

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Remote location using Microsoft® Teams
Wednesday, December 15, 2021
9:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA
COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS

ALSO PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN DEREK S. GREEN

RESOLUTION: 210978

1 - - -

2 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

3 Good morning. This is the Committee on
4 Education hosting today's public hearing
5 on Resolution No. 210978.

6 Before we begin today's public
7 hearing, I'll have to make the following
8 announcement: Due to the continued
9 threat of public health from COVID-19
10 and the Delta variant, City Council
11 Committees are currently meeting
12 remotely. We're using Microsoft Teams
13 to make these remote hearings possible.

14 Instructions for how the public
15 may view and offer public testimony at
16 public hearings of Council Committees
17 are included in the public hearing
18 notices that are published in the Daily
19 News, Inquirer and Legal Intelligencer
20 prior to all hearings and can also be
21 found on the PHLCouncil.com website. I
22 now note that the hour has come.

23 Will the Clerk please call the
24 roll for attendance. Members that are
25 in attendance, please indicate that you

1 are present when your name is called.

2 Also, please say a few brief words when
3 responding so that your image can be
4 displayed on screen when you speak.

5 Can the Clerk please call the
6 roll.

7 THE CLERK: Councilmember Oh.

8 COUNCILMAN OH: Present. Good
9 morning, Chairwoman. Good morning,
10 colleagues. I am present.

11 THE CLERK: Councilmember
12 Brooks.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good
14 morning. I am present.

15 THE CLERK: Councilmember Gym.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Good
17 morning. I'm present.

18 THE CLERK: Councilmember
19 Squilla.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Good
21 morning, Madam Chair and colleagues.
22 Present.

23 THE CLERK: Councilmember
24 Gauthier.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Good

1 morning, Madam Chair, colleagues and to
2 all of the panelists. Present.

3 THE CLERK: Councilmember
4 Thomas.

5 (No response.)

6 THE CLERK: And, Chairwoman
7 Sanchez.

8 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
9 Good morning. I am present. Thank you.
10 A quorum of the Committee is present and
11 this hearing will now be called to
12 order. This is the public hearing of
13 the Committee on Education regarding
14 Resolution 210978.

15 Will the Clerk please read the
16 title of the resolution.

17 THE CLERK: Resolution No.
18 210978, calling for public hearings in
19 Council's Committee on Education to
20 examine the School District's newly
21 proposed admission process for
22 criteria-based middle and high school
23 schools.

24 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
25 Before we begin to hear testimony from

1 the witnesses we have for today,
2 everyone who has been invited to the
3 meeting to testify should be aware that
4 this is a public hearing that is being
5 recorded. Because the hearing is
6 public, participants and viewers have no
7 reasonable expectation of privacy. By
8 continuing to be in the meeting, you are
9 consenting to being recorded.

10 Additionally, prior to
11 recognizing Members for questions or
12 comments they have for witnesses, I will
13 note for the record at this time that we
14 will use the chat feature available on
15 Microsoft Teams to allow Members to
16 signify that they wish to be recognized.
17 In order to comply with the Sunshine
18 Act, the chat feature must only be used
19 for this purpose.

20 Will the Clerk please call the
21 first panel to testify this morning on
22 Resolution 210978.

23 THE CLERK: The first panel is
24 Donna Bullock, Dr. Joshua Wilson, Steven
25 Kleinman, Dr. Keely McCarthy and

1 Kimberly Caputo.

2 COUNCILMAN OH: Yes. And,
3 Chair, I do have an opening statement --

4 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
5 My apologies, Councilmember Oh. The
6 Chair recognizes Councilman Oh for an
7 opening statement before the panel gets
8 started.

9 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
10 much, Chair.

11 I received a phone call from
12 parents who live in Southwest
13 Philadelphia. I don't know them. They
14 tried to reach me through a friend. I
15 live in Southwest Philadelphia in Cobbs
16 Creek Kingessing, and I have lived
17 there my whole life. I attended public
18 school at Longstreth and then Turner
19 Middle School. It is described as a
20 high crime, poor African American
21 neighborhood.

22 The parents who contacted me,
23 they told me that their son was
24 fortunate to receive financial aid, a
25 grant, a scholarship, to Catholic School

1 where he excelled. His GPA was close to
2 4.0. He did extremely well in the
3 standardized tests, in the 98th
4 percentile. They struggled in the
5 community to keep him off the streets,
6 to keep him safe where there's a lot of
7 violence and danger. They were proud of
8 his work ethic and his commitment to
9 helping others, great recommendations,
10 and they believed that would be
11 explained in his essay.

12 They were alarmed, and what
13 they were telling me I was unclear of
14 because I didn't have any details. I
15 was even unsure of what was going on.
16 What they told me is that they learned
17 that there's a new process to get into
18 one of the criteria-based schools, in
19 this case it was Central High School,
20 that Central High School and our magnet
21 schools under a new process just
22 announced by the School District and
23 already implemented, with great
24 confusion, was that their son's
25 standardized tests will not be taken

1 into account, his recommendation letters
2 will not be taken into account, and his
3 essay would be graded by a computer
4 program, which they felt very insecure
5 about.

6 I have since learned that the
7 computer program obviously cannot judge
8 content, but is specifically not to be
9 used for grading. It's a teaching aid
10 and, therefore, that left them with a
11 GPA. But they understood to some extent
12 and were asking me, that GPA is not the
13 only criteria in the sense that perhaps
14 their son, for example, got a 3.8 GPA,
15 someone might have a 3.2, but then it's
16 in a lottery. And that was very
17 disturbing to them.

18 But they also said they
19 understood that some zip codes would
20 receive weight. What weight, how much
21 weight, what zip codes? I don't know
22 what the zip codes are as of today. But
23 at the time I looked at it, there were
24 no zip codes in West Philadelphia, no
25 zip codes in Southwest Philadelphia, no

1 zip codes in South Philadelphia, no zip
2 codes in most parts of Philadelphia that
3 represent underserved communities. So
4 it was unclear to me at that time what
5 the basis of all of this was.

6 What it turns out to be is it's
7 an effort to reach equity, and I don't
8 see that at all, but that can be
9 debated. However, the problem appears
10 to me to be the fact that this was
11 announced the day before a seven-week
12 window open for applications to these
13 criteria-based admissions schools. And
14 people were reeling from the fact that
15 an entirely new process had been put in
16 without their knowledge, without their
17 opportunity to discuss or to have
18 experts weigh in on it and that it was
19 already implemented.

20 We have witnesses today and we
21 have parents today. And the fundamental
22 question, is this system better than
23 what had existed before. And certainly,
24 the issues around it include the fact
25 that Philadelphia by some accounts is

1 ranked 597 out of 707 school districts
2 in the state of Pennsylvania, putting us
3 at the bottom 15, where we have to
4 fight, parents and students, to get a
5 good education whereas other students
6 simply by where they live, they just go
7 to school and it's a great school.

8 It is the fact that there isn't
9 equal opportunity or equity in any of
10 this, but the issue is access. In other
11 words, not improving neighborhood
12 schools, not providing academic programs
13 and alternatives and opportunities, but
14 simply going in and changing the
15 admissions process for those schools
16 that parents feel provide a good
17 education in a city that does not
18 provide good education.

19 So by doing this system, is it
20 equity? Equality is fairness. \$1,000,
21 I get 500, you get 500. Equity is an
22 adjustment for disadvantages. Perhaps I
23 have a disadvantage, so instead of 500,
24 I get 600, you get 400. Equity of
25 outcome. This process does neither. It

1 ends up taking away from people the
2 opportunity to go to a school as good as
3 St. Joe's Prep, Germantown Friends,
4 Baldwin or Friends Select, which the
5 tuition is between \$18,000 and \$42,000 a
6 year. But anyone in Philadelphia
7 through self-determination, effort,
8 though not perfect, can go to a
9 criteria-based school or what we call a
10 magnet school, and is this a better
11 system. And it certainly is not clear
12 that it is.

