key themes that we've heard from our

community over the past year.

Slide please. What are those key themes we've heard from members of our community? There were four major things that were validated by more than 8, 000 Philadelphians who completed the most recent survey. Those four things are we should strengthen Pre-K through 8 programming by better utilizing all the space and address how we're utilizing buildings.

To reinvest neighborhood high school as community anchors. It's one of the reasons this plan does not prioritized recommended for closure comprehensive neighborhood high schools.

Number 3, there was a theme around reducing unnecessary school transitions for students as they move from kindergarten to 12th grade. As a result, we're investing

heavily in the K through 8 strategy and will not be recommending significant increases in the number of traditional middle schools in the city.

And we also have been encouraged to expand access to grades 5 through 12 criteria based schools and grow our career and technical education programs.

Next slide, please. I do want to note that those 8, 000 surveys that we received, Mr. President, 70 percent or greater of the survey respondents said that those four themes are important.

Now, we didn't get a large number of people to raise their hand and say close my school. I want to note that, for the record. And we understand it because schools have always been centers of communities and we certainly understand the concern among parents and staff and

others.

I do want to note that among those surveyed respondents we've got one of the most diverse response rates since I've been superintendent here since 2022, and that looks like about nearly half of the survey respondents were from families or had connections with students the disabilities.

About a third of the survey respondents had family members or were connected to individuals who are English language learners. Less than a -- te majority of the participants in the survey reported they earned less than $50, 000 a year. And what's most significant to me at least, President Streater, President Johnson and members of Council, is that the survey responses came from every single zip code in the city of Philadelphia. It's one of the reasons why we are

laser light focused on the survey result as well as the other feedback.

On the next slide, Mr. President, I want to show you some school recommendations related to theme 1 strengthening Pre-K through 8 programming. In the interest of time, I won't read this, it's post in the website, it's entered into the record and we're happy to speak to it during our testimony today.

On the next slide, you'll see the school recommendations related to revesting in neighborhood high schools. The second guiding thing from this survey. Again, I won't read it to you, it's entered into record and we're happy to speak to each of these recommendations and answer your questions and receive feedback today.

Next slide. You'll see

recommendations related to reducing the number of transitions specifically from reducing 13 grades bands down to 6. A parent who has kids in K-5 and 6, 8, doesn't have to take kids to multiple grades to multiple schools. Once kids get acclimated in the elementary grade, they don't have to transition to middle school, they stay there three years and then transition to a high school. You'll see the recommendations related to that that we'll speak to during the presentation.

And on the next slide, you'll see on this page, "Guiding theme 4:" Expand our 5 through 12 criteria based schools as well as our career and technical education and building trades programs. And not just to expand those programs, Mr. President, but to expand these programs and to focus in on the jobs

of the future in the Philadelphia metro area. Where our young people will not just graduate and get a job, a minimum wage job, recognizing the minimum wage in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is already lower than our neighboring states of New Jersey, New York, Delaware and Ohio, but jobs that pay really strong middle income, middle America wages or higher, so they can support themselves and their family and make an economic impact on the city.

And then relative to the Mayor's commitment that we have access to economic opportunity for all. And on the next slide, the final slide on this you'll see some additional investments that we want to have an opportunity to speak with you about today.

With that, I wanted to say a few words about the timeline, Mr. President.

On this slide you'll see that we are proposing on February 26th, we will present to President Streater and The Board of Education a 10-year, $2.8 billion plan that if funded will reduce the number of poor and unsatisfactory school ratings from 85 to zero. We'll modernize 159 school campuses and will absolutely help us to more strategically push in more high quality, academic and extracurricular programs across every neighborhood and across every zip code.

One-billion dollar of the plan will be funded by our bond borrowing program subject to President Streater year over year approval. And the other $1.8-billion of this plan we'll be making the case that new government and philanthropic funding be secured for that purpose.

I want you to note we'll modernize 159 buildings. We'll maintain 122 facilities which means we'll continue those schools and do routine maintenance, but won't make significant additional investments. You'll see six co-located schools facilities here. And you'll see 12 schools at this point will be recommending to close and repurpose for the district's use.

Tilden Middle School, for example, we'll recommend to tear that building down and build a state-of-the-art athletics complex in Southwest Philadelphia to compliment the other complexes already in the area. We're going to recommend -- the draft recommendations at this point are to also close eight additional schools and to convey those eight buildings to the city of Philadelphia for purposes of affordable and workforce

housing.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Just a point of information. Is that eight a part of the 20?

DR. WATLINGTON: Eight is part of the 20 at this point.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Just a little clarity on that.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: I think, Council President, are you asking are the eight part of the 20 part of the previous resolution the Board passed in December?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: No.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It's eight plus?

CHAIRMAN STREATER: This would be eight in addition to.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Eight in addition to. I want to get clarity on that. So there were the eight that's already abandoned,

correct?

CHAIRMAN STREATER: No, there's about 20 facilities that could be -- that fit the definition of the resolution that the Board passed in December. These are eight in addition to, that's what Dr. Watlington is saying right now.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So eight plus 20 is 28.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: In theory, if they're all conveyed to the city.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Twenty-eight, correct.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: Yeah, I don't want to get ahead of the Board, but in theory.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I just want to get clarity on that part. Okay. You can finish.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thanks for that clarification.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Go ahead, Dr. Watlington.

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes. Among our -- again, just for the record to be crystal clear, as Council Chair Thomas, Education Chair Thomas said at the top of the meeting, there are currently 20 persistently vacant properties that are already vacant that the Board has given some direction about how to communicate and work with the city about possible conveyance.

Separate and apart from that, there are -- currently there are 20 draft schools in this current plan where children are currently in schools right now, that in the current draft of those 20 schools, 12 of those we intend where kids are currently in buildings right now, 12 of those we currently have a plan to recommend to President Streater and the Board to close 12 and to repurpose for district use. In 8 of

those 20 to close and convey to the city for purposes of affordable and work force housing and job creation.

Do that answer that question, Mr. President?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you.

And you'll see that I also want to note that there will be no changes in school year 27-28, the upcoming school year, because we want to take the time to plan thoughtfully.

Also, we will staff up, Mr. President and members of council, a transition office that will report directly to me and Deputy Superintendent Oz Hill that will be a one-stop shop for any displaced families. So that they, No. 1, we ensure that unlike 2012-13 our children's academic performance and student attendance goes up and

not down, as was the case in 2012-13.

B, that office will provide one-stop shop service that range from social and emotional and mental health and wellness supports. To transportation needs, to whatever our parents and families need. And more to come on that.

On the next slide I want to just note, Mr. President, that this plan provides for -- this slide outlines for you by Councilmatic district what the total investment would be in this plan.

For example, in Councilmatic District 9, Councilmember Dr. Phillips' district, they'll be a $443-million investment all the way to Councilmatic District 1, $308-million investment in Councilmember Squilla's district.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Don't the Mayor live up there in the 9th District?

DR. WATLINGTON: I won't read them for the record because you put me on a time clock, sir. But I want you and the public to note the millions of dollars that will be spent very strategically in every Councilmatic district.

I also want you to note that we are very sensitive and paying attention to the number of school closures at present on the table. Again, I want to underscore we are listening to feedback as President Streater said to opine how this feedback will land on the final recommendations because we want to do our due diligence, just like you are. But you'll see the schools we're recommending at this point to close compared to 2020.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm going to ask you to summarize

because I know at least for the members, we've gone over this extensively. And so...if that's okay, Dr. Watlington.

DR. WATLINGTON: I want to summarize that this is the next to last slide, No. 1.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Sure, sir.

DR. WATLINGTON: Number 2, the $2.8-billion you can see how it will be spent across all 10 councilmatic districts. I want to note that there were 30 schools that closed in 2012-13. In 2026, at present there are 20 schools on that recommended closure list.

Pleased to report to you that this plan will modernize 159 campuses and reduce the number of schools with poor or unsatisfactory ratings from 85 to zero. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity.

With that, I'll go to the

last slide and say thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Dr. Watlington.

Dr. Deborah Carrera.

DR. CARRERA: Good morning, Council President Johnson. Good morning, Majority Learder Gilmore-Richardson, Chair Thomas and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Deborah Carrera. I'm the chief education officer for the city of Philadelphia.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to testify on resolution No. 250895, concerning the School District of Philadelphia School Facilities Modernization Plan.

I, too, am a graduate of the School District of Philadelphia, Potter Thomas Bilingual Elementary School, Conwell Middle Magnet School, Northeast High School.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Did you say Conwell?

DR. CARRERA: Yes, sir, I did, yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. Cool.

DR. CARRERA: Before joining the administration I spent 27 years in the School District of Philadelphia as a teacher at Potter Thomas Bilingual School, as a Assistant Principal at Elkin Elementary, as an elementary principal at McKinley Elementary and as a high school principal at Kensington Creative and Performing Arts. And then as an assistant superintendent at Learning Network One, which were mainly South Philly high schools as well.

In 2012, during the last round of school closures, I was the principal at Kensington CAPA High School. I have lived experience as

a school leader and as a parent. And while the conversation is difficult, it's necessary and long over due.

The School Facilities Plan has been carefully designed to improve the quality of education for Philadelphia students by providing more equitable access to programming and addressing chronic overcrowding in many of our schools. It offers a comprehensive road map to remedy the District's longstanding facilities challenges and a vision for schools that are suitable for a 21st century education.

The plan would also end the decade-long disinvestments in comprehensive high school. I was as comprehensive high school principal. Which are anchor institutions in city neighborhoods which were once the pride of many communities.

I was priviledged to serve

the administrations representative on the Facilities Program team conviened by the School District. From outset it was clear that our mission was not just to consider te condition of buildings, but to look at the educational resources available to students in each school and determine how those resources could be delivered.

The planning rubric included four factors. Educational programming, neighborhood vulnerability, building condition and building utilization.

The District incorporated lessons from the 2012 building closure process when designing the rubric. Academic performance which contributed to the closure of low performing schools in our most vulnerable communities in 2012 was not included as a decision factor.

As a former assistant

superintendent of 19 schools in the District, I traveled to these schools. I saw disparities in programming and activities available to students in the schools in my portfolio. At one time I had 28 schools. This plan is an important step towards ending this inequity.

In addition to better quality facilities, students, all students will have access, as the superintendent said, to algebra 1. A foundational class for college or career in STEM or health fields. Students will have art and music classes. I went to buildings, there are buildings that do not have an art teacher and have an art classroom.

Access to more AP classes. My high school was a small high school, I could only offer my kids two AP courses, where other schools like Central, where my son went,

could offer them over 20 plus AP courses, or International Baccalaureate program.

Students in smaller schools will have more choices of clubs, sports that are available in large schools. As an educator I know that these experiences are instrumental to children's self discovery and necessary part of their growth and development.

The District has presented a draft plan with reasonable goals and a sound methodology and has provided multiple opportunities for engagement, but I want to emphasize as the superintendent and president has said today, it is still also draft plan. The voices of the school communities deserve to be heard and their input should be considered.

The Mayor is a Philadelphia public school graduate, as we know,

and she credits her schools with helping her to become the person she is today. It is her assessment that the current District foot print is unsustainable and to secure the long-term funding necessary to improve schools our funding partners require a comprehensive plan that accounts for both overcrowded and under utilized buildings.

There are a number of underlying conditions that make these decisions difficult, but they are necessary. School enrollment, and we heard the Board president talk a little bit about that today, it has declined. The school is doing better, as Dr. Watlington has said, with students who have dropped out, but over the last 10 years, the District Schools have lost over 15,556 students. While enrollment in cyber charter schools, and I worked for the State of Pennsylvania

and I saw it, have grown from 547 students to 14,252 students.

Cyber charter school enrollment accelerated during the pandemic and peeked in 2023-24 to 14,643, and it is unclear whether enrollment will level off or continue to grow.

Philadelphia school facilities are old. You've heard that today. The average age of school buildings are 73 years and some are more than a century old. These schools have served a useful purpose, but lack updated wiring to support educational technology, have outdated heating and cooling systems, insufficient science labs, auditoriums and gymnasiums and limited space to accommodate diverse learners.

Philadelphia City Councilmember, you were the first to acknowledge and advocate for the

removal of environmental hazards from schools and we thank you for that. And you are often the first to hear about burst pipes, air conditioning failures, neglected playing fields and classrooms that attribute to students asthma.

Currently the District faces a steady and unpredictable stream of facility problems that are disruptive to students, faculty and parents. Requiring them to move to swing spaces for weeks or even months. Family and staff deserve a facilities renovation program that is comprehensice, predictable and planned in advanced.

City Council and Philadelphia legislative delegation has successfully elevated school facilities as a state wide problem that could not be ignored. Unfortunately the state has not yet put forth the necessary investment.

Your efforts were instrumental in the creation of the Pennsylvania School Facilities Improvement grant program and we thank you, which provides $125-million in grants annually to address the needs of the states 500 school districts.

Governor Shapiro has proposed $51-billion infrastructure bond in the 26-27 budget that could be used to fund housing, energy infrastructure and school facilities. But the Commonwealth still have not replaced the $340-million annual allocation for the Plan Con School Construction subsidy program which ended more than a decade ago, leaving a large gap in predictable annual funding.

The $7-billion price tag for a thorough renovation of all school buildings recommended in the 2017 Parsons report beyond our

reach. The District's $2.8 billion proposal however is a realistic and achievable goal if we work together.

This plan will support the modernization, as the superintendent has said, from 159 schools and reduce the number of unsatisfactory buildings in 10 years from 85 to zero. That is worth fighting for.

As a state representative the Mayor visited schools across the Commonwealth and her motivation is clear. Philadelphia students must have access to the same levels of quality programming facilities and opportunities as students do in other counties.

It's not my intention today to diminish the uncertainty and disruption that is natural for a change of this magnitude. We know this is hard. Or the minimize a infection that Philadelphians have for our local public schools. I am

proud graduate of Conwell Middle Magnet School and Northeast High School. They made me who I am today, but I believe we should honor our history, our legacy while also striving for something better for our children.

Thank you for this opportunity.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. Just going back to the question I asked regarding the data that was utilized to determine what schools are closed and what schools stay open and what schools are co-located and how recent were these site assessments done of those particular schools?

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Mr. President. Two things I'll say very suscinctly. One, you'll recall that in previous years, maybe three years ago, we came before this council and talked about the former

Parsons report.

Since that time we completed a second review of every district facility and we did 35 data verification meetings directly with principals, so that we could make sure we had up-to-date accurate information on every school. Long story short that resulted in four key data points looking at things like the condition of the building, what's the building utilization of the building.

We also looked at something called neighborhood vulnerability index. What were the schools that were closed? Are there some parts of the city that had a significant closure in 2012; are there some parts of the city have a hyper concentrations of poverty?

Long story short we do not just take the four scores add them together, divide by 4, and say if

you're number is here, here's what happens. If you're number is here, here's what happen. There is some complex thinking looking at the numbers and feedback we received along the way. So there's no really short simple formula, it's both quantitative and qualitative that feedback.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And that's great segway regarding this question. And the Philadelphia Inquirer found that among the closing schools about 68 percent of the student population is black compared to 40 percent. The rest of the district schools, meaning the majority of black schools are being disproportionately impacted, basically black and brown neighborhoods.

So did the School District collect data on analysis regarding the potential racial inequity impact

this proposal may have, and also did the District evaluate cumulative impacts? Meaning did they look at neighborhoods that have experienced previous closures, right, and the impact that had on the surrounding community?

You kind of alluded to it, but could you clarify, have you done that part of due diligence regarding when the schools will be closed in certain neighborhoods? Which pretty much would create a educationally gap zone. Meaning, there'll be a vacuum in a particular area when that school shuts down. Because for most neighborhoods the school that hub, right, in an ideal world, I would hope we could do you one for one and that's in an ideal world.

Meaning, if you are going to tear down this school, right, because of infrastructure, it was built for 1,000 students, it's only

200 now and economically it don't make sense, right? But can we tear that school down, but in that very same location build another school for that same community, right? That would be smaller, right? Maybe put a health center on the side, maybe a rec center on the side in partnership on in the city. Then you have one for one and the neighborhood keeps that anchor, right, in that area and have a smaller footprint which I also think would be economicaly feasible in terms of saving money. Just something the Board can think about long term in terms of the vision if something like that could happen.

DR. WATLINGTON: I think President Streater wanted to say something.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: Not to minimize the point, but I think the way the resolution is drafted is to

have a both/and approach. I think issues of equity should be kind of infused in the process, but also trying to ensure that in these parts of the city just because there's a facility there that serves students as it relates for education, that it's not an educational dessert.

And I think the Facilities Plan is trying to figure out how to better utilize the resources, these are the directives we gave to the superintendent. So it's not just a quantity of the facilities, it's also looking at the quality of the programming that we are funded and we have the resources to do. So that's kind of the preamble based upon the resolution and Dr. Watlington can answer the sort of in the weeds question.

DR. WATLINGTON: I'll say four things in 60 seconds. Number 1, we looked at vulnerability

factors across the city. We could have come here to President Streater -- we could have released a draft plan that closed twice as many schools and been able to defend it. I want to be clear.

Second, I read the article in the newspaper that you referenced. And the context is about 50 to 51 percent is composed of African American students. About a third of our students in the School District are Hispanic or Latino students and that's our fastest growing demographics. So any changes are going to inherently affect black and brown students no matter how you slice the pie.

Third, I would ask the Council to take a look at that map we shared earlier. The map shows geographic investments across multi-million dollar investments across all 10 Councilmatic districts. And

when you look at the current recommendations for closures, they're spread out and are not isolated to any one district, although I'm sure Councilmembers feel a little bit differently about that.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: This has the most, but we'll accept that and we do see the investments across Councilmatic districts which I think it's great we can see the visual of where the investments are going from in terms of the $2.8-billion.

Have we done an assessment of the proper value of these school buildings that are going up for closure, as well as the other eight that are sitting abandoned that will be transferred to the city of Philadelphia Land Bank.

What's the property value of those particular parcels of land?

DR. WATLINGTON: Short answer is yes. Under Deputy Superintendent Hill leadership and Senior Advisor Landau, they're looking to two key data points. One, the historic tax records for each of the properties for the school, as well as the most recent apraised values for all of those properties. That's correct, yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: To clarify, on the record, how much the value are of those properties?

DR. WATLINGTON: We have Senior Advisor Landau. I don't know if they have that on their person or we might want to submit it for the record.

Colonel Hill, do we have that or do you want to submit it for the record?

We'd like to submit that for the record.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Yeah, please submit that to the Chair of Education and he'll make sure we'll have a copy of it. And just for the record, that's the actual property accessment value of the proposed closure schools, as well as the eight that will be transferred to the Land Bank, just for the record.

DR. WATLINGTON: Duly noted.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: In terms of the borrowing, the billion dollars borrowing, give us an idea of the debt service cost of the bond and its impact on our current operating budget.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: The capital budget -- just for point of information for those listening, the capital budget we have to approve a five-year budget, but we do it every year. So just for point of information for those who don't

understand what we're talking about, we have two budgets, we have our capital budget and our operating budget. The operating budget is separate. So the capital budget assuming that this plan or some iteration of it moves forward will likely be this year evolves it relates to some of the recommendations. I do know that the School District and the Board have done its due diligence to make sure we have the highest credit rating to lower the debt service to some extent. But Dr. Watlington, you can speak to the in the weeds question.

DR. WATLINGTON: To your point, Mr. President and President Streater, thank you. The short answer to your question is we will -- we fully anticipate to keep our debt service at the gold standard, industry standard rate of less than 10 percent. Historically we run

about 8 percent. To President Streater's points the bond markets -- our confidence is partly driven by the fact that we have the best investment grade credit rating that we've had in the history of the district.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And what is that, sir?

DR. WATLINGTON: That's BAA and we'll submit it for the record, too. Also, our credit outlook has been upgraded from stable to positive. And our investment rate credit by both Moody's and Fitch services has been upgraded every year over the past three years. So the bond markets understand that over time we have a structural deficit if we don't get the constitutional funding, but they have confidence in the decisions we're making.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

And just for clarification, are you saying -- and I think, Mr. Chairman, I don't know if you were saying this as well, I just want to get clarity. Would the 1-billion possibly increase, therefore at the moment you can't give me the number -- the actual number it would cost for the debt service on the life of the actual billion dollar bond?

But let me ask you this, what's the assessment as of now? Let's just say hypothetically we just stick with that billion. It doesn't grow, right?

Have your team said over the lifetime of the bond this is how much it's going cost up to pay back in bond. What's that number, just for the record?

DR. WATLINGTON: I can't give you that number off the top of my head, but I will tell you we'll submit, for the recrod, a detailed

in depth multi-page calculation and the detailed information embedded therein.

But we have absolutely costed out our best most conservative estimate for the debt service being repaid.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Please submit that to the chair. I want to see also the cost of debt service, and then obviously somebody has to pay for that, right? So are there any other plans beyond -- I know you're going to Council, I know you're going to Harrisburg for funding, right? What's the plan to pay down that debt service? How does that work? I'm just asking for clarification and understanding.

DR. WATLINGTON: Certainly the $1-billion we believe the School District will be able to pay towards this $2.8 billion plan with a two-year, we borrow every two years,

it will be completely consistent with how we borrow in the School District in the past. The $1.8-billion will be dependent upon government and perhaps philanthropic resources, that will just be contingent on what level of additional funding we are able to get.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Dr. Watlington. And another question, in terms of the additional $1.8-billion gap, right, who are we in conversations with in terms of the philanthropic commitment to support the Philadelphia School District Facilities Plan. Right? And also it seems like the other aspect of the 1.8 hinges on, hinges on the environment in Harrisburg, right?

I'm an idealistic pragmatic person. And I hope that in the leadership of our speaker Joanna

McClinton, our Chairman of Appropriations Jordan Harris, as well as our Governor Josh Shapiro, that we're in a good position, right? But let's say the creek rises, right, and we don't get 1-billion from thhe administration in Harrisburg, how does that have an impact on this plan?

So it's the philanthropic aspect, I want to know who committed thus far? Who has a interest in our great students in the city of Philadelphia and put some skin in the game to make sure our young people succeed from philanthropic community. And also, in the event the dynamics in Harrisburg may change. Hopefully that's never the case, but it could happen. How does that impact this particular plan?

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Mr. President. I'll start with Harrisburg. We believe consistent

with the feedback that I've heard from members of both the House and Senate as I've traveled with President Streater and others to Harrisburg is that when the School District of Philadelphia does a better job of addressing significantly under enrolled schools and when we tighten our belt as appropriate, maybe we'll be considered for more support.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: When you say the House and the Senate, are we talking about Republicans and Democrats?

DR. WATLINGTON: I think we've visited both parties and it's been more of a conservative sentiment than members of the other party, but both have indicated that we've got to do some things to tighten our belt.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: If I could add briefly, Council

President. Also, I believe it's been the strategy with the Board of Education, whether it's the use of COVID dollars which we use effectively for supported learning, but also infrastructure upgrades that we know have came to past. That as we continue to strive toward holistically holding on tightly why we exist, which is to educate children, that those who hold the purse strings will feel even more confident to investing in our product.

And I don't want to use the word product because I know we're talking about our babies and children, but that's how some individuals think who hold purse strings. And we believe with the higher graduation rates, student achievement is up and good physical stewardship that we can make the case and willing to take this tough

decision as a village that we believe we've done everything we can do.

And I'm a trial attorney, we've done everything we can do in front of the reasonable facts in front of the factfinder to make the right decision, which the Commonwealth court also said is the right decision as well, to fund us in a way to support this public good, that I would argue is more important than drinkable water.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And the reason we had this Commonwealth decision because folks in Harrisburg that's from the Philadelphia delegation, but there are other folks that do not perceive our students as high academic achieving students here in the city of Philadelphia. Hence, why we are always fighting year after year because if that wasn't the case we

wouldn't need a court mandate to say, we need equity in terms of making sure that all young people get a high quality education.

The reason I asked that question is because a key component of your proposal is contingent with us fighting with individuals in Harrisburg, but I want clarity on in the event that they say, well, we are not going to do it for a billion, right, how I does that impact this plan?

And then also I still want to know, who are the private individuals? The private industry that are investing in our young people? Who has the interest interesting in our young people? I would like to know at least, for the record, who are they?

DR. WATLINGTON: I'll say two things there, Mr. President. One, given the improvement that the

District is making, we think this is great opportunity to reach out the philanthropist and others who have made investments to other sectors outside of district operated schools.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: My guy, like who? Who are we talking about? Penn, Temple, Drexel, IBM, Comcast, talk to me.

DR. WATLINGTON: Well, I want to be careful about naming all the people because it's their right to do what they want with their money. Let me give you one concrete example. Drexel raised money to build for that Powell Slam School. And I believe pays money --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Excuse me, sir. Go ahead.

DR. WATLINGTON: Drexel raised dollars to build that Powell Slam School, that we pay a dollars a year. And it's that kind of

creative, innovative thinking that we ought to make the case far and wide to people who care about education in the city who have additional resources and ask them to consider donating to the District.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I have to ask the question. That 1.8 is contingent, right? It's not factual, right? It's not actual.

DR. WATLINGTON: Right.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It's if we get these things done, if the private sector wants to invest in us, if everything goes right in Harrisburg, we'll get that 1.8, right? In the event we don't or the private sector says, you know what, the market went left, therefore, we're not going to invest in our public school system, what happens to this part of the plan?

DR. WATLINGTON: Good question. Thank you, Mr. President.

If we do not get $1.8-billion, instead of bring the number of poor and unsatisfactory building ratings down from 85 to zero, we'll work our way down from 85 to more than zero, and we will not modernize 159 campuses, we'll modernize less.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. So we want to be hopeful that we strategize and work that public/private partnership as well as keep that environment in Harrisburg conducive to one supporting what we are doing here for supporting our children.

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir. And we also think we need to continue to make the case that the former price tag of $7.8-billion on the Parsons report, this team has worked very strategically to get that number down to 2.8.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm glad you said that for the

record. So the original number was 7?

DR. WATLINGTON: 7.8-billion.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So it really was 7.8 and you worked it down to --

DR. WATLINGTON: 2.8.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: 2.8. Okay.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: So that number likely would be even higher now than 7.8 because we've had the pandemic and there's inflation and things like that.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: But can I say one quick thing on the record. I've done a little research on what the School District under former Mayor who was president of the Board, Richardson Dilworth did after the great migration and I read their

Facilities Plan.

And I think what makes this plan unique and I hope those can agree to help support it, help fund it, is that it is not just buildings. We are actually trying to recreate the system of public education in service of why we exist which is to educate children.

That School Board had an emergency of black folks, my people, our people coming to Philadelphia with their hair on fire just building and building, but it wasn't in service, I would argue, to the core mission, it was just being responsive. We are trying to do it in a methodical and logical way that's responsive to what I would argue is the real emergency which is historic and chronic under achievement.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Chairman, I want to acknowledge that

same point because I heard Dr. Deborah Carrera talk about what we didn't do the last time was focus on academic achievement. The last time was a land grab to shut down schools to take care of budget. That was just really clear. So I'm smiling when you're saying, let's look at academic achievement because that's the most important component, probably the most important component.

But I also want to make sure -- my segue into my last question is how we are looking about strategy around -- and I talked about this to Dr. Watlington in our private meeting as well briefly.

We're a city of neighborhoods. We're a city of neighborhoods. And let's say you want somebody to go from Gompers to Lankenau, right? They're two totally different neighborhoods,

right? So I have to feel comfortable as the parent, right, to travel from one neighborhood to the next neighborhood. Right? And I'm happy that we're at a 60-year historical low when it comes to homicides and shootings, right? But I also remember Member Bass in her district where some young men came, and also President Streater you were with me as well, at one of the schools where some folks came up to a SEPTA bus stop and unloaded on a group of students.

So when I think about the merging, when I think about the closures, I know we are a city of neighborhoods, but I also think about the reality and safety of our young people.

What has been the strategy and plan thus far in examining how our young people will be safe as a part of this particular plan that's

presented us to?

CHAIRMAN STREATER: As a precursor I'll just say as a board member whose been on the Board for five years, president for four, part of this confidence is a reflection of y'all. We have confidence that City Council will continue to do the work you-all have been doing to make this city a safer, more welcoming city and our Mayor. So I think that we wouldn't even call this question if we thought we were in an ecosystem where the superintendent wouldn't create the mechanism --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman, I hear you. I think how you put on us that we're doing great work to reduce gun violence and shootings which is great. That's not question, though. I just want you to get to, Mr. Johnson, thus far this is our safety strategy plan that goes in partnership with

what we're presenting to you to make sure that when we merge these schools, shut down these schools and co-locate students in these environments, our data shows that we have a game plan to ensure our young people are safe. And if I cut you off, excuse me.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: No worries, brother. Attorneys have a big wind up before we make our point so I'll be more quick with my point.

I think we have exemplars, that's the point I was going to make from continuing to perfecting our union to getting back local control. Our operation Safe Pathways is an example is how we have as a city worked with City Council, our police depart, our Mayor to find ways to create pathways for our babies to get to school in the most safest way possible.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Is it in this plan already? I'm just asking. Is it in the plan, though?

CHAIRMAN STREATER: What I'm saying is The Board of Education wouldn't have triggered the resolution if we didn't have a confidence. And that's an example to us to say this is something that could be workable and now Dr. Watlington's job is to answer your question in a more direct way. My job is to at least put the energy as to why we're doing this as a Board. And Dr. Watlington's job to answer the in the weeds question.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Because that last board they also did a resolution and they had the confidence that we would address the issue of safety, but they didn't actually have a strategy on doing it. That's why I was just thinking maybe if we're being proactive, and

your team is already on the ground knowing this can be an issue, that could be a part of the plan. So Mr. Watlington, what is that plan, sir?

DR. WATLINGTON: In 60 seconds or less. Number 1, the team has taken a deep dive -- has already and continues to take a deep dive into the children and young people who are already moving across the city to study that pattern to make sure we try to accent and not make it more pronounced.

Number 2, part of the role of the transition office will be invest in additional Safe Path opportunities as needed and appropriate and increased safety supports.

And No. 3, we intentionally released this draft plan five weeks prior to taking it to President Streater and the Board to hear more

detailed feedback.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You told me that as well. You said the reason why we are not going to wrap it up, we're going to hear from the people.

DR. WATLINGTON: If we miss something, we'll go back and revisit it.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: What's the role of the neighborhood stakeholders and parents in terms of the recommendation? What role have they played? Is there a parent neighborhood working group? I want some clarity, what role has parents played in these recommendations? What role have neighborhood stakeholders played in these recommendations?

DR. WATLINGTON: We prioritized over a five-week period getting in front of every one of the 20 school communities face-to-face.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Not getting them in front of them. Are they part of the actual planning process? Not getting in front of them.

DR. WATLINGTON: I would say two things then. One, we had diverse representation on a project team, diverse parent and community representation on nine advisory groups that helped shaped the recommendation.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's what I wanted to hear.

DR. WATLINGTON: And certainly third, we added to that nearly 14,000 survey responses and we're continuing to listen to them.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: All right. I'll wrap up because my members have questions.

I know you have three town halls coming up, I know you also have to put your recommendations by

the 26th. Which I said this privately and I'll say in public, this project seems rushed to me, right, but nevertheless it's nothing I didn't share with you privately but I think it's a little rushed.

I know you have three town halls that are coming up, right? I have to ask the question, how many town halls have you done with members, district members whose districts are actually going to be impacted? Like I'm doing one in the 9th; I'm doing one in the 3rd. I'm partnering with Quetcy to do one in the 7th. I'm partnering with Squilla in the 1st. Mr. Johnson in the 2nd.

And really, it's not just about, I'll just say the plan, because who knows, you might be in the 1st Councilmatic District and southern is going to get a brand new building and folks are going to get

a chance the hear this plan directly in partnership with 1st Councilmatic Councilmember about what's coming to his district. I just want to get an idea why wasn't that the thought process? I'm just trying to understand.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Mr. President. For each of the current draft recommended school closures, we've done not less than two townhall meetings, one virtual and one in-person. And we've been very intentional about ensuring that we invite Councilmembers to be present, as well as board members to so they can see what's going on firsthand.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So there's been 20 already in the district.