13 And so, this provides an
14 opportunity for parents and community
15 and experts to now provide to the School
16 District, to the City of Philadelphia
17 and to our Councilmembers what they
18 would have liked to have told the School
19 District, and some people will say that
20 they like the system and some people
21 will say that they do not.

22 But I thank you, Chair, for
23 holding this hearing and I appreciate my
24 colleagues for taking the time. Thank
25 you.

1 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

2 Thank you, Councilmember Oh.

3 The Chair recognizes
4 Councilwoman Helen Gym for opening
5 remarks.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you so
7 much, Madam Chair. And I apologize to
8 the public for the condition of my
9 voice. I'm trying get it back. But I
10 wanted to make some brief opening
11 remarks in case I'm not fully able to
12 participate in the Q&A later.

13 First of all, I want to thank
14 all the community members, parents,
15 educators who are on this hearing or are
16 watching this hearing because today
17 needs to be a conversation about equity.
18 And that is an important conversation
19 that we need to have. It has been a
20 critical conversation since the advent
21 of the creation of special selection
22 schools, criteria-based admission
23 schools in the School District of
24 Philadelphia.

25 And it is particularly

1 important because in recent years we
2 have seen an alarming drop in the number
3 of African American student enrollment
4 at many of our criteria-based admission
5 schools. That is an issue for the
6 entire City to be concerned about. That
7 is a particular issue that I'm certainly
8 concerned about and have raised directly
9 with the Superintendent in particular
10 around a school that two of my children
11 attended, Masterman. And in particular,
12 when we see plummeting student
13 enrollment, there needs to be an
14 analysis. There needs to be addressing
15 of conditions. There needs to be
16 dialogue and there needs to be change.

17 I think the question isn't
18 whether we go with a new system or go
19 with the old system. Things need to
20 change in order for equity to be
21 achieved here in the School District of
22 Philadelphia. But I do have serious
23 issues about this process. I think some
24 of them my colleague Councilmember
25 David Oh addressed.

1 There's no question that in
2 terms of process, announcing a brand new
3 high school selections process on the
4 day that high school selection
5 effectively with almost no information
6 going to parents is irresponsible. It
7 created chaos and uncertainty, fear and
8 suspicion. That is the wrong approach
9 towards any school system, towards its
10 students, towards its parents and
11 towards its educators and towards our
12 City.

13 I think that there was no
14 question that there was no significant
15 public input. I know we will hear from
16 the District that there might have been
17 some amounts of parent surveys that
18 might have gone out. That is not a
19 substitution for input. There was no
20 significant input into this decision
21 that was made. And a generation of
22 kids, certainly a whole class of them,
23 are deeply impacted by that and that
24 also is unacceptable.

25 And then finally, I want to

1 take issue with the idea of what equity
2 is and what it isn't. Equity is a
3 purposeful change in practice, policy,
4 resources and investments. It requires
5 human intervention because otherwise
6 things will go the way polling goes or
7 the way SAT scores go. We know that
8 they reflect privilege. And thus,
9 equity requires intervention. That is
10 why I do primarily take issue with the
11 School District's announcement that this
12 process intends to "remove all human
13 judgment from the admissions process of
14 select schools." That is not equity.
15 It is not equity in any definition.

16 It is randomness. Randomness
17 is not synonymous with equity.
18 Randomness can be chaos. Randomness can
19 also be inequity and randomness does not
20 build for confidence, trust and
21 engagement in a better more equitable
22 school system that serves all students
23 and not the most privileged.

24 We also know that some of the
25 computer algorithms that are being

1 proposed for things like a writing essay
2 makes no sense in the criminal justice
3 field and they do not make sense in the
4 evolution of young people. Many young
5 people -- one thing that we know about
6 computer algorithms is that they can
7 measure a preinserted formula of
8 effectiveness, but they cannot measure
9 heart. They cannot measure potential.
10 They cannot measure the power of a young
11 person's voice to speak to experience.

12 It is shocking to me that a
13 computer would read and review essays
14 for applications to a school. And so,
15 again I want to emphasize algorithms,
16 removing human judgment are no way a
17 form of equity. They're not assuring
18 change and I do not think that they are
19 a better change.

20 And then finally, the last
21 thing I want to say is that the
22 longstanding issues around equity in the
23 School District, not only plummeting
24 enrollment of African American students
25 at criteria-based schools, but the

1 plummeting number of African American
2 teachers in the School District of
3 Philadelphia, the plummeting number of
4 African American leadership in the City
5 is something that should be school
6 leadership in the City, is something
7 that needs to be a top priority in this
8 School District. One without the other
9 and not having a fuller sense of our
10 commitment to all schools, particularly
11 our elementary schools, resources that
12 are invested in them makes this move
13 even more difficult to understand.

14 And so, I hope this
15 conversation today is going to be a
16 complicated one. I know our School
17 Board has been dedicated to its goals
18 and guardrails, but I also urge the
19 School Board to understand that equity
20 isn't played out in algorithms and
21 things that are created down at 440.
22 They're executed in classrooms all
23 across the City of Philadelphia in the
24 welcomeness that young people as soon as
25 they step foot into a school in terms of

1 the opportunities that they are granted
2 when mistakes are made, in terms of
3 opportunities for scholarship, external
4 opportunities for leadership that are
5 provided in schools and outside of them.
6 I expect that this will be an ongoing
7 conversation far beyond this hearing.

8 I want to thank the Chair and
9 the sponsor for taking the time to hold
10 it, but I do believe that we are going
11 to have a much more serious dedicated
12 conversation to equity that goes far
13 beyond school selection and admission,
14 and that we should challenge any equity
15 definition that calls for the removal of
16 human judgment and relies on computer
17 algorithms. Those are not again equity.
18 We need a fuller vision of it. I look
19 forward to that conversation.

20 Thank you, Madam Chair.

21 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

22 Thank you, Councilmember Gym.

23 The Chair recognizes
24 Councilmember Gauthier for some opening
25 remarks.

1 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: Thank
2 you, Madam Chair.

3 Good morning to my fellow
4 Education Committee members and the City
5 of Philadelphia. We're here today
6 because there is a glaring equity
7 problem in many of our criteria-based
8 high schools. Just a few months ago
9 students from some of these schools
10 voiced their concerns over the dwindling
11 enrollment of Black and Hispanic
12 students, and they are understandably
13 disturbed by how the demographics as the
14 City top schools do not even come close
15 to reflecting the demographics of
16 Philadelphia as a whole.

17 While I commend the School
18 District for putting a plan in place
19 specifically to address the disparities
20 in the selection process, the
21 implementation of this plan has left me
22 with many questions, the most pressing
23 of which is about the prioritization of
24 students by zip code and the timeline
25 for implementation.

1 By using large areas to
2 determine representation in the City's
3 criteria-based schools, thousands of
4 children from underrepresented
5 neighborhoods are at risk of being
6 overlooked because they share a zip code
7 with students from more resourced areas.
8 As one example from my District, which
9 is not included in any of the zip codes
10 that are given preference, I would want
11 to be sure that kids from Cobbs Creek
12 are represented in the top schools the
13 way that students from Cedar Park are
14 because these are very different
15 neighborhoods even though they share a
16 zip code and are only a few minutes
17 apart.

18 If a prioritization model like
19 this one is truly to be effective, we
20 need to look at smaller sections of the
21 City so that students are grouped in a
22 way that allows the student bodies of
23 our criteria-based schools to be more
24 reflective of our City's diversity. The
25 timing of the implementation of this new

1 process also gave me pause. The school
2 selection feedback survey was open until
3 June 11th, and results and solutions
4 were released the first week of October,
5 the same week that the high school
6 selection process for the next year
7 began.

8 And it concerns me that parents
9 and students were notified of the
10 changes to the application process the
11 same week that students were expected to
12 begin choosing the high schools that
13 they wanted to attend. In a system
14 that's already inequitable, it would be
15 almost impossible for even
16 well-resourced students to adjust to
17 these kind of massive changes, let alone
18 our most vulnerable students.

19 The selection process does need
20 an overhaul, but we need to evaluate
21 whether the system that has been put in
22 place for the upcoming school year will
23 actually create the equity that we are
24 striving for in our City schools.

25 So I look forward to the

1 conversation today, and I appreciate the
2 sponsor of this resolution and the Chair
3 of this Committee for hosting it.

4 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

5 Thank you so very much. I know that at
6 last week's School Board meeting there
7 was a lot of discussion around this
8 issue. I look forward to this morning's
9 conversation. And like my colleagues,
10 I'm very concerned because we're finally
11 recognizing the issue of equity, racial
12 equity and then we roll out something
13 that is so bumpy and so chaotic. And
14 this is not the kind of conversation we
15 should be having.

16 We should be having a
17 conversation about providing more
18 opportunity, not less opportunity. And
19 so, I hope that through this
20 conversation and the conversation that
21 has been happening by the School Board,
22 that the School District will listen to
23 many of the folks who are going to
24 testify today and really consider what
25 it's going to implement this year and

1 how we can better improve this process.
2 So I also want to thank the resolution
3 sponsor for this discussion.

4 So with that, we will start
5 with our first panel. I'm going to
6 reiterate that the Honorable Donna
7 Bullock first, Dr. Joshua Wilson, Steven
8 Kleinman, Dr. Keely McCarthy, Jaya
9 Ramji-Nogales, and Kimberly Caputo. So,
10 Representative Bullock.

11 As a parent also of a graduate
12 of Masterman and Central, I can tell you
13 that this is an issue that I have
14 personally experienced myself, this
15 process. So thank you very much. Good
16 morning. Please proceed with your
17 testimony.

18 STATE REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK:
19 Good morning. Thank you, Councilwoman,
20 Chairwoman Maria Quinones-Sanchez.
21 First, let me thank my former boss in
22 his absence, Council President Darrell
23 Clarke, as I mentioned the Chairwoman,
24 Councilmember David Oh and the members
25 of the Education Committee for inviting

1 me to speak today.

2 For the record, my name is
3 Donna Bullock and I serve as the
4 Representative of the 195th Legislative
5 District, Chair of the Pennsylvania
6 Legislative Black Caucus and most
7 important title, a parent in the
8 Philadelphia School District.

9 In early October, I had to
10 share with my son, a current 8th grader
11 at Carver, that the school selection
12 process had changed. His immediate
13 response, I can't stay at my school.
14 You see, my son had enrolled in Carver
15 Middle School after participating in a
16 tour meeting its principal, learning
17 about its STEM programs, talking to
18 students and reading on its website that
19 the middle school was a path to entering
20 the Carver School community early.

21 Since the inception of its
22 middle school program, substantially all
23 of its middle school students continued
24 on through the high school, comprising
25 of about 25 percent of the high school

1 class while welcoming in new students
2 from all across the City to fill the
3 other 75 percent of the seats. The
4 school had a reputation for its small
5 diverse community. Its 900-plus 7th
6 through 12th grade students are more
7 than 60 percent Black, 13 percent Asian,
8 9 percent Latino and 8 percent White.
9 More than two-thirds of the students
10 come from economically disadvantaged
11 households and many of them will be the
12 first in their families to attend
13 college.

14 And when the school was
15 recognized as the Blue Ribbon school in
16 2019, our Board of Education President
17 Joyce Wilkerson praised the school for
18 its diversity saying, and I quote, "I
19 want to salute Carver's commitment to
20 diversity and equity. It does it in a
21 way no one else does. It's unmatched in
22 the City." But the School District's
23 recent announcement puts all of that
24 into question.

25 I share that because as I

1 prepared my remarks for today, it
2 required me to understand the very
3 privileged and competing
4 responsibilities that I bring to this
5 conversation. Every parent, including
6 lawmakers like myself, is going to do
7 what is best for their child. And I
8 acknowledge that.

9 I am also a legislator who has
10 advocated for equitable solutions to
11 address the disparities created and
12 perpetuated by years of historically
13 racist and inequitable systems,
14 institutions and investments. So I do
15 not take this conversation lightly. As
16 we spent a year talking about equity as
17 legislators, we now face the conundrum
18 of what does equity really look like
19 beyond words and eloquent statements.

20 What does equity look like in
21 our policies and actions, how do we fund
22 equity in our budget. And even more
23 challenging, how do we achieve equity
24 with limited resources. Equity is about
25 giving people what they need to have the

1 same access to the same opportunities
2 and benefits. But when it comes to
3 limited resources or in this case a
4 limited number of seats in top
5 performing schools in an otherwise
6 underperforming School District that is
7 also underfunded by state funds, how do
8 we equitably divide the pie when we
9 simply don't have enough pie.

10 In this case, we create winners
11 and losers. And no matter how we slice
12 that pie, we will just have another set
13 of winners and losers. And the more I
14 talk to parents at Carver, at SLA
15 Beeber, at Masterman, at schools all
16 across the City, I realize that more is
17 at stake than the 8th grade class at
18 Carver. We must do this right.

19 We have a chance as
20 legislators, as policymakers, as
21 lawmakers, as leaders and as parents to
22 be critical of any and all policies even
23 those that claim to address equity and
24 to ensure that they actually achieve the
25 goals that they set forth and not set us

1 back. We have an obligation to do so
2 for our children and for our
3 constituents.

4 So before I move on, I want to
5 applaud the City Council for holding
6 this hearing and asking the tough
7 questions. As explained by the
8 Councilmembers in their opening remarks,
9 the School District announced this
10 online application at the same time that
11 they announced the significant changes
12 to the process. It's not the first time
13 that they've attempted to do this and
14 nor are they the only school district to
15 try.

16 New York City also implemented
17 a lottery last year among other things
18 with modest results. A decade ago
19 Chicago public schools used the
20 race-based admissions program. It now
21 chooses 30 percent of its students from
22 a city-wide poll and the remaining 70
23 percent from a much complicated process
24 that draws evenly from the top students
25 from various socioeconomic tiers in

1 census tracts throughout the City rather
2 than zip codes. This is not easy.

3 As we heard Philadelphia's
4 changes included removing barriers to
5 eligibility such as making Algebra
6 available to every single middle school
7 student and removing the foreign
8 language requirements, changes that I
9 believe are appropriate and equitable
10 without question. But the more
11 aggressive and controversial changes
12 that included a lottery for eligible
13 students, that included an online
14 writing assessment created by an
15 algorithm, that included zip code
16 preferences only representing one
17 section of the City, all of these threw
18 the policy and the process into
19 question.

20 The merits of these policies
21 will be discussed by other panelists so
22 I will focus on process, much like the
23 opening remarks from the Councilmembers.
24 The School District's development and
25 implementation of the new admissions

1 process is fraught with
2 miscommunication, lack of transparency,
3 conflicting information and mishaps,
4 such as the total system failure during
5 the administration of the online writing
6 assessment at one school. These things
7 continue to call on and to question the
8 effectiveness of the policy and more
9 specifically, the ability of the School
10 District to execute it.

11 The Board of Education adopted
12 a broad policy about equity during last
13 spring. This was all part of its goals
14 and guardrails framework. A policy that
15 at such a high level all of us will
16 agree with, we all acknowledge how we
17 must address equity and access in these
18 criteria-based schools. But the policy
19 lacked any details about how we will
20 actually achieve equity.

21 Those details were left to
22 School District personnel and were
23 developed without much public input
24 other than an online survey, and even
25 that survey failed to build any

1 consensus around some of the most
2 polarizing changes in the new process.
3 And to my knowledge, there wasn't any
4 public comment or opportunity to provide
5 feedback or the proposed changes before
6 the announcement.

7 And even if these steps were
8 taken to engage School District
9 families, they clearly were not
10 sufficient as many families, teachers,
11 students and faculty were shell-shocked
12 by the announcement of the changes this
13 fall. This alone should have given the
14 School District pause to ask whether
15 they effectively rolled out this
16 process.

17 Furthermore, the announcement
18 had very little details about the online
19 writing assessment, the zip code
20 processes or any clarity about how it
21 applied to middle schools like Carver
22 that had traditionally served as a
23 pipeline to their high schools. School
24 District personnel admitted that they
25 were still developing a process as the

1 process was being implemented.