DR. WATLINGTON: For each school. And because I as superintendent could not go to every

single one of those, we scheduled three additional.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Where you're going to be at.

DR. WATLINGTON: Not just be at, but I will lead, including this afternoon at Franklin High School.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Dr. Phillips. Thank you, sir.

I'm going to turn over to my members and I'm going to start with Dr. Anthony Phillips.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Thank you, Council President. I was listening to your questions and thinking you're spot on with a lot of them.

I do want to mention to Board President Streater and also Dr. Watlington that I think it's really important that we are having this facilities conversation and we

are glad that it's finally happening.

You know, how it happens is something that we're continuing to discuss, but I'm happy that you all have presented a plan in this fashion.

I have questions about transportation. We have in our district Penny Packer School who has been suggested to close. The school options closer to Penny Packer would include AB Day and also Edmonds down the street.

The problem is that from a geographical standpoint, you know, historically the reasons why these schools were built in these neighborhoods is because they were in a four-block walking radius, easy to get to.

That school is not as close to Edmonds. I just want to put on the record, how are you going

address commuting now for K through 6th grade students, you know, who oftentimes come to school with their parents? Is there going to be -- I want to put on the record, is there going to be a school bus that's going to be now brought to the School District and paid for? Are there going to be SEPTA passes for adults and children in the morning to help with these commuting?

All this has to be thought of in terms of the operations since these schools are no longer as close as they used to.

DR. WATLINGTON: In terms of Penny Packer, one of the reasons we're recommending Edmonds and Day is because we are doing our level best to try to keep our young people as close to the schools that make sense. We also at Penny Packer in particular want to increase the access that our young people have to

ADA accessible facilities and improve educational facilities.

To your point about transportation, that transition office will do everything that needs to be done to ensure that we support our parents and families with transportation. Whether it's SEPTA passes, whether it's additional Safe Pathways, we are committed to doing that.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Okay. That's important that the public heard from you that they are going to do whatever they can do to make sure transportation happens not just for Penny Packer, but over school in our district as well.

Also, have you thought about the following: For special education services, what is the step-by-step plan and timeline for special education placement tied to closure related moves? Like IEP

meetings, classroom readiness, staffing, how are you going to make sure everything is in compliance when it comes to special education with all these changes?

DR. WATLINGTON: Three years ago we organized the special education area and actually brought in a chief special education and diverse learners because we wanted to elevate it and place it in the position in my cabinet, No. 1. And No. 2, we will follow the letter and spirit of federal law that requires us -- it's not an option that we follow students individualized education plan. We anticipate those services to be uninterrupted by this plan.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Thank you. And I just have an additional question, I think it's important to put it on the record.

I'm concerned as well about

the operations part of this process. For me one of the things is that teachers and staff are in need of understanding what is your future going look like? And how soon can that information get back to them in terms of, you know, you've mentioned that, you know, we're going to make sure that teachers and staff continue to have their job. But what does that look like and how soon can you get the information to them?

And I'm also concerned about the operations about making sure that each -- like understanding the how behind modernization of a school. You're saying that we're going to be -- some schools are going to be modernized by 2028 or 2029. What does that look like?

You know, when are we going to start getting templates in terms of hard details around what

relocation means, what modernization means? What do all these terms mean in terms of the full fledged details beyond just the recommendations?

DR. WATLINGTON: Relative to the first part of that question about jobs, I just want to note that the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers have clear rules and guidelines in the collective bargaining agreement about how that would work. I do want to note that I would recommend zero cuts in those whatever number of schools are recommended for closure. That's our commitment unlike 2012-13.

What does modernization look like? It's a bit different by school and it could vary on one end from replacing chillers and boilers that don't work currently, so we don't have to shut schools down when we have a cold snap like we just had or schools having to close early

when it's warm outside, all the way to a refresh of the school building, just like we did at Frankford High School. And on the far end it could look like TM Pierce or Cassidy, a brand new school.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Thanks a lot, Council President. I just want to mention that I know all of this is contingent upon funding, however I think with some families if you're going to do something, they'll be much more interested around the details behind. Once the funding is placed, we're going to be able to do X, Y, Z in a certain amount of time. So being able to give the whole construction timeline as well to be very clear to folks in that particular way. And I think that's half the battle, too. Thank you.

Thank you, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, sir.

I just want to let everybody to know housekeeping rules, we're on a two-minute rule for questions for members.

The Chair recognizes Councilmember Cindy Bass.

COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank you, Mr. President. I'm going to be brief and kind of leave my questions. I don't know if they'll get a chance to answer.

But I firmly believe that if you create the conditions, then you are responsible for the results.

And the state that we're in at this moment is a direct result of the decisions made by the Board, most of them before you arrived here, Dr. Watlington. But nonetheless, the reactions that we're having are a result of past policies and changes that really

worked against public education in the city of Philadelphia.

I feel like this is the breaking down of public education in Philadelphia. What we're doing here, what you're proposing to do here is a step along the way to fundamentally breaking down public education for our children in the city.

And rather than adjusting an admissions policy at special admit schools that had the unintended consequence of lowering enrollment, you know, why not go back and fix that before we close anything? Why are we even talking about closing anything when we know that decisions were made by the Board and a district that essentially had adverse affect. It lowered enrollment.

And so it's almost as if we cut off a limb like if you're in a

medical state of emergency, you know, cutting off a limb instead of addressing the symptoms of the problem. And that's what we're doing here, we don't have to take sledge hammer approach by closing these schools. We don't have to.

Further more, I just wanted to address something that has happened in the city of Philadelphia for years. And that is the east versus the west. When I say east versus west, a lot of people think northeast gets more, you know, parts of South Philly gets more, parts of everything on the east side of Broad Street gets more.

I think when you looked at your map, the one you all produced and gave to us, it showed that essentially that is accurate. That over the last 10 years those investments really went on one side of Broad Street for the most part.

And now it's sort of like, okay, we'll make investments here and there and we're going to make them all over. But we're not addressing the changes that those investments had in the areas where there was no investment. We're not addressing that at all. So that's something that has to be done.

The district can't keep circling the wagon when these major changes need to happen. You know, you have to bring us in, you have to bring all of us in. And we have to all be partners at the table to say exactly what we think, what ideas we have. It can't be, here's a presentation, this is what we're going to do and now you fund it. No, no, it cannot be that.

And listen, you know, again, we're going to have a budget vote sometime soon, I'm not for it. You know, what is presented here is

just totally unacceptable.

There has been very little interaction with district members -- well, I'll say me. I don't know about other district members, but I would say with me and conversation around zoning, you know, you're moving these properties to being residential properties, you know, multi-unit properties. I'm going to assume you're going to need zoning. Don't you need a conversation with us? Don't we need to talk? Don't we need to know be a part of what's happening? When is that going to happen?

And a lot of conversations that are happening, I hear about them here and there. I have not been contacted directly by the District about what meetings are happening and where and when. I have to find them myself. So you have to include us, we have to be a

part of whatever happens.

We know that we lost children, we lost some young people when we closed the schools back in 2013. We lost children during COVID. And if we do this, we are going to lose more children. And so, you know, we need the District to, sort of, own some of the problems that have been somewhat, in my opinion, self-created and figure out how do we address them and address them now. And how do we make sure that we address these inequities that have led to certain areas getting more resources than others.

And even some young people having accessibility in the same school district, right, how is it that some young people were receiving algebra and some weren't? Who made those kinds of decisions? And when were they made and how long

have they been made? Because until it just came up, I had no idea that every child wasn't receiving algebra class so that they can at least begin to prepare whether college was their track or not.

So Mr. President, that was longer than two minutes and I don't know if I have time for any response.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You have a time for response. Response, please.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: I'll be brief --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And just for the record, unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, I was told you have to depart by 12:45?

CHAIRMAN STREATER: Yes, sir. I'll be brief.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. You know I rearranged my whole schedule to be here until 5:00

today because I knew it was just that important.

CHAIRMAN STREATER: I did as well and my client and I have things to do as well. I take this work very seriously.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm not giving you a hard time, but just so you know, if members want to get a question in to Mr. Chairman, who will be undertaking these recommendations you have to get them in before 12:45.

I'm not saying you think any less I'm just saying for me, I rearranged everything to be here today. And I know you're volunteering and have another life as well.

So any response to Member Bass?

CHAIRMAN STREATER: Briefly because the Board of Education was mentioned.

I can't opine on the criteria base issue because currently we're in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals where a certain alcalade of our current president is seeking to create a circuit split so that could potentially lead to us losing all criteria-based schools.

So with that being said, I will not opine on that because I'm concerned about saying something on the record that can be misconstrued and I don't want our case to be the lead case in the Supreme Court where we lose the ability to have criteria-based schools all over the America. So that's something that's going on behind the scenes. Thank you so much.

DR. WATLINGTON: Consistent with what President Streater said, I'd ditto relative to criteria-based schools given their litigation.

The only thing I want to

say now to Councilmember Bass is we had two-day retreat with all of the criteria-based principals. Myself, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Jermaine Dawson and Dr. Tonya Wolford who leads our research and accountability department. And we solicited feedback directly from them about changes.

We're not so sure that -- and we agreed that it doesn't make sense for all the criteria-based schools to have the exact same criteria and I signed off on that.

Secondly, to your question of the west versus east side of Broad Street, we hear you loud and clear. We've tried to address that by looking at it in terms of councilmatic district. We're happy to go back and look at that pursuant to your question.

In terms of priorities and involvement of council. As we make

recommendations it's my understanding that there are some built-in processes by which the executive and legislative branches of government worked together over time to figure out what happens with -- how we think about properties in Councilmatic districts. And so we think that process would happen at the appropriate time.

In terms of losing children as a result of this plan, the District unfortunately for a 10-year periods consistently was losing children already. A couple of years ago we were able for the first time in a decade to increase the enrollment by 1,841 students. I think we could have increased it this year, too, if we had not had the interruptions at the facility of SEPTA transportation. However, we're very conscious to do everything we can to grow the

enrollment and not to have parents leave.

And then finally, in terms of algebra, I think it's been a sheer resource issue. I don't think people have been trying to harm kids in the School District. It's one of those messages of historic under funding.

COUNCILMEMBER BASS: I don't think people are intentionally trying to harm kids, but you have to see the end result of the actions that are being taken. There is some level of harm being done. And I don't want to make it seem as though -- I get what you're saying about criteria-based schools. But at the same time, who made the decision that, you know, little Mark Squilla's classroom can have access to algebra and little Cindy Bass's classroom does not. Who made that decision? And whose parent did we

tell, he's getting algebra, but yours not.

Come on, some of these decisions made along the way have not benefited our kids and left them behind and not given them the opportunity that they should have had that every kid should have had in the city of Philadelphia.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN STREATER: Councilmember Bass, and this is not to punt, not saying it's our fault. But I think there was a time we lost local control where decisions were made where many of these decisions we're talking about were going forth.

I want to give Dr. Tony Watlington the credit. He has come here and he has opened up the car while it's moving a thousand miles down the road and say, hey, you guys

are missing an alternator.

There are things like that that occurred in our School District, so I would say a lot of these decisions we are trying to unwind decisions that were made when we didn't have the pre-requisitability to have this conversation because there was a thing called the SRC. Not to say it was a bad thing, there are some good things he did. But I think we should look at ourselves and see what the Board of Education is trying to unwind and hold us accountable for things we need to fix.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. I also want to acknowledge the presence of Mr. Edward Santana, Philadelphia School District. Sir, thank you for being here. Thank you for your hard work and always making sure we move

the city of Philadelphia forward in terms of all things School District.

At this time I want to acknowledge the chairman of education, and then I'm going to Jamie Gauthier next.

CHAIR THOMAS: Good afternoon. I'm going to try -- I have questions that I'm going to try hold off because I know district members are going to ask about specific schools, so I'm going to try to stay away from that.

A couple things, so I spoke earlier about my feelings on certain things and I want to try to get a little more some clarity on top level stuff.

Let's start with transportation because I heard Dr. Phillips talk a little bit about transportation. He gave an example of a school being closed that would force people travel to get to and

from school everyday. Right now we spend about $64-million a year on SEPTA passes for people and about $120-million total on transportation between yellow buses and SEPTA passes.

Transportation is one of the biggest problems we have in the School District, whether we're talking about safe corridor travel or some of the expenses I just communicated. We can do a whole dissertation on the issues with the yellow buses.

When we look at the plan as proposed right now, do we anticipate the transportation cost going up, staying the same, or coming down if these recommendations were to be adopted as is?

DR. WATLINGTON: Colonel Hill, do we have that number? I'm going to ask if you could speak to that because I want to make sure

since you're closest to it, I want to give you the right answer on the record.

CHAIR THOMAS: So I'm hoping that we've considered this in the mist of some of the decisions that were made. To me it seems like in the mist of rethinking and reimaging what public education could look like, one of the things we can consider is how do we bring cost down as it relates to transportation and travel. The $120-million line item in the budget is one of the highest that you'll see in any major city in the entire country because so many of our young people are forced to go to school in neighborhoods they don't live in.

DR. WATLINGTON: As Colonel Hill takes the microphone, let me just remind you, we're looking at a lot of ways to optimize transportation.

We're a district, for example, in Philadelphia that have 21 vendors, whereas there's some districts that run that operation themselves as part of the School District. We're looking at operational efficiency in a lot of ways relative to the $120-million spend you referenced.

CHAIR THOMAS: Okay. Colonel, can you just be quick because my time is limited, that's the only reason why.

DR. WATLINGTON: Right. Sure.

COLONEL HILL: Thank you very much for the question, sir, and the opportunity to respond and add a caveat to what the superintendent said.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Could you state your name for the record, sir?

COLONEL HILL: Oz Hill,

Deputy Superintendent for Operations, School District of Philadelphia.

Objectively, we do not intend that there will be any diminished service for our students as we implement recommendations from the plan. We anticipate that we will maintain the level of service not only with our yellow bus organic resources, but also with contractors that without a doubt no diminishment of services for our special needs community.

There are likely to be some savings, but the objective has always been with savings we are going to reinvest those savings for the benefit of students to improve student achievement.

CHAIR THOMAS: So when we come back with the edited version of the plan, can we have that plan reflect a transportation amount

that's below $120-million? Because I think this is an opportunity for us to try to save some of the money we are spending as it relates to transportation. That's just one request.

Second request. We've seen a huge shift in population and we know that the population increase in the northeast has dictated some of the plans that exist here.

I'm not even going to ask this question. I'm going to ask that you consider the population shift that's also happening in the 7th Councilmatic District. We've seen a lot of development, a lot of movement over there. It would be unfortunate for us to close schools and then have to open more schools when we see a population shift happening in certain areas. So I did want to put that out there.

I know we did it with the

northeast with the population shift up there, but there are other parts of the city that's seeing an increase of population. I don't want to close schools just to have to open them, or even in the recommendations you have you have situations where we're talking about using current school buildings for office space and transition space when we already have vacant buildings. I know that those buildings are deplorable conditions and thing like that, but it's about the message that it send to constituents when we make these decisions.

I hear it, Council President. Let me get one more thing on the record and I'm going to wrap up for now. We talked about population, we talked about transportation cost coming down.

The concept of moving away

from middle schools. I'm not going to fight you there. I'm going to leave at that fight to somebody else. Right? You're going to have a lot of people offering push back on that.

Let me attack it from a facilities perspective. Harding, Wagner, and a couple other schools, Dr. Phillips named one, too. If you were to close those schools the places that you're recommending that they go, those buildings already don't have enough space for the students that go there right now.

So when I think about the schools that I just named, Elwood, for example, that's in Councilmember Phillips district. Elwood right now, if you don't know, is a K through 6 school, but the building itself only has enough space for K through 4, and 5th and 6th already go to an annex that we rent which

costs us more money.

So if we're saying Wagner, Harding, Conwell, some of these middle schools we're going to close, I don't understand how we expect these buildings to receive the young people when they don't have enough space for the children that's currently in the school as is.

So we got to do a deeper dive into some of this stuff as it relates as to how we're going to do it. But if you can just answer anything, help the public -- it's not your fault, it's because I'm talking the whole time.

Help the public understand your position on middle school specifically because we're talking about closing some, then we're saying opening some, then we're redirecting young people and the schools that we're saying for them to go to already don't have enough

space.

I'll stop right there, Council President. If you can just provide me some feedback on that, I'll queue up for the second round.

DR. WATLINGTON: I'll do this very quickly. The middle. The research in over two decades says that kids do not perform better in traditional middle schools than K-8 schools.

Two, the second thing about traditional middle schools is we're trying to be consistent with the survey responses and what we heard from feedback sessions.

Secondly, in terms of Harding and other schools, we're committed to make modernizations where needed to accommodate any schools you referenced with population concerns.

And then third, in terms of enrollment, I just want to note that

we absolutely are not presenting -- will not present a plan that just push resources in the parts of the city that's growing fastest.

I think this is as strategic a plan that we can create. Because when we looked at the 1,041 students who grew in the district enrollment for the first time in a decade, Mr. Chairman, it was interesting the students were primarily high school young people. And they came in every one of the learning networks, geographic learning network.

Every geographic network grew, neighborhood high school enrollment grew, and our criteria-based enrollment grew. We're not growing heavily at the elementary level two years ago, but we did at the high school level. And that's why we make strategic investments to try to grow that high school

enrollment.

CHAIR THOMAS: So, Doc, you're saying your position around middle school is focused on growing the high school population and that these decisions will put us in a position to grow the high school population?

DR. WATLINGTON: No, sir. Our position on middle school is driven by, A, students in middle schools don't perform better than students in K-8 schools. Number 2, parents have asked us to limit the number of transitions. And No. 3, we can more efficiently distribute our resources in a K-8 model, than operating 13 grade spans as opposed to six. This is an efficiency issue.

CHAIR THOMAS: Thank you. I'll queue back for the second round. Thank you, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Question?

CHAIR THOMAS: I'll wait until we -- no, that's fine. Other members got to go.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You ARE the Chair of education, do you have another question?

CHAIR THOMAS: No, I mean I do. I'm sorry, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Might as well.

CHAIR THOMAS: Yeah. All right. This is the thing, so when you hear it, right, it sounds good. But then when you look at it on paper and you hear what you're saying, right? And then you have a decision like engineering and science. Okay. We want to phase out middle school, but when it's appropriate for Engineering and science in Masterman, then we will have middle. But when it comes to

Conwell and Harding, we kind of won't have engineering and science.

I'm not trying to be the spicy guy here. I'm trying to avoid that because I really want us to have nuisance dialog around where we are and what we need to do. And I also recognize that there's push back on every decision that you've made. I have it all on my desk. So I understand that we have to make a tough decision somewhere or else there is no real facilities plan, and we do need a plan. And I do commend you for taking it from $7-billion, which is what it was when I came in, to about $2-billion. So I get all that.

But the reality is that we're still not sending the right message to people. And I think our position around middle school is problematic. It's not just about the kitchen, it's not just about

saving money. You know, I have an 8th grade son and when I think about my 8th grade son, it's difficult to ask that 8th grader to be in the same space as kindergarten and first graders and deal with that food. And then it's also difficult to ask him to deal with high school students and to deal with that majority level.

I know the model that you're looking at doesn't necessarily put the middle school students with the high school students per se. But that K through 8 model, you know, it kind of worries me a little bit.

So ease our anxiety at least around the K through 8 model and help us understand why it's not hypocritical to push that for Masterman and Engineering and Science, but not for Harding and Wagner.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Thomas. I absolutely understand your question, and I think it's a good legitimate question. Two things were true at the same time in the feedback we got from parents across the city. Number one, there was a strong theme around reducing the number of transitions, which we agree with because we can use our resources, we can push in resources more efficiently into schools if we do that.

Number two, there was also a theme around in some of the criteria-based schools, expand the 5-12 configuration, not by creating new middle schools, but expand that configuration so that students would be able to better best unify -- utilize those criteria-based schools, like Carver E&S would be 5-12 versus not being 5-12. Two

different things that may look like they're inconsistent, but both were strong themes in the feedback we've heard.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Chair recognizes Councilman Jamie Gauthier.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: Thank you, Council President. Dr. Watlington, as I've shared with you privately, I remain deeply concerned about the level of detail behind your proposal and the disproportionate impact that it would have on West and Southwest Philadelphia in addition to Black and Brown neighborhoods across the city. I urge the district to slow down the implementation of these recommendations until the methodology, sequencing, and community impact are fully examined and addressed.

My questions for today are focused on Paul Robeson High School and Motivation High as case studies to better understand your logic in the plan, especially as it relates to closures and mergers. Robeson is not an academically failing school. After fighting closure in 2013, it was recognized as the district's most improved high school in 2017. Its principal was recognized nationally. Its teachers have been honored by the district. Its students have earned admission to highly competitive colleges, including Harvard. And I know in your opening comments that you noted we should be sending students to Harvard.

I acknowledge that Robeson's facility condition is poor. That is a reality. But my questions are as follows: when a school's academic performance is

improving, but the building requires capital investment, why is closure the quick remedy rather than modernization?

In your comments about this, you've mainly cited the size of Robeson's program as a key factor in your recommendation. Can you provide any data showing that Robeson students are experiencing worse academic or post-secondary outcomes because their program is small?

And is the district's position that small high schools, even those that are incredibly successful, are no longer viable and sustainable in Philadelphia?

And then lastly, if modernization funding were secured for Robeson's facility, would your closure recommendations still stand?

And I ask this while noting that your own chart shows that my

district, the 3rd district, is recommended to receive the second lowest amount of investment in your entire plan. And the gap between the investment recommended for the 3rd district and the highest level of investment that you're recommending is about $240 million. And so why, within that huge gap, could there not have been a more creative solution for Robeson?

And then I'll just tack onto that, and this is for President Streater. You speak wonderfully, and you come from this background of activism. What are we saying to the students at Robeson who have fought so hard to improve their school, both academically and with respect to physical improvements, that after all that activism, we want to come and close it right in their faces?

I would like for you to answer -- I would like for you all

to answer those questions. And then my next set of questions on the second-round deal with the data that you've presented for your closure recommendation for Motivation High.

MR. STREATER:

Councilmember Gauthier, I thank you for your question and your energy. And I understand all too well what it means to advocate for something and it no longer exists as a graduate Germantown High School. I get it, 100 percent. I do get it. So with that being said -- with that being said, Councilmember Gauthier, just as Dr. King said, "The arc toward justice bends, not a straight line."

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Mr. Chairman, can you hold just a moment? I just want to ask everybody in the listening audience, wherever you support or not support on the testimony that you hearing

and disagree, please refrain from any sidebar comments and allow the individuals to provide their testimony respectfully, please.

Mr. Chairman?

MR. STREATER: And understanding that this answer might not be applicable to all of our children and all of the way they would like to advocate, as an adult, I could have took my bags and ran home and moved to Plymouth Meeting, moved to Exton, moved out the state, but I decided to be a volunteer using my legal acumen, my lived experience as a Black man, a Black boy, house insecure boy, to do what I can to push the needle on student achievement in this School District of Philadelphia.

So understanding that, and also, I would say keep advocating, because the final decision has not been made yet. Keep advocating.

But with that being said, I will say, don't be discouraged. Keep pushing and find a way to either, if you -- to advocate now, but to continue advocating in public education. And only -- another thing I would like to say on the record is I'm hoping that this moment, irrespective of what the outcome is, will allow those who are activated and energized to stay connected so that we can continue to fight for public education Philadelphia.

But to that young man, or young woman, or person at that school, I will say don't give up and keep pushing, because I do believe that my work as the Board president, even though some of the decisions I have to make are tough, I still -- I still have a seat at the table and I'm pushing, doing the best I can with what I have. Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

Thank you.

DR. WATLINGTON:

Councilmember Gauthier, I'd start with Paul Robeson. And I do want to note that in my first year here, I think I recall visiting the school with Governor -- former Governor Wolf was there speaking, McClinton, Senator Hughes, and heard really great things about Paul Robeson. So I want to let you know it's not lost on me the very fine things that have happened in that school.

I would also say that part of the reason that the draft recommendation -- the recommendation has been to move Paul Robeson into Sayre, one, there's a strong theme around investing in neighborhood high schools. And unfortunately, we can't keep all of our small boutique high schools and all of our neighborhood high schools, so we're

in a place where we have to make some hard choices. Part of that choice, the recommendation, was built upon students being able to go to a more modern facility. Where we're -- as we were proposing a $41 million investment in Sayre. A building that has better ADA compliance, then it would make sense to put into -- financially to put into Paul Robeson.

Also, in terms of English language arts and math, it does slightly over perform Paul Robeson at present, 2.7 percentage points in English language arts and 2.2 percentage points in math. Not that that's the end all to be all, but that was part of the thinking there. And we thought that we could be consistent with the programming in another school building.

In terms of Motivation High School, which my understanding is at

one time was housed within the Bartram facility, with the $54.5 million proposed investment into Bartram, you know, there are people who say, well, kids won't come, and say, well, sometimes you build it they will, and maybe sometimes you build it and folks won't. But we at least want to put that as a vision.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: May I have a -- may I have a point of information?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Because Watlington is in my district.

DR. WATLINGTON: Yeah.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And so I'm trying to understand, so the children from the magnet school, right, are going to Bartram, the traditional public school, correct? Will the same magnet programs be offered in John Bartram High School?

And also, if that's the case or not the case, I'll let you explain it to me. How does that model work, putting the magnet school students in the same environment as the traditional public-school students? How does that work? And I'm just -- I'm just trying to understand. When I saw it, I was like, how does that work? It's like putting Masterman and Strawberry Mansion students together, right?

And if I'm a parent, right, I'm probably going to have some questions because, you know, I think all children can succeed. I know that for a fact. But if my child is in a magnet school like Masterman, and then you call me one day and say, by the way, Masterman students are now going to go to Strawberry Mansion, I want to know how do my child still get that magnet education?

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: Council President, can I just tack onto that to say this deserves a detailed response? How do you plan to keep the integrity of these high-performing magnet programs once you move them or "merge" them in schools where they do not currently exist?

MR. STREATER: I will just, again, visualizing this, and this is not me opining on the plan, because again, that will be -- I will -- you would hear my perspective when the Board deliberates, when the football is handed off to us. But again, I'm looking back on my experience at Germantown High School. We had small learning communities. I was in Junior Air Force ROTC, and there was ways for there to be an individualized approach in the district, in the school that I was at, where children were able to kind of grow together, but also access

all the bells and whistles of a school that had over a thousand students in it as well. So that's just to visualize potentially how this could work.

I know this thing happens right now in Northeast High School, I believe there's other schools in School District Philadelphia where there are honors program or magnet citywide or criteria-based programs where babies -- our students can get into those spaces and the integrity is protected.

So I'm not saying that it's going to work in every case, Councilmember Gauthier, I'm just saying that I think there are examples or exemplars of this existing in the past and existing now that could be -- that could be a guideline for how this goes. Dr. Watlington?

MR. STREATER: President

Streater was spot on there. I'll just give you two concrete examples. Lincoln High School, one of the largest schools in the district, has a district-wide CTE program within it, and it works very well. George Washington High School has an International Baccalaureate program embedded within the school. Not all students in George Washington High School participate working very well. We replicate that kind of success.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: Can I close?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Member Gauthier, please close.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I'd just like to note that we did not receive a detailed plan in those responses for how we will keep the integrity of these programs. And then lastly, I again want to call out, there is a $240 million gap

between the district that you're investing the highest in and my district. Within that $240 million gap, I think you could have come up with a more creative solution for schools like Robeson, for schools -- and for schools like Motivation. And if other kids in other parts of the city deserve it, so do the kids in the 3rd District. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Chair recognizes Councilmember Jones. The next Councilmember, Dr. Nina Ahmad.

COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Thank you so much, Mr. President. We have provided a Snickers bar.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER JONES: For you, because you going to be here a while.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER JONES: But after closing in on two-and-a-half hours of listening, I will try very hard not to be repetitive in my two-and-a-half minutes. So let's start with things that I agree on. Take off the plate for the 4th District. We approve. Not that we have the ability to ratify, but we approve what you're doing at Overbrook. You have invested money on the fourth and fifth floor. You have picked a school to take and merge with that is complimentary to some of the CTE things we're going to do. We're going to have an auto shop there. You're investing in upgrading the base there. I cannot thank you enough for that. So -- there we go, Overbrook.

So you don't have to -- we did an analysis, we took the liberty of looking at every one of your proposals, and we've codified the

ones we agree with.

Secondly, you don't have to come to me about SLA, Science Leadership Academy. That merger, I've talked with the stakeholders in that area, they are tickled pink about. So we don't have to waste time talking about those schools.

Now let me transition to some things that I think we need to give a greater insight on. For you to try to -- for you to recommend closing Lankenau, which is a high real estate value area, located in a bucolic Schuylkill Nature Preserve that a lot of people would like to get their -- have always wanted to get their hands on to develop, is not a good look. Particularly, when you take those high-performing kids that are environmental students from around the region and want to send them all the way down the hall -- all the way down the road to

Roxborough, passing right by Saul, that is also in that bucolic area, does not make equitable education sense to me.

So I need some thought given to that to make sure that we are not being subtly discriminatory, saying now you-all go down here. You don't have to be by the farm, you don't have to go with your mandates. Please take a hard look at that.

Third thing is Overbrook Elementary. Another beautiful building. Are you-all here? Is that -- yeah, talk to me. Overbrook Elementary is a beautiful high-performing school, once again, where parents and local leaders alike support it. You want to -- or considering utilizing that facility for a headquarters. We want you to be comfortable. I think 400 North Broad is a nice building, but even

closer, Lankenau right down the hall, the high school is vacant. You could invest in that, not disrupt those kids, and we could -- we could -- we could support -- we could support what you're doing.

Finally, what I would say to you, and I know my time is up, is geography matters. Location, location, location. When you start to want to merge schools, as the president said, that historically have had issues with other neighbors, I remember when we merged, we lost University City, and they went all the way up to Overbrook. If you don't know down the bottom don't like up top, then you are missing the point. And we had increases in student-to-student violence, student-to-teacher violence as a result of that. So a lot of emphasis. You got Dr. -- the Head of Security Johnson over there

who does a wonderful job of understanding geography. We got to take our time to get it right. You could take those other schools that I mentioned as a plus off the -- off the -- you don't have to come back to me about that, therefore. But the ones that I identified, please consider the unintended consequences that goes into those decisions.

Thank you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Member Jones. Councilor Dr. Nina Ahmad and Councilmember Quetcy Lozada, then Councilmember Rue Landau.

COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank you, Council President. Thank you, Superintendent and our school board chair. Thank you for being here. As an at-large Councilmember, I'm coming at this with a citywide set of concerns. Three things I want to focus on. First, transparency, not

just a rating but underlying data, the dates and the assumptions that drive these recommendations.

Second, readiness. If students are moved or programs -- and this has been referred to already, are consolidated, receiving schools must be ready on day one with space, staffing, supports, and critical building systems in place.

And third, accountability for the funding gap, especially where improvements are described as contingent on outside government or philanthropic dollars. And I was really -- I am really pleased to go after my colleague, Councilmember Jones, because I want to bring special attention to Lankenau. I was very privileged to visit Lankenau last year and see the kids in action. They were getting ready to go to a national conference in Chicago, and they were presenting to

their -- to their school student body what they were going to do. They got question & answers. I was so impressed with the preparation that was poured into them by the -- by their teachers and all support staff.

This is a school that is close to 90 percent -- over 90 percent people of -- children of color, 90 percent -- close to 90 percent African American children. It's 70 percent economically disadvantaged. And yet we have the premier school, the only school in the state which is a three-year CTE completer school, right? Agriculture, food, natural resources, and is dependent on a green campus that they're on.