2 Students, parents and teachers
3 and guidance counselors waited as
4 details trickled out, and yet many
5 questions remained leading up to
6 November 21st application deadline,
7 during the administration of the online
8 writing assessments, these last few
9 weeks and even today.

10 Does the use of technology
11 through both the lottery and online
12 writing assessment truly eliminate bias
13 and achieve equity? According to
14 Virginia Eubanks in her book Automating
15 Inequality, technology systems don't
16 remove the bias. They simply move it.
17 Move it to a different set of winners
18 and losers. Technology is not a
19 substitute for justice. And the use of
20 algorithms in the delivery of public
21 services often fail the most vulnerable.
22 So how are we safeguarding against those
23 concerns.

24 What was the process for
25 selecting the companies that developed

1 this technology, the technology to
2 administer the lottery and the writing
3 assessment? How exactly would zip code
4 preferences be applied? Was this change
5 really just about a few schools or a few
6 administrators and why couldn't we
7 address those behaviors in those
8 specific situations? Could the lottery
9 possibly make a school like Carver less
10 diverse? And what, if any, appeals
11 process even exist? These are just a
12 few questions.

13 The School District's approach
14 to developing and announcing this new
15 admissions process, as mentioned by
16 earlier comments, did not build any
17 confidence in the School District. In
18 fact, it breaks trust and discontent.
19 It unnecessarily pits families against
20 each other and causes division.
21 Policies and actions to achieve equity
22 must be strategic, they must be
23 intentional and they must be inclusive.
24 They should reflect our values as a city
25 and they must have buy-in to work.

1 It is not sufficient to say
2 this is equity for equity's sake without
3 explanation. If the Health Department
4 were to decide to distribute vaccines by
5 lottery, there will be public outcry and
6 we would question how do we prioritize
7 those most in need. If the City were to
8 award City contracts by lottery to
9 achieve equity, such a shift in policy
10 and practices would require months of
11 public engagement. And if we had
12 determined which laws to pass based on
13 an algorithm, I'm not sure how many of
14 us will get re-elected.

15 For the next several years, we
16 will be faced with more challenges when
17 it comes to how we equitably distribute
18 resources and services. The question is
19 are we willing to do the hard work to
20 create real equity and not just the
21 reallocation of the same pieces of the
22 small pie. The hard work would be
23 figuring out how do we create more pie,
24 more quality seats and classrooms across
25 the City, how do we replicate the

1 success of a Carver or a Central or
2 Masterman and other parts of our great
3 beloved City, how do we invest in our
4 neighborhood schools and how do we keep
5 fighting at the state for the fair
6 funding formula so that Philadelphia has
7 the resources to provide more
8 opportunity for all of our students.

9 Since that October conversation
10 with my son, I have constantly checked
11 my own moral compass. Yes, I want my
12 son to go to the school he believes best
13 matches his interests and would best
14 prepare him for his next chapter. But I
15 also want that for his classmates, a
16 diverse group of students from all
17 across the City and from different and
18 social economic backgrounds.

19 I want that for the shining
20 star at Gideon Elementary in North
21 Philadelphia, for the student at
22 McMichael in West or at Childs
23 Elementary in South Philadelphia and I
24 want that for the student coming from
25 St. Malachy entering the School District

1 for the first time. We have a
2 responsibility to all of our students
3 and reshuffling the equity deck doesn't
4 get us there. Investing in equity does.

5 I look forward to hearing the
6 testimony from all of the other
7 panelists. And again, I want to thank
8 City Council for taking this opportunity
9 to allow the public to hear from the
10 School District and to ask the hard
11 questions to make sure we are getting
12 this opportunity to address equity
13 right. We must do it right. This is
14 the time. Thank you.

15 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

16 Thank you, Representative Bullock.
17 Thank you as a parent of a public school
18 student. Thank you so very much. It's
19 so important to have your voice in
20 Harrisburg, and we appreciate the
21 collaboration.

22 Dr. Joshua Wilson, can you
23 proceed with your testimony.

24 DR. WILSON: Thank you. Good
25 morning. Can everyone hear me?

1 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
2 (Nodded affirmatively).

3 DR. WILSON: Okay. Thank you.
4 Good morning. Thank you,
5 Councilmembers, for inviting me to offer
6 my testimony at today's City Council
7 Education hearing. My name is
8 Dr. Joshua Wilson and I'm an Associate
9 Professor of Education at the University
10 of Delaware. I'm an expert in the use
11 of automated scoring and automated
12 writing evaluation tools in K-12
13 education. I've published 17 articles
14 on this topic and my research has been
15 funded by the U.S. Department of
16 Education, Institute of Education
17 Sciences, the Spencer Foundation and the
18 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

19 I wanted to share my concerns
20 about the writing sample that is being
21 used as part of the school selection
22 process. But first, I do want to
23 clarify that the District's decision in
24 absence of PSSA scores to evaluate
25 writing is laudable. Writing is one of

1 the best predictors of academic success.
2 In addition, it's also laudable that the
3 District recognizes the challenges of
4 efficiently and reliably scoring student
5 writing. Scoring writing is time-
6 consuming challenging work. It is
7 virtually impossible to institute an
8 efficient and reliable human scoring
9 process. Without substantial rater
10 training, scoring writing can be filled
11 with error and bias.

12 Instead, rater error as it
13 known in the field is perhaps the
14 largest source of error in writing
15 evaluation. Thus, the decision by the
16 District to adopt a scoring method that
17 ensures consistency and objectivity,
18 increases efficiency and reduces biases
19 is also reasonable and laudable.
20 Automated essay scoring can be a natural
21 solution in that regard.

22 Automated essay scoring or AES,
23 sometimes called machine scoring, is the
24 use of computer algorithms to assign
25 scores to student writing that are

1 highly consistent with those a trained
2 rater would assign. Those scores are
3 returned immediately with no human
4 effort and those scores are 100 percent
5 consistent. The computer is not biased
6 by the student's name, gender, race,
7 attendance or behavior or anything else
8 that a rater may consciously or
9 unconsciously inform the way that they
10 score that student's writing sample.

11 AES just examines the features
12 of that essay, features such as
13 vocabulary, sentence structure,
14 cohesion, coherence and assigns a score
15 based on how that essay compares to
16 essays that scored previously. So
17 turning to AES could be seen as a
18 reasonable decision by the District.

19 Indeed there is precedent to
20 suggest that automated scoring can make
21 placement decisions. For example, the
22 WritePlacer test designed by the College
23 Board is a writing test score using AES
24 that is used in community and four-year
25 colleges to determine whether a student

1 requires development or basic writing
2 courses before taking credit-bearing
3 courses.

4 And finally, there is a new
5 form of educational technology that
6 incorporates AES and automated feedback
7 to help support the teaching and
8 learning of writing. This technology
9 sometimes referred to as automated
10 writing evaluation combines automated
11 scoring and automated feedback to help
12 students learn the strengths and
13 weaknesses of their writing, helps
14 teachers promote greater amounts of
15 writing practice and more rapid practice
16 feedback cycles, and ultimately help
17 improve writing instruction, writing
18 outcomes for students. Indeed the MI
19 Write system used by the School District
20 of Philadelphia is one such program. A
21 program I have done a lot of research on
22 myself. In my research, I show that by
23 giving students feedback about the ways
24 they can improve their essays when
25 revising, MI Write provides benefits to

1 teachers and students.

2 So the first point I want to
3 make is that AES itself, automated essay
4 scoring, is not the bad guy. It's not
5 that there are no valid uses of AES,
6 there are. However it depends on how
7 AES is used, which brings me to my
8 concerns about the School District's
9 writing sample as part of its school
10 selection process. As I will share,
11 these concerns how AES is being used
12 here, but also include the writing --
13 they're also broader and include the way
14 that the writing assessment is
15 independent of AES.

16 So my concerns: First, I do
17 not believe the use of the MI Write
18 system in this instance is appropriate.
19 MI Write is not intended to be used as
20 part of high stakes decision-making. MI
21 Write is intended to support
22 classroom-based writing instruction,
23 giving students feedback about ways they
24 can improve their essays when revising.

25 Further, it is not meant to be

1 used without a teacher or a human rater
2 looking at student writing. Yet this is
3 what is happening here. And here's an
4 example of why using MI Write for high
5 stakes decisions is inappropriate. Its
6 scoring system is deliberately designed
7 not to evaluate content. It only
8 evaluates the quality of the writing.
9 This is not because AES can never score
10 content. It can.

11 It's also not because
12 Measurement, Inc., the developers of MI
13 Write, do not know how to create those
14 kinds of algorithms or models. They
15 can. MI Write doesn't score for content
16 because doing so would mean that MI
17 Write would need to include a very
18 limited number of writing prompts and
19 that teachers would not be able to
20 create their own writing prompts or
21 embed their curriculums writing prompts.

22 If MI Write is intended to work
23 in different school districts, in
24 different schools and with different
25 curricula, it would be a substantial

1 limitation to only include a limited
2 number of prompts that students can
3 practice on. Instead the tool is
4 designed to score only for writing
5 quality, ignoring content so that it can
6 be maximally flexible across
7 instructional context. And this is okay
8 because it's intended to be used in
9 conjunction with the teacher who also
10 reads and provides feedback on the
11 student's writing.

12 If the system is scoring for
13 general aspects of writing quality, it
14 frees up the teacher to address the
15 content issues. And when I work with
16 teachers, I say that's what you've gone
17 to school to do. You really want to
18 help writers develop their voice,
19 develop their insight. So it frees you
20 up to do what you've gone to school to
21 do. You didn't go to school to be an
22 editor or else you'd been an editor.

23 If the system were designed to
24 be a placement test or support placement
25 decisions, it would be desirable and

1 preferable to score for content and
2 include only a limited number of prompts
3 to ensure that students writing is
4 scored more fully and appropriately in
5 that context. And in fact, thinking
6 about the WritePlacer example, that
7 assessment uses a yes, but that AES
8 system scores for content.

9 Indeed when you remove the
10 teacher as reader from MI Write and use
11 an AES system that doesn't score for
12 context, it introduces the possibility
13 that students can compose off-topic
14 prompts or well-written nonsense. This
15 type of writing could conceivably
16 receive a higher score than the writing
17 of a student that is responding to the
18 prompt and has creative insight, but has
19 more errors than basic writing skills,
20 and this is a serious issue if there are
21 high stakes attached to performance,
22 stakes like school selection which is
23 the case in the current situation.

24 Next, I know of no research
25 that validates the cut scores selected

1 by the District as predictive of future
2 success in those respective schools.
3 Absent appropriately researched and
4 validated cut scores, decisions on who
5 can and cannot enter the lottery may not
6 be accurate and thus may cause harm.
7 Why a 22? Why not 24 or 21? Why a 17
8 and not 16 or 18?

9 While there are percentiles
10 attached to the scores that MI Write
11 produces, it is unclear whether those
12 scores are nationally normed or
13 represent a population of students
14 writing in response to 90-minute writing
15 prompts, which is what the School
16 District has elected to use as its
17 writing sample.

18 I'm unaware of any published
19 research for Measurement, Inc. that
20 describes those aspects of the
21 percentile scores. Thus, I will not
22 treat the MI Write percentile scores as
23 equivalent to percentile scores
24 generated from a validated norm
25 reference test like the PSSA.

1 Finally, it is well-known in
2 the field of writing assessment that a
3 single writing prompt is insufficient to
4 make an accurate decision about a
5 student's writing ability. Students
6 vary in their performance relative to
7 the genre of the prompt, whether they
8 compose narrative information or opinion
9 pieces and relative to the topic of the
10 prompt.

11 For example, writing about out
12 of space or bravery or the role of
13 automation in industry, for example.
14 These variations mean that a score from
15 a single writing assessment indicates
16 only so much about a student's writing
17 skills, and I've done research showing
18 that when using MI Write with elementary
19 students, you arrive at a much more
20 generalizable estimate of a student's
21 true writing ability if they complete
22 three 30-minute writing prompts, one
23 prompt in each genre and then taking the
24 average of those scores.

25 Thus, I wonder if the District

1 would have better served allocating the
2 90-minute assessment window to elicit
3 three 30-minute writing samples in
4 different genres versus a single writing
5 sample. So in sum, I do think the
6 District was wise to think about the
7 role of writing assessment in making
8 predictions about student success in
9 academically-demanding schools.

10 I also think it was wise to
11 consider ways to make scoring that
12 writing assessment maximally reliable
13 and efficient reducing, removing any
14 human bias that may be limiting
15 diversity in these schools. Looking to
16 AES was also reasonable as it has a
17 number of benefits and it can address
18 those goals. However, MI Write was not
19 intended to be used in this way and
20 coupled with the lack of research on the
21 selected cut scores and issues
22 surrounding single item writing
23 assessments, good intentions
24 unfortunately arrived at a very
25 problematic writing assessment scenario

1 that should be reconsidered given the
2 stakes attached. Thank you very much
3 for your time today.

4 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

5 Thank you. That was very insightful.
6 Steven Kleinman. Please state your name
7 for the record and proceed with your
8 testimony.

9 MR. KLEINMAN: Yes. Thank you.
10 Turning on my audio and video. One
11 second.

12 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

13 My apologies. Give me a minute. The
14 Chair recognizes Councilmember Green has
15 joined us.

16 Did you have an opening comment
17 or you had a comment, Councilmember?

18 COUNCILMAN GREEN: Thank you,
19 Madam Chair.

20 I also want to thank
21 Councilmember Oh and all of the other
22 Councilmembers that sponsored this
23 resolution. Although I'm not a member
24 of the Education Committee, I'm
25 definitely concerned in reference to

1 this new policy and direction. I will
2 be listening and paying attention, but
3 I support the efforts of both you, Madam
4 Chair, as well as Councilmember Oh and
5 the other members of this Committee in
6 addressing this issue that I was really
7 somewhat taken aback in reference to how
8 quickly this proposal came about when
9 many parents and members were not aware
10 of it. So thank you for this
11 opportunity and I will be listening as
12 ex officio, I guess, a member of this
13 Committee. So thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
15 Thank you, Councilmember Green.

16 I also want to recognize, he's
17 raised his hand, Councilmember Thomas.
18 Councilmember Thomas, did you have
19 something to add?

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: No, not
21 really. I just wanted to note for the
22 record that I'm present and also thank
23 you to the leadership on this issue. I
24 actually have a 4th grade son. So for
25 ethical purposes, I try to stay away

1 from this conversation because whatever
2 decisions are going to be made is going
3 to have a direct impact on my son, but I
4 do echo the sentiments of my colleagues
5 as it relates to the concern around this
6 issue.

7 Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank
8 you, Councilmember Oh. Appreciate your
9 leadership.

10 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

11 Thank you, Councilmember Thomas.

12 Mr. Kleinman, my apologies.
13 You can get started.

14 MR. KLEINMAN: Great. Thank
15 you. And I'm just sharing my screen.
16 One second. And I just want to make
17 sure that everybody can see that on the
18 screen, School District of Philadelphia.
19 I'm sorry. Can everybody see that?

20 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
21 (Nodded affirmatively).

22 MR. KLEINMAN: So good morning.
23 And again, thank you for the chance to
24 testify. My name is Steve Kleinman.
25 I'm a parent of a student applying to

1 high school, but I'm here because for
2 over 30 years I led research initiatives
3 at a nonprofit here in Philly best known
4 for developing the licensing exam for
5 physicians in the U.S.

6 My job for many years was to
7 look for novel assessment approaches,
8 including cutting edge technologies like
9 automated scoring. I served there a
10 Senior Vice-president for Research and
11 Discovery and have published on a range
12 of assessment topics. Professor Wilson
13 shared with us a few reasons why the
14 writing sample is problematic, a design
15 for feedback, not high stakes use, cut
16 scores not validated, one sample not
17 enough.