This is -- Pennsylvania is -- agriculture is a major industry in our state. We are a feeder for that. These are jobs. These are

high-paying jobs for our children. So all of that to say that we -- I looked at the data you gave us around this. That is fair, the school building score, fair. Program alignment, fair. What was under capacity was the under severely under utilized meaning enrollment. Can we fix that instead of disrupting everything that is a premier program? Can we -- in this day and age, we are facing climate change in a very detrimental way for the entire globe, and this is the Environmental Science High School where teachers are creative in how they teach chemistry and physics. I've been reading about that. Why are we taking something that is working and disrupting it?

So I would love to get your feedback on that, I would love to make sure that these were recommendations, not set in stone,

because for children, and clearly the statistics of the children tell us that children can perform when they're in a good school, regardless of their economic status, regardless of race. We can have our children perform when the schools deliver, and this school delivers. So I would like to know how we are going to address this.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Ahmad. Right or wrong, the reason we put this recommendation in is because it was consistent with building the enrollment in our neighborhood high schools. We believe that right or wrong and not making an assessment at the moment, because we're going to take the time to listen and hear this feedback -- continue to hear the feedback. We think there absolutely can be more schools like George Washington High School,

Lincoln High School, and Northeast High School.

You know, a few weeks ago, I ran into the State Secretary of Education for the state of California, and I didn't know that he's a Northeast High School graduate. He said, "How's my school doing? Is it still --" I said, "They've got all these programs out there and got a still a very large enrollment." I saw Will Smith in your district, Councilmember Jones, a couple years ago. He said, "Look, why is the enrollment keep going down at Overbrook? I want to make a contribution to make sure that there's always a -- the 'brook'," as he called it. And it made me think about some of these high schools have not seen their best days, and we need to just give up on them.

I think we can have more. We can grow the enrollment for three

reasons. Number one, two years ago, the enrollment increased after a decade of not decreased. Number two -- of going down. Number two, it grew across every learning network and most of it was at the high schools. And number three, dollar investments have a way of attracting attention. Could potentially attract attention.

Now, specifically to Lankenau, right or wrong, just know we're listening to the feedback. We hear you loud and clear, and we hear the students at Lankenau, who I have personally heard say there's something unique and special about the environmental conditions at the school. Now, do you have to have a large acreage to learn environmental science? No. Just like an international high school doesn't have to be sitting right beside of City Hall in order to make that a

part of the curriculum. You can do that through field trips, other experiences. But long story short, we're not being tone deaf, and we hear you loud and clear.

COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank you. I just wanted to underscore that there was a -- there was a comment made about real estate value. And I do not want our children's to be sacrificed in order for developers to be able to access that land.

I'm a scientist. And when we think about progress in science, we don't have to -- just because we can, doesn't mean we should, right? Or else we would have eugenics, right? Just because we can, doesn't mean we should. And I want us to deeply understand what message are we sending our children that we have a high-functioning school with resources that could -- that is a

jewel in the crown of Pennsylvania. And here we are rethinking it because it fits into a framework that you might have. We have anomalies in every framework; we have exceptions in every framework. So I highly recommend, and I'm happy to be supportive in any way for us to reconsider Lankenau. There are many other schools that I don't have time to talk about. We'll come back to them. But this one specifically, given where we are in the world, sends a message how importantly we're taking our environment. So thank you very much. Thank you, Council President.

DR. WATLINGTON: Your feedback is well taken.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Member Lozada.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Thank you, Council President. I guess my first question -- first,

thank you for being here today. I guess my first question is very similar to everyone else's, right? But before I even ask any of all of these questions I have, I want to know if we are firm on the date of end of February to present this plan to the Board. And, you know, how long will they have to consider? I just want to know, is that firm? Why do we have to have this plan to the Board by the end of the month? And is that a firm date?

MR. STREATER: Yes. Firstly, I think the superintendent has communicated to the village, and I think there's a buildup --

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I can't hear him.

MR. STREATER: -- to that time. Can you hear me? Can you hear me now? Okay. Yes. firstly, I believe the superintendent has communicated -- I mean, we long

communicated that by the end of the winter for this school year, that there will be a draft or recommendation to the Board. The Board will not vote on whatever the recommendations are, but we will deliberate and we'll definitely take public comment at that meeting. Thereafter, at some point, the Board will likely call the question and then officially vote on a resolution attaching the -- attaching the facilities planning process to it.

So as to when the Board will vote on it, I can't speak to that right now, but just for everybody to know, there will be no vote and the plan will not be codified by way -- by way of resolution until after the February 26th.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

Okay. So I think many --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Point of information. It's a point of information. So how would you deal with amendments? How would you deal with additional input in the event that the project moves forward on the 26th? And I know that the town hall is taking place, right? Which people will still be providing additional information. So once it goes from Dr. Watlington, from the school district to the actual board, how this still will be a transparent process that allows individuals to provide feedback and recommendations in terms of the Board having an opportunity to amend? Because you may hear some great things beyond what's being recommended initially and say, Hey, you know what, as a board, we sat around the table and we looked at some other things, and based upon additional information, we want to take these things in consideration to add to the

recommendations process.

MR. STREATER: What I could share which has been shared earlier. The board members -- board members have been at the convenings. Board members are in tuned. I'm here today before the football has been handed off. And our expectation is that the superintendent in the spirit of the resolution has done the engagement that will inform, you know, what the plan is and the things to consider even if they're not in the plan. So --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We just got here in terms of us doing -- I'm not saying we just got here. I mean, to be frank, in all due respect, we got a call the weekend of Dr. King Holiday to be with the district that Monday, and there was an announcement being made that Thursday. And so we all had to ram -- and, you know, and just

having the frank conversation from one body to another, you know, we had to all begin doing our due diligence as quick and soon as possible, which separate from you, the district, reaching out to the -- our various constituencies, we had to go out and also address our constituencies. Why? We are still going through this process and unraveling such a huge undertaking that's going to impact generations to come. And so that's what you're actually hearing.

So we don't feel like, to be frank, and I don't think this will be the case, but we're just doing the dates.

MR. STREATER: Oh, no. Oh, no.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And so that's what you're hearing from Member Lozada.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

Yeah, definitely. I don't understand. I'm trying to understand what's the rush here. We -- I came in November of 2022. I was assigned to the education committee. From day one, we've been asking about a facilities plan. It's taken us all this time, now you guys come up with a plan and now we want to rush through it now. And now all of a sudden, there's this sense of urgency to get through this plan, which I don't understand. So I appreciate you being much more clear, I guess, than I was. I don't have the patience for all of that.

But being that 20 percent of the -- of the school closures are going to happen in the 7th Council district, I found it really important to make sure that I participate in both the online meetings as well as the in-person meetings. One of the things I want

to bring to your attention is, I think the school district has to consider the fact that many of our families are not -- don't have access to online -- to the internet. And so they can't participate in those online meetings.

Second, there seems to be a pattern of when these questions that are being brought to your attention, whether it be from this legislative body or the community at large, they -- we dance around them or we don't answer them. And so my question, Mr. President, is: is there going to be someone who is going to be reviewing these questions that are not being responded to? And will we submit them? Can we submit them back to the district, so that we can get a response?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes. We are working with chairman of Education, Isaiah Thomas, and our

tech team to take all the information, issues and concerns of members. And we have been working with the district, as well as making sure they get the information in a timely fashion.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I appreciate that. There was one project team, nine advisories, 35 principal visits, 47 listening sessions, almost 1400 surveys. I've been to these meetings, none of my constituents say they participated, none say they were able to be a part of a real process. I receive letters from students that had expressed very serious concerns, and I think they deserve a response.

My question to you is: are we going to receive, or can we receive a list of who responded to these surveys? Where did they come from? What were their ZIP codes? What was the real verbal and written

responses? In the 7th Council district, I've talked to many families who say, you know, yeah, we heard there was a meeting after the meeting happened in the middle of the summer, and there was a lot of school district folks there, but there were three families. And so when we talk about these guiding principles, you're -- they're not guiding principles that come from people in my district. And so I want -- I want to know -- I want to know how? How do we get our families to have a real opportunity in this process? It can't be an online meeting and one meeting in the community. We are going to have to have multiple meetings to be able to better understand what is happening.

In the 7th Council district, I represent three of the five most violent school, my police

districts. I represent some of the lowest performing schools. Every single one of these says that -- every one of my schools in here, the majority of them say that they're in high risk, very vulnerable neighborhoods. And so the decisions that you-all are making to close my schools, send my kids to the most dangerous neighborhood as opposed to away from that neighborhood. And so I'm just trying to understand where the common sense is, right?

Some of these decisions that are being discussed here, or presented here, just don't make any sense. We have schools that are right beside each other that are not -- we're not considering relocating or merging. We have schools like in other places where the buildings that are -- that are being considered to be K-8 cannot handle that -- the -- those sized children.

We know these kids are big now, right? So how are we asking -- how are we asking Cramp and Elkins to serve as a pre-K-8 when we know those schools are not capable of holding those students?

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: We talked -- we just had a major storm. SEPTA could not handle the storm -- the transportation situation. Is -- has SEPTA been brought to the table to have a conversation about how our children are going to depend on them. Because for some of you, 1.2 miles is nothing. That's a 30-minute walk for some of my kids. 30 minutes. And we're sending them into a completely different neighborhood. And it is a dangerous neighborhood.

We talk about safe paths; I have like a million questions. We don't talk about safe paths, but we have safe paths now. In the 7th

Council district, safe paths mean nothing. I have principals who leave the school to walk into neighborhoods, dangerous neighborhoods by themselves to walk children to school. They -- I want to know what's the plan? We can't -- this submitting to the Board on -- in the end of the month, I don't think it just is -- it doesn't work. It doesn't make sense. You're putting our kids into more dangerous spaces as opposed to away from them.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Point of information.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Talk about 33 students -- I'm sorry. 33 students in a classroom. Many of my students have IEPs. How are my teachers supposed to deal with these children? I don't understand this.

Sorry, Mr. President, I have a -- there was a million questions. I probably have a

million more.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No, go ahead. The Chair recognizes Councilman Isaiah Thomas, point of information.

COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Sure. If I could just add an attachment to those list of questions, because I was inspired. And I know board president, you have to go soon, that's why I wanted to get this in there now. In the midst of listening to Councilmember Lozada, and all of the concerns, when -- we know that you plan on presenting the plan February 26th, when does the school board plan on voting on the final plan?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: He said he not sure.

MR. STREATER: Yeah, I -- what I -- what I can share. I do think I want to put more meat on the bones to what the role of the Board

is, and what I foresee as the Board president of how the Board tends to operate. I do think the Board wants to wait until all the engagement and not have a pre -- a date, right? I think that if we were to come here and say how we're going to do it, I think you -- then you can checkmate. You guys already had this plan; you already know where you're going to vote. It's very important for the Board to engage and hear this energy that you're bringing, but also from the village as well.

I would -- I would also like to clarify what I think this is going to be. I think this is going to be a resolution based off of what we know now: a plan that is dynamic that can evolve over time. I think that's what we're going to get. I don't think you're going to get, when the Board votes, the plan is set in stone and everything's done.

I think that we all understand that things change, facts change, funding changes, enrollment trends change. But for the Board, I think the Board will be willing to vote on something based upon what we know from the village, based upon what we know about our enrollment trends of the direction we're headed in.

And just for everybody's perspective and understanding, there are going to be other board actions that are probably going to be set forth in the resolution to let people know where the future decisions are going to be made and where to advocate and where for City Council to push.

So for example, our capital budget this year, it is my hope that we can start working on this plan this year, so that the district has what it needs to bring a capital budget so we can start doing these

things with all -- with all speed -- with all speediness, right?

Also, there's going to be policy changes around potential catchment. Again, I don't know, because the football hasn't been given. The resolution's likely going to call out those moments that are public actions, that the village can come, you-all can come, as we continue to build this plan. And that's the best I can do for you because we don't know the future. But if we don't do nothing and signal a direction, I think if we continue doing the same thing, expecting a different result, which I would argue is chronic underachievement, we are -- we are doomed.

And so I think that's -- I hope that answers some of the question of what this will look like. That there will be future

votes, future considerations that are going to be attached, just like Accelerate Philly is attached to our budget right now, that's attached to Board actions, and that this will be a dynamic plan.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So, Mr. Chairman, what I'm going to take at face value, and I'm going to defer back to Member Lozada, and we've been working with you, work with Dr. Watlington, and I just expect that as we continue to work as a body, right, this is the beginning of that process and I still believe it's pretty rushed. But nevertheless, we will continue to huddle today as we have this dialogue. But we've been working extensively. Like this is just a hearing for the public, but our team has been taking this apart over the last two weeks in doing our due diligence and this process and we

expect to continue to keep that line of communication moving forward.

Member Lozada, as you wrap up, please.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Yes. And I recognize that this is an ongoing process. We're talking about $384 million that you're talking about investing into the -- into the 7th Council district. I want to know, is it -- of that 389 million, is -- what's the real number, right? Is it $4 or is it 100 million, right? I don't know. But I need to figure -- I want to -- I want to know what's a real number, and I also want to respond to all of my other questions that I answered -- that I asked. Thank you.

MR. STREATER: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. STREATER: Dr. Watlington.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Please respond back to the Chair with her answers to the questions in writing. You would like them in writing? Dr. Watlington, would you like --

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: They need them now.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Oh, you can have them now. Absolutely. Response to Member Lozada, please?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yeah. Councilmember Lozada, thank you for the questions, plural. I'm going to try to get all of them briefly. Number one, let me assure you, this is not a dance between now over the past five weeks and the time between now and February 26th. I promise you this is not the Tamia or the Cupid Shuffle. We are really listening to feedback and being very thoughtful about what we do with it.

Prior to February 26th, I think President Streater just spoke to what he intends to do with his board after February 26th.

We're also saying quite candidly, if there's a better way to push in more -- to better utilize our resources to push in more high-quality academic and extracurricular programs across all neighborhoods and zip codes, we are absolutely open to it, and we want -- we want to hear it. Any and every alternative option.

Third, all the surveys and the data are on our facilities planning website. It's available off of the main page of our district website. If Council would like a deeper dive into that survey, we are happy to provide it, a deeper dive on the record; and I think that's what you've asked for. I'll ask our chief of staff, Sarah Galbally, and

Chief of Communications, Alexandra Coppadge, if they will be sure we follow up on in a timely manner.

Yes, we are working on an ongoing basis with SEPTA. I'm personally in communications with SEPTA on an ongoing basis around -- as we move forward with potential recommendations. And in terms of enrollment and whether the said schools you referenced can house the student populations, this plan commits us to spending whatever resource outlined in the plan to make sure we can accommodate the students without delays or without overcrowding. Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

Thank you. Council President, can I just ask one last question? Stetson has had a request for a leaking roof. More than 12 times, they've put in a request. That roof is still leaking. Can I have someone

please today commit to going to Stetson and checking their leaking roof?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes. We'll make that happen, yes. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's called good constituent services.

MR. STREATER: Council President, may I be excused?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: The Chair recognizes Council Rue Landau, then Councilman Kendra Brooks. Matter of fact, Kendra Brooks says she has to have to make a service. Sorry, Member Brooks, the floor is yours.

COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: Thank you, Council President. So I'm -- so I'm so glad that we are having this meeting, right -- this hearing right now. So many folks know that this is how I came into

elected politics around school closures, I've been here --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Member Brooks, speaking into your microphone with that strong voice you have.

COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: I led the fight against closure of my daughter's school during the last rounds of closures nearly a decade ago. And we have felt this effect of these closures since then, and I have only recently began. We just saw the turn of the corner of this history, you know, where these school closures were painful to communities and hurt the academic process and the city, and it's led to a yearlong --years of long fights around local control, which we won. So it was kind of disappointing to be back here again. You know, anytime a school closes, the community pays the price. A

closure, a merger can impact every aspect of a child's life. It impacts a school safety, the class size, staff-to-student ratios, relationships among all parties involved. And it has had a negative long-term effect on the type of family-sustaining investment neighborhoods received.

And I'm going to kind of speed this up to get to the point. And, you know, for me, I'm hoping today to hear directly about the closures and the proposed -- the impact of these proposed decisions. And I'm listening to my colleagues, and, you know, agreeing with some of the factors that they're bringing up. So, you know, my first question is: in the last decade, and the 2020 -- 2012 school closures have led to a profound lack of distrust among community in the school district. The reputation of the

district and trust within the community is like to take another hit. If these closures go through, what is the district going to do to rebuild that trust with the community moving forward? And I'm going to go through my questions and then you can answer them at the end.

And what has the state and city -- how has the state and city increased funding support factored into these proposed closures? Even with this proposal, I'm not seeing where this fundamentally affects the deficits that we will face in years ahead. And what does the school doing -- school district doing to prepare for this? And I'm going to skip around. What is the driving force behind these closures in predominantly black and brown neighborhoods, and how much of these decisions can be attributed to the lack of family sustaining

investments in neighborhoods for the proposed closures? And what role does charters and cyber school play in these communities where these charters have been proposed?

I have a few more. What community support is planned for the students who will be going to new schools and what pre-planning has be done -- been done to ensure that these are done with minimal disruption to students? Because we know that students forced to move schools often struggle to keep up with their peers who have had consistent school location. What is the estimate cost to ensure that affected students do not fall back academically, and what does this investment look like, including any cost estimates the district has undertaken to ensure they won't?

And my last one, the school district has a lot of vacancies, and

because of vacancies, it by default saves money. So it has staffing surplus plus, what does it do -- what does it do with that surplus plus? And is it collected for the entire school district or held for each individual school? And how has this impacted the overall budget discussion? And I have other questions, but those are the ones I need right now.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Bass (sic). Let me try to get to each one of those questions and do it in a timely manner. First to rebuild trust, we've taken a three-and-a-half-year process to try to do just that. Engage people in every step of the way. We engage nearly 3000 Philadelphians in the development of our strategic plan entitled Accelerate Philly, more than 30 community members were on a

district-wide project team related to the specific facility's plan, 170 individuals representing a lot of different walks of life and regular folks here in the city were part of the nine advisory groups, we've had over 14,000 survey responses. And to be rebuild trust, we wanted to put out a set of recommendations five weeks ahead of taking any recommendations to the Board of Education so that it wouldn't feel like a dance; that we're actually listening and we are listening. And we intend to take the feedback that we hear and to think about what that might mean before we take recommendations on February 26th. I'm sorry.

COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: I just want to kind of throw it to the process. I know there are a lot of meetings that happened to in every district going online, individual,

but since this has been recommended, in my experience firsthand working in school closures, the individual conversations that need to be had with school communities, I see lacking. That's where we got the key component to whether we kept schools open or they were closed. And that's where the meat and potatoes happen. When I think about the number of schools that are being closed in various districts, the conversation from the parents and folks in their communities make a difference on the information that we wouldn't necessarily have.

Like when we talk about safety plans, like certain dynamics, consultants wouldn't just know, because it's information that you would only know for communities. So I'm very interested now that the recommendations are out, how are these individual conversations going

to happen within the school communities, including the district Councilmembers to make sure that we not -- we aren't mistakenly harming people -- you know, young people and communities in our closures.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Brooks. I think I would say that in addition to in-person and virtual opportunities for parents and community members, for each of the 20 current recommended school closures to be engaged, we've added three additional opportunities for people to talk directly to me. I won't be on the sideline this afternoon at Ben Franklin High School, I will lead that town hall. I'll do the same thing at Kensington CAPA on Friday. And over the weekend, I am going to facilitate an online opportunity as well. And I will stay as long as people ask us to

stay. And we won't leave until -- well, hopefully, we won't be there midnight. But we won't leave until -- I won't leave until people say we're ready to go home.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And can I get a point of information? Member Brooks, is that okay? Will there be a process where you would have -- which recommended in one column from the community and neighborhood stakeholders versus what actually gets implemented in another cap -- in another column?

DR. WATLINGTON: I think absolutely, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So people could see that yes, these were recommendations that came from the people and this what we actually done or didn't do, but you actually see what actually is being implemented.

DR. WATLINGTON: We are

absolutely committed to saying here are --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We heard from you?

DR. WATLINGTON: -- the first -- here's the recommendations we put on the table, if you will, five weeks in advance of going to the Board of Education, President Streater and his board. Here is a summary and we've gotten lots of it, an executive summary of the feedback that we've heard across stakeholder groups across the city, and here are the recommendations that were taking on February 26th, including specifically how feedback informed those recommendations. Yes, sir. I think that's transparent and fair. Absolutely.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. Member Brooks?

DR. WATLINGTON: May I just answer really quickly your other

questions? I'll do it very quickly. You talked about what's the driving force relative to black and brown students? Because the district is 50 percent African American -- African American, about a third Hispanic or Latinx, any changes are going to have an impact on black and brown children. And while I'm very proud that we are making significant progress, we can do 5 to 10 times better in the nation's sixth largest city.

I want to remind all of us that the majority of our children in Philadelphia still do not read and do math on grade level, despite all the progress we're making. And so we've got to push harder to push those resources in so that we can get there. In terms of the charter, I didn't understand the full question, but I'll just quickly -- charter Impacts. Philadelphia is

different than New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, in that, in our city, we have about 60 percent of the public-school children and district-operated schools, 40 percent in charter schools, whereas the other big cities across the United States are very different from us. Their ratio is 80 to 20. I wasn't sure if that was the spirit of your question or if I missed it?

COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: No. Like my major concern is, like, in the last round of student school closures, where I live, most of those schools end up being charters. What is this -- what's different about this particular school closure process? And are we guaranteed that won't happen?

DR. WATLINGTON: I don't think we can guarantee it, and I'll tell you why. I spent a lot of time with my mentor, Dr. Constance E.

Clayton, the year before her death. And she told me about a time where not only was this the fourth largest school district in the nation, the lion's share of children went to district-operated schools.

As decisions have been made over time, that out-migration of children from district to charter schools has continued. The only way that I know to turn that around and to grow the district enrollment is to improve student attendance in the district-operated schools, improve test scores of the district-operated schools, get the graduation rate up and drop-out rate down. That's why we are so --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And public safety.

DR. WATLINGTON: -- bullish about trying to improve.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And safety.

DR. WATLINGTON: And safety, to your point, and that which is our number one priority, safety and health and wellbeing of our students and staff. But could it result in some choose -- parents choosing other options? That's already happening. We are hopeful that as we reinvest our limited resources into the schools and the district-operated schools, that we can improve outcomes, and get better, and have more parents to choose the district as they did two years ago.

COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. The Chair recognizes Councilman Rue Landau, and we'll go into our second round.

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Okay. Thank you. Thanks -- thank you, Council President. Thank you,

Dr. Watlington. I'm looking for more details on what's missing from this plan. I mean, we -- we've all stated some obvious facts. We really need $7 billion to fix all of our facilities. This is a $2.8 billion plan. And I'm looking for details on what was decided and why. And in specifically, I believe last time we went through this, there was detailed descriptions of what needed to be updated and which school and why, and parents had access to that. You could see this school needs X amount of money, this is the investment that needs. And maybe that we are going to give them X, but right now, we're in this amorphous state where we don't know exactly what investment -- what increased investment is happening under what was already proposed. So what increased investment and why? And we don't have any of those

details. They are not out there in the public for us. So none of us have any understanding as why this is happening.

This should all be public so all of the public can see. And I say this in a sense that I know that in his testimony, Jerry Rosen is going to come up and say this amazing term that we all hear. We heard it throughout school when we were younger, and the kids are hearing it now, show your work. We do not have the answers as to why you made these decisions. We don't even have a delineation of what's wrong with each school and what needs to be fixed. And the school district needs to do exactly what we are asking every single student to do: Show your work.

It's the only reason -- it's the only way we can know that these decisions are sound, and it is

the only way for us, and the public, and you, and the school board to hold you accountable to what -- to what is happening here. I also want to know that after we do these investments, what changes? Are there going to be -- is there going to be adequate outside space? We -- finally, we have a governor who's talking about what we've been saying for a long time, "Everybody needs recess." All the students need recess. Will there'll be adequate playgrounds? Are there adequate stem spaces? This proposal still leaves 30 percent of the K-8 students without adequate space. This is the proposal that is finished and done, and still 30 percent of the kids won't have adequate space. So as we've talked about schools melding together and starting to crowd a school that is working, we need to understand it.

And the final thing I want to say is, I appreciate your saying that this will change over time, but I think it is extremely important that we look at communities and what is changing. And we know that change takes time, so when we look at places like the 7th Councilmanic district, we are seeing change happen, and we are seeing a community gets stronger. We should keep those schools there, and keep investing in them, and keep investing in the community, instead of closing them and telling kids to go some other place. We have to imagine a future with hope and investment and prosperity where everybody thrives. That's it.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Landau. The best way, I'll end -- I can answer the question is in terms of show you the work -- show our work, which is kind

of what our new math curriculum is all about, is I just want to note that on our facilities planning website, we have very meticulous and detailed information about every school. And if there's every one of the district-operated schools to the tune of 249 schools. And so while we may not in the time we have here today be able to talk -- have the time to go into very detailed explanation, if Council wanted to pick one or two, we'd be happy to do a deep dive and show all the work, get out some marker paper if the Council President would allow us, because we have all the information, and we're prepared to talk about it. I can assure you we're not hiding anything.

Also, when we think about what's missing, here's how I want to answer that. We absolutely can improve this district if we push

more high-quality academic and extracurricular resources in. There are districts around the country, including the past districts that I've worked in, where all children have access in their schools to algebra and middle schools, all. There are districts that I've worked in that are not Rockefeller rich, and they don't have quite the cache of a big city like Philadelphia. And these are some high-level poverty districts, where we don't -- we didn't close schools down when the temperature got above a certain degrees because we had working air condition. And these were not Rockefeller-rich districts. The fact that we still have to -- we've made great progress, but there schools we have to close down. In the past couple of weeks with this cold spell, we've been shutting schools down because of pipes

bursting in some of the schools, and we -- and at 2:00 in the morning, the boilers break down. Those kind of things will get better over time in terms of student attendance.

But let me be clear, we -- this is not a plan to make all of our schools a Taj Mahal. But we will absolutely, if funded to the point of -- to the tune of $2.8 billion, we'll reduce the number of unsatisfactory and poor-school ratings from 85 to 0. And I'm not opposed to if there are some closures that we've recommended that Council wants to say, Hey, take this off and put somebody else on there, we're open to receiving that feedback as well.

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Can I just jump in? A couple of things. One, it is absolutely no secret that we haven't been providing algebra to 5th graders or young kids up until

now. That -- this -- the fact that this is coming up now is ludicrous. We've known this, we knew this was a problem when you changed the admission's criteria, not you, your predecessor, four years ago. This is not a secret. This is like, I thank you for finally addressing it. Absolutely, we should, but this isn't something that came up now.

The second thing is, I'm all for spending even more than the $2.8 billion. I don't think this is enough, personally. And the last thing I want to say is bless Channel 64. I've got to tell you; there's a lot of people watching this right now who are blowing up my phone, that your facilities master plan is not online. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So just for the record, the facilities master plan should be online. Is that correct?

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. So we're going to go into our second round. And I do, because we still want to thank the superintendent, though, for you inheriting some past wrongs. And, you know, I'll tell you privately, I'll still tell you publicly, you didn't have to stay. We usually have a new superintendent per each new administration, which really doesn't provide stability for our children. And so, same thing I tell you privately, I still tell you publicly --

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: -- at least thank you for stepping up and having the shoulders to deal with some of the tough decisions, specifically like Councilman Rue Landau saying, or Cindy Bass saying, how do we live in an environment

where all children -- I didn't even know that was the thing that all children don't have the ability to take algebra. I had -- I hate algebra, but that's a different conversation. But I didn't even know that was the thing that is not even standard that you take algebra. And the fact that that's part of the conversation still within itself, of us trying to grapple with a very, very difficult and complex issue. Because we could sit here and do the whole sound bite thing and, you know, sound good, but we know this is a complex issue that we got to get done right.

As we go into the second round, I'm going to add -- I'm going to push through, because we have public comment. And so I'm going to ask for Councilmember, Dr. Phillips, did you -- did you take the light off? It was -- it was on.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

Oh, I'm still on.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Councilman Dr. Anthony Phillips.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

Thank you. I just want to ask a really solid question for me, which is really important. You may not -- Dr. Watlington, you may not have the prepared plans for what co-location is going to look like from an operational standpoint, as well as a maintenance standpoint, and a building standpoint, is for every school that you recommended for co-location, including Building 21 in our district, you -- do you have a sense of when you provide that information to us? So that's one question.

The second question is: you -- there are several schools that, of course, are relatively unsatisfactory in building

structure, or fair, or not -- you know, not so good in terms of the rubric, but the question becomes, what's the rationale of that one particular school over another particular school.

And then lastly, what are the decision's deadlines between now and the -- when the Board votes? What does the district consider locked in versus subject to change? And so those are things that, you know, I'm just, you know, want to hear from you about before.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Dr. Phillips. I do want to take it with the Council President's permission that the responses to a little bit more deep level, to your point, Councilmember Landau, and I'm going to invite Senior Advisor for Strategy, Claire Landau, and Colonel Oz Hill, our Deputy Superintendent of Operations

to come join me. And we'll go a little bit deeper per your -- the spirit of your questions. Let me just say last question, Dr. -- Councilmember Dr. Phillips, are all the decisions locked in? If I'd said yes, they're locked in, then this will be a token dance; and this is not a token dance. We are reviewing every single one of the facilities master plan and recommendations relative against the feedback that we've heard over the past few weeks, and that we'll continue to hear up until February 26th.

The second --

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: So that -- does that mean that you're not wedded to $2.8 billion?

DR. WATLINGTON: No. We absolutely, there's more than one way to get to $2.8 billion.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

Okay.

DR. WATLINGTON: And that's why I've said if there are schools that Council wants me to take off the list and add others on that list, we are open to you telling me what those are.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Okay.

DR. WATLINGTON: But we cannot get to a place where we address our 35 percent non-utilization rate in buildings if no changes are made.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Do you want to explain why? And I think it's -- if you -- if you're okay with $2.8 billion, that's fine.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Could you speak into the microphone, Dr. Phillips?

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Thanks, Council President. $2.8 billion, if that's your rationale,

that's fine. But then how do we explain that to the -- to our -- to the residents of Philadelphia, just to make sure that everyone's very clear about the why behind only $2.8 billion versus $4 billion, 5 billion, whatever it might be.

DR. WATLINGTON:

Absolutely. One, we recognize that $1.8 billion is not in the budget, from the city or the Commonwealth. Two, we believe that everything we propose, whether a strategic -- a strategic plan five -- three-and-a-half years ago, or a facilities master plan, we always like to present options. And for me, I think the children of Philadelphia always deserve the Cadillac option. If we can't get the Good American Cadillac option, if we have to, we can come down to a good Lincoln, a new Lincoln. If you can't get the Lincoln, you have to

come down to a Chevy. I sure hope that we don't have to come down to get a used Chevy, because the children in Philadelphia deserve a Cadillac.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Thank you.

DR. WATLINGTON: Cadillac Education Services.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: I figured that was probably the reason, right. And I think it's just really important that folks -- you explained that because -- oh, I figured that was probably the reason, because folks need to understand that rationale. What and how hard it is, and that needs to come from you, because the reality matters is that we've been fighting for $7 billion to fix all of our schools for how many years now? Probably over a decades, and we're still not there. And so you're

choosing 2.8 as the line of the sand.

DR. WATLINGTON: And part of that thinking, Councilmember Dr. Phillips, is it would take 2.8 to reduce poor and unsatisfactory school ratings from 85 to 0. If the Commonwealth had an appetite to do more, we'd go off the next set of schools. But we think that's the floor, the minimum, that we ought to do at this once in a lifetime facilities master plan opportunity. See, Colonel Hill and Senior Advisor Landau could speak more specifically, if you'd like, about the rationale of one school versus the other, or if there's a question you had about co-locations, if you'd mind --

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: And that in co-location --

DR. WATLINGTON: If you don't mind, sure.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: -- if the operation's behind that maintenance. Thank you.

DR. WATLINGTON: Do you mind repeating, in the spirit of the question, Dr. Phillips?

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Just real quick, what is the rationale behind one under performed -- under maintenance school, over another school? How did you choose that? Because there's multiple fear and unsatisfactory schools. Why'd you choose one to be closed versus others? And then lastly, do you have a plan that you're going to be sharing out eventually on what co-location is going to look like from a maintenance and operations standpoint? What do you have to change in the building, and how do you make sure it's operative in a way that is fair to the students for schools like Building 21?

COLONEL HILL: Thank you very much, Councilmember Phillips. Oz Hill, Deputy Superintendent of Operations. I'll take the latter part of the question first. We have amassed experience recently in combining or co-locating school communities. Specifically, we did that as we went through the renovation process with Frankford High School, taking that 9th grade class and putting it into Clemente for a two-year period. Through that process, we understood how to segregate the student bodies. We created separate entrances and egress points, and then went through the process of branding the areas of the school where they would be. So we've amassed that information in terms of how to do it right.

When we look at the co-locations, we went and we took, as Dr. Watlington shared previously,

that quantitative data as well as the qualitative data. And then that was combined with the themes. And once we looked at all of that mass of data, we came up with the recommendations regarding co-locations.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: I mean, yes. But then you have to come up with a plan for every one of these other co-location recommendations. Do you have a timeline on when you're going to be able to give -- if the, like, do you have a sense of what that would look like? A skeleton, a draft of what a co-location for Building 21 in Martin King High School would look like? Or it's just a recommendation out of the air right now?

COLONEL HILL: Certainly, we have established a timeline, a general timeline based on the school year/fiscal year, when the

co-locations will take place. We -- what we also have, which becomes critically important, is a planning year for 2026 and 2027. And I want to emphasize that the lived experiences, the detailed planning, the nuances of the students, faculty, staff, and family members that have been in these schools for years, becomes important. And so we need that input to really finalize all of the detailed planning required to do this well.

DR. WATLINGTON: And in the spirit of nothing for us, without us, Councilmember Dr. Phillips, we've not pulled any schools together for a formal conversation about that, because one, we don't want to get ahead of the Board of Education, and we'll need to get some final -- final, final -- in concrete final approved recommendations before we do that,

and then we'll have a runway of not less than a full year to bring up all those folks together, just as the colonel said.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I have a question regarding -- you've finished, Dr. Phillips?

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: Yes, I have.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. I have a question regarding, so we go and do a $2.8 billion investment, right, and we know how we got here, because historically we have old buildings, right? So the question is, in the spirit of the fair maintenance and keeping our facilities in the best conditions, just give me for the record the number of plumbers, electricians, painters, the team that will be making sure that this investment is an investment worthwhile for the long haul. So

the next generation won't be sitting here saying, we got to close schools down, because we didn't invest in making sure the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings remain high quality over the next 25, 30, 40, 50 years.

And then also, who will be responsible for -- and this is a lot of development now. This is my way out. Who's going to be making sure that projects stay on time, under budget, right, and making sure the implementation and contract management all benefits the district?

DR. WATLINGTON: I will be ultimately responsible for making sure that projects are completed on time and on budget.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay.

DR. WATLINGTON: Just as those four new schools were built on

time, on budget under Colonel Hill's leadership over the past four years or so. And I'll ask him to speak to your question about the numbers of plumbers, electricians, et cetera.

COLONEL HILL: Sir, I would like to suggest that we take that as a homework assignment so that I give you accurate detail.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. Just please report to the Chair the information, and he'll make sure, well, to submit to members of Council. And then also the role of the trades, give me an update role of the building trades will play in terms of, you got eight abandoned properties that will be transferred to Council, and then you also have a proposal of 20 new properties in their role in terms of facilitating this process moving forward.

DR. WATLINGTON: There's

been some thoughtful conversations and interactions around career technical education and building trades, and I'm going to ask Ms. Landau, our senior advisor for strategy in the school district, if she'll talk about that strategy in particular.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MS. LANDAU: Thank you. Claire Landau, Senior Advisor for Strategic Planning. Thank you, Council President. We have in our strategic plan work happening on our career and technical education programming in particular, and enhancing that, and working with our trades to make sure that there are more opportunities for partnerships and growing all of our career and technical education opportunities. And that is certainly going to be part of what we are looking at in

how we think about the career and technical education support.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So we partner with, let's say -- I know it's not my district, but it always boggled my mind. You have YouthBuild is a high school where young people build houses. And it just boggled my mind, is there a pipeline between such a program with the trades and the work that they're doing with the school district? Has something like that been explored, or what would this look like in terms of pathways for our young people? And for the record, I do come in the district with partnering with myself and the bell of a district to help young people get their driver's license so they can get in the trades, so I do know you have been doing work in this area, but I just want to go on a record and see what this look like for the

future.

DR. WATLINGTON: Before I ask Senior Advisor Landau to say something specific. As an example, South Philadelphia High School, let me say that we are currently in meetings with the Carpenters Union in Philadelphia looking at the current enrollment at schools like Swenson and Mastbaum. We're taking a look at how do we make sure those opportunities through this process are available -- more available, for example, in southwest Philadelphia.

We are in communications meeting directly with the leadership there, and more will be coming out about that over time, because we're thinking about how do we repurpose some of the existing classrooms in some of the schools across the city. For good-paying jobs, where we kind of take away some of the barriers for our graduates to be able to get

into the Carpenters Union.

I'll ask Senior Advisor Landau to say a few words specifically about some of the planning for South Philadelphia High School.

MS. LANDAU: We have -- and I hear you on the question specifically about what some of these pathways will look like. One of the things that you'll see is for instance, South Philadelphia High School, you'll see a major investment there to make that a hub for career and technical education. We want that to look like a hub you'd see anywhere in the suburbs and something that we can be working with trades, working specifically there on advanced manufacturing as a real point of pride for the city and take in your feedback and questions about just making sure that pipeline is clear.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Okay. Thank you.

DR. WATLINGTON:

Mr. President?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Yes.

DR. WATLINGTON: I want you to think about our partnerships with the Navy Yard, Maritime and some of the, you know, really exciting opportunities there. We're in communication with Penn Medicine in terms of not just getting some programming in some of the schools in West Philadelphia. The training kids to become certified nursing assistants where, you know, you go to our schools and you learn to become a certified nursing assistant. Great opportunity. But we know that many of these individuals clean hospital beds every day, and then when they get sick, they can't afford to lay in

the same beds that they clean every day. We are talking about those high-paying 50, 60, $70,000 jobs, many of which may not require a high school -- I mean, it requires a high school diploma, but may not require a two or four-year degree, but some kind of industry certification.

Colonel, do you want to add anything to that?

COLONEL HILL: Yes, sir. I would just like to share that as we have imagined what the career and technical education investment in hubs could be, we not only went to all of the partnering institutions that the superintendent shared, but we also went to Kensington, to the Energy Coordinating Agency and looked at their facility that they have and borrowed some of the lessons learned there in terms of what could be possible for our students.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And I last -- before I turn over to my members, has there been a third party or independent cost estimate regarding this particular proposal? Like, have your outside eyes just say, Hey, we are going to take a look at the $2.8 billion estimate for this type of investment from a outside perspective, just to take a look at it.

DR. WATLINGTON: You want to take it, Colonel?

COLONEL HILL: Yes, sir. Absolutely invite the external view as we've gone through the process --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I didn't ask you did -- do you invite? I'm asking has it been done? That's all I was asking.

COLONEL HILL: Yes, sir. We have had the benefit of objective external look at the budgeting associated with the investments that

the plan proposes --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And what firm? What third party firm or independent firm has that been?

COLONEL HILL: Sir, we contacted both the DLR Group as well as --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: What is it called again, sir?

COLONEL HILL: DLR Group. They do a lot of construction and renovation in the K-12 space. Additionally, we stayed locally and we also looked at the resources from the Aramark Engineering and Solutions Group in terms of their approach to our investments.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So are we -- do we have contracts with these two companies?

DR. WATLINGTON: And Mr. President, let me be clear. I want to be -- we want to be clear.

We actually put out a request for proposals, and we went through a competitive process.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay.

DR. WATLINGTON: We didn't just go find somebody on the internet, or call up somebody who's a friend, or somebody in the district. We went through a competitive process, took it to the Board so that we could get best-in-class support.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So is RFP right now on the street now?

DR. WATLINGTON: No, we put the RFP out well early in the process. We can submit for the record how that was done and how we arrived at those.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: No, I'm okay with that part.

DR. WATLINGTON: Okay.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm just saying, are we currently contracting with the two companies just mentioned, that's doing a third-party independent cost estimate review? That's the question.

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. That's all I just wanted.

DR. WATLINGTON: Categorically, yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. That's all I have. We are in the second round. The Chair recognizes Councilman Isaiah Thomas.

COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Thank you, Council President. A couple of quick questions. First of all, Council President, you were talking about co-locating, Frankford was used as an example. I just want to put on the record that Frankford, you know, that's my folks. I went

to Frankford High School. I know them well. We have a cooperative sponsorship -- cooperative partnership with them as a former athletic director. They did kind of struggle with that transition. It wasn't like the easiest one. And then we also have the example of SLA and Ben Franklin, which is like another example of where we struggle with the initial co-location. Clearly things are doing better now in both examples, but I just wanted to put that out there on the record. And if I have time, I'm going to come back to co-locating.

Council president has talked -- spoke a little bit about who's going to do the work around the facilities. You talked about the four new schools that were built. Those four new schools were built in partnership with PIDC, right?

COLONEL HILL: Three of them. Yes, sir.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: And so, when we look at this facility's plan, the modified version, the current version, clearly the daily maintenance is going to happen by the school district. In the plan, there's talks about building new buildings. Would the district build those buildings yourself, or do you plan to partner with somebody like PIDC to build new school buildings?

COLONEL HILL: Sir, that determination specifically hasn't been made at this point in time. However, I will share that the relationship with PIDC was instrumental and invaluable in meeting the construction demands of Amy at James Martin, Thomas Holme, and Cassidy.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

Well, I'm going to defer to Council President when it comes to that stuff, because he's been phenomenal as a district Council person, as well as the Council President when it comes to contracts, minority inclusion, diversity numbers and things of that capacity. But I do support him in his effort to make sure that we hit those numbers. And I think it's important that we remain transparent as it relates to not just who's going to do the maintenance on a daily basis, looking forward to the numbers around plumbers and things of that capacity, but also when we put them RFPs out there, how will that process go? And who's going to get those contracts? Because we do have an opportunity to make a lot of millionaires, if we're going to spend this much money on school building facilities. And I want us

to be very intentional to make sure that those dollars get reinvested in those same neighborhoods that we're fighting for right now. So I just want to put that out there.

When it comes to coordination, based on the plan, if adopted as is, it will create eight new school buildings. I'm wondering what has been the level of communication and coordination with the mayor, the admin, the mayor's Office of Education, and how much of a priority has it been communicating with the executive branch of government to get new buildings? Is it in the midst of your dialogue with them, have they communicated essentially urgency around getting space for housing? Is it about, I don't know, one of the things I talked about was cutting down transportation costs, which is already at 120 million. So what has

been the communication with the mayor and the admin as it relates to this facilities plan, and what has the admin communicated to be the priority as you navigate through this process?

DR. WATLINGTON: We've been very intentional, Councilmember Thomas, about communicating on an ongoing basis with the mayor and the mayor's office, Council President, members of Council who are representing both the executive and legislative branches. And we're committed to doing that. We are aware, just like Council, it's been no secret to us about the mayor's vision for -- aggressive vision for housing -- building more housing in the city of Philadelphia, and have recognized some intersections between the facilities planning process draft recommendations in that vision.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: So I just want to be clear and put this on the record. This was one of my number one objectives here today to have this conversation. I've listened to a lot of stakeholders, union members, parents, community advocates, partners who work in after-school programs, out-of-school program stuff, there is a belief that there is a conspiracy amongst all of us to push poor people out of Philadelphia, to push people of color out of Philadelphia. And the narrative online right now is that this facility's plan puts that on steroids. The reason I think it's important that I'm putting on a record how I feel, and other people can do the same thing, there is no conspiracy here from the members of City Council in the education committee to push poor people out, to close their schools, to increase

violence, or to do a lot of the other things that folks have feel like have happened in the past when decisions like this have been made.

I do support the mayor's vision to separate the conversation around the current school's plan and the vacant school buildings that existed before any of us got the position that we have right now. I want to be clear, I support that because the blight hurts our communities, I support it because the decisions that was made before we got here were reckless: to leave those buildings abandoned, and I support action around getting rid of asbestos, mold, and things like that. But Council President, I could probably speak for you on this one, and a couple other members who I have a close relationship with. Let's be very clear, there is no conspiracy from this legislative

body to work with any legislative body, executive branch, or quasi government organization to put black people, poor people, people in color, Latino folks in a position where they feel like they've been displaced, where we feel like they've been pushed out of city, or they feel like we're trying to have more violence in their neighborhood. That's not what we're looking to do. The goal of today's conversation is to make sure that there's clarity around how we got to this point, but more importantly, to allow impact -- input from constituents.

So, Council President, I thank you for your leadership. And as I close out, I also want to put on the record that because of your leadership and us working together with district Councilmembers, today will not be the last time for people to come before this legislative body

to tell us how they feel around this issue. So we're going to do our due diligence to make sure that we address this. And, Council President, I also commend you because I personally know you got a lot of pushback for this, but it's important that the public understands that not only is this a legacy vote, that we are willing to hold up funding from the city of Philadelphia if a plan is not put in place that we feel like best serves the interest of the people that we represent.

So it's important that I put that out there as, the chair of the Education Committee, and it's important that the general public understands that everything we're doing is reflective of the people of Lankenau, right? Lankenau was never a school that I was thinking about. I wasn't talking about it, it wasn't

on my radar. But man, look at the letters that we've gotten, the emails that we've gotten. When we represent the people of Philadelphia, the package over there, Councilmember Lozada, when we represent the people of Philadelphia, we cannot ignore this type of outreach, this type of organizing effort, and this level of advocacy that's coming to district members, as well as members in leadership, that's pretty much begging us not to ruin their lives.

They're not saying, don't keep my school open; they're saying, keep my child alive. They're saying, please don't ruin our community and our neighborhood. And I want to be clear that that is the focus of this legislative body.

Thank you, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Thank you, Chairman Thomas.

Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, then Councilmember Jim Harrity. Well, let me -- you-all just showed up. So Jamie Gauthier, then Jim Harrity, and then also Member Young. Point of Information, Councilman Quetcy Lozada.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I want to thank Councilmember Thomas for that, but I also think it's important to say that communities feel that way because of our inability.

COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Or some people's inability to assume accountability about what they have allowed to happen in certain neighborhoods like mine, right? And so we have to be able to respond to the fact that we have caused government-inflicted trauma in certain neighborhoods like the 7th Councilmanic District, and we are

here, our schools in the 7th Councilmanic district are where we are today, because we have not been able to respond to the social detriments that are occurring on the outside of those buildings. And that's the fact.

So if people feel that there's a conspiracy, it is because they are watching what we're doing. They are watching what we are allowing in their neighborhoods, and they feel that way. So it is our responsibility to assume accountability first and be transparent. That's why transparency is so important, because there cannot be any room for people that have been disinvested in for so many years to feel like we are now allowing this to happen, because we don't want them in those neighborhoods.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

The Chair now recognizes Councilman Jamie Gauthier, then Member Harrity, then Member Young.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: Thank you, Council President. For this round, I'd like to examine your closure recommendation for Motivation High School. Motivation High school's building condition is fair. It's program alignment by your own data is fair. Academically, it is a school that performs well. The primary issue that you identified is utilization, which is listed at 15 percent. However, 300 KIPP students occupy the building that also includes Motivation High, and that seems to have been excluded from your calculation.

So first, will the district revise the utilization formula to accurately reflect full-building occupancy? And if not, why should

Council have confident that your utilization scores were applied factually and rigorously across any of the closure recommendations that you've put forward?

Lastly, if vulnerability scores are not what's driving this closure recommendation, if the building condition is not what's driving this closure recommendation, if program alignment is not what's driving this closure recommendation, and your utilization metrics contain errors, I need you to tell us what variables actually are driving these recommendations?

Especially because -- especially because your recommendation is that Motivation moves to Bartram, which deserves investment, but currently has a much worse building condition. So I would like for you to explain this recommendation that no one in the

school community or the broader community understands.

And then before you answer, I have a very quick point of information that I want to get on the record because we keep skirting past it. The Council President noted in his opening comments that there's a disproportionate impact on black and brown neighborhoods in that 68 percent of the students in these schools that you're recommending for closure are black or brown. You keep countering that and saying that that's inevitable because 51 percent of the students in the district are black and brown. There is almost a 20 percent difference between the 51 percent number that you are given and the 68 percent impact that is in your plan, and it's not something that should be skirted over. So after you answer the questions about

Motivation, I want you to tell us why that 20 percent disparity that is over and above the population of the district is okay with you.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Gauthier. The first thing I would note is that the recommendation is consistent with the guiding theme about investing in neighborhood high schools, in this case, Bartram in particular.

Number two, while we are aware that there is another school that operates inside of that school facility, we didn't include it in our building utilization numbers because as the district superintendent, I was hired annually held accountable for performance of students in the district-operated schools. What happens? I think all 200,000 children in Philadelphia or all of our children, I just don't have oversight and accountability

for all 200,000. I have direct oversight and accountability and an expectation to improve reading and math performance for those who are in district-operated schools. So everything I do, I focus on, first, my fiduciary and evaluation responsibility to improve outcomes for district-operated schools, because that's who I have authority over.

And accordingly, in order to get more resources pushed into Motivation in particular, you will never, ever have the kind of robust opportunities that Northeast offers, that Lincoln offers, that George Washington offers in terms of robust programming in schools that are so small that you have 30 or less students in a grade level. It doesn't mean it's not a very fine school.

Again, the North Star for

me is how do I push it more resources, and how do we get reading and math performance that's improving to sky rocket 10 times faster?

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: Can I pause you for a second?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, ma'am.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: So because there is a theme in the plan around improving comprehensive neighborhood schools, the logic of the recommendations is that even when we have a high-performing small program, even when it's in a fair building, we would essentially shutter it and move it to a worse building, even though we don't necessarily have the money in hand to improve the worst building. We'll shutter the high-performing academic program first, and then we'll move the program to a worse

facility, and then worry about getting those resources in the future; is that the logic of the plan?

DR. WATLINGTON: I want to look -- suggest looking at it a little bit different, if I might. Given the choice to invest resources in all of the comprehensive-neighborhood high schools, and make an appropriate investment in the small, smaller, or boutique high schools, I'm going to submit to the -- this Council that we just don't have the resources to do all of it. I'm not saying I'm right here in terms of the school selected.

So we think it makes -- we have historically thought that it makes sense to put a $54 million investment in Bartram and bring Bartram up to the level that we can offer the same kind of programming in Southwest Philadelphia that we're

offering right now in Northeast Philadelphia. Because if we don't do something different, we'll always have that disparity.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Can I get a point of information real quick for clarity? So there would be additional academic programming at John Bartram High School to also --

DR. WATLINGTON: Specifically, in career technical education.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Say it again, I'm sorry.

DR. WATLINGTON: Specifically related to career and technical education programs.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So it'd be new CTE programming and then also magnet school children attending the same school as well?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir. And we think we can do it really

well.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Share it.

DR. WATLINGTON: That's how Motivation started.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: It just sounded backwards to me. You shutter a well-performing school in the -- in the near to the present tense and then move it to a school that deserves investment, but that you have not identified the investment for it yet, that will come sometime, you know, within the next decade, maybe. It just seems backwards to me.

And then secondly, I would really like for you to specifically address the disparity issue because there is a big difference between the 51 percent number that you're given, and the 68 percent number that -- in terms of the impact of the plan on black and brown

students.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Gauthier. The reason I made the comment to the Council President earlier is that because this is a majority black and brown district, any way you slice the pie, anybody who -- in any decisions that get made relative to -- I believe, relative to changes in current school configurations will have some disproportionate impact, positive or negative, on black and brown children.

Now, for me, I see, and I'll just speak as a superintendent here, we've had almost a 13-percentage point increase in 3rd grade math performance. If we look at 3rd through 8th grade math performance over the past three-and-a-half years, we have almost a nine-percentage point. Outperforming the Commonwealth of

Pennsylvania average, outperforming the national average. But black people here in our schools, the majority do not do math or reading on grade level. And so we ought to call the question and say, we've already done a number on black and brown kids in this city and in public education across this country, and that's why I'm so adamant, let's do something different.

Let's make -- let's do less and go deeper so that we can really accelerate, because we've got teachers and leaders and students and others who are just ready to accelerate even more. I'm not saying I'm right, but that's the way I see the world.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: Respectfully, that does not answer the question. The population of the district is 51 percent black and

brown, according to your testimony.

DR. WATLINGTON: 51 percent African American.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: As Council President stated, and that was also reported by the inquirer, the impact of your proposed recommendations would have a -- it shows a disparate impact on black and brown students to the tune of 68 percent. That shows a disparity that is present within your plan. Speak -- please speak to the disparity.

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes. Let me say this, because of the demographics of the school district, there are not a lot of majority white schools in the School District of Philadelphia. It's just the sheer numbers. There just are not. And when you look at the percentage of non-African American, non-Hispanic or Latino children, you

just don't have that number of schools that you could go close, even if I said, okay, I'll take all these off the table, and let's go close some other ones, you would never have enough for that impact not to hit black and brown people in the city. It's just our demographics.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I don't think we should be okay with that. Thank you, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Member Harrity, then Member Young.

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: Thank you, Council President. And I apologize for having to leave. I had to go to a janazah for a friend of mine who passed. So I apologize if some of my questions may be repetitive. But, you know, I'd like to -- just start off by just saying that, as I said earlier, and has Councilwoman Gauthier just bought up

that the schools are disproportionate in black and brown neighborhoods, where we're taking them away. And I would absolutely argue that is because of the school district's disinvestment in them schools. The fact that we have all this deferred maintenance that we put off, put off, put off to where it's now at a point where we could never actually do it. And it just goes to show you that -- you know, and I get it. When I first went up to the Senate with Senator Street and found out how they actually did school funding, it didn't take a rocket science to figure out why my schools and my neighborhood weren't like other schools, it's because it goes by real estate tax.

And in a neighborhood like mine, where most people are on the homestead and are not paying real estate tax, they are not coming in.

It just seems to me that they're the neighborhoods we always end up cutting from. But the fact of the matter is, we wouldn't have to cut if we would've invested in them in the first place. The 7th District is where I live, but I went to Bartram. I wasn't smart enough to get in Motivation, but I did go to Bartram Business, which is also another school that was cut years ago.

Bartram, when I was a kid, you had Motivation, you had Bartram Business, you had Bartram Main, and on top of Bartram Main, you had the CTA Auto Mechanics. I can't tell you how many guys I grew up with that went to Bartram that owned their own auto mechanics shop now because of what they learned there at Bartram. So I'm glad we're trying to get some of that back. But for me, part of the reason that

some of these schools are succeeding better than our other schools is because they're smaller. It's not rocket science. The teacher has more one-on-one time with the student.

Look, I get it. We all want to be fiscally responsible, right? We all want to -- but -- and again, maybe it's because I'm just a regular guy here, the union guy on Council, some of this stuff just doesn't get to me, it doesn't register sometimes. We keep cutting from these neighborhoods, and we see the direct result from it.

We see crime, we see things of that nature. I just -- I just want us to think more about the actual kids as we're saying. These kids -- some of our kids can't go to other schools. That's life. That's reality in the city of Philadelphia. Our kids can't go from one neighbor

to another because there's stupid old beefs that are out there. And I get that, but that is our kids' faults. We got to protect our kids whatever way we can.

And Bartram Motivation that -- like that's a school that did so much good for so many kids. My sister went to Bartram Motivation; she also got to go to college because she went to Bartram Motivation. You understand that for me, that's the way to get out, is through the education, and we just need to -- we need to think long and hard.

I get that we need to make sure that the schools are, but like we said, some of these schools are foundational. They are legacy in the city of Philadelphia. And I know, I didn't even ask the question yet.

So just in frustrations,

because this is what's coming to us. These are questions like; we're not bringing this stuff out of the air. So some of the schools have mentioned that changes in administration and requirements for reasons of decreased enrollment.

Can you talk about how the school district administration process, the lottery, changed over the last few years and why these changes implemented? And what's -- why were these changes implemented? And what goals do they aim to accomplish? Because as far as I can see, what it's aiming to accomplish is closing some of our good schools.

DR. WATLINGTON: May I speak to that, Mr. Chairman -- Mr. President?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Absolutely, Dr. Watlington.

DR. WATLINGTON: Relative to Councilmember Gauthier's question

and yours, Councilmember Harrity, the lottery was designed to give more children choice opportunity, and to make sure it's as equitable as possible.

The second thing I want to just note, Dr. Clayton and I used to talk about how, when she was superintendent in the early '80s, it was like 20,30, 40,000 children in district-operated schools, fourth largest in the country. Let me tell you what's happened.

In addition to the historic underfunding, if you go -- if you look at our enrollment in this city, there were 200,000 public school children in Philadelphia a decade ago, about the time that Bill Height came here. Guess what? There's still just about 200,000 public school children.

Public school population isn't shrinking very -- at a very

high volume. What's happening in Philadelphia is different than New York, it's different than Chicago, it's different than Los Angeles, and it's somewhat different from Miami, some of the other bigger school districts.

What we are experiencing is kids over time leaving district-operated schools to go to publicly-funded charter schools. And I never get into debate about one or the other, but I was hired by the Board of Education to move the needle in district-operated schools, and so that's why I'm focused there.

The second thing, when we talk about the impact on black and brown students, I will also tell you that one of the other things that Dr. Clayton and I used to talk about is in the School District of Philadelphia at present or before her death, we weren't experiencing a

white flight. What we're experiencing is as a black flight issue, black kids leaving the school district.

So really, our plan is to grow that black enrollment by I improve -- improving outcomes, because if I'm a parent, I'm going to say, look, tell me who's getting the best reading and math performance? Who's graduating these kids ready to go to the University of Pennsylvania, like the Council President, and then to Harvard? And I say, I'm going to send my kids with who's getting the best result. And I would encourage kids to do that. That's why we are so focused on improving those district-operated schools because we have responsibility for improving outcomes.

Anyway, I just -- Senior Advisor Landau can walk you through

an example, Blankenburg School, for example, if she would just say a quick word about what that looks like at a Blankenburg.

MS. LANDAU: Yes, thank you. So we certainly see an alignment between the number of charters that are in a certain area and the number of vacant seats that we see. I believe they're -- so for a good example would be Blankenburg, where right now there are 150 students that are from the catchment going to Blankenburg.

There's four -- 543 in the same catchment that are going to charters. Ten years ago, those numbers were flipped, but we're seeing that in districts, I believe there are 10 charters in Council District 3, where we have a lot of students that are choosing charters. And because they don't go equally to charters, we then have district

schools where there's very low enrollment, and some of those impacts are more pronounced. I think Blankenburg is a good example of that.

DR. WATLINGTON: And so we have to address the fact that we've lost 60,000 children to charters over multiple decades. And it has some impact on the district-operated schools, and our budgets and facilities. And charter should not -- I just want to --

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: You said yourself parents want to send their kids to schools where the math and grades are up, where kids are going. I would say that the fact that more people want to send their kids to charter school rather than public school, I think we should learn from that and ask why is that? Well, I can tell you why. Because they're safer on most counts and

they have a better education.

DR. WATLINGTON: May I just say we've looked at the data --

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I'm not saying -- no, I'm not saying -- oh, listen, I'm not saying it. I'm saying -- what I'm saying is you can't argue with kids transferring to other schools because parents want their kids to be safe and stuff like that. I'm for the public schools. I'm went to public schools. I'm for public schools.

I'm not saying anything about closing public schools down. Now you see how what I'm saying about it. What I'm saying is we should change the way we're educating our kids, if the kids don't want to go to those schools. So if we're not getting the numbers, it's because of the education. That's what you just said yourself.

DR. WATLINGTON: So if I

may, Mr. President, just --

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: Not the schools that they're -- I'm not talking about --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: The Chair recognizes Dr. Tony Watlington.

DR. WATLINGTON: Mr. President, for the record, I do want to note in the record that I personally have not seen a report that in the aggregate -- I've heard people say it, but I've not seen a verified report that charter schools are safer than district-operated schools. I've not seen that in evidence.

Second, I can tell you that the multiple years of investment in charter schools, charter schools do not get better academic results than district-operated schools. I can tell you, in fact, in the aggregate, the top quartile -- we've looked at

the data very deeply, the top quartile of district-operated schools, our data suggests outperform the top quartile of charter schools in Philadelphia. And I'm not anti-charter because I believe in choice -- appropriate choice with accountability because I came from that experience in my previous job.

And number three, when you look at when our children graduate from district schools and charter schools, Mr. President, if you look at who persists in that second year of college, beyond the first year, district-operated graduates have a higher persistence rate. Don't take my word for it, we'll submit it on the record. But the way we know this is through the clearinghouse data that comes out every year.

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: All I wanted was we need to think about

keeping kids. Because if kids are jumping ship --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I think what he's saying --

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: They used to be in public school now they're switching over to charter school. Why?

DR. WATLINGTON: I think we're turning that tide too, Councilmember Harrity. And that we were really pleased to see last year, for the first time in a decade, with the support of some verifying principals and school leaders, in partnership with unions and others. I see Dr. Robin Cooper over there, with the CASA Union. Those leaders are focused on making these district operator schools better. Test scores are up, graduation rates up.

And, you know, I don't want to stick -- I don't want to say we

won the war, Mr. President, but when we cut that dropout rate by more than half, and we know that the cost for every dropout to this city in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is $405,000 through incarceration, no healthcare, social supports, et cetera. I would say the district operated schools are doing some phenomenal work. In fact, we're among the most improved big cities in the nation. And I just think we've got to tell that story. But thank you for the feedback. Yes, sir.

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I hope that's the case because I --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Member Harrity.

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: -- would like to get the kids back to public school.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Can you speak to the microphone,

Member Harrity.

COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I'm sorry. I thought my voice was okay. I hope that's the case, because what I'll -- all I'm trying to get at is how do we get those kids back? How do we make them feel like they won't -- instead of cutting their schools. We're going to close schools because we lost schools -- kids to public school -- well, to charter schools.

I want to know why we lost them so we can get them back into our public schools so we don't have to close public schools. And part of the stuff that I was getting in my office is what I was saying, was that they say that some of the policies on how the kids are picked and how they get to go to that school is what is holding them up. They had more kids the old way is what I was told. That was all I was getting at. All I want to do is

keep the kids we got and keep our schools.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, sir.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's our Chairman of Labor over there. You see all them PFT folks out there, CASA and all that. So -- but thank you very much, Member Harrity, your passion. We have three more and then we're going to go into public comment. And so I want to acknowledge the presence of my majority leader, Councilwoman Katherine Gilmore-Richardson.

So in the queue is Councilmember Jeffrey J. Young, then Councilmember Dr. Nina Ahmad, and then the majority leader will wrap us up, Councilmember Katherine Gilmore-Richardson. Press your button, ma'am. Okay. It's pressed now. We see it now. You got to be on point back there. Councilmember

Jeffrey J. Young.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. I like to think that, you know, I'm a logical and practical person, but as I'm reviewing this plan, like it just -- a lot of things aren't connected for me.

So I just want to ask some questions based on how to connect, you know, the rationale behind this. I know my colleagues alluded to, you know, asking you all the rationale behind it, but just listening to the conversation, it seems like that smaller class sizes seem to be a bad thing, and I don't know why that seems to be a bad thing, right? That's -- I mean, I don't understand that. Like, do you get more attention? So let's -- you know, I just want to put that out there.

So I do not think smaller class sizes are a bad thing when you

have that one-on-one attention. I mean, this plan has a lot to take in, particularly when you look at the effect that it has across the city. And I like -- you know, you guys you give us information that's based on our council districts, but unfortunately, right, well, unfortunately, our council district lines aren't -- don't match your catchment lines, right?