18 I'll build on that and describe
19 how the writing sample was delivered,
20 how automated scoring is used by another
21 major company and some additional
22 challenges, and one replacement idea.
23 Well, first to put a face on this, we're
24 talking about scores and cut points.
25 But a few thousand 8th graders are right

1 now vying for 1300 positions in five
2 schools affected by this. For many,
3 getting in is their aspiration and maybe
4 even their ticket out. The decision
5 about this has very real and personal
6 consequences.

7 So how does it work? Students
8 have 90 minutes and after they write
9 essay, they click submit, a score
10 appears on the screen on a scale of 6 to
11 30, indicating whether they will enter
12 the lottery or not. To see how this can
13 be done differently, we look to leaders
14 in the industry. The Educational
15 Testing Service has been using automated
16 essay scoring for TOEFL, so a test of
17 English is a foreign language. It's a
18 three-hour test of reading, listening
19 and writing.

20 And, yes, the writing sample is
21 scored by computer, but there's some big
22 differences. There are two writing
23 samples, not one. It's rated by a
24 computer and a human. If the computer
25 and the human disagree, another human

1 rates it. You can retake the test as
2 many times as you want. It only counts
3 25 percent of your score and there's no
4 pass-fail.

5 In measurement, as Professor
6 Wilson started to talk about, even when
7 a test looks like it's working, we worry
8 about threats to score interpretation.
9 That is what could have gone wrong to
10 make the score suspect. Especially for
11 high stakes decisions there needs to be
12 rigorous study whenever new threats are
13 plausible, and there are a few that I
14 will add to what was already mentioned.

15 One seemingly innocent one was
16 that there no practice with the software
17 beforehand. There are two possible
18 threats here, but one is that some might
19 have provided their children with
20 practice to learn how to do better
21 against the computer and gain an
22 advantage.

23 Another concern I have has to
24 do with the possibility of bias, and I
25 think Professor Wilson and I agree on

1 this and it takes a little unpacking.
2 But I'd like to back up a little bit to
3 say a little bit more about what the
4 computer is actually doing. The
5 computer scoring is done by modeling
6 human ratings of essays, but humans can
7 have bias. And because the computers
8 model the humans, the computers can be
9 biased.

10 ETS studies show that the
11 English as second language TOEFL test-
12 takers were upscored or downscored by
13 the software systematically and there
14 were some differences, for example,
15 among those originating in different
16 countries and continents. So efforts
17 must be expended to pretest in a
18 representative population and look for
19 and correct it in a model and score.
20 So, yes, they can score without bias,
21 but it takes a lot of work and analysis
22 to do that.

23 So let's move maybe now to what
24 can we do to replace the writing sample
25 score, what are some of our options at

1 this point. To think about it, I made
2 it easy for myself. I assume that we
3 had only a couple of weeks and no money.
4 So under those conditions, I was left
5 with a few choices. We got to use
6 existing data, and that consists of
7 standardized test scores or grades. And
8 I'm going to take us down the latter
9 path quickly, but other options should
10 still be on the table.

11 So grades, why grades you say.
12 A lot of schools use it for 9th grade
13 selection and middle school grades are a
14 good predictor of high school grades.
15 Well, aren't we using them already? Yes
16 and no. In the design of this year's
17 criteria for school selection, schools
18 require, for example, A's and B's. But
19 operationally, that's not what it means.
20 It means A's or B's, not A's and B's.
21 It means that if someone has all B's,
22 they move onto the lottery. If they
23 have all A's, they move onto the
24 lottery. There is no distinction made
25 between A's and B's. It's a 1-0.

1 There's one bit of information.

2 Well, let's use numbers instead
3 of grades. If someone got an A in
4 English and it was a 92, use the number
5 92. That increases the information
6 content from one bit to 20 bits because
7 the scores range from 80 to 100 and the
8 date is already there in the school
9 systems. But doing this just for
10 English raises the question, why just
11 English, why just a writing sample. If
12 we already have a math numerical grade,
13 let's use it. And once we're down that
14 path, we're right at GPAs. Take the
15 core subjects and do the same, and we
16 now have potentially 80 times the amount
17 of information. But we also have
18 another half year of school for the 8th
19 graders. We can fold that into a GPA.
20 We've now increased the amount of
21 information by two orders of magnitude.

22 I don't want to trivialize this
23 because correction may well be needed to
24 ensure comparability grades across
25 schools, but a lot of bad information

1 may already be in the School District
2 systems. Does it make sense why we want
3 more information, not less. How many of
4 you would bet \$1,000 that you know what
5 that image is? How many of you would
6 bet \$1,000 that you know what that image
7 is? In high resolution even upside
8 down, we recognize Mona Lisa. We don't
9 recognize her in low resolution.

10 Without better information, it's not
11 just that we're going to pick the wrong
12 students. It's that some of the most
13 promising kids are not going to be seen.

14 But this is where it gets
15 interesting, at least for me. What are
16 the problems that we're grappling with
17 that are right at the border of this in
18 the new school selection process that
19 can be managed through GPAs and maybe in
20 some different ways.

21 So let me have everybody look
22 at this one. Select the student most
23 likely to succeed in high school. Which
24 one is going to be most likely to
25 succeed? Well, I'm going to go with

1 this person who got the 97 and 94.4
2 percent attendance. But the way the new
3 system is implemented, it's a 1-0. So
4 if you have an A, you get a 1. If you
5 get a B, you get a 1. If you have a
6 94.4 percent attendance, you get a 0 --

7 (Background interruption)

8 COUNCILMAN OH: I'm sorry.
9 Someone's microphone is not muted and we
10 are listening to your conversation.
11 Please mute so we don't hear your
12 conversation. Thank you.

13 MR. KLEINMAN: So in this
14 example, that person, that A is going to
15 be kicked out of the lottery. The 94.4
16 percent does not qualify to enter the
17 lottery. The 95 percent is a 1-0. So
18 that person is going to be disqualified
19 from attending any of these criteria-
20 based schools because of a one-day
21 difference. And what happened here is
22 that we've lost information. We've cut
23 it down to a couple of 1s and 0s, and
24 this person missed their shot because of
25 that one day of school.

1 There are other ways that we
2 might do this in a more sensible way by
3 preserving all the information that we
4 have. First, for the immediate fix, and
5 we could stop right here, GPAs are going
6 to be a better metric that we can
7 possibly use. Now, in the longer term
8 we can consider folding in other
9 information allowing accommodations or
10 slippage for things and not do a 1-0 for
11 example for attendance.

12 So, for example, this
13 represents the -- the thickness of the
14 bar here represents the GPA. Maybe we
15 bring in attendance, but rather than
16 lopping that person off and not allowing
17 them to qualify for the lottery or in
18 this case just to rank order in, maybe
19 the GPA gets adjusted down. It's now a
20 composite score and we can continue
21 thinking, well, what other things might
22 we want to fold in.

23 Can we think about some
24 measures of economic disadvantage?
25 Again, it will not be a 1-0. But

1 actually, would bump up this person's
2 GPA or their composite score and allow
3 us to think more critically about how
4 this sensible to rank order people. So
5 certainly we'd have to have policies in
6 place on how we would even think about
7 doing this. But that's one approach
8 that we could take rather than doing
9 this 1-0, trying to fold the information
10 in and administer it to policy level.

11 Could we fold in standardized
12 tests? Standardized tests are going to
13 be a good source of information and can
14 also be something in service here.

15 Well, certainly this is just one way of
16 doing it with continuous scores, but the
17 point is to try to preserve as much
18 information as we can. And there are
19 other logical or non-numerical methods
20 to handle this.

21 So to conclude, GPAs could
22 improve information available for school
23 selection in the very short term. Some
24 sort of composite score could
25 incorporate multi-dimensional factors

1 important for equity, fairness and
2 academic excellence and other options
3 really should be explored. And I offer
4 these ideas in the hopes that some of
5 them might serve as kindling and bring
6 to light debate on the full range of
7 really complicated issues before us.
8 Thank you.