And so I have folks who live in my council district but go to school in Quetcy's district and vice versa, right? So to kind of -- you know, you slice it up to try to make it individualized, but that doesn't really get the full story about how parents that go to Moffet now have to send their kids to, what's that, Hackett, when Adaire is in my district, which is actually closer, right? And a better school, might I add, right? So -- right?

So -- and then we're closing.

So I think there's another story about, you know, we're not closing, you know, comprehensive high schools, but you're closing Penn Treaty, right? Which is a comprehensive neighborhood high school, which those kids from Adaire, right, would transition to go to, right? So they're closing their high school. They have no neighborhood school in that community once it's closed.

Now, if I go to Adaire, I go to go to Kensington. Just think about it. I don't know who -- folks who came up with this plan if they're from Philadelphia or had that idea in mind. But if you live in Fishtown, right, you're -- you got to see your kid in Kensington High School, that's something to really just think about, right? I really think we have to make sure

that Philadelphians are taking a look at this plan. So my question is -- I know Councilmember Thomas alluded to this, right?

We have some, you know, closures of magnet schools that are middle schools, right? But then we have some expansion of others that are middle schools. And it looks like the ones that are being expanded, right, which is, you know, great school, one of the best schools in the country, right? That's being expanded while -- and that -- and that population is a primarily white population, right?

And then you're closing other magnet middle schools. The magnet middle school I went to, AMY Northwest, I went there for 6th Grade, right? Closing, right? Conwell, closing. Like the -- you seem like, you know, other magnet schools -- if the idea is to -- I'm

trying to look back at your -- the themes here. This is to create more academic opportunities. It seems like you are taking away those academic opportunities for black and brown kids in the city of Philadelphia, right?

Because if I'm going to these smaller magnet middle schools, I just think that, you know, it just -- I can't -- I can't wrap my head around why is this logical? Like, why is it logical? Why is it okay to have middle school for some but not others? If your data says, right, you keep -- you know, you always say, our data says better -- less transitions, this, that, and other.

Why is it okay for this school but not that school, right? And I'm just -- you know, show me what the data says about that. Like, why is it okay to expand

Masterman but to close Conwell, to close AMY Northwest? And why is it a -- why is that okay, specifically? And I want to -- I know my bell rang, because I got a lot on my mind with this.

The catchment lines. I would ask that you include community members and other stakeholders when deciding what these new catchment lines will look like. Because this has to be equitable in every facet possible because of -- we are -- you -- this is going get beat down your throat. We are a city of neighborhoods. And although -- right -- I mean, you're closing a school that's in council district --

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Councilmember Young, Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: I'm sorry. It's just a --

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: I received it. And we have given you

three additional minutes, I just ask that you wrap up with your question.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: All right. I'm going to wrap up with a question. I'm feeling like Councilmember Harrity right now, right? Because there's just a lot going on here that does not make sense to me, right? As someone, again, I think is very practical and logical.

So the question is, yes, how does closing black and brown magnet schools provide the best opportunities for Philadelphia's children?

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Young. First, you referenced, is school size a bad -- small class or school size a bad thing? And here's the bottom line to the point answer. No, it's not a bad thing in well-resourced schools.

When you have schools that

are not well-resourced and do -- that do not have very strong stable populations over -- teaching population and staff populations over time where you have turnover, what happens is you'll never be able to offer in those places that same quality of academic and extracurricular programs that we have at Northeast, George Washington, and Lankenau.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: You keep mentioning those schools. Those are large schools. What -- like -- so does closing those schools then -- so the schools that you're closing, do they have issues with teacher retention? Do they have issues with providing all these things that like -- because if that's your rationale, then show us that that is the -- you know, that's what's happening here. That's what's happening at Conwell and Amy

Northwest and Parkway Northwest and Lankenau. Like these are great schools for our residents.

DR. WATLINGTON: If resources were not an issue, we could pump in the resources that will allow a small school to offer robust programming. And I'm not just talking about algebra in the middle grades. You talk about foreign language, the best career -- technical education programs.

But that's the problem we're solving for. Right or wrong, I'm not saying that my way of seeing the world as we look at the research is the right way, but that's the straight answer.

Second, to your point about it looks like we're being hypocritical in the middle grades space, I would just say in the criteria-based schools where there's a high demand year-over-year, there

are a lot more parents requesting these schools and saying, Look, we want to go to these schools. So we say, Hey, that makes sense. If we can make these five through 12 schools like Carver Engineering and Science, if there's a high demand, put the resources there. Because again, we're trying to grow the school district enrollment.

If, on the other hand, you look at schools that are not as a part of some of those choice schools that people are trying to get into, and the schools where people are leaving, and if you look at the line graph, we have schools where the population has gone down year after year. You know, we can't ignore that trend.

And so we need to put the resources where we think we can grow and not where we're shrinking. And so it's not that we value some of

those criteria schools more, it's just that we know there's a demand to go there.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Of course, it's the best school in the state. Who don't want to send their kid to Masterman, right?

DR. WATLINGTON: And we don't want -- you're right, sir. And we don't want to divest in those other schools. We just need to run a different play because the play we're running isn't helping us to score.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: This play makes no sense.

DR. WATLINGTON: Understood.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: To be honest.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you very much.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON:

Councilmember Young, are you good?

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: I mean, ultimately still the question is, again, like how does this plan ultimately -- like how does closing these black and brown magnet schools provide the best opportunities for Philadelphia's children, right? That's it. Like these are some of the best schools in the city. Why does closing some of the best schools in the city -- how does closing some of the best schools in the city make our city's education better?

DR. WATLINGTON: We believe over time we will give kids more and not less by pushing more high quality academic extracurricular resources into less schools.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Okay. Thank you very much, Dr. Watlington. I'm just arriving, so I apologize for the delay. The

Chair now recognizes Councilmember Squilla, who I'm looking at, who's next in the queue. And then after that, based on presence in the hearing, I see Councilmember Ahmad, and then me, and then I'll defer to Councilmember Lozada. I'll go last. Okay. So Councilmember Squilla, Councilmember Ahmad, Councilmember Lozada. Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for being here. And I know this is a charged conversation, and when you're dealing with parents and children in schools, it's always a challenge. And I want to thank you. Because I know I gave you specifics on our concerns in my district, in the first district and city challenges.

But I want to be more general in these questions in that, during the numbers that we see, the

modernization of schools that have challenges, the number always is, if we get all the money we ask for, this is what we're doing. How are we prioritizing what schools get what? And how are we also prioritizing what schools that are in basic needs now -- that have basic needs now being done?

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilman Squilla. Let me just say two things to Councilmember Young's point. Thank you for the feedback, and I didn't answer your question directly. The last one. I apologize, sir. Yes, we want parent and community feedback on catchment areas.

Councilmember Squilla, with regard to how we prioritize -- if we don't get -- is the spirit of your question, if we don't get the full 2.8 billion, how do we prioritize which schools get in the hopper and

which get in line first. I'm going to ask senior advisor Landau to speak a little bit to that strategy.

MS. LANDAU: Thank you, Councilmember. The investments will be prioritized to ensure that schools where there is a recommendation and an impact through a closure or through a co-location, that investments get made in those schools that would be receiving schools to make sure that all of -- all of what we are saying is true about making sure that students are going to schools with better facilities. Those will be where you see investments made first, prioritizing any school that's impacted by the plan. And then -- I think that's -- I think that's the most important first.

DR. WATLINGTON: And to -- and to add to that Councilmember Squilla, the reason why we didn't

just pull up and say, Okay, with 2.8 billion we'll do all these projects, with only 1 billion we'll do these projects, is because we believe that $2.8 billion is a responsible number in the -- in a city that's the sixth largest city, and in a state that is the fifth largest state in the nation based on population. Surely, we can find $2.8 billion to invest in public education in the nation's sixth largest city. Fantastic birthplace of democracy.

COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: Nobody's arguing that we need $2.8 billion as part of the plan. But when you put a whole plan process out there together and then people are reaching out, we see that certain schools are going to get maybe added facilities, expanded school rooms, a new gym, a new lunchroom.

And then we have some schools that are falling apart now that need immediate care. How do we know that the schools that aren't being touched, the ones who aren't being either changed from middle school to a grade school. How do we know that they're going to be addressed, too?

Because we're going to end up in the same position that we're in now, trying to fix all the schools that aren't getting any attention. You're addressing the schools that I think are changing, which may make some of those changes easier, even though it isn't from what we hear. But we also need these schools to be addressed now that have big needs.

So I don't see where that is in the plan where those schools, you have a capital improvement done now and then you have -- all right,

say you don't get 2.8 billion, you get 2 billion.

So we -- are you doing half of everything in every school. I mean, I don't know what that plan is. It's just a -- it makes it difficult for us to tell. Our constituents are saying, we don't see anything getting done to our school. And I say, well, it says if we get more money, you're getting this.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you. What you're asking is very clear. I'd like to ask Colonel -- Deputy Superintendent Hill to speak to both of those questions.

COLONEL HILL: Thank you very much for the question, sir. Since 2017, since that's kind of a benchmark in terms of what the needs of our facilities were at that time, we have continued to make investments in our schools with our

scheduled maintenance, preventive maintenance. And as part of this facility's planning process, going back to 2024, we have dispatch or deployed a team that has been to each and every one of our schools to inform the current facility condition status of the schools.

And based on that, along with the schools that are most impacted, that senior advisor Landau mentioned, we are able to prioritize where we make those investments first based on the current information that we have.

Additionally, as we go through this process, we have aligned our CIP, our Capital Improvement Program investments with the proposals, and we will continue our ongoing maintenance investments as required to keep these facilities warm and welcoming.

COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

Could -- is it possible for us to get a list of what's going to be done now in the immediate schools, and then how you're prioritizing the schools? You're saying we all want $2.8 billion, I get it, but how are you prioritizing the schools if $2.8 million don't come for some reason?

And we need to know that in the sense that everybody's looking at a plan and they're saying, all right, you're going to do all these things in these schools, but then you don't get the resources, and we push them back and then we also push back deferred maintenance on other things. To me that's the biggest challenge beside the changes that we all spoke about and we heard the concerns for and that we spoke about privately.

But we need to know how that money is going to be disseminated. If you get the 2.8,

everything's getting done, right? From far as you say. But if you don't get the 2.8, we need to know what's -- what -- how you're prioritizing those schools that get done. And then we need to know -- make sure that the capital improvements that are every day work, that some schools don't have heat, right? We have a furnace that's just had a major issue.

We have Southwark that has major issues. We need to know that that work's still getting done now with the resources that you currently have, no matter how much additional dollars you get.

COLONEL HILL: Yes, sir. We will be able to provide that information.

COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: Can you provide that to the Chair -- to Council President. It would be appreciated.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON:
Thank you. Thank you very much, Councilmember Squilla. We will now take a break. We will now take a break from questions, and we'll return with questions from Councilmember Ahmad. We'll take a 10-minute recess. Thank you.
COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
I am going to start off with Majority Leader Katherine Gilmore-Richardson. Because you haven't been in any rounds. And so -- and then I'll go to Member Lozada, and then we'll wrap up with Dr. Nina Ahmad. If -- I know I changed things around. It's okay. If -- we don't see Councilmember Squilla. If you could hear me, Councilmember Squilla, come on. Because you're queued up. And so Majority Leader Gilmore-Richardson, the floor is yours. The Chair recognizes Majority Leader, Gilmore-Richardson.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON:

Okay. Thank you, Council President. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. I'll quickly begin first in thanking my colleagues for all of your work this morning and today, and appreciate all of the comments that have been made, but really want to uplift the young people who are here.

I just had the opportunity to meet some dynamic freshmen and sophomore students from Lankenau Environmental Science Magnet High School. And they were excellent.

And I know that -- I heard Councilmember Young talk about the catchment areas, and I know that we had a conversation about this. And I just want to thank the district for your more thoughtful approach to this process this time versus years ago relative to community engagement.

But I think we have to make sure that in all that we do we get it right this time around. And the big part of that is listening to and taking the feedback of not only our young people but of the students and the administrators and everyone impacted by this plan. You all know, and I don't have to repeat this, that all of my children are in public school across the city now. We're not in campus anymore. I'm not going to mention the new schools, but I have children at two different schools in the School District of Philadelphia currently.

So even back to when Dr. Heit was here, I was talking to the district about the catchment areas and the boundaries that currently route families to School District of Philadelphia schools.

And as a part of this conversation, I know you all have

talked about this, you said that you are committed to researching best practices nationwide and sharing findings around research for your analysis of the new catchment areas.

My concern with the catchment piece is, how do we effectively know that we are enrolling the proper young people in our schools currently if we know the catchment zones are wrong?

And knowing that information has informed this process, like how are we making up for that as a part of this new catchment boundary zone that will be released? And when will the new catchment zones be released? Will that be a part of this process? Will it be afterward? If you could just address that quickly.

And then I also wanted to mention the 2026-2027 school year. You talked about schools that will

close or co-locate, and they will enroll students -- new students starting next year.

Can you talk about exactly which schools will be impacted next year based on the plan that you all have presented? And then based on all the town halls that you all are having, how are you incorporating the feedback to make strategic changes to the plan?

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Majority leader -- Madam Majority Leader. In terms of impacted schools for the 2026/27 school year, that's pretty much a planning year. So it'd be a planning year, although we are looking at how to staff up a true year round school experience at the K-8 level in 26/27. But that's a pure option for parents to consider. But as far as these changes we're talking about today, none of those in the -- over the

next school year. It would be not until school year 27/28 that you'll begin seeing some of those changes.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: So what's the one school that will be impacted next year? Because the plan states that there's only one school that will be impacted next school year.

DR. WATLINGTON: It's a to be determined year-round K-8 school.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Okay.

DR. WATLINGTON: That has not been formally presented or created just yet. More information to come. It's still in some planning and partnership with a number of partners, kind of pattern after the Harlem Children's Zone. More to come on that in North Philadelphia.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Okay.

DR. WATLINGTON: More to come on that. Number two, relative to the catchment areas, as we shared with Councilmember Young, we absolutely welcome parent feedback around catchment areas. Unlike the U.S. Census that's done every 10 years to -- because the population shifts, to figure out how to draw the lines, we are not trying to draw the -- trying to draw the lines just based on population.

We are thinking about how do we best push in the most-high quality academic and extracurricular resources across all areas of the city, every zip code in every neighborhood, and how might catchment areas best match up with that considering all the feedback we've heard from parents so far?

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Okay. Can you all commit to working with Google Maps this time? Because

a part of the challenge you all stated previously, even when I worked on this issue back to Dr. Heit, was that there was an issue with Google Maps.

So as an example, when you go to Philasd.org website and you type in your address to find your local schools, it's powered by the Google mapping service. So as a part of the redrawing of the catchment zones, can you work with Google Maps to ensure that it lines up correctly?

As an example, if I type in my address today, we're routed to Gompers, which is a K through 8 school, but also routed to Blankenburg for middle school.

DR. WATLINGTON: Oh, really?

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Okay. And so --

DR. WATLINGTON: Sure.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: -- as an example, now under this plan, I think Blankenburg would be slated too close.

And so if you could work with Google mapping services as you redraw the attachment zones, I think that would be helpful. And I wanted to mention one last thing relative to -- and I heard other colleagues bring this up; cultural differences in student populations.

You all know that I had the great fortune of working at a number of schools. I started off as a substitute teacher. But my longest assignment was at Overbrook High School. And I love -- I love Overbrook High School so much, and I think their current principal is doing a fantastic job.

But we know that even when I was there, there were cultural differences with, you know, Hilltop,

59th Street, over the bridge. Like how are you all taking into consideration those cultural factors, those neighborhood factors, as you make these decisions?

And I know we did talk about this on the meeting, and folks know I do this, I did ask was everybody from Philadelphia? So for the understanding of the cultural and the neighborhood challenges that we face within the academic environment, which most often plays out in the behavioral challenges that we see.

DR. WATLINGTON: Sure. There's been a number of feedback opportunities, not limited to just the virtual and in-person meetings with the 20 impacted schools. We've heard very clearly that feedback about the reluctance to move across neighborhoods. We've been doing that listening even before we got to

this phase of the facilities plan. So we're paying very close attention to it. We've got a lot of survey data related to that as well, which we can make public.

Madam Majority Leader, may I also say that as we look at the catchment areas and this whole plan, also, I do want to note for the record, Mr. President, also that this plan aspires when there has to be a school closure or relocation to put students in what is currently a better school facility or will be a school budget -- be a better school facility based on the investments that we've embedded in the plan.

And I also want to have on the record, 90 percent of the children in the current proposed 20 school closure recommendations would be assigned to schools that have better reading and/or math performance, not worse.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON:

Okay. I'll submit the additional questions that I have. I have about 36 other questions that I'll submit for the record, but I just wanted to -- and I apologize, but I'll submit them for a written response to our Council President and for dissemination to all members of Council.

But I just wanted to put on the record that two of those questions relate to city services being co-located at school buildings that still have under-utilization scores, and also building conveyance relative not only to the city, but to others, how those sales will be negotiated, the timeline for conveyance for each of those properties, and how the proceeds will be reinvested relative to modernization of all the remaining facilities, and also the timeline

for the redevelopment of those facilities.

I think one important thing that's getting lost in this conversation is that we need to talk about -- and we need you all to explain to us, like in real layman's terms, where we are as a district. Like what is the overall picture? What are you all seeking to solve for, and how will you take the feedback of families, of parents, of teachers, of administrators, of all the building maintenance workers, everybody that works to make all of this work each and every day.

How are you taking school bus drivers, everybody? How are you taking that feedback into consideration based on what you know you have to do. You know you have a deficit. Can you explain what that means? Can you explain where we are financially? Can you explain what

you are seeking to solve for and how we best get to where we need to be so that the school district can try to be in a position -- in a circumstance where we are doing the very best for all of our young people?

You got to explain where we are, in layman's terms plainly, so people can understand and take into consideration their feedback. Because I mean, some of the locations we know are being under utilized, but some of the locations we could co-locate city services there and help to bring the buildings back up to par.

Other locations we have good thriving academic programs like Lankenau, what can we do for students like, you know, specialty programs, environmental science, agriculture, those type of things that we don't have on a more regular

basis across the district.

So I'll submit the rest of my questions for the record, but I just wanted to put all that on the record based on what I know --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I have 35 more questions she would like a response from, sir. 35. That's our majority leader. Would you like to make a brief response, sir?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir. Very briefly, Mr. President. Madam Majority Leader -- Majority Leader, the School District of Philadelphia is making significant progress at present better than the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania average, better than any big city in the country in 8th Grade Math, except Los Angeles. However, we also know that a majority of our students still do not perform at grade level or higher in reading and math.

And if we can make this much improvement, we believe that we can quadruple it if we take our limited resources and figure out how to push more high quality academic and extracurricular programming into less schools and address the under utilized and overcrowded schools at the same time. That's what we're talking for.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Chair recognizes Majority Leader, Gilmore-Richardson.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: May I just respond to that very quickly?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Absolutely.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: You know how deeply I feel about academic achievement and ensuring that our young people are on grade level in reading and in math and in all of their subjects. But what I'm talking about specifically is

relative to the real financial picture of the School District of Philadelphia. That's what I mean.

DR. WATLINGTON: Okay. Great.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: That's what I mean. Because I think that we have to have a real conversation with our families and with our community members. So academic achievement, that's for sure. That's why we're doing this, because we want to invest in our young people. But I think we have to have a real conversation, and we -- what's happening? Why are -- what are we solving for that? We must do this and that, we must go through this plan with all of these recommendations. What are you all seeking to solve for?

And I get the academic achievement piece. But deficit, there's a deficit here. What are

you solving for? And I think we owe families that response.

DR. WATLINGTON: May I have 60 seconds, Mr. President?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Sure, sir.

DR. WATLINGTON: We are, A, in the School District of Philadelphia, balancing our budget annually, and we still have a structural deficit. What a structural -- we have a $300 million structural deficit that was here in 2021 -- 2022.

A structural deficit means that beginning next year and thereafter our expenses will outpace the revenue that we have unless we get to constitutional level funding faster. We're being good stewards of the dollars. We have best investment grade credit rating. We have clean year over year audits. The bond markets have upgraded our

credit rating every year over the past three years. They've upgraded our credit outlook from stable to positive, even though they know we have a structural deficit in the future years.

Now, in order to attack that future deficit, three things have to happen. One, we have to get more funding. And it's going to take time for a historically underfunded school district for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to catch up to where we need to be.

Number two, we've got to do some things to tighten our belt too, and part of that is we can no longer afford to kick the can down the road and operate schools that have a lot of space and very few children in there. We've got about a 35 percent non-utilized rate across the district.

And number three, as we do

this work, we've got to keep families and children right in front of us, talk to them, don't surprise them, tell them the truth, be transparent, hear their feedback, and incorporate their feedback all along the way.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you very much.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You're welcome.

VICE CHAIR RICHARDSON: Thank you, Council President. Thank you for your commitment to putting families first.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You're welcome. The Chair recognizes -- and then we have to wrap up for public comment. The Chair recognizes Councilmember Young, then Councilmember Lozada, then Dr. Nina Ahmad, and that's it. Public hearing.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank

you, Mr. President. I just want to -- for the record, you just mentioned that -- you said 90 percent of the schools that are closed, the feeder schools essentially, will be -- have better test scores.

Can you provide us with the PSSA data of the receiving schools broken down? So for example, Ludlow is -- so those students are slated to go to four different schools: Kearney, Dunbar, Spring Garden, and I believe one more -- one other. Could you give us the PSSA data for those schools as well? All those receiving schools. I think that'd be helpful for us to really take a look at it, see if that's in fact actually true or not, right? Because I'm looking here, and from what I see, for the PSSA data from the -- you know, the schools in my district, you know, it's -- I don't

know if that to be -- if 90 percent of that is actually to be accurate.

So I would love if you can provide to the Chair that data, so we can make that our own assessment regarding that. And you also mentioned that no schools are slated to be closed for next year, but can you tell us what schools are going to close at the end of the 26/27 school year?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes. On the first question -- thank you, Councilmember Young. Yes, we will absolutely prepare, for the record, to the Council President, for the members of council, a listing of the at least currently recommended 20 schools; the receiving schools that are currently recommended on the record and the test scores.

And again, I want to be clear, 90 percent will have higher reading and/or math, not necessarily

both. Some cases both, but reading and/or math performance. And then secondly to your question, I'll ask Senior Advisor Landau to speak to after 26/27 school year.

MS. LANDAU: I think if we can provide -- we can provide a list for the record for -- of all the schools that would be -- either begin to phase out or close and --

DR. WATLINGTON: And the timeline.

MS. LANDAU: -- and the timeline or those.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: So -- I mean, I'm asking that to be put on the record because I have here, from the school district, that in my district -- if this was provided to me I'm sure it was provided to the rest of my colleagues, that in the 5th District, Ludlow is slated to close at the end of the 26/27 school year, Robert Morris is slated to

close at the end of the 26/27 school year.

So I'm just asking if you could let us know, right? And Philadelphians know what schools are slated to close at the end of that school year. That information is readily available. And so I'm just asking to put that on a record for us so folks can understand, and what decisions they need to make for their -- for themselves.

DR. WATLINGTON: I can assure you we are not trying to hide anything. Everything is -- someone said, Mr. President, they could not access our website. We'd be happy to pull that website up if -- because I look at it every single day. I promise you it's there. And we'll be happy to submit it for the record today.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Is it the website or the facilities

plan on the website?

DR. WATLINGTON: All of the components, including the record draft recommendations.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: All on the website?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes. Sure.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for the clarity.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: I just think that Philadelphians deserve to have that in -- on a -- on a public record so they can know what's happening, right? Everyone doesn't have access to the internet, right?

And so as we have social media coverage here and other folks covering this, you're -- you know, I think to let people know today, as we are in this hearing, to let us know what schools are slated to close at the end of next year, I

think would be very helpful. But I'm going to get to -- my final question is regarding my -- a district specific school in Bache-Martin. Bache-Martin is --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Point of information real quick.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Yes, sir.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I have to ask the question, Dr. Watlington, the member is asking, will you actually put on a record?

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: These schools that are slated to close in the 26/27 year. And even if the information is provided on the website, are you willing to go on the record and list the names of the schools that he's referring to?

DR. WATLINGTON: Absolutely. We'll ask the team to

pull that together and we'll do that before we leave. Yes, absolutely.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: All right.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: And regarding Bache-Martin, again, Bache-Martin is one of the schools that, you know, comparatively is doing pretty well, but it's busted at the seams already, and you're closing Waring and Robert Morris, to add to Bache-Martin, and I see that there it is slated to undergo some renovations.

But those populations, particularly at Waring is a homeless population, at Bache-Martin is a lot of folks that need other support there. And so the question is like, how will we handle the transportation issues, one, and also the other service issues that's

necessary to keep Bache-Martin at the level that it is, because the data shows, and research shows that receiving schools -- the test scores for receiving schools tend to go down when you combine these schools.

So what efforts, what commitments can you make to those parents and those families that their schools will, you know, maintain or even increase the level of service that they're getting from our school district?

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you, Councilmember Young.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And that -- I think that's what Member Gauthier is getting at as well. If you merge this magnet school, right, and a school that's non-magnet, we support all students, but it is a magnet school for a reason, right?

And you put them all in one

environment, how do you maintain that level of academic excellence in one environment that's commingled together? And that's a legitimate question, sir.

DR. WATLINGTON: I would say three things, Mr. President, Councilmember Young, one, we have some really good models in the city, in the district already, where you have multiple programs in a school building that are thriving.

And what's why I keep pointing to Lankenau High School, Northeast High School, and George Washington High School, it ranges from International Baccalaureate programs, which is the highest academic K-12 kind of opportunity that you could have in any -- internationally. And we have it here in Philadelphia. And it's not -- every student at Northeast does not participate. You have career

technical education programs as well.

Second thing, when we -- at some point when there's a final decision about students transferring to a different school, unlike 2012/13, we will not lay off people, principals, teachers, et cetera in these schools, and take the money to help with a deficit in the school district.

In these schools, our commitment on the record is we won't cut -- make cuts there, and we're going to take those dollars and reinvest them in these same families and students so that they get more, not less.

And the third thing I would say is we're going to start -- before I turn it to Senior Advisor Landau, to give you a bit more context, is we are going to staff up a transition office that the three

of us will be -- have reporting directly to me and us, that will be a one stop shop for whatever parents and children need.

If it's transportation, we're going to get it for them. We're going to wrap our arms around them. If it's social and emotional health and wellness supports, mental health supports, we're going to get it for them. If we need to do something extra and different to make sure that their individualized education plans are followed to the latter, we're going to personally oversight that among the three people you see sitting here. And with that I want to ask Senior Advisor Landau to give you some more context.

MS. LANDAU: Thank you. I just wanted to share -- you had raised Bache-Martin as an example. Bache-Martin is currently -- only 55

percent of the students in Bache-Martin actually come from the Bache-Martin catchment.

The majority of other students come from Morris and Waring already. So I think, you know, we are also hoping that we will build on communities that are already together. Obviously, they're more students, but in examples like that we know that these are communities where already we see a lot of these communities coming together.

DR. WATLINGTON: And the fact that Bache-Martin has 16.7 percentage point higher English language arts performance than Waring, and 22.5 percentage point greater performance than Waring, tells us that we've got to invest in receiving kids as well as the -- make sure that we support kids and families who are already there so that performance doesn't go down, as

was the case across the board in 2012/13. But we're committed to performance going up.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: But my question is, what does that look like though, right? Because if you're adding more students to a school, then you're increasing class sizes. Are you -- are you -- are you going to take away their library space that's in, you know, Bache-Martin? Like, how are you -- where are you going to find the classroom space in order to keep the ratio at a level where students actually achieve.

DR. WATLINGTON: Sure. That's --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And a point of information to Councilmember Isaiah Thomas.

COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: The question that Councilmember Young is asking is relevant to other

questions that have been asked earlier, when you talked about closing middle schools and reassigning them to elementary schools that were already filled.

So I just want to make sure that in the midst of answering Councilmember Young's questions, because he gave a specific example, you're also providing context around earlier questions when we talked about middle schools opening and those students being reassigned to buildings that already don't have enough space for the people who are in the building right now.

So I just wanted to make sure that that context was provided because of Councilmember Young's question. Thank you, Council President.

DR. WATLINGTON: We will clear. In some schools, Mr. President, we will be proposing

to add more space, and we built into the budget. In some places, not here. In this particular -- at Bache-Martin in particular, we'll have capacity and space to grow. Is that not right, Senior Advisor Landau?

MS. LANDAU: Bache-Martin will be receiving an investment of approximately $59 million, which will include an addition, which will be specifically built both to enhance the building because there's considerable concerns at the Bache-Martin facility now. That can also --

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: You could build a new school for that.

MS. LANDAU: But then also to increase the capacity for the expected additional enrollment.

DR. WATLINGTON: And Councilmember Young, let me just also note, when we say that class

sizes in the School District of Philadelphia are governed by the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, I promise you President Steinberg would not support, nor do we, going outside of those Collective Bargaining Agreements. We're going to follow them to the letter. So that doesn't -- so we won't go above and over those class sizes as part of this work.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: I mean, I just think even that bargain number is too high. I mean, that's just my personal opinion, right?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, Member Young.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You're welcome, sir. Chair recognizes, you all going to get me, Councilmember Lozada.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Thank you, Council President. I just want to -- I want to follow up on a -- on that topic. In the community meetings, we were told that the student-teacher ratio will be about 30 to 33 students; is that -- is that correct?

DR. WATLINGTON: That is consistent with the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. I believe there's a -- I see Dr. Dawson over there. Is that number correct? Is that our current --

MR. DAWSON: 1:30 in K2 through 3.

DR. WATLINGTON: 1:30 in K2 through 3. And 1:33 in Grades 4 through 12. Thank you, Dr. Dawson.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Okay. In districts like mine, right, I'm not going to speak for

everybody else, but districts like mine where a large number of students are having IEP, you know that those students require more hands on, you know, independent attention. And so putting the pressure on a teacher to handle 30 to 33 or 28 to 33 students is -- that's a lot to ask for a teacher for, right?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Especially when they just don't have an IEP but they have all of these other social challenges that come with them and that they bring to school that their families have. And so I just want us to kind of think about what we're asking our teachers to do in these spaces.

DR. WATLINGTON: I will tell your, Councilmember Lozada, thank you for that feedback. I go into schools where I see class sizes

that are extraordinarily small, 10, 11 students. And we absolutely in the school district can't operate efficiently a school district where in some places the class size is just so small that I can't get a math teacher in there, I can't get a foreign language teacher in there. Some of it we are self-inflicting our own wounds here.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I understand that. I'm just saying, let's think about that. You know, everyone -- it's no secret. I said -- I've always said that I am an advocate for education. I come from the Catholic school -- from the Catholic school world, right? My children went to private school. I'm blessed like that. Not everyone has that opportunity.

And as we make these changes, we need to make sure that we are talking to those other school

systems that are in place. Example, charter schools that are within a walking distance from our public schools that are closing.

And, you know, I have to say that I am a little bit disappointed in the fact that when it is convenient we say charter schools are public schools, and when it's not convenient we say we don't want to lose our kids to the charter school system, right? And so let's be very cautious of that.

Some of our charter schools are a better option. That's just a reality. I'm going to use Memphis as an example, who is a few blocks away from where we are looking to make changes. And no one has had a conversation with Memphis about the possibilities of children potentially -- or families choosing a local charter school to go into. And so at what point do we think it

is important to connect with our Catholic schools, our private schools, and our charter schools within a walking distance of those schools where we're going -- that are going to be impacted to say we need you to care for our families and our children, and these are the possibilities.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you. Your point is well taken.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: When are we going to do that? Have we done that? And is that even being considered?

DR. WATLINGTON: I have not -- personally a superintendent since I've been here, my number one priority has been to improve reading performance, math performance, graduation rates, and get dropout rates down in the district operated schools because that's where I have control over the budget. That's

where I have control over staffing. And so I've focused on what's in my locus of control. But I do agree with you that all 200,000 children in the city are our children.

COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: I think our overall goal needs to be better educating our children and opening up opportunities for them wherever it is that their families choose. Those children will receive the best academic journey and wherever that space is that works best for them.

And so I believe, and I'm going to request that in my district -- I'm not -- I'm not going to speak for my colleagues, but in my district, I have some very responsible, very capable charter school providers and Catholic schools. I think that we should be concerned about all of our children and their education, not what

system, right? If our system is not right, and until we get our system right, we need to look at the community around us to take care of our children.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. Councilmember Dr. Nina Ahmad.

COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank you, Council President. I just want to drill down a little bit on what some of my colleagues touched on, particularly Waring School, and the type of student population that goes to that school, and how we are making sure the feeder school that you're going to send them to, Bache-Martin, is ready in multitude of ways.

So you're -- the population at Waring right now is a high needs population with many families experiencing homelessness. They also serve families from around the

globe who come to CHOP for treatment. Many of them severely ill. And there's a significant portion of the student population who receive special education services.

So given all of that, and given that you're going to feed them, what -- and this is being specific, devil is in the details, like what are we doing to make sure this population is well received, well integrated, and well taken care of? And I know this was echoed by many of my colleagues.

And the second piece to that is, you know, you mentioned about performance metrics, right? When you have a population like this, you -- it's apples and oranges if you're going to compare to other schools in terms of what type of student population goes there.

And if you're using that as

a reason, including the low enrollment, I see that these classes here at Waring, at least one of the classes that I know about, is called under utilized, has 19 students, and then in a -- in a second grade, 22 students. Those are optimal numbers for this type of population.

So I would like to know in your metrics that you have set severely under utilized, is it under utilized for the entire school or you going classroom by classroom and saying, we don't have enough kids, the 33 kids per classroom. Because we don't want 33 kids in a classroom, at least in my opinion.

So what are you terming under utilized? I just need to understand how you are using this data and what is the broad brush you're painting a school like Waring with?

DR. WATLINGTON: I'm going

to ask Senior Advisor Landau to speak to what does under utilized really mean?

MS. LANDAU: So the term under utilized is about the size of the building and the number of students. So that really could mean that you have -- you have to look at the actual number of students, right? Because you might have a small building with a very small program, but it's well utilized because of the size of the building. Or you might have a huge building that looks really under utilized but actually the program's not that small. It's just in a very large building.

In the case of Waring, I do think it is important looking at classes. Waring is a K through 8 school. You see, yes, at a high they have a 7th Grade class of 27 students, but they also have a 1st

Grade class of 10 students, a 3rd Grade class of nine students, a 4th Grade class of 16 students. Those are very small numbers.

And what we would propose doing to the point that you raised earlier, Bache-Martin does actually have a lot of specialized programs in it. It is a school that welcomes a lot of students with diverse needs.

So for instance, when we have a small school like Waring, we will be able to go to each and every family, whether they are there because of an IEP, because of any other -- whether they opted into the school and make sure that they understand the transition and can work with them on a specific transition plan into Bache-Martin.

So that will be the goal, is to make sure that each and every one of those students receives

personal outreach and a personalized plan to make that transition.

COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank you. And I know the superintendent referred to this, that there's going to be a special unit --

DR. WATLINGTON: Transitional office.

COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: -- for this transitional unit. Are you using behavioral health and mental health supports in that setup very specifically, particularly for a school like this, where not only the populations I mentioned, we have also asylum seekers who are at this school, right?

So we have very diverse populations with very diverse needs, but every child is precious. So we need to make sure we are disaggregated in the type of services we are going to give them, whether they're in Bache-Martin or

they stay here, whatever the case may be. Just wanted to make sure we are not losing people in this broad-based way of doing metrics around that. I'm concerned about that.

DR. WATLINGTON: Duly noted. Thank you, Councilmember Ahmad.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you very much. And last member of Council, Rue Landau. You just came back. Very brief question. We have to go straight in the public comment.

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: I promise. I'm going to start with a comment that for some of our schools that are doing well and the students are progressing it's because they have small classes, and 33 should never ever be our standard. Thank you. The second thing is that I've gone on your facility just to make sure I wasn't wrong. I've gone on

your facilities plan online.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: He said he'll pull it up now. So you-all want to settle up this problem.

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Okay. I play -- let's do it right now. I played on --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Somebody want to turn on --

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: I played on the decision-making progress tab, and what I've seen when you look up a school is a conclusion as to what -- the conclusion of whatever metrics that you used and how you got there, but no data and no understanding of a process.

So I tried. I really tried with you. I'm telling you. You bring up a school and it'll tell you that it is -- I actually looked at Conwell, and you have four different

points of matrix here. And for the first two it comes up kind of medium adequate and the second two is falling behind. But some of it is class size. Okay.

What are we going to do? Why are we not as a school -- and I'm -- by the way, I'm going to stop for a second. We absolutely need to invest in our facilities. I am very happy about this. I am the one person who said I want to put more money into this. I want this to happen.

But when you've got a school like Conwell who might be experiencing some neighborhood disruption, we invest in it. We recruit, we get the amazing principal out there with balloons saying you got to come to this school. That's what we do. We don't close it down. That's what we do. So I'll leave that.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So just in wrapping up Dr. Watlington, and just quite sure, well one, all the questions that were asked of members who requested information just make sure you get to the Chair so we can disseminate to members of Council and we can do our due diligence on follow up.

I had two small wrap up questions. One, have we taken into consideration these school closures with the more than 10,000 homeless students that are part of our district in terms of making sure they're not impacted by these closures? So have any analysis been done regarding the homeless student population?

DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, Mr. President. In fact, the federal McKinney-Vento rules legislation requires that when a student tells us that they're experiencing

homelessness or we just know it, homeless kids can enroll wherever they so choose without penalty from principals or any administrator.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. And another question is around -- and I have a longer conversation about when they transfer land to the Land Bank and making sure that we address the issue of gentrification with these parcels of land. And I support the development of schools, abandoned schools, for a variety of different uses. And housing is one of them.

But also taking into consideration how we balance that development with the surrounding community. And I think about the schools that have been shut down in Point Breeze, and all of them -- well, I was able to work out some level of affordable workforce housing percentage with one of them,

and the other one wasn't. But I do know when I rode passed these schools today, you know, they're housing. And so we take that in consideration.

And the last part, as we continue to do a deeper dive on -- one key aspect of the plan that is concerning to me is that even though it says this is the commitment to all of the 10 District Councils and with a specific amount, like the proposal is contingent upon other variables that we don't control.

We talk about philanthropy, we don't control that, right? It can go either way. We talk about Harrisburg, we don't control that. It go have -- you know, other than that 1 billion that you know for a fact that you're going to borrow on your own, is the only definite money that you have. And also it depends on how much you come in a City

Council for. And we decide where we decide to provide to the district.

And that's the part that I look at as -- that's one key aspect, because it seemed like 2.8 billion hinges on 1.8 billion with other individuals having to say so. And they could say, we'll give you the full 1.8 or, you know, other variables may be at play.

And so I'm a wishful thinker, you know, pragmatic idealist that we can accomplish it. But in reality terms, in terms of this being definite and finite, it's just something I believe we have to pay attention to. That's all I have.

DR. WATLINGTON: Duly noted. Yes, sir.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: At this time we are going to ask for any brief questions, comments, from members of Council before we call up

the public, who's been waiting patiently for us all day to testify.

Dr. Watlington, listen, and I communicate with you in this capacity, I communicate to you when I see you out and about. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your -- being open. You have said on several different times, I am open to listen to what members of council have to say, rather that be school, rather there be other aspects.

So we do want to thank you for least coming in here with an open mind as opposed to, Hey, here's the proposal and here's my perspective and, you know, I'm going about my business. So thank you for being a gentleman as you are and your leadership. I tell you that privately, I tell you that publicly.

This is just a very complex process that we all are trying to

work on, which the ultimate goal is the academic achievement for all of our children all across the city of Philadelphia. So thank you for your time, sir.

DR. WATLINGTON: And thank you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. The Chair recognizes Councilmember Jeffrey Young.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank you, Mr. President. I just wanted to see if we were going to get that information on the record about the schools that are slated to close at the end of the 26/27 school year.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You know what, that was on my mind too.

DR. WATLINGTON: We are ready, Mr. President. We are ready. And we were not going to just walk out of here either. I just wanted you to know that. We weren't just

going to walk out.

MS. LANDAU: All right. This is as the plan is currently drafted. Now, the schools that would either begin phasing out or closing at the end of the 26/27 school year would be Fitler, Penn Treaty, Tilden, AMY Northwest, Wagner, Harding, Stetson, all of them would begin phasing out. So they would stop accepting grades. They wouldn't close until several years later once they had -- once they had reached -- all of their students had graduated.

The schools that would close would be Blankenburg, Overbrook Elementary School, Ludlow, Morris, Pennypacker, Welsh, Conwell, Robeson, Motivation, Parkway West, Lankenau and Parkway Northwest.

DR. WATLINGTON: Mr. President, last thing I want to say --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
Yes, sir.
DR. WATLINGTON: -- in regards to the retention is, we are also looking at incentives that -- a model for folks in schools that would have phase closures so that they have an incentive to stay with those schools until they end before they transition to another school in the District. We want to keep everyone who's in good standing in this house and not have them to go to anywhere else because we value all of these verified employees.
COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
I was trying to let you all go, right?
DR. WATLINGTON: As we take our leave, sir.
COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
So, Jim Harrity, Chairman of Labor, talked about -- and it's something you're going to have to deal with,

like when the parents hear these schools they're going to be closed in these types of changes, do they continue the exodus of going to an alternative school setting as opposed to staying? But I'm confident, I believe in your leadership.

I don't think you stuck around just for the sake of sticking around, because you could have put School District of Philadelphia on your resume and said, you know what, new mayor come in, I'm going to go do something different. And so, looking forward to seeing, as we give you our feedback, what this looks like to try to keep as many kids in the system as possible so everybody can get a quality academic achievement education. With that being said, thank you very much, sir.

DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, Mr. Christmas, will you call the first panel during public comment, please.

THE CLERK: Yes. Would Leshawna Coleman and Robin Cooper, please come forward. Again, Leshawna Coleman and Robin Cooper.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: What's your name, sir?

MR. ROSEMAN: Jerry Roseman.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: He didn't call you up yet, Mr. Roseman. It's still Leshawna. We didn't call you up yet.

MR. CHRISTMAS: No, we didn't. Hold on. First of all, do we have Leshawna Coleman and Robin Cooper?

MS. COLEMAN: I'm Leshawna Coleman.

THE CLERK: Okay. Is Ms. Robin Cooper here? Ma'am, did

you want to take a seat at the -- that's who we called. So we would --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You're chief of staff.

MS. COOPER: Yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We met the other day. I know you.

THE CLERK: Ma'am -- Ms. Leshawna Cooper, could you state your position or the -- any kind of entity?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Chief of staff.

THE CLERK: Chief of staff of the --

MS. COLEMAN: I'm Leshawna Coleman. I'm the Chief of Staff and Chief Trustee of the Health and Welfare Fund at PFT.

THE CLERK: Oh, beautiful. Okay. And, Ms. Robin Cooper, what about you?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

The Robin.

THE CLERK: The Robin.

MS. COOPER: Dr. Robin Cooper, President and Principal Officer of Teamsters Local 502 CASA.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much, ma'am. And welcome. Well, Ms. Leshawna Coleman, please state your name for the record and begin with your testimony.

MS. COLEMAN: Sure. L-E-S-H-A-W-N-A C-O-L-E-M-A-N. Okay. Good morning -- excuse me. Good afternoon, Council President Johnson, Education Chair Thomas and members of the Committee of the Whole.

My name is Leshawna Coleman. I'm Chief of Staff and Chief Trustee of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Health and Welfare Fund. President Arthur Steinberg cannot be here today due to an AFT Executive Committee

meeting. The PFT represents more than 14,000 educators who work in the School District of Philadelphia.

We are the exclusive bargaining agent for Philly Public School educators and are proud to be the foremost advocates for children's education, health and wellness in the city of Philadelphia. We often remind the district that educators know the conditions of our schools facilities inside and out.

As the recent snowstorm and deep freeze have demonstrated, when our members experience -- when our members experience and knowledge are ignored, students and families pay the price. No one who works for the school district knows the urgency of modernizing aging pipes, sewer systems, shoddy insulation and heating and cooling systems more acutely than PFT members.

Just ask those of us who have moved heaven and earth these last several weeks to distribute extra coats and scarfs to students in 40-degree classrooms. A week ago, Stetson Middle School went virtual due to still freezing building conditions. Our members know that the ambitious plan for our facilities is overdue, but we also know that mass closures a decade ago did not result in meaningful cost savings to the district. Communities were vacant, abandoned, former schools sites sit attracting illegal dumping and crime, know that they are not better off.

Our position remains our schools need fixing and funding, not closure. Following a thorough review, the PFT has concluded that the district's 10-year facilities master plan or FMP does not provide sufficient detail or data to inform

binding decisions about school closures, co-location, or repurposing.

We did not reach this conclusion in haste. We spent the past more month pouring over the $2.8 billion plan, checking assertions and claims against the experiences of our members who know these buildings best.

The PFT is bravely concerned that the FMP will pervert distrust anxiety among beloved established educators and schools designed for closure. It's imperative that execution of the plan does not spark an exodus of teachers and specialists to surrounding districts and exacerbate a crisis level staffing shortness in Philly Public Schools.

I am here today alongside Jerry Roseman, our environmental director, and a leading expert in

the district's aging historically toxic facilities. You will hear from him more detailed concerns about data, mythology, and transparency. Our members know that every dollar put into the district, whether from the state or federal government or local governments, is hard fought and deserved. Because the PFT has been fighting for our school's fair share funding since our founding. We know that hard decisions must be made to address student overcrowding in one school and empty floors in classrooms in another school just as a few neighborhoods over.

We know our students and staff facing poor and uncomfortable building conditions deserve immediate relief. But the FMP, as proposed, raises far more questions than have been answered since it's released in January. The district

must do better, show their work and provide all data used to make determinations about targeted schools.

Austerity and institutional discriminatory practices against black and brown communities are why we are here today. But let's be clear, it's our union of educators, our students, and our families and our neighbors who hold solutions for a better future for our schools. Our union has a saying that resonates especially in long under-resourced communities, Nothing about us without us. For your convenience, we have transmitted our written testimony along with supplemental charts and data to the offices of every member.

I'm happy to answer questions you have after Mr. Roseman shares our findings. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Can I -- can I take a point of personal privilege real quick? Mr. Silman, come on up real quick. Did I say your name correctly?

MR. ROSEMAN: Roseman.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes, sir. What's his name?

MS. COLEMAN: Jerry Roseman.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Mr. Roseman, come on up. Only because his testimony is in consultation with.

MS. COLEMAN: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Go ahead.

MR. ROSEMAN: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm Jerry Roseman. I'm the director of environmental science for the PFT. And I've been doing that job for a very -- a lot -- a number of years. I've -- that work involves me looking at the

schools directly by visiting these buildings and doing kind of deep dive research about the school conditions.

My experience and expertise is in environmental and building and data science related to school conditions. And I've done work for the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund looking at these conditions in the context of equity in Alabama, Louisiana, and Maryland. And I work with Philadelphia's Children's Research Center for environmental health at Penn.

So I look at these conditions a lot and have been spending a lot of time looking at the Philadelphia school district situation, and was on the project planning team as part of the school district's process.

That was the team that was supposed to help put the plan

together. So I want to talk today a little bit about would I -- would I end up doing and understanding about how to determine what's going on in the school district condition with the school district, and how I think a plan should be developed.

I think what we have right now is not really an effective plan of any type, because the underlying data and inputs that are required for such a plan don't exist. In my case, I've asked for this information and data from the school district many times, and all -- as part of the project planning team we asked many times, that information was not provided.

So when I look at this, the way that I start and I think other investigators do this is to look at the needs of the Philadelphia School District.

And there have been four

planning processes for -- in the last maybe 15 years, the one in 2012/13 that led to closures. One in 2015/17, an update in 2022, and now this one. They've all shown the same thing, of course, that the conditions are really very challenging and difficult in most of our schools and buildings.

And I'm going to separate schools and buildings, because from the environmental science perspective the building is where the conditions that we talk about and the fixes are, the programs, the schools really relate to the children and staff and where they move. And there we're talking more about program alignment and some of the vulnerability and neighborhood issues.

On the condition front, one thing I can tell you is that our district has a value. The buildings

have a value of about $18 billion across these buildings. And that tells us something that's distressing and helpful here.

You need seven percent of that to manage your buildings, the facility conditions, capital and maintenance and operations, that's $1.2 billion a year. That's what we need. So with $2.8 billion tenure plan, doesn't really help us get to where the district has been saying we're going to get to. It doesn't result in what we're looking at. You need much more money than that.

Now, it's not to say that we shouldn't use this money and do this, we need to. And there is a plan, I think, that can actually improve our buildings. It's just not this one. And one thing to know is the scale of what we're facing, because that really helps in planning what to do. So we need

more money than this plan comes close to giving us. When we look at the -- the information hasn't been provided in detail, but there's a lot of detail out there if you know where to look from the earlier surveys, they're on the district's website.

So we collected all that information and looked at that information. And it turns out that there are about 4,000 systems, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, roof, windows, that are unsatisfactory and poor across the district buildings. Some are actually in schools that are good and schools that are considered fair. And so when I'm thinking about the -- this kind of planning, you realize that you need to account for those systems in schools too when you're -- when you're thinking about that.

In addition to the facility conditions, with the PFT, we've used a mobile application to get information from staff about the conditions in the building, the as-lived experience. So we've plugged that information in as well. We've gotten 6,000 of those reports over several years. They confirm the condition status actually in the buildings.

And one of the things that we know needs to happen is all that information has to be blended together in order to come up with any kind of a plan. So I don't know -- is my time -- okay. I will -- I mean, I guess the points that I want to make is that we don't have that data for the plan. We -- that information and data has to be given.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And just clarify for the record, the

members of Council, what's the specific data you were requesting while you were part of the planning committee that wasn't given to you, specifically?

MR. ROSEMAN: Where did the score -- where did the unsatisfactory score come from, for instance.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That data?

MR. ROSEMAN: Right. That information.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Okay. All right. Thank you very much.

MR. ROSEMAN: Sure. Thank you. Thanks very much.

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Jerry. Jerry. Jerry.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Chair recognizes Councilmember Rue Landau.

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Just

one quick question for Jerry Roseman. Do you believe the data that you want exists?

MR. ROSEMAN: Of course.

COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Okay. Thank you.

MR. ROSEMAN: Sure.

THE CLERK: Thank you both very much for your testimony. Would Ms. Judith Palmer -- Oh, okay. I forgot about her. Oh, I'm sorry. Ms. Robin Cooper.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you Doctor for your patience.

MS. COOPER: No worries.

THE CLERK: Doctor, thank you very much for being here today. Please state your name for the record and begin with your testimony.

MS. COOPER: Dr. Robin Cooper.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Please begin.

MS. COOPER: To City Council President Johnson, Majority Whip Gilmore-Richardson, Minority Whip O'Rourke, Education Chair Isaiah Thomas, and all esteemed City Councilmembers.

I sit here today with no joy in my heart because I truly believe in the leadership of Superintendent Watlington due to the academic improvement since his arrival four years ago.

Understanding the complexities facing the superintendent and ultimately the school board, I understand about the lack of funding, because CASA has been in the fight traveling to Harrisburg to fight for fairness for vulnerable students of Philadelphia.

I understand about the close bonds Philadelphians have with their schools because I am one of them, having attended Meade at 18th

and Oxford, Duckrey at 16th and Diamond, Conwell at Clearfield and Jasper. And lastly, I am a member of the first graduating class of Parkway Center City at 12th and Market.

My ties didn't stop there. I attended Pennsylvania State University. I attended Cheyney University for grad school, and I received my doctorate from St. Joseph's University.

Why start my testimony this way is simple: I am a true-blue Philadelphia and Pennsylvania success story. I received everything that I had from public institutions. I understand the need to change, improve, revitalize. I understand the need to work in partnership with our district to do what's best for our children. I understand the complexities of this situation. What I don't understand

is why eliminate all neighborhood middle schools with the exception to keeping the most privileged middle school. I don't understand that.

I don't understand why move neighborhood children out of their own schools to more -- to move more privileged children into those schools complete with total renovations. I don't understand that. Why weren't the existing neighborhood students given the options around building beautiful new edifice. Neighborhood children matter. Why continue with the school selection process that truly limits those who get in?

The way the system is set now you can have 300 children waiting to get into the high school of their choice and limit the school to 70 slots, thus leading to a decline in enrollment.

Approximately 20 years ago, Paul

Valles created a smaller high school option, hence giving parents student choice on whether to send their children to a large or small high school. This was the parent's choice. Did the parents survey say that they wanted a return to a larger environment? What exactly did the survey say?

What I don't understand is the rationale of how some schools will close immediately while others will remain open for the next three to seven years or more. What I don't understand is why DEI officials did not speak loudly against the many inequities of this plan prior to allowing this plan to be released.

What I don't understand is why union leaders such as CASA were informed about superficial parts of the plan, but our engagement was not sought to share historical data

points on our schools.

Why include only to exclude when it really matters? So what is CASA seeking? CASA is seeking -- as the president of and the principal officer of Teamsters Local 502, CASA, we just seek authentic collaboration. We want -- we want to know about the plan, the real plan. I have 33 years in this district. That is a history. I am a walking Philadelphia success story.

I've been born and bred in Philadelphia. I live, breathe, cry, and die Philadelphia. So I am very disappointed that when it came time to discuss historical data, there was no say. I don't speak for other unions, but I'm almost certain that if I was excluded -- and I have a great working relationship with the school district.

My question is at what

point are you included at the table and at what point are you excluded? The history matters. The history of neighborhoods matter. I am saying that if I could sit here as the first African American -- the first African American woman, and the first woman of Teamsters Local 502, and I received everything that I have in me from the School District of Philadelphia and from state schools, I should have a seat at the table. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: The Chair now recognizes Councilmember Isaiah Thomas.

COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Thank you, Dr. Cooper. We appreciate that. And I also want to put on the record that the Education Committee did have a number of meetings with yourself and other leaders to just get your feedback as it relates to these issues.

I'm not going to ask you to -- I'm not going to ask you to provide a synopsis of those conversations, but you did -- in the midst of listening and learning from you, you raised a couple red flags around examples of things that were in the plan that you felt like were extremely problematic. I know we're running low on time and we want to hear other testimony, but can you just take 60 seconds just to highlight things that might have been in the plan that you feel like are like extremely problematic, that you feel like should be brought to all of the members of City Council attention and not just the Education Committee?

MS. COOPER: Absolutely. I just think that when you're looking -- when you're looking why close all middle schools with the exception of one? And when you are looking why

move out neighborhood children to move them to more privileged schools? I just think just looking at the overall plan, the overall plan speaks to privilege. So I'm more concerned. I've been both. I was at a neighborhood school, school student, me. Don't care if I didn't have teachers. My parents were poor. They didn't have a lot of money.

I had teachers who were grounded, who told my mother, Hey, this young lady, she needs to be in Conwell. So what happens when there's not a magnet school for mainly African Americans and Latino children? So what happens? So I'm well aware, and I do believe in a plan where if all of the schools can get better, that's fine.

My concern is why are we eliminating? I'm really concerned with the middle school -- the middle

school elimination, because the middle school, that's the meat and potatoes. So with a middle school, those children, 6th, 7th, 8th, or sometimes 5th to 8th, they receive very different foods, they receive a very different social -- social emotional aspect.

In a middle school, you have a full-service kitchen. So I really think the middle school is about dollars and cents. But in those big middle schools, you are able to eat, to grow, to move about.

Now, I may be in the minority. I don't like the K-8 concept, because I don't think a 7th and 8th Grader should have to eat what a kindergartner eats. I don't believe that middle school children -- I just think that it's a different -- it's a different time.

Middle school students, whether we want to believe it or

not, you know, they're trying to get their first little kiss. They're trying to really walk the halls. I don't like prep school -- prep classes on the same floor with a kindergarten and 8th Grader. One may be in music, the other may be in art, just because that's the way the prep schedule is made. So I really believe in middle school. I believe in junior high school, too. I just want to be really clear that when we're eliminating, we are not eliminating just for the fiscal aspect, because we won't have any middle school.

And if we have one middle school that's that largely services Latino and African American, what are we saying about that? So we didn't eliminate all of the middle school; we eliminated all of them with the exception of one. And that's a privileged school. I love

privileged schools. I went to a couple. But we are saying that the regular neighborhoods are not good enough, and I think we need to switch that around.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. What's that one school they're not eliminating?

MS. COOPER: Say it again.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: What's the one school that's not being eliminated?

MS. COOPER: Masterman. Masterman Middle School will move into Waring.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: What is good for the geese should be good for the gander, right? Point of information, Councilman Young.

COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank you. And they're also -- they're also adding a middle school for Palumbo, right? So let's put that -- let's put that on the record as

well. So they're not just taking a -- you know, there -- so there is a model where middle schools can thrive, but not in certain neighborhoods. So, thank you, Mr. President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, they are connecting Palumbo with Charles Elementary School, and that part of my district is gentrifying, so it would probably be a conversation to have, but -- okay. Thank you very much, Dr. Cooper.

MR. COOPER: Thank you. Appreciate your time.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much. Would Ms. Judith Palmer, Erica Green, and Lisa Haver, please come forward.

Okay. Again Mr. Judith Palmer, Erica Green, and Lisa Haver. Thank you very much.

Please state your name for the record and begin with your

testimony.

MS. GREEN: Sure. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Erica Green. I'm the proud principal of Conwell Middle Magnet School, the first middle magnet school in the School District of Philadelphia.

So today I'm asking -- well, first, let me honor council president, members of council, and specifically Councilmember Lozada from the councilmanic 7th District, in which we love, along with Conwell alum, educator, Councilmember Thomas.

So I'm Erica Green, as you heard me say, proud principal of Conwell Middle Magnet School. Conwell represents an opportunity, history, and the belief that brilliance lives in every neighborhood, and closing it would erase a legacy that still matters.

For many years, Conwell has

been the cornerstone of Kensington community, a place where students flourish and leaders are born. Alumni include leaders in governments, education, law, media, public safety, and professional sports, living proof that diamonds are truly in our backyard. Conwell does not take from the community; we actually add to the community. Teachers show up more than most in our academic division.

Conwell was one of three schools in our division out of five learning networks to have 100 percent of our teachers attend work 90 percent of school days. We were just awarded this at our December citywide principals' meeting. We generate and operate a food pantry. Our students give back through the National Junior Honor Society, community service and partnership with the World Affairs Council,

Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts, Broad Street Love, and other civic organizations.

Our school shows up, whether it's in neighborhood cleanups, alongside leaders, advocacy around the opioid crisis, or opening our doors to host critical city events. Conwell has served as a trusted host for swearing in a Philadelphia police commissioner and Mayor Parker and Councilmembers who came to witness firsthand the realities of Kensington community. When the city needed space, Conwell said yes and showed up.

The Conwell building is celebrating 100 years. So bright and shiny does not always mean better as what is being proposed. Philly is a city that values its history and historical properties.

Conwell has received

substantial public and philanthropic investment, HVAC upgrades, security enhancements, modern lighting, renovated science labs, a makerspace, digital media lab, and state-of-the-art athletic facilities made possible by partners like Love Football, Fiesta School Yards, and the Pinkness, and Lindy Foundations. Partners have only visited our school once and they're impressed by the students' leadership and what they see, but also what they feel inside of Conwell in the heart of Kensington.

Those investments were weighed for students in Kensington. We owe it to them to improve their neighborhood, not push them out once the neighborhood begins to thrive. Conwell's success is rooted in its people, its history and its impact. I urge the school district, along with school board members, and all

of you here in City Council to do what is right, fair, and just for children in Kensington. Using the words of my favorite Dr. Constance E. Clayton, Do not let the almighty dollar drive a choice that removes a beautifully designed historic school with beautifully gifted people that can be displaced elsewhere, the essence, the prestige and impact of Conwell cannot be duplicated, replicated, or appropriated.

So many partners, so many advocates, so many leaders, so many promises. I respectfully ask City Council to stand in support of Conwell Middle Magnet schools and other middle schools that are affected by this proposal. Preserve the building, preserve the culture, preserve the legacy, because history matters and Conwell matters. Thank you.

THE CLERK: Thank you very

much for your testimony. You ladies decide who wants to go first.

Ms. Haver?

MS. HAVER: Just tell me -- am I on?

THE CLERK: Why don't you go ahead.

MS. HAVER: Thank you. My name is Lisa Haver. I am here representing the Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools. We're a grassroots organization of educators and parents who came together in 2012 to fight the mass school closings carried out by the state-imposed School Reform Commission. It is a betrayal to all of us who fought to regain local control that this mayoral control board is about to carry out another round of public-school closings.

Also, want to note that I'm a former district parent. One of my kids went to Conwell, and I'm a

former middle school teacher. Go Harding Hawks.

APPS members attended facilities meetings in North Philly, South Philly, West Philly, Chinatown, and the Northeastern 24 and 25. In the past two weeks, we have attended meetings at high schools, middle schools, elementary schools across the city who are facing elimination. Councilmembers who have attended those meetings and have witnessed the frustration and anger from members of those school communities, heard parents and students at Lankenau, Conwell, Robeson, Stetson, who feel that their second homes are being foreclosed on, and they can't get an answer to the honest answer to the simple question of why . They dispute misinformation in the deceptive language being presented by district staff and the

consultants who the -- whose firms the board has paid a total of over $5 million.

They have talked about and documented the incorrect data that the data has included about many schools' capacities, resources, enrollment and achievement. Some of the board members were in those community meetings too, and if they really listened, they could not, in good conscience, vote to close those schools.

The most important thing to understand about this plan is that no one has given a reason why. And your questions here today, I want to say thank you, have reflected that. It's not because buildings are crumbling, it can't be about under enrollment, because nearly half the charter schools who are not included in this facilities review are under-enrolled. And it is definitely not

because any parent or student wants it.

I'm going to skip down and say, the most obvious and shocking feature of this district's proposal -- and I -- and I say proposal because it is way too muddled and incomplete to call it a plan. The most shocking feature is its cruelty and lack of humanity.

Teachers who have stayed for decades and dedicated themselves to their schools throughout the privatization, the EMOs, the over testing, the neglect, not to mention the district itself sabotaging their enrollment are now being tossed aside.

Parents who managed to navigate the district's application process and found a safe and nurturing school for their children feel that they're the victims of a bait and switch. Students who

worked hard to get into certain schools are now wondering why none of their work counts with the district.

Alumni see part of their history raced. Community members who volunteered and worked through their friends of and home in schools feel that their work has been in vain. And when you come down to it, what all of them feel, now, is that the schools that they work to maintain, and sometimes establish like Parkway Northwest, they dedicated themselves to those schools, and they feel they no longer have a choice. So APPS members thank the members of councils.

Council, we will continue to stand up for public schools and we will be at the February 26th board meeting to say, do not close our public schools. Thank you.

COUNCILMEMBER RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you very much for your testimony. I wanted to remind everyone, because we appreciate you being here and waiting for us all day, please try to adhere to the two-minute bell for public comment. I know we have young people here. Are you all slated to testify as well? So we want to hear from the young people also, and each and every one of you who are here. So please adhere to the time as we have a very, very long witness list, not just the folks that you see in this room. Thank you.

MS. RUBIN: Good afternoon. Thank you. Thank you. And by the way, I timed myself for two minutes. I thought maybe it was longer. My name is Linda Rubin. I'm a member of APPS. I am a retired teacher for three years and counselor for 38 years.