9 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

10 Thank you, Mr. Kleinman.

11 Will Dr. Keely McCarthy proceed
12 with her testimony.

13 DR. MCCARTHY: Thank you so
14 much. Good morning and thank you for
15 allowing me to testify today. I'm here
16 as a professional and also as a parent.
17 I have an 11th grader at Central and a
18 7th grader at Carver Engineering and
19 Science. I'm also a Professor of
20 English and the Director of the Writing
21 Program at Chestnut Hill College here in
22 Philadelphia. Most of my career has
23 been spent teaching and assessing the
24 writing of first-year college students.

25 I want to make two points

1 today. One about the use of
2 computerized scoring of student writing,
3 and the other about having any one
4 assessment be a gatekeeper for
5 admission. And I'm grateful for the
6 other speakers today and this will be a
7 little bit repetitive, but I hope will
8 reinforce some of the issues.

9 Number one, for several decades
10 scholars in my field of writing has
11 studied machine-scored assessment and
12 have come to the conclusion that it
13 should never be used for what we call
14 high stakes assignments, particularly if
15 used out of the context of a class with
16 no chance to see the algorithm or
17 prepare, no chance to learn from
18 mistakes and revise. The District's new
19 writing assessment for high school
20 admission unfortunately violates all of
21 the above.

22 Why is this a problem? We know
23 from research that in writing
24 assessments like this, that reward
25 correct or standard English sentences

1 over nonstandard English disadvantage
2 English language learners and students
3 from other language communities. In
4 addition, what is being tested is
5 questionable as a useful measurement,
6 since as we know from research the
7 algorithms are not rewarding things like
8 subtlety, humor, do not reward for
9 complexity of ideas, but rather sentence
10 structure.

11 Number two, having one
12 assessment, and now we know a flawed and
13 unfair one as a gatekeeper, is itself
14 flawed and unfair. What test can you
15 think of that is a one and done, that
16 doesn't allow you a retake. A driving
17 test? No, you can retake it. The bar
18 exam? You can retake it. The short
19 responses that students write for me as
20 they come into CHC as first-year
21 students, no. Not only do they write
22 this in-house created assessment at home
23 given lots of time, it's not the only
24 thing that we use to assess them. It is
25 scored by humans and the stakes for that

1 score are not very high. They've
2 already been admitted to the college.

3 The District's model also
4 disadvantages neurodiverse students as
5 well as students with undiagnosed
6 learning disabilities, who we know have
7 difficulty decoding assignments.

8 Finally, I want to say that giving
9 students their score immediately and
10 making that score determine everything
11 is cruel.

12 If you have a student in
13 school, you know how stressful even
14 something like Kahn Academy for math is.
15 They don't like it very much. But with
16 those math quizzes, if they don't get
17 100, they just retake it again. The
18 stakes are very low for Kahn Academy
19 homework. This is really different. My
20 7th grader very much wants to stay at
21 Carver for high school. But I would be
22 here even if I did not have a 7th grader
23 because I am alarmed by the lack of
24 grounded research that went into this
25 move and in particular, the use of

1 writing as a gatekeeper. Thank you very
2 much for allowing me to speak.

3 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
4 Thank you.

5 Next we have Jaya Ramji-
6 Nogales. I hope I'm not mispronouncing
7 your name. My apologies.

8 MS. RAMJI-NOGALES: Thank you
9 so much and thanks for having me here
10 today. It's Jaya Ramji-Nogales. I'm a
11 Professor of Law and Associate Dean for
12 Research at Temple Law School. I should
13 start by saying I'm here speaking in my
14 capacity and a parent as a 4th grader
15 and 8th grader in the Philadelphia
16 public systems. Nothing I say comes
17 from Temple University. It's my
18 personal insight having been through
19 this wild ride this fall.

20 Let me start with a huge thank
21 you to the Council and the Committee for
22 hosting this hearing and for providing
23 parents with the opportunity to share
24 our thoughts on the new admissions
25 process for criteria-based high schools.

1 Let me start by making my commitments
2 clear. As a parent and educator,
3 diversity, equity and inclusion in
4 public education is at the core of the
5 work I do every day and at the core of
6 my belief system. The criteria-based
7 school that I'm most familiar with is
8 Masterman. I have ongoing concerns that
9 I have raised in various fora that
10 Masterman is not representative of the
11 beautiful diversity of our City as it
12 should be, as Councilmember Gym noted.

13 All of our students benefit
14 from schools that represent our
15 diversity, and all of Philadelphia's
16 public school students deserve to be
17 represented at the criteria-based
18 schools. So it is this commitment that
19 gives rise to my concern about the new
20 admission process, which I see is
21 prioritizing optics over meaningful
22 opportunity.

23 I want to talk about four
24 concerns with the new process that other
25 speakers have spoken about with much

1 more expertise and much greater detail,
2 the computer-scored essay and the
3 concerns about its inaccuracy, zip code
4 as a proxy for diversity, the bluntness
5 of this tool, other barriers that are in
6 there, the hidden obstacles that some of
7 you have spoken about, and then this
8 haphazard process, right, the problems
9 with the process. And then I'll wrap up
10 by talking about where this might take
11 us, right. All of these concerns
12 together, I'm very concerned about where
13 we're going to end up, and I'll throw in
14 some potential next steps.

15 So as we heard very clearly and
16 very thoughtfully, the computer-scored
17 essay is just inappropriate for high
18 stakes assessment. I don't need to add
19 much to what the other experts have
20 said, but I will say that the website
21 itself for MI Write says that it should
22 not be used for high stakes assessment.
23 In my written testimony, I have quoted
24 directly from their website. Also, the
25 company itself said this is not the way

1 this essay should be used.

2 I'll also echo the cruelty that
3 Dr. McCarthy spoke about. In my
4 daughter's 8th grade class, they took
5 the test together and the students who
6 did not get the score they wanted
7 immediately knew in front of all their
8 classmates. It's just shocking as an
9 educator that you would do that to your
10 students.

11 Zip code as others have spoken
12 about is simply too blunt an instrument.
13 In addition to the concerns raised by
14 Councilmember Oh, I will say if the goal
15 is racial and ethnic and socioeconomic
16 diversity which I believe it should be,
17 we need a much more fine-grain analysis.

18 As Councilmember Gauthier said,
19 zip codes in Philadelphia are not
20 homogenous. My own, as I'm sure yours
21 does, include a broad range of humans
22 along race, ethnicity and socioeconomic
23 status. This is why we love our City.
24 Many diversity students are going to be
25 penalized for living in a particular zip

1 code even if they attend an
2 underperforming school. So why is the
3 School District not looking at the
4 school the student is actual attending
5 rather than using the blunt tool of zip
6 codes. This is surely information that
7 is within the purview of the School
8 District.

9 Equity demand that the process
10 make an effort to include all
11 underserved students in the City on an
12 equal basis as previous speakers have
13 said. There are other barriers. There
14 are yet more obstacles. These ones are
15 a bit more hidden. This 95 percent
16 attendance rate that others have spoken
17 about, this is coming on the heels of a
18 pandemic in which our students were
19 forced to undergo online learning. Many
20 students through no fault of their own
21 have serious problems being present for
22 online learning. So this is a measure
23 that is cruelly unfair.

24 The Algebra 1 requirement, I
25 agree that Algebra 1 should be taught in

1 all the schools. But in underserved
2 schools, right, those students are
3 obviously not going to have the same
4 background as the high-performing
5 school, so this also seems unfair. And
6 these barriers are harder to see. But
7 as a parent, I noticed them and
8 registered deep concern.

9 As Representative Bullock said,
10 as a parent it's been breathtaking to
11 see the chaos, which just demonstrates
12 the lack of thought in the process. As
13 a very privileged parent, it has been
14 challenging to navigate this. I can
15 only imagine how difficult it has been
16 for any parent who does not have the
17 privilege as I have, as Councilmember
18 Gauthier said.