Yesterday's Inquirer included the following quote in Kristen Graham's article about the new plan. This plan is about ensuring that more students in every neighborhood have access to the high quality in academics, programs, and facilities they deserve.

What Clayton said in a statement, Sounds great, except the key words have access to' are very slippery suckers. What does that mean? Students will be moved to another school where they will have access to programs that they may be interested in. Having access means that the programs may be in the new school but not who will actually be assigned to them, because now they will be competing with the students from that new school.

The district's purposely vague phrasing means that not that many students will not have access

to these programs if they're actually included in the curriculum.

Most important, parents and students have been telling you quite loudly that the atmosphere provided by the smaller number of students and faculty helps many children overcome their shyness bit by bit, who already assume they're dumb and might as well give up and or get angry.

Some students do far better in this -- in the atmosphere of smaller schools and are better able to learn in that environment. Many other students thrive in the bustle of a large school.

The former group can be emotionally overwhelmed just by being in hallways filled with hundreds of loud teens and shrink into the safety of being unknown and invisible. We adults tend to forget the depth of our own past fears:

automatic assumptions that others are smarter, more popular, more athletic than we are, and the dreaded being laughed at.

Children's bodies and brain functions mature at very different levels in different time frames and in the vagaries of each child's academic, social, and emotional development. We educators must take all of these individual differences and fears into account. It doesn't sound like children's actual individual needs are being given with their importance in these equations. Thank you.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for your testimony. Would Ms. Ann Dorn, Desiree Whitfield, and Ann Park, please come forward? Again, Ann Dorn, Desiree Whitfield and Ann Park, please. Okay. And maybe Chris Sofa and Rebecca Roman could please come forward.

Thank you very much, ma'am. Please state your name for the record and begin with your testimony.

MS. DORN: My name is Ann Dorn. I've been a parent in the Philadelphia School District for 15 years, and I'm currently serving on the Parent and Community Advisory Council. The first thing I -- the Parent and Community Advisory Council to the school board.

The first thing I'd ask of council is if you could please confirm Joyce Wilkerson to the school board. My understanding is while she's serving without a proper confirmation, everything that happens is subject to lawsuits. We don't have money to waste on lawyers. We don't have time to waste on policies that nobody can count on because they're tied up in court. We would really appreciate

it.

I think it's been long enough that if there's some real issue with her, a new candidate can be found. Apparently, that's not going to happen. Can -- the children of Philadelphia please just have a school board that has the legal authority to do what they need to do. While we're on the subject of lawsuits, the school selection lottery is also a subject of a lawsuit.

Dr. Watlington and the board president suggested it can't even be commented on. Because of this lawsuit, I'm sure that there's no reason why it cannot be altered that for the duration of this lawsuit, we have to have a bad policy that is causing under enrollment in a lot of lot of these schools that we'd rather close the schools than change a policy, which

is so bad, it's the subject of a lawsuit. That really doesn't seem to be a very valid excuse, and I think movement needs to come on the school selection process rather than just closing these schools.

There seems to be a lot of closing schools rather than solving problems in other ways. For example, the Algebra 1 issue. You don't need a specific sort of building to teach Algebra 1. You need a specific sort of teacher, you need a principal who's able to recruit teachers like that and retain them, you need an assistant superintendent that sees to it that the principal does these things. These are all people that you need. We need the people that we already have to do these things. We don't need a different building to teach Algebra 1 in.

And a lot of the school --

these facilities planning process, it seems to be there's just this tremendous momentum behind it that everybody has to come up with some kind of excuse why they don't like it. But the district is not able to answer any questions. Parents have a lot of questions about how is this supposed to work. There's a lot of questions of if there's been so much community engagement, why is the finished plan not more popular? If this is what people asked for, where are the people who are happy with what they got?

And, you know, we don't need to look into who answered that survey, and were the survey data properly collected, were the survey data properly analyzed, because if it had been the plan would be popular; people would be happy. The fact that there's so many unhappy people, it tells you right there, it

was not properly collected, it was not properly handled. We don't need to go back and audit it; we just need to not implement a plan that is not what the community wants.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for your testimony. Ma'am, please state your name for the record.

MS. SAFA: Yes.

THE CLERK: And begin with your testimony.

MS. SAFA: Yes, it was good morning. Now it's good evening. We're all sleeping over right here.

THE CLERK: Oh, did I say good morning?

MS. SAFA Yes. I'm just teasing.

THE CLERK: Forgive me.

MS. SAFA: Yeah. My name is Chris Safa, and thank you very much for your work and for letting me speak. I am a former teacher and

a former member of the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Committee, and I'm a committee person in the 21st Ward where the Lankenau Environmental Science School is located. And that's what I'm here to ask you to take off the closure list. Although that is a school board thing.

So we wanted to remain open because I was doing salt sampling in the Schuylkill River and a few other places this week as we're trying to see how much salt the city is dumping. Oh, I was walking on the Schuylkill River, though it was frozen solid. Of course that's illegal. Nobody do that. And now it's melting. But the point is, I don't know what you think about climate change or if you believe in it, but it is real, and we need these kids in the only environmental school in the district to be trained

how to manage it, with all the challenges we're going to have.

The salt line is going to come up the river, right? I mean, there's millions of things that we have trouble with. And the kids in this school are raising trout and putting them in the river to help clean it. They're going down to the water works, they're learning all about the mussels that clean the water, and they're using -- if you do me a favor, could you open your little green folder? We gave you a folder for each person, and just pull out the maps right in the front, there should be a couple maps, just to show you where the school is located. And I am very grateful to Councilmember Jones, who back in the day helped us preserve about -- well, a lot of land.

No, this is good. So the school is actually located in the

federal historic district that this community built piece by piece. And it's -- actually, we made a contiguous corridor of about 500 acres of open space. And the community is very alarmed that we're saying don't trade our kids for condos. Like, there's no way that the community would accept this school being closed.

Oh, back in 2013, here's a map of how the community rose up and defended Lankenau School when the School Reform Commission came to try to take it over. So, basically, I won't take any more time because the kids are here to speak with you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much for your work. And --

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for your testimony.

MS. SAFA: And I just want to say thank you for keeping ICE out of the city, and fixing the other

problems, the poly crises that we're working on.

THE CLERK: Thank you, ma'am. Sir, please state your name for the record and begin with your testimony.

MR. HALL: I'm sorry, can you say that again?

THE CLERK: I said, sir, please -- oh, well, I have a list now.

COUNCILMEMBER RICHARDSON: Just say your name.

THE CLERK: Are you -- you're not Rebecca, you're not -- are you Jesse Hall?

MR. HALL: Yes, sir.

THE CLERK: Okay. Thank you. Please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MR. HALL: All right. My name is Jesse Hall. I am a junior at Lankenau Environmental Science

High School. Now, I'm here to voice my concern regarding the closure of my school. While I acknowledge that closing Lankenau seems optimal from a financial perspective, I believe that shutting down my school will not only ruin community, but also the potential future of our students.

Growing up, I was always fascinated by plants and animals. Yeah, I rarely had the opportunity to truly experience nature firsthand. This was until I first found Lankenau. In my 8th-grade year, my middle school had a previous Lankenau student show us a previous -- a presentation teaching us about what they do at Lankenau. Ever since then, I've grown a much stronger interest in environmental sciences.

Environmental science isn't the only thing Lankenau has to

offer. There are so many opportunities and learning experiences that have access to at Lankenau that no other school has. It gives us unique learning experiences like our wildlife management class, which is only a five-minute drive away from our school.

At Lankenau, we don't just learn about -- learn new things about the environment. Most of the things that would usually be taught in a classroom are taught outside, giving us a more hands-on education that not many schools in Philly have.

Along with our environmental classes, Lankenau also has many academic opportunities that no other high school has, like our CTE program or GIS dual enrollment class, both of which we'll lose if we were to move schools.

With all this in mind, I would like for you all to please think twice before closing my school, because I deeply appreciate Lankenau and the unique opportunities that has given me. If I never heard of Lankenau, I probably would've lost my interest in environmental science. How many other kids will lose that spark if Lankenau is gone.

Lankenau is a one-in-a-million school, and I'll be very grateful if more people had the chance to join our community. Thank you for your time.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Ms. Rebecca Roman?

MS. THOMAS: I'm not Rebecca. Morgan Thomas.

THE CLERK: Morgan Thomas. Okay. That's good. Please state your name for the record and begin

with your testimony.

MS. THOMAS: Morgan Thomas. Hello. I am a 10th grade student at Lankenau Environmental High School. First, I want to thank you for your time and giving me the opportunity to be here.

In the two years I've attended Lankenau, all I've noticed monumental changes and not only my mental and physical health, but who I am and how I act as a person. I went to a big middle school and I always felt lost and like I was never -- I never had a place, and it was always just so tight and stuffy there.

Once I went to Lankenau, all those problems went away for me. The woods around my school allows me to have a serene space where I can clear my head and appreciate nature as well as conduct projects for the school that better help our

environment. I can't do that anywhere else.

Lankenau has a hundred percent graduation rate -- graduation rate, and I -- and myself personally have been on honor roll since I started Lankenau. We have dual enrollment with multiple schools and we have internships unique to our environmental focus.

I have been exposed to so many opportunities, not only as a young woman, but as a black woman that has -- that Lankenau has able -- been able to provide for me as a person.

I've always been a shy person, but Lankenau has taught me how to use my voice and that it matters, and even have the courage to speak in front of you all now. Today I use this voice to ask that you hear the pleas and voices of your community and keep this one of

a kind school open. Please save Lankenau.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for testimony. Please state your name for the record and begin with your testimony.

MS. PHILIPS: Hello. My name is Akira Phillips.

THE CLERK: Okay. Hold on a second.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILIPS:1 I'm a 9th Grader at Lankenau Environmental Science Magnet Philadelphia. I'm not a politician, I'm not an expert in budgets; I'm just a student who really loves her school, and I don't want to see it close. Lankenau is different from any other school in the city.

We don't just sit in the classrooms all day reading about science; we actually go outside and experience it. Our campus is part of how we learn. In a city like

Philadelphia where not every neighborhood has a safe, green space, being able to learn outside isn't just nice. It makes a real difference in our lives. It helps us focus. It helps us with stress. It makes school feel less overwhelming.

We also work on real environmental projects. For example, we do the trout in the classroom project where we raise trout from eggs and learn about water quality ecosystem and conservation before releasing them. That teaches us responsibility. It teaches us that what happens in our city streams and rivers actually matters. It makes science feel real because it is real.

I chose Lankenau because I wanted something different. I didn't want to feel like I was stuck in a building all day. I didn't --

I wanted to learn in a way that connected the real world to that. And that's what I found here. Our teachers, they really know us. They check on us and they care about who we are, not just our grades. And as a freshman, that really matters. High school is a big transition and Lankenau made that transition feel safe.

When you talk about closing schools in Philadelphia, it might just sound like numbers for you, but for me, it's my routine, my teachers, my friends, in a place where I'm starting to figure out my future. You can't just move a school like Lankenau somewhere else and expect it to be the same.

The land, the projects, the community, that's what makes it work. Philadelphia says it cares about opportunity and equity. For students like me, Lankenau is

opportunity. Please don't let them take that away from us. Thank you.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for your testimony. Please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MS. SAXARONE: All right. Hello. My name is Juniper Saxarone, and I am a freshman that attends Lankenau. So as we established, Lankenau has been chosen for closure based on the school facilities master plan criteria. But this criteria is flawed and fails to recognize how Lankenau works, how it educates its students, and how the campus plays into that.

We have some of the best performing CTE programs in Philadelphia, let alone one of only two schools that offer CTE AFNR programs in the state of Pennsylvania. They say that us having a low neighborhood

vulnerability risk is a factor they considered. But this lets us harbor a safe welcoming environment for children, so why move us?

Kids from 29 different zip codes all over the city travel two, three hours just to be a part of what Lankenau offers. The Schuylkill Center is up the street. We have fields, we have a vast woodland area, and we have bodies of water. An interactive campus like this helps students gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum and apply these lessons to real world situations.

We do not have an inadequate gym or auditorium. We already have these facilities outside. Even if you ignore Lankenau's evidence success, shutting the school down would be a disservice to the city itself and the school board's goals.

Our CTE programs produce 7 percent of the city's workers, which in turn benefits workforce development as a whole. Our students typically perform higher than district averages on state tests. And the only way we reach our 100 percent graduation rate is by making sure every student meets state standards.

If we were to try to move our programs and curriculum to Roxborough, it would only fall apart. There's no green campus there. There's no way for us to receive the same opportunities. We would lose a huge portion of our 76 partners who only work with us because of where we are. The school board wants results and we are the results, yet they try to shut us down using insufficient criteria that doesn't even apply to us. That doesn't make any sense.

I ask you to reconsider the school facility's master plan criteria as Lankenau is a city asset. And thank you for your time.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for your testimony.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Excuse me, young lady. Can you come back? Excuse me. Excuse me, young lady. Juniper, was it?

THE CLERK: Juniper.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Juniper. Come on back. Have a seat. All of you come on back that participated. As -- and I listened to testimony, as well we have Channel 64 covering this, and I just want to thank all of you for your leadership.

Thank you for being here, speaking truth to power and making a choice to be an advocate, making a choice to fight, and making a choice to resist.

And so on behalf of City Council, as City Council president, I just want to say thank you very much for your leadership.

THE CLERK: Winston Hayes?

MR. HAYES: Yes, sir.

THE CLERK: Please state your name for the -- for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MR. HAYES: My name is Winston Hayes, and I would just like to say thank you for allowing me the ability to speak here, President Kenyatta Johnson, everybody in the council body. Honestly, I had a script here to go by, but everything that you-all talked about during the meeting, it just -- it just hit every point.

So I would just truly like to thank you all. If I had the ability to give you all a standing ovation, I would.

Yeah, Lankenau, honestly,

it's a hidden gem. As mentioned, it's a hidden gem. Three-year CTE, the only three-year CTE in the -- in the district. A hundred percent graduation rate. Got programs like GIS, Geographical Information Systems, like the map that was presented to you all earlier that was made with GIS, that's only possible here at Lankenau.

We are the only school with the teacher who's certified to teach that. And I just wanted to mention, before this meeting happened, I had a conversation with Board President Streater, and he had mentioned how before it changed to environmental science, that was the focus, it had things like the choir, things like student government.

But if homework was truly done on Lankenau, it would be known that that can still happen at Lankenau, even if it's not

environmental. Students have the ability to create clubs and programs on their own as long as they have support from a teacher. So to say that things like that is what's affecting it, it's not entirely right.

And then the land, the 17 acres with the value of 7 million, that -- to take that away from students who are using that property and the 400 acres that we have access to, to take that away from students who want to get into the world of environmental science, that's crazy to me. That doesn't seem logical at all. And, yeah, I really have nothing else to say. Like -- yeah, like I said, you-all hit all the points I wanted to hit earlier before I came to this meeting. So I say thank you for your time.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Thank you.

THE CLERK: Thank you all very much. Would Adam Blyweiss, Lisa Sally, and Maya Stevenson, please come forward. Ms. Celia Thompson also, please come forward.

Thank you very much. Okay. Thank you. Either one of you just please begin. State your name for the record. Sir, why don't you go first. State your name for the record, and please proceed with your testimony.

MR. BLYWEISS: Adam Blyweiss. I have a whole bunch of details and examples I'd love to get into -- but I don't have a whole lot of time, so I'll just do something broad.

I'm a PFT teacher at Mastbaum standing in solidarity with schools targeted in the school district's facilities plan. Its effects will ripple beyond just the

buildings named in it, and an injury to one is an injury to all.

I'm also speaking today as a district parent, one who participated in the advisory panels set up to help guide this plan, and then joined with other teachers and community leaders to form the group, Stand Up for Philly Schools, to alert our citizens and peers about the flaws and opacity in the planning process.

During and after our advisory work, we begged for a better understanding of publicly available scoring and underlying data or logical decisions behind it. These were never clarified. We saw data that was inaccurate or confusing, but rarely corrected. We wanted to present ideas or plans of our own based on personal experience. We were never given the chance. We were told we could give

input and envision the future. We were sold a bill of goods. For all of the steps forward, this plan promises on buzzwords like equity and access and capacity. The reality and unintended consequences suggest two steps back.

We need to remind Dr. Watlington through this forum, remind the Board of Education and Mayor Parker through this forum, and emphasize to the rest of the city in this forum that the idea of closed and merged schools never came from your neighbors.

It was brought to us from SDP from the start. The so-called conversation that needed to be had has been one-sided. I taught at a school closed as part of 2012 strategic planning, so I share a wide belief that this proposal will harm students, families, schools, neighborhoods, district employees,

and the city as a whole.

You, City Council, must stand up for Philly schools and find a way to support the recall and revision of the school district's plans. Save these schools and tell 440 they can and must do better. Thank you.

THE CLERK: Thank you, sir.

MS. SALLY: Good afternoon. My name is Lisa Sally, and I'm actually a former member of the school board when some of this process started. I'm also a native Philadelphian and a product of the Philadelphia Public School System. I went to PennyPacker in West Oak Lane, which is on the list.

I also went to Masterman, and I'm also a graduate of the Philadelphia High Schools for Girls. And I'm here because I didn't have any other choice. I did participate in the community sessions on this

discussion, and many of my comments and several of what I witnessed in the room fell on deaf ears.

The second thing I did after attending those sessions was, I reached out to Reggie Streater directly as the president of the board, and also reached out directly to Dr. Watlington and said, let's talk about your process. Right? Your process is flawed. And so that -- I was promised a meeting. I followed up multiple times, the meeting never came to fruition.

And I'll tell you my background, which I -- why I felt so adamant about it. My public school education in Philadelphia allowed me to go to Carnegie Mellon, where my first degree was in metallurgical engineering and material science. My second degree, my graduate studies, is also in engineering, but it's in the sciences and engineering

systems.

I have a deep expertise in modeling and simulating, and making transformation, deep transformations in multi-billion-dollar organizations, in particular, using the data, writing the model, using the science essentially. And so I come out of that deep expertise in the concern from my Philadelphia and our Philadelphia.

So I also failed to say thank you for the opportunity to speak in this way. I do want to say that Philadelphia's children deserve schools that are safe, that are modern, and that are sustainable and designed to meet their developmental needs and prepare them for their future dreams.

The School District of Philadelphia, when you compare it to the last time we went through this process, has made real progress. It

has gathered an unprecedented amount of facilities data, right? It has launched public dashboards, it's engaged communities citywide, and it has outlined a long-term capital vision.

But these steps showed improved commitment and transparency, but the progress alone is inadequate. The work is incomplete. The current analysis is a series of silos. What is needed is an integrated analysis.

Currently, the series of silos, the sum of the parts do not equal the whole. There is no due diligence, there is no sensitivity, there are no assumptions being viewed publicly. All of the questions, all of this discussion today, should have been subject to a sensitivity analysis, which is a 101 technique when you do this type of evaluation. It is called

simulation. It is a standard model.

Ten years is a long time to implement anything in today's world. Ten years, if you think about it, the children in kindergarten today, in 10 years will be about 15 years old. So we're going to take the time that it -- people that are currently in kindergarten to the 10th grade to figure this out? That sounds ludicrous. The works is currently too emotional, it fails to express the balanced conversation, what is being taken and what is being given and the why behind it all.

It fails to adequately consider implementation benchmarked from other districts nearby who have all invested in middle schools. And it also takes -- does not take advantage of all the corporate partners here who have offered to lend support with the analysis

method.

The district has the pieces of a strong plan, but it lacks a fully institutionalized rules-based model and portfolio management system. Simulation and forecasting are required at a minimum. It is missing. Ten years, as I mentioned, is a very long horizon spanning multiple superintendents, potentially, multiple councils and mayors. Without clear rules and independent analytic oversight, the plan risk stalling or being hijacked by politics.

So, in addition to an overly long planning horizon, there are four critical gaps I want to identify today. First, clear decision thresholds are missing. No one knows what the criteria is, what utilization rates trigger a review, what facility condition index signals renovation versus closure,

or what cost per seat guides new construction.

Number two, monitoring tools or strategies are clearly underused. AI driven enrollment and utilization modeling can optimize assignments and predict demographic shifts. Green strategies like solar rooftops on the schools, even the existing schools, in energy efficient retrofits reduced costs, support climate goals and service learning labs. New revenue streams from multi-use facilities or community partnerships can fund ongoing maintenance and programs.

Number three, the scenario modeling and student-centered design -- the student-centered design are incomplete. Families need side-by-side comparisons of the rolling five-year costs, travel and transportation impacts, equity implications, developmentally

appropriate learning environments, and validated career readiness pathways.

Current K-8 models may mix too many ages, which can dilute developmental support. Age-appropriate groupings also should guide planning.

Lastly --and I'll mention this here -- the fourth gap is that staffing is insufficient. Managing hundreds of buildings and billions in capital over a decade, and with gray-haired facility staff, requires an expert strategic portfolio analytics office, or, at a minimum, an advisory board that is independent, professional, and durable.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm sorry, Lisa, we got a -- can you give us the summary, please?

MS. SALLY: Yes, I can. So council has a critical role to play.

I respectfully urge you to take the following three actions. Request a published utilization condition and cost per seat threshold.

Number two, request integrated scenario analysis, the sensitivity analysis, showing cost, equity, travel, developmental and environmental trade off with clear funding guidance.

And number three, support the opening of a long-term independent strategic portfolio analytics office or advisory board.

Philadelphia cannot afford a half-baked facilities plan that only survives half a turn. Let's build a system that lasts a decade and beyond for every child, every age in every neighborhood for generations to come. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Lisa, if you -- if you don't mind, I have staff over there. If you could

just give us your comments so we can make sure that we listen to everything that was said and the things you didn't read as well too. As a former board member, we definitely appreciate your service and your perspective.

MS. SALLY: Okay. And thank you so much.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for your testimony, ma'am. Ma'am, please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MS. THOMPSON: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Cecilia Thompson and I am a former school board member, 227 class of Philadelphia High School for girls, and my severely disabled son is a proud graduate of MLK High

School. I'm only going to talk about the meetings that I attended. And I'll -- I am also part of Councilmember Gauthier's 3rd District. This seems like they want to make neighborhood schools great again.

Let's start with Bartram. And this is not about the principals or anything like that. It's about the socioeconomic -- what's going on in the neighborhoods. Bartram Motivation made it crystal clear they are not going to the Bartram main building. What they talked about happened 50 years ago, when Motivation went to 78th and Buist. And then in 2012, they went down here to 58th and Baltimore.

The answer is, Well, work with us during the planning. Motivation said, We already told you, unless you can give us a plan right now, we're not working with

you during that planning year. Some of those individuals said they might do online learning. They would go to Parkway West, but that's being folded into SLA Beeber. They would go to Paul Robeson, but that's scheduled for closing. So most of them are going to go -- from what I heard, are going to go online.

Now, let's talk about Robeson. There's a real -- whatever is going on with the children between Robeson and Sayre High School. This is what happens when you have people that don't live here making decisions for people that live here and don't do their homework. Paul Robeson said they're not going. The parents said it and the students said it. So I don't know what's going to happen with this situation.

One second. While Parkway West is going to be folded into SLA

Beeber, I love both of those principals. They are strong, caring Black men. The early childhood program is run by KenCrest, not the district. So if KenCrest, an outside agency, decides not to go, then I don't know what's going to happen.

And you are the lawmakers. So this foolishness doesn't happen again, you can legislate that any and all facilities decisions that will disband, displace, or disrupt a neighborhood must be presented to you all at a minimum of 90 calendar days before any such conversation.

And secondly, you can also legislate that no school shall be disrupted, disbanded, or displaced for administrative uses. Case in point, Overbrook Elementary, which is the third time this is being put up for closure. It is only for closure so the district can have

some administrative offices. They can use that annex behind the main school at Beeber to put staff in and leave those students -- leave those children-there.

Same thing with Robert Morris. They want that to be the Office of Diverse Learners hub. Okay. They don't need to disrupt that community when they can go into Blankenburg, which got more than enough space to put staff in if that's what they want to do.

We are counting on you. We voted for you because we want you all to help us. We want you to -- I'm not saying schools need not to be closed, but why is it that when schools are closed, it's always the 3rd District? It's always something in the 4th District? It's never the greater Northeast, which in March of 2025, the district is spending and approved $11 million on trailers,

but they can't put a trailer in Lankenau, which they said the reason it is closing is because they don't have a gym, or they don't have an auditorium.

You can put one there and then that's the end of that conversation. And let me calm down because I'm getting excited. I just want to thank you for the opportunity to share, and I think the Council President asked, Were there conversations with the community? No, it's not a conversation with the community; it's a dictation. This is what we're going to do, and when the board votes on this, we will plan with you all in that 26/27 school year.

They're not listening to the schools that I just mentioned. And we are appealing to this body to help us save our schools. Thank you

very much.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILIPS:

Thank you for your testimony, and thank you, and Lisa, for your service on our school board. It is very much appreciated. Before we move on, I just want to reiterate that we can only allow two minutes for public comment. Yeah, so when you hear the dinging, I'm trying not to interrupt folks because I know you've been waiting a long time, and you have a lot to say, and we want to try to listen to as much as possible. But please think about the person who hasn't spoken yet. We still have a long list of people who want to get their remarks in. So please try to keep it to two minutes so we can get everyone in before our stenographer and other folks need to take a break.

MS. THOMPSON: Sorry about that.

COUNCILMEMBER PHILIPS: You're fine. Please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. SVENSON: My name is Mia Svenson, or Ms. S, and I'm a special education teacher at Blankenburg Elementary School. This is my first year at Blankenburg and my first year with the school district, but I bring 10 years of experience in public education, curriculum writing, and Early Head Start. And I'm here because I oppose the district's plan to close our school.

After winter break, four of my students, a 2nd grader, a 1st grader, and two kindergartners, one of whose mother and grandmother are here today, discovered a dead ladybug in my classroom. They asked if it was dead; it was. Then we talked about the environments in

which ladybugs live and how classrooms, our classroom, may not have been the best environment for a ladybug. They noticed the ladybug's wing was broken, and we agreed to keep her and try to fix her name -- fix her wing. We named her Lucy. Every day these four students asked to check on Lucy. One of the kindergartners even completed a puzzle spelling the word bug and insisted on showing Lucy the puzzle.

I share this story because Blankenburg may not have been the best environment for that ladybug, but it is the best environment for our students. It's a place where they can be curious and ask questions, where they can be creative and solve problems, from a broken wing to puzzles, to addition, subtraction, and improper fractions, and where they can wonder and work together in spite of age or ability.

Blankenburg is part of the acceleration network, meaning we receive additional support to improve academics, such as smaller class sizes and professional development for staff. These supports are working. This can be seen in our change in designation from CSI, Comprehensive Support and Improvement to TSI, Targeted Support and Improvement, our improved STAR test scores, and most importantly, in the relationships between students and teachers afforded by small class sizes.

At Blankenburg, we say, Destined for greatness --

AUDIENCE: Updated by progress.

MS. SVENSON: The plan to close our school disregards the progress we have made, derails the progress we will continue to make, and ultimately hurts our students

and school community. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for your service, and thank you for sticking to our time limit. We truly appreciate it. And to all of the other members of the school, thank you for being here today.

THE CLERK: Thank you very much for your testimony. Will Paul Brown, Stacey Mandell, and Sarah Ambre, please come forward.

Also, could Fernando Cordera, Dr. Elena Evans and Samantha Bromfield, please come forward. Okay. Also, Renee Rowdy and Daniel Rothman, Esra Shaharta, please come forward. Sir, please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MR. BROWN: Paul Brown. Hi. My name is Paul Brown. I'm a school psychologist at Roxborough High School. I'm here as a member

of Brewerytown Sharswood Neighborhood Coalition and Stand Up for Philly Schools. I'm speaking against the facilities plan.

I would just want to highlight the district has been able to find $2.8 billion to implement this project. However, $1.8 billion of that is not guaranteed to ensure the entirety of this plan. The district claims that this plan is to ensure greater equity within the district.

But what does that plan mean when the district already does not provide enough adequate funding for our schools, which is one of the reasons why families don't attend neighborhood schools. There's a promise to invest in schools that are receiving an influx of students through this plan, but I don't want the improvements of my school to come at the expense of another.

That's not equity.

I'm looking at that $2.8 billion and not understanding why it can't be used to expand educational programming at Roxborough High School or any of these public schools individually, but apparently can be used to build two-year round schools that no one asks for. This plan does not expand access to quality education. It shrinks it.

When we're talking about these kids, the only thing we should be talking about is pouring into them. And that looks like investment. We shouldn't be closing any of these schools. We should be investing in the ones we have.

If people ask about public schools in Philadelphia, the only reason why they're bad is because we don't invest in them. Just give them the money. Thank you.

THE CLERK: Thank you very

much for your testimony. Sir, please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MR. CORDERO: Hi. My name is Fernando Cordero, a parent representing the parents at Moffet School. We are here talking because our school is about to be merged with Hackett, and they're being turned into a middle school, which affects our students.

Moffet is a thriving school in a community that is diverse, and it demonstrates what a sustainable investment can achieve. Removing it as an elementary school risks destabilizing families and increasing inequity and representing -- and repeating past mistakes by shifting students without addressing the root issues like underinvestment, access, and trust.

Our big issue is the lack

of transparency that makes it seem like there's no good faith. The Moffet merger does not appear anywhere in the district website. Many in the wider community are still unaware about it because it was not announced publicly anywhere.

Now, by closing Ludlow and converting Moffet to a middle school, you're leaving South Kensington without a neighborhood elementary school. Young elementary school children in the neighborhood are going to have to make long commutes without transportation or a caregiver who can accompany them.

This raises safety concerns if the merger goes through. Moffet's students who are predominantly black, brown, and Hispanic will bear most of the burden in terms of longer commutes into unfamiliar neighborhoods. There is evidence in our

neighborhood of further demand. There's new houses being built with young families. The birth rate is going up. Parents want to send their children to Moffet, and they're not being allowed to.

Moffet is a high-performing school with robust programming, tight-knit community that also serves a uniquely diverse community. It's not just racially, but socio-economically and linguistically, and also serves a range of educational needs, from autistic support to special education. This is something that cannot be easily replicated. It's not just a school; it's a family. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your testimony.

MR. ROTHMAN: Hello. My name's Dan Rothman. I'm the father of Alana Rothman, who's a sophomore

at Lankenau High School. I want to thank City Council for this hearing. Since this was announced, the closing of Lankenau on January 22nd, this is the fourth meeting I've gone to.

And I want to say that I appreciate City Council, because while the school district and the Board of Education have been present at all these meetings, I really feel like they're not listening. We'll just throw that in there. And I feel that our only voice that's -- the only people that are listening to our voice is City Council. So very much appreciated.

Lankenau is a unique institution. I think people don't realize that it's the sum of the mission, environmental science, the location, 17 acres in a 400-acre nature preserve, the unique educators, dedicated staff, and the

students who travel from all over Philadelphia to get to that school and who want to be in that school.

All of that comes together to form that success story. That unique institution is Lankenau. And if that institution is destroyed, it'll be near impossible to rebuild because all those unique factors will not come together again.

You know, the students, they're traveling to Lankenau, they're not going to go to Roxborough. The population will be gone. The teachers will be dispersed throughout the -- throughout the school district. The facility will no longer be there. It's going to be over. And how will we ever get that type of confluence of factors together again to build that type of institution? It won't happen. So we're going to lose this and we'll never get it back. It's

very sad.

I found that the whole -- this whole sort of journey has been predicated on a lot of assumptions. But in general, I feel that there was a destination, these factors that weren't impartial process. They had a destination.

Most of the schools are already closed. We've got ones that they wanted to close back in 2013. The factors were predetermined to get the result. They weren't impartial. And I think it needs to be challenged. And thank you so much for your sympathy and letting us voice our opinions and for your support. Please --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you.