19 And as Councilmember Gym said,
20 this is not purposeful at all in any
21 way. This was announced the day school
22 selection was opened. Information about
23 zip codes and the computer essay came
24 later. Parents were scrambling to
25 obtain information, and it promises more

1 chaos ahead. The students have not
2 ranked their choices. The schools have
3 not ranked the students. So what we
4 could see going forward is one student
5 could get into all five criteria-based
6 schools. There's nothing to stop that
7 from happening while their next door
8 neighbor with identified
9 co-qualifications gets into none, and
10 then this process is going to have to
11 sort itself out over the month of the
12 spring semester. So it promises more
13 chaos going forward, which is obviously
14 going to impact different households in
15 Philadelphia differentially.

16 Also, the Algebra 1 requirement
17 cannot be assessed until the end of 8th
18 grade. So some students who may think
19 that they've gotten into a criteria-
20 based school in January may come to the
21 end of the year and not met the Algebra
22 1 requirement. This is not a process
23 that has been well-thought-through.

24 So I would as a parent said,
25 okay, if this process is increasing

1 equity and diversity in the Philadelphia
2 school system, I'm just going to ride
3 this out. But my concern about the
4 implications for DEI with this process
5 is this score design could actually
6 decrease racial, ethnic and
7 socioeconomic diversity at the criteria-
8 based schools.

9 So first of all, we all
10 discussed the ways that this new process
11 can actually exclude underserved
12 students by the thoughtlessness of its
13 design. And as prior speakers have
14 said, students who meet the criteria are
15 all eligible for the lottery on the same
16 basis regardless of race ethnicity,
17 socioeconomic status or academic
18 performance. So we can end up in a
19 situation where the criteria-based
20 schools become less diverse because no
21 attention is being given to the
22 diversity factors that should matter
23 here.

24 So there are several next steps
25 that I think we should see. There needs

1 to be reform and strategic planning as
2 other speakers have said engaging key
3 stakeholders, that really has not
4 happened here. We need to fix the
5 process this year to minimize the harm.
6 Dr. Kleinman has given us some great
7 ideas. Maybe we need to pause the
8 process.

9 But what we really need is a
10 long-term plan to diversify all of
11 Philadelphia's high schools, the
12 criteria-based high schools and the
13 catchment-based high schools. This is
14 an opportunity I believe created by the
15 Black Lives Matter movement to improve
16 public education for every student in
17 Philadelphia. Do not throw away this
18 opportunity in service of this poorly
19 devised process that prioritizes optics
20 over meaningful opportunity. Our
21 students deserve more far more than
22 this. Thank you very much for your
23 time.

24 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

25 Thank you for your testimony.

1 Kimberly Caputo. Please
2 proceed with your testimony.

3 MS. CAPUTO: Good morning. Can
4 everyone hear me?

5 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
6 (Nodded affirmatively.)

7 MS. CAPUTO: Thank you for
8 having me and allowing me to present
9 some information, perspective on the
10 high school process for students in
11 Philadelphia. I'm Kimberly Caputo and I
12 was asked to provide this information by
13 a group of concerned parents known as
14 All Parents For Equity. I am an
15 attorney representing parents and
16 caregivers across the Commonwealth,
17 specifically in the education space.

18 I can share that Philadelphia
19 unlike other districts, including many
20 with far more resources than
21 Philadelphia, has something these
22 districts do not. And that is, as we've
23 been discussing today, options a high
24 school level. It --

25 (Background Interruption.)

1 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

2 Natalie, can you please mute yourself.

3 Thank you.

4 MS. CAPUTO: In most districts,
5 families are limited to a natural
6 progression which includes a single high
7 school and perhaps a single vocational
8 opportunity for their child. Here in
9 Philadelphia the options are far larger.
10 However, these options are not equally
11 accessible to students with
12 disabilities. Those are the students I
13 serve and the families I represent.

14 Similarly, these options are
15 not equally accessible or available to
16 students for whom English is not their
17 primary language. I've submitted my
18 remarks in writing and I've also
19 submitted some information for review,
20 including a table which notes that the
21 population of students with disabilities
22 here in the Philadelphia School District
23 by their last official public count is
24 approximately 15 percent. For these
25 students, the opportunities appear to be

1 restricted or limited to the large
2 comprehensive high schools. They are
3 not represented consistent with other
4 children in higher performing schools.

5 In fact, the numbers should be
6 alarming. In the catchment or
7 neighborhood high schools, students with
8 disabilities represent at times numbers
9 double what the overall students with
10 disabilities population is in the
11 District overall. For example, in
12 certain schools the students with
13 disabilities represent 43 percent of the
14 overall population, 38 percent of the
15 overall population whereas a school like
16 Central, they represent 1 percent;
17 Masterman 1 percent; Academy at Palumbo
18 4 percent. Again, the information is
19 available and I would submit that it
20 should be reviewed carefully.

21 These numbers are not new.
22 They have in most instances remained the
23 same or close to the same over many,
24 many years, particularly in the magnet,
25 special admit and now what we are

1 calling criteria-based schools. For
2 students with disabilities who are
3 supported with an IEP, which is an
4 individualized education plan or a
5 Section 504 Accommodation Plan, there is
6 a process known in Philadelphia as the
7 LeGare process, and I've attached to my
8 materials a number of publicly available
9 slides outlining that process.

10 I am challenged to see how this
11 process was employed in this new high
12 school application process, not just
13 because of the timing of the process,
14 the new process as other speakers have
15 outlined, but also because of COVID
16 students were not in school last year.
17 Many, many, many Philadelphia students
18 were in hybrid learning. What does that
19 mean? What that means realistically is
20 that parents and teens did not have an
21 opportunity to get to know that student
22 through the benefit of face-to-face
23 instruction.

24 How does that apply to this
25 LaGare process that I'm talking about?

1 How that applies is LeGare speaks to
2 specifically in Philadelphia the
3 obligation of the District to provide
4 equal access and opportunity to high
5 performing schools for students with
6 disabilities, English language learners
7 and students with Section 504
8 Accommodation Plans.

9 How is the process supposed to
10 work? It is supposed to work through a
11 human advocacy process. The touch of
12 human to student, adult to student.
13 What do we know about this student, what
14 are his or her strengths, what are the
15 circumstances around his or her
16 disability or learning difference such
17 that criteria used as often times a
18 barrier to access should be
19 reconsidered. That is the first step of
20 LaGare, and I am unaware of how that
21 first step was integrated into this
22 process.

23 The second step of LaGare is
24 when the high school application process
25 concludes, a parent of a child with a

1 disability is entitled to an impartial
2 review of that decision. I would hope
3 that there would be further conversation
4 about how this protective measure was or
5 can be integrated into any new policy
6 for the high school application process.

7 With regard to the separate
8 writing requirement for the identified
9 five schools, I would hope that every
10 student with a Section 504 Plan of
11 Accommodation and/or an IEP will be
12 provided with their legally mandated
13 necessary supports during the point at
14 which this single one-and-done testing
15 was provided. I am alarmed, I am
16 alarmed to hear that students were
17 automatically provided with their scores
18 after taking this assessment,
19 particularly fragile students, students
20 who struggle with writing, students who
21 struggle with emotional regulation,
22 students who have been outside of the
23 typical learning environment in many
24 instances since March of 2020. That is
25 absolutely shocking to me.

1 And I appreciate that many of
2 you may not have firsthand knowledge or
3 even secondhand knowledge of what it
4 means to be a student with a learning
5 difference. And so, I offer this for
6 consideration. Imagine you are an
7 individual struggling with regulating
8 your emotions. Imagine you are an
9 individual who has tremendous
10 creativity, who has wonderful ideas and
11 they're locked in here. They're locked
12 in here because you have a barrier with
13 communicating through writing. That is
14 something you work on every single day.
15 Maybe you use speech to text to devices.
16 Maybe you have a scribe to help you
17 communicate through written expression.
18 Were those supports provided to these
19 students who are so desperately,
20 desperately in need?

21 On behalf of all students,
22 those with differences and those
23 without, I submit that all learning
24 environments should be inclusive and
25 should reflect the faces and needs of

1 the entire population of Philadelphia.
2 We are all richer for this approach.
3 There is already research showing that
4 the variety of instructional models
5 delivered during and in response to
6 COVID-19 have had a significant negative
7 impact on all students, and particularly
8 those with disabilities.

9 I appreciate the current policy