MR. ROTHMAN: -- keep it open.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for your advocacy as a

parent. It is very much appreciated. Please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. BROMFIELD: Good afternoon. My name is Samantha Bromfield. I am the school principal at Paul Robeson High School. So I just want to give a little background about my students. I come from a Catholic school background. I've always went to a private school. My oldest son, who is now his second year of college, always went to a private school. My twins, who have been homeschooled prior to COVID, I decided to send them to a school because they wanted to be in a school environment. I tried to send them to Sayre, Sayre was full.

God blessed and made it work, so my children could be enrolled in Paul Robeson. Since the

day that they entered into Paul Robeson, number one, I've seen nothing but acceleration in their drive. My daughter is now on honor roll. I'm not saying she wasn't before, but knows that she didn't like where she was being homeschooled. So they've given her something that she's been able to grow on and accelerate her drive.

Paul Robeson is a very homey school. And what I mean by that is everyone knows everyone, which is something great, something you don't get too often.

We have a 95 percent rate of graduation, which is very high. The school may be small, but small means great, and I need everyone to understand that we have not been heard. What I mean by that is no one contacted the Homeless School president to say, hey, this is what our ideas are, so that we can

implement options.

Please do not close Paul Robeson. The biggest part for me is give us another school, give us another option. But merging students with other students who might not get along in certain areas will lead me to making a choice of making my child be homeschooled again. Because once again, I have a choice as a parent, and my choice comes first. Thank you very much.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for that perspective. It's important. We definitely appreciate it. Thank you. Please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. EVANS: Yes. My name is Dr. Alana Evans, and I am the SPECM, which is a Special Ed Compliance Manager at Paul Robeson High School.

And at our school -- it's

every school. If you don't feel this way about your school, I don't know, but it's a special school. It's a diamond in the rough. It is a high school that I actually started in 2017, because I was part of the first wave of closure, which was University City High School.

I was unable to attend University City High School meetings because my father was passing away. And I promised myself if I ever went through this again, that I was going to stand up and make my voice heard. And I don't care where it goes, but I'm making my voice heard.

Paul Robeson is a gentleman who believed in this legacy, and this is what we stand behind: to develop well-rounded individuals committed to social justice, racial equality, and global solidarity.

It is a very special school and near and dear to my heart. What

I love about Paul Robeson is that we teach our children to build your own brand. What does that mean? Where do you want to go? What do you want to do? Who do you want to be? And we will help you build that road to there. We are their bridge. The teachers are their bridge to getting them there.

That's why we have someone at Harvard University who is in their junior year. That's why we have a whole bunch of students at Lankenau, Howard, Cheyney, you name it, Penn State. There's so many around.

We have dual enrollment. I don't know about -- yeah, dual enrollment, Harrisburg University, community college. They go down there, and they can connect to the CTE programs that are at community college and get college credits.

We also have a partnership

with the University of Pennsylvania, and with that partnership we receive -- and this is just one grant -- $330,000 annually to help us to build certain programs into our school, which no one has asked us about.

And I'm just going to say this, and I need to say it because it got underneath my skin. We have been making keystone waves since we've been doing the afterschool program and so forth.

We are now leading. If you look at the data, we're leading our network with STAR data because they threw that in as well. Thanks for allowing me to share.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for the passionate testimony. I'm sure Councilmember Gauthier appreciates that as the person who represents the school that you're talking about. So we

definitely appreciate you being here. Thank you.

THE CLERK: Could Flora Thomas, Derrick Washington. Mama Gale, Hora Stewart, please come forward.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And while those folks are making their way to come testify, I just want to put on a record that some of the Councilmembers who are not here right now had to leave because there is another community meeting happening at Ben Franklin this evening at 5:30.

So if you notice the room is thinning out a little bit, we're human, some folks got to eat. But then on top of that, we do have council representation that will be at Ben Franklin this evening for the community dialogue around this same topic as it relates to school facility. So I just wanted to put

that on the record.

Please state your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony. It doesn't matter. Rock, paper, scissors.

MS. THOMAS: Good afternoon. My name is Florie Thomas. I teach middle school at Blankenburg Elementary School. I am the middle school union rep as well.

I just want to start by saying Blankenburg belongs to Network 3. Blankenburg is the success story of that network. It is the only school that moved from CSI to TSI status.

Based on the January 22nd announcement, the official reassignment logic for Blankenburg was underutilization and excessive cost for repairs. Blankenburg is a national historic landmark. I do know that there is supposed to be a duty to repair. So it bothers me to

know that some of these repairs have existed as long as I've worked there. And I started working there during 2020.

Some of the repairs have existed and haven't been acted on. So it's really discouraging and upsetting to now be told that the building is too damaged. I mean, at my house, if you have a bad roof, you get a notice from the township. So I'm not sure how this happened.

But in any event, the status of our school is to close and convey. Blankenburg is supposed to be, according to what I've researched, given to the city for the purpose of repurposing it for affordable housing.

I definitely support affordable housing for working families. However, affordable housing can become transient housing, especially if those

families start to look around and realize that three charter schools that surround them may not even be accessible to the children in that affordable housing space, as those schools are using lotteries and bringing people in from all over the city, so they could possibly find it beneficial to move on.

I want to talk about the receiving schools. Oh, was that my time? Okay. The receiving schools: Heston and Rhodes. I just want to say the district said that the students would be moving to better conditions.

I have to disagree with that because Rudolph Blankenburg stands as an asbestos-free building in the network, while the other two schools are struggling with asbestos concerns. In fact, as recently as May 2025, Rhodes was flagged for damaged asbestos in student-occupied

spaces. It's illogical to move students from a clean, safe building into older facilities that have hazardous material monitoring.

The second thing, the capacity and cost. Both of those schools are already up to 90 percent at least capacity. Okay. And -- okay. So I guess I want to stay mostly with the fact that we've moved our students, we have smaller classroom sizes, and to put them in a different school is going to not only impact the status we've obtained, but I think it'll also slow down Rhodes and Heston from reaching their goal, their CSI. So they want to be TSI as well, and I just think all of these changes will impact our students' outcome.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We're sorry to cut you time, but we want to hear from everybody.

MS. THOMAS: Yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Clearly, your remarks are valuable just like in everyone else's, but we truly respect the fact that you're teaching in the building, and you're a building rep. Is it possible for you to get the things that you have written that you didn't get a chance to say to my staff over there?

MS. THOMAS: I made 20 copies.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So we can make sure it's getting disseminated to the rest of the members of council?

MS. THOMAS: I have 20 copies somewhere. I don't know where they are.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Amazing. If we can get like a 21st copy.

MS. THOMAS: Yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We make sure that all the members of

council get it.

MS. THOMAS: And can I just say we have a dedicated science teacher? That's me. I teach 6th, 7th, and 8th. I go to PDs, and I hear teachers say all the time they don't have time to teach science. Our kids get science every day, all day.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's beautiful. Thank you so much for your service, and thank you for the work that you're doing. And somebody will meet you in the back to make sure we get that testimony. Go ahead, sir. Please state your name for the record. You may begin with your testimony.

MR. WASHINGTON: My name is Derek Anthony Washington.

And I came here today, and I was standing in the hallway there, and I saw my family tree. My aunt told me many years ago that we come

from an indigenous nation. She called the nation -- the Bustle Nation. And they are known as the Bustle to Indian of the Lenape. And I think they're also the civilized tribes of the Iroquois.

And I say all this to say that she -- and she also told me then, and it didn't dawn on me till I looked at the family tree out there, that most of my people were free. Most of my people were abolitionists and activists. And you might know them. George Washington. She said he was Native American; not White. He was Native American: my ancestor. Paul Robeson of the Bustle Nation, he was a chief, and he was Native American, and so many others.

And she told me that we traveled from Virginia all the way up to Canada and back. And that the Northeast -- we call the Greater

Northeast -- was our land. And we gave our rights -- we gave rights to people to use the land, and they thought they owned the land. And it's just a different perspective of things.

And I fast forward now to today, and I feel as though they say these people were talking with a forked tongue. I feel today that you have a lot of doublespeak and manipulation of facts and figures and statistics. Anybody can manipulate a fact. Anyone can manipulate a figure, you know. And I just felt like, you know, good people just giving us doublespeak, giving us nonsense.

And I want to say that the people -- you know, we have politicians, we have the school board superintendent -- but the people intrinsically have power. And that if we have to stand against

this, we should stand against this. If we have to speak against it, we should speak against it. And that's all I have to say. Thank you.

MR. CLAUDIN: Thank you. My name is Horace Claudin. What I gave you is talking about your school closures. And this is just a sample of 104 K-8s.

So with that being said, in 2012, it took over one summer to move students and staff. It can be done. I suggest we rebuild the school district, the 10-year plan, leave the high schools where they are, and invest in six building trades and culinary arts and cosmetology into Bartram, Sayre, Overbrook, Roxborough, and MLK. They would be your comprehensive high schools.

Leave the five standalone middle buildings for closure alone with the remaining nine, and add 10,

and bring back junior high schools, 7th, 8th, and 9th, for citywide program alignment. The 9th graders are lost in these high schools. Stop adding schools to an underperforming pre-K-8 system.

Number one, too many grades to manage: 9 or 10 down to 7 or 8 in a pre-K-6. You must separate the younger students from the older ones. The K-6's from the 7th's and 8th's.

There are seven pools; only two are open. Plan proposed to open two more. One has been waiting for four years with an approved $13 million action item. Just another talking point on the plan.

Save Tilden, make it a junior high school. Build a super-site field on the vacant Pepper Middle School. How many swing spaces are enough? Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Thank you, sir. And thank you for your dedication as a relates to our schools,

MS. CLAUDIN: Can I get some of his time? He didn't do his whole two minutes, right?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That don't mean you get them. I know where you were going with it.

MS. CLAUDIN: I'm just asking.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: But I probably can't tell you no. So go ahead. Please state your name for the record and begin your testimony.

MS. CLAUDIN: I learned to ask for what you want, right?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Well, you know, I can't tell you no.

MS. CLAUDIN: I can ask, right?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: State your name for the record. You

may begin with your testimony.

MS. GAIL: Peace and love. I'm Mama Gail, his wife, 50 years, Claudin. I sit here really disturbed because I find it interesting that for years we've been dealing with people coming in and out of the city, and we are not even celebrating Black History Month. Here we are during Black History Month going through this. This is what our ancestors went through.

And I can tell you from being around this district for 40 years. Forty years ago, when my daughter was in elementary school, I asked the superintendent of the region when they were talking about changing the levels of education: kindergarten to 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, that kind of thing. It was a transformation time. And I raised my hand. I had just taken my

daughter, the two daughters, out of private school and put them in public school.

I raised my hand. I said, so is there a period set aside, if this doesn't work, that you'll go back to what we have now, which was kindergarten to 6th grade, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th. The superintendent at that time told me that my question was so ludicrous he wasn't going to answer me.

So I became an advocate and an activist on that day. And I've been in this district all of these 40 years now. We need to look at what's happening right now. We have a system that has always been in Philadelphia when it comes to education. You knew who the -- what the best schools were. You knew who -- where you wanted to put your children.

So I'm saying to you,

having sat in the 90s and gone through this and saw that no matter how bad a teacher was, he or she was not let go because of the union. So no matter how bad they were, they were passed from program to program in the school because of the union. That's the same now.

And so I'm saying that because we're -- I don't want to see any more generational trauma. I saw it the last time, 2012. I saw what happened, how many children were affected, how many families. I'm going to say this as fast as I can. We are dealing with racism. We are dealing with classism. I'm saying while we hear the children say, I don't want to go to that school because of this, that, and the other, it reminds me of the Willie Lynch syndrome where people were put against each other. And I don't want to see that ever again in this

life.

High schools -- I'm thinking about why Tony Watlington talked about high school numbers going up. Do you know how many people are putting their children in private school all the way up to high school, then they bring them here so that they can get scholarships in high schools? We also have people paying for their children to come to the public school system.

I'm going to say this and I'm going to end with this. We got a lot of special needs children that have special needs that are not taken care of in these schools. The lady that was here talked about Blankenburg. Before COVID, there was 30 children. I was told by the principal at Blankenburg they hadn't had an IEP in three years. Come to find out there were those that

hadn't had them in four years, and she had been there three years trying to get help. That was before COVID.

Can you imagine where these children are today? Special needs is a very serious thing. We've been to -- my family has been to as many listening sessions as possible. The people weren't there. All these people that are coming out now, they were not there. We met -- we may have missed four listening sessions around the whole city. The people were not there because there was no effort to really get the people there.

We had sometimes more staff there than the people from communities. We talk about the Northeast, and we see all that going on. I'm from -- sitting with Dr. Clayton to Dr. Ackerman. I'm telling you, bless both their souls.

How is it that while our numbers are going down, you can have 800 to a 1,000 overpopulation and nothing said about that?

But over here, where the numbers are going down -- and most of the times people thought in the Northeast it was better. My husband has the data. It's not better for Black children no matter what part of the city they're in, whether it's the top schools or the bottom schools when it comes to mixing. How is it that Black children are doing worse than any other child in that -- in that same class or in that same grade level?

So I'm going to finish by saying enough is enough. Dr. Ackerman said to me, Everything in this city is about adults. Nothing is about the children. We have to make it back to the children, back to the basics for new

beginnings. That means dealing with the children and their needs, because we have what we have now because those children are now grandmothers. My 52 -- this is my 49-year-old, but my 52 --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Oh, you're not supposed to do that.

MS. GAIL: Oh, yeah, I say it all the time. My 52-year-old daughter is a grandmother, right? Well, her counterparts back then didn't get the education that she got in this city. And I'm saying to you, we have to fix this. If we're number two poorest city in the country now, we can fix that by making sure that this plan is stopped.

And I say, enough is enough. And I mean it. I declare it. I claim it. I decree. It's over.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Thank you.

MS. GAIL: This poverty system that has been put in place, it's over.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you, mama. Thank you, Baba. We appreciate your work. We appreciate your testimony, and we know that the people at Strawberry Mansion truly appreciate all the service and dedication that you have put into that school. So thank you both. We truly appreciate you.

So thank you for all that. We appreciate you. You can state your name for the record, and please begin your testimony.

MS. CLAUDIN: Okay. Leah Claudin. Greetings everybody. So we need you all to step up as our representative --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You got to say -- I'm sorry, start all over. State your name for the

record and then begin with your testimony because I didn't hear you. So other people might not have heard you.

MS. CLAUDIN: Okay. Leah Claudin. We need you all to step up as our representatives. Our communities have been taxed out in the name of the children that end up being warehouse. You've even noticed, council people, that the 15 schools that are doing well, you noticed that there was transition, more likely three transitions to get to high school.

When it comes to our schools, the majority of the schools, they want to warehouse them to K-8. It doesn't work in our communities because our children are so far behind in academics. We have to be honest about that.

Parents are being deceived by their report cards thinking that

a child is on a grade level. These children aren't on grade level. So we understand that at that, even with academics, you need to be able to have some skills with your hands.

So our campaign as the Claudin's family is that we want to bring back junior high school. We have to figure out a way for our children to become productive citizens in their future. And the only way to do that is not to just try to focus on academics that they are not receiving in any schools. They're being babysat. That's the honest truth. They are being babysat, and it's criminal and they're using federal dollars to do it. And that's just my opinion. I'm not going to say allegedly. My opinion.

The district was 11,000 work orders in a hole. I don't know if any of you all noticed that or

remembered that, but they were 11,000 work orders in a hole. You all need to ask the question where they are on that because if I'm not mistaken, I was told that they will never catch up. And they're still receiving more work orders.

Another thing is the 14,000 surveys that they said they received, out of that, they said at one time 9,000 agreed. If I'm not mistaken, we have 118,000 children in the district. So if you're receiving 9,000 approvals out of 118,000 something -- the math isn't mathing. And so I don't even know how we came to this plan that they're trying to push.

Paul Robeson is money. It's a land grab. If you pay attention to every corner near, right there across from Paul Robeson, it's ready to go. You got the excavator on one portion of the

land. Everything else is just waiting for whatever bridge they're trying to make. Far as the buildings. Wagner. How do you take Wagner from the children that got trade space? We got all these shops in our middle schools, which is why it's important. Our junior high schools that you have to --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Sis, I'm sorry, we got to --

MS. CLAUDIN: I know. I'm done after -- I'll be done after this one. So with Wagner, to take Wagner and create a trade school for adults is insane. You take it from the children; they have the space, they have a beautiful culinary program, they have an electrical wiring program. I don't understand why it's not implemented during school hours because it's on a Saturday.

And also, why isn't it put

back into the curriculum like we had when we were in junior high school where we had language metal, wood shop, typing and sewing, cooking, stuff like that. So I'm done.

But I just need for you all City Council people to really pay attention to what they're doing. This is a land grab. They're not talking about academics. They're doing everything in reverse. This is a fairy tale that they're trying to concoct and to send children to warehouse them at schools and then say, oh, the program is going to go over there. We're going to do program plan. And that's just stupid.

I'm just going to say it. Things should be there before they get there. We've seen what happened when they closed them in 2012 and 2013. Our society has been messed up since that happened, and they

don't have no way to bring it back. And the only way to do that is to reimplement junior high schools. Tell them no. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. State your name for the record.

MS. ROBINSON: Do I have to press anything? No. Okay. So my name is Sherell Robinson. Sherell Robinson --Parker, so I am a parent to a kindergartner at Blankenburg. New to the area of lifelong South Philadelphian. And I didn't know about the timing thing, but I'm going to try my best.

So I'm going to try my best to speak from the head and the heart, whoever was at another meeting. Mama mouthful. Mighty strikes again.

So my baby is -- basically, if you guys can think back to when you were a child and everybody is

picking teams, and you're the child that got picked last and reluctantly, that's sort of what my five-year-old has experienced her whole life because of what she looks like on paper. So she had to put her knees in contact. She has 14 specialists. And in one year I facilitated 216 appointments by myself just for her autism; not for cardiac appointments, not for her seizures, not for anything else.

And I've even been told, you know, I'm not going to lose my staff over no one child because they're stressed about supporting her. And the only place that took a chance on her was Blankenburg. And I almost fought to not have her in there actually, because we were closer to Gompers. But they had us go there. The district fought me to put her in there, and now I love it.

So in spite of all of her

challenges that she has while at the school, my -- I'm going to call her my baby. My baby is five years old, and she reads on a 3rd grade reading level. She has been tested at 99.8 percent percentile in her English. So claiming that the building coincides with bad grades or whatever else, it just doesn't -- it's not real.

Aside from being a parent, I also have a 17-year-old, but she's in charter and this doesn't really affect her.

But I do want to mention the humanity piece. And the humanity piece is while people were lying to me about putting her on wait list and placating me, even telling me that I had -- I would have to pay $150 to put her on a wait list for two years and still no guarantee, I was below the federal poverty line for four years.

So every day that I woke up for four years, I didn't know what we were going to do until Blankenburg actually did something, and I was able to go ahead and sustain work.

So the workforce housing that they're proposing would affect somebody like me and I won't even be a part of workforce housing if they take her school away, and I don't find a place for her again.

So everything is backwards, and I just wanted to put that on record. And also as a professional in real estate for 17 years and my graduate education and personal experience and development makes me feel that this is a real estate deal that's done. And we're just going through the motions.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for the story, and thank you for your testimony. We truly

appreciate it and we hear you. Please state your name for the record and you may begin.

MS. ROUNDY: Good afternoon. I'm Renee Roundy, a fourth-grade ELA and social studies teacher at Blankenburg. One of my students actually mentors her student, and she is brilliant. I've been an educator for five years, though this is my first year at Blankenburg and the place I finally found home. I'll try to be short.

My students shared out, in a recent social studies lesson, their thoughts on the proposed closure at Blankenburg. I don't think that we've really discussed the emotional impact that this is having on our babies, who, mine are only 10, some are five. I would've brought these posters here, but they mysteriously disappeared after some students presented at our district

community meeting. Luckily, I took photos.

Some of the initial unprompted sentiments from my students to What would you like the district to know? were: We are not our STAR scores. We're smarter than they think we are. We love this school. I wish they knew us. They don't know us. To What can we do about the potential closure? We can fix the class up. We cannot do anything because they won't listen. However, written about five times was, We can protest.

While district leadership has demonstrated a care for product and money, shown through the disproportional care for white communities and charter schools, the school communities are concerned for our scholars and our families. I don't care how we frame this

facilities plan.

This plan harms our young people who have now been labeled publicly by the district's plan as vulnerable." And my 10-year-olds have now internalized that their test scores, the building's infrastructure, and the way our school is viewed is their fault rather than a misplaced district responsibility.

Do not close our schools. Invest in our scholars, who have only shown up to invest in each other and their community and demonstrated the growth that you have asked us for. As a renaissance school, we're expected to dot every I, cross every T, and we have. So this makes no sense. Thank you for your time.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you for your service and the work you do as an educator. We

truly appreciate it. Thank you. Please state your name for the record, and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Hi. I'm Katie Hoffman Williamson. I am representing the families for Moffet Elementary. You might be wondering what Moffet Elementary is because it's not in the facilities plan, but we are going to change from an elementary school to a middle school. So effectively, this is a closure.

And for the idea that we're not investing in middle schools, well, guess what? We've got one now at Moffet. So our kids, all of them, will have to go to Hackett, which from the school is about a 20-minute walk. That's if you're in catchment. If you're on the edge of that catchment, that's -- for me, that's 35 minutes to walk to that

school. And I am not alone. I'm an out-of-catchment family, but I'm just on the edge of what our catchment is.

Our school is a beautiful, magical gem of a school. A lot of our families here have said the same thing about their school. We are doing everything that the school district wants us to be. We have engaged families. We have an incredible principal. We have teachers that go above and beyond what they're required to do. They host afterschool programs they're not paid to do. They host special things inside of the school they don't have to do.

We are also beautifully diverse. We are not just black. We are not just brown. We are Asian. We are African American. We are Hispanic. We are Muslim and Arabic. We had many families here that

represented that earlier today. It's an incredible school and an incredible community, and all of that will be taken away from us.

Also, in the area where we are, we are Moffet. Ludlow is closing as well. So now, for the South Kensington neighborhood, there is no elementary school for us to go to.

Me and my family, we go to Moffet. That is closing. We are districted for Ludlow that is closing. Our middle school and high school is Penn Treaty. That is closing. What is my family supposed to do?

We're told that the numbers just aren't there. But if you look at our numbers, our first grades have two classes. Twenty-five kids are in each of those classes. Our kindergartens have two classes, 25 kids in each of those classes.

Our pre-K classes are -- people couldn't get into them, even with family members in that class. We were told that last year our principal couldn't accept people on the lottery. We heard that there were dozens of families that wanted to go to Moffet, and they weren't accepted.

My last thing is that this does feel like this was done in bad faith. This was announced to us after the school selection process. It was after the Penn Charter admission program, the ability to apply for charters. And this was after a lot of private schools, you could apply for them.

I would love to speak to you more about this because also Moffet families have not met with the school district yet in person or online. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Thank you for your testimony. For the record, we will have other opportunities for people to communicate to City Council, specifically outside of the school district meetings, concerns and things of that capacity. So if it's not something that you didn't get the chance to say today, you can send that communication to my office as well as the council president's office. But you can also be assured that there will be another platform for people to be able to communicate their concerns. So thank you.

MS. WILLIAMSON: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We are Penn State. State your name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. RENEE: So my name is Rashida Renee, and I'm here because my daughter is an anti-social social

butterfly. And I say that because my kids, I paid for them to go to school. Like, it was no questions asked. But when they came to them picking their high schools, I allowed them to do that.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I'm sorry. When they came where?

MS. RENEE: When they came to high school, they were able to pick their high schools. So my kids came from a private setting to public school. Both of -- all three of my children are literally, like, like small environments.

So that's why Paul Robeson being on the chopping block really pisses me off, because my daughter's senior school year will be impacted. And they keep saying it is a numbers thing, and I'm looking at that we have 78 percent utilization in the building. I'm a numbers person, so if you're telling me something, it

has to make sense numerically.

So I sat on one of their meetings, which I didn't find out about the meeting until my daughter sent me like a screenshot, like, Hey, our school is closing. And I'm amazed because I'm in the community. I was a former educator. Like, I know usually what's going on. But when it came to the closing of these 20, now 28 schools, I had no clue about it.

So that's why I'm here to ask City Council to help fight for Paul Robeson, not only Paul Robeson but the other schools. And as stated, they haven't processed or thought about the safety of our students.

Our students, many of them are anti-social social butterflies, meaning that within their little environment they blossom. And so that's what I would like to continue

to do. And as I stated, this impacts my daughter's senior year of school, meaning that she would be transferring over as a senior versus -- and most schools don't even accept a senior into their program.

And it was stated that we're not merging, is code something, whatever that word is. But yeah, that doesn't work. And I know I'm over my time limit. The important things to take away is that Sayre -- Paul Robeson does not want to be merged with Sayre. They keep talking about CTE programming. We had partnerships with Penn, with CHOP, I believe, if I'm not mistaken.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We got you. You-all golden -- you all had a great basketball season.

MS. RENEE: Thank you. So listen, and my daughter scored her a thousand points in three years.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Wait, your daughter scored?

MS. RENEE: Her a thousand points in three years.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: At Robeson?

MS. RENEE: At Paul Robeson, yes.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: That's what's up. What's her name? Say her name.

MS. RENEE: Ashley Robinson. That's what's up. Shout out to Ashley.

MS. RENEE: And she's now at Penn State Brandywine.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. Oh, that's what's up. Shout out to Ashley. That's amazing.

MS. RENEE: Oh yes. And I'm 246 of GHS.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Oh, goodness.

MS. RENEE: I saw you look at her when the lady said 227. Don't front on us.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Go Robeson. Let's leave it at that. Please state your name for the record. Thank you. I'm sorry. Thank you, ma'am, for your testimony, and thank you for the great work you're doing raising your children. We appreciate it. Sorry for playing too much. It's been a long day. State your name for the record, and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. JOEL: My name is Deborah Joel. I am a third generation West Philadelphian. My daughter's fourth generation West Philadelphian. I've attended -- my whole family has attended school in West Philadelphia.

I'm a proud Overbrook Elementary school teacher and former

parents. And I'm very concerned about the duplicitousness of the conversations that are being had with the parents, with the teachers, with the community members, with the City Council.

It's very hard to keep up with the truth and the lies and to tell the difference and quite frankly, as a teacher, we have very little time to dedicate, to find out the truth. So I do appreciate what I heard in here today from all the members. I do appreciate the concern that you have for our students.

And as you can see, these are just some of the names of some of the two classes that I particularly teach at Overbrook Elementary in reading and social studies. Because when this was first proposed, we were on the chopping block in 2012. We fought

with Gompers School and realized at some point that we conceded to a decision that had already been made.

The decision was for SLA to overtake Beeber Middle School and that we would then keep our middle schoolers and stay open. And we were very happy with that because it gave us the opportunity to stay open.

However, we realized at a later date that that plan had already been quite well in motion and that there needed to be a cleaning out of Beeber Middle School. There will be no more feeder school for our students from Overbrook Elementary, from Gompers School. And that that was the only decision that we could kind of concede to. So I see it now as it was smoke and mirrors at that time.

In 2019 before COVID, there were community meetings regarding

Overbook Elementary closing again and some other schools closing again and Cassidy School being the community school. And we brought up the issue that you cannot combine students from different neighborhoods and expect there to be success, because they're going to be some other underlying issues that will be barriers to everyone's success and to their learning. Even to the detriment as we see our young men now who still have very few leaders and are following whatever they can find on social media. I'll be very quick.

My concern when I first heard about this in 2019, I thought of a student who is on my shirt, who I taught in 2nd grade and then again in 5th and now in 6th grade, who I know that if he is forced to go to Heston School or Barry School or Cassidy School, where $2 million was

spent to demolish the -- to demolish the school, $55 million to rebuild the school to hold 700 students, which would never happen unless it was a community school. My thinking is that money could have been invested in the historic Overbook Elementary, which celebrates 120th year this year.

And just a portion of that money could have been invested in us for us to stay open as opposed to the school district determining that we're underutilizing even though we're 75 percent, and we are not doing well, even though our scores are better than where they want to send our students to at Heston and Barry. Cassidy hasn't been proven. They've only had one year in with, you know, very little students and --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

We need -- we need you to summarize.

MS. JOEL: In summary, the district is lying when they're saying they're giving the students a better opportunity. Taking our students from Overbook Elementary to Heston, Overbook Elementary to Barry, or Overbrook Elementary to Cassidy is not a solution. Our community is safer. Those schools have students that want to come to us for safety.

Those students have schools that want to come to us for success, and we need our school to stay open for the safety of the children of the neighborhood and for our future -- for our future success.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony, and thank you for your service as a teacher.

MS. JOEL: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: We appreciate it. Please state your

name for the record and you may begin with your testimony.

MS. ALLISON: Good evening. My name is Monica Allison. I'm a committee person in 3rd Ward, 18th Division, where Motivation High sits. I'm a resident of the 5,800 block of Cedarhurst, and I'm an alumni of both Turner Middle School and Motivation High School. So I'm here in more than one capacity, and I have a stake in these decisions.

When I attended Motivation, it operated as a Bartram annex, and it was intentionally designed to be separate from the main building. That was 50 years ago. It was a special-admit school event, a college prep program built around small enrollment and individualized detention.

At full capacity, we averaged about a hundred students per grade, and that was grades 10

through 12, because at that time Bartram had a freshman center located on 81st and Lyons Avenue. Its strength has always been that it's part of the small school model, and it focused on academic -- an academic mission. Bartram Motivation at that time graduated people like State Representative Jordan Harris and education advocate and nonprofit leader Tamir Harper.

I understand enrollment is down, but the school was never designed to be at high enrollment. Closing or relocating it ignores the purpose that the school was built to serve. Enrollment is down due to the district instituting the lottery system in 2021, which systematically caused most special-admit schools to operate under capacity. That is not even taken into account that the system was created by the district.

The district invested

millions of dollars in the HVAC upgrade and other building systems at Turner. We've also been asking for years for our Olympic-size pool to be repaired so that the community and the students can use it. This building also houses KIPP Middle School, and basically Turner itself is built for 1,500 students.

Right now, KIPP has approximately 350 students. Motivation has 150 students, but has the capacity for 300 to 400. Then if you look at Paul Robeson, who actually has an enrollment of 289, we can increase that to about 300, and that would fill the capacity of Turner School, and it would no longer be an underused space.

As far as CTE is concerned, we had ample opportunity at Bartram to create CTE and other programs, and we have disinvested in it for years.

Bartram was built in 1938. Turner, where Motivation is, was built in 1971. Sayre was built in 1949. Paul Robeson in 1971, again. So we are disinvesting in the younger schools and then investing in the older schools. It just doesn't make practical sense.

So in closing, I just want to say that our neighborhood is a neighborhood of seniors and of homeowners. And as committee person in that area, the issue is that Turner would become a flex space where Motivation is housed now, which creates instability and safety concerns in the neighborhood. And I appreciate your time.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So thank you, ma'am, and I appreciate you summarizing. If you can get that information, because that was very valuable. If you can get that information to us, because

I know you didn't say everything that was in your written testimony, that will help us -- that will help inform us as we advocate and fight for these different issues. So thank you very much for that.

Are there any other questions or comments from members of the committee?

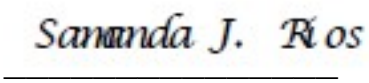
Hearing none, I want to say thank you to all of the people who came to testify today, and thank you to all of my colleagues for listening to all of the testimony and your advocacy.

This concludes -- I'm sorry. The Committee of the Whole will stand in recess until the call of the chair as it relates to this particular resolution. Thank you, everybody.

(Committee of the Whole hearing concluded at 5:40 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me of the above case, and this copy is a correct transcript of the same.



Samanda J. Rios

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City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Meeting Agenda

Tuesday, February 17, 2026

10:00 AM

Room 400, City Hall

Committee of the Whole

250895 Resolution Authorizing the Philadelphia City Council Committee of the Whole to hold hearings to discuss the current state of Philadelphia school facilities, how the School District evaluates those facilities and what the educational facilities need are for the school district today and in the future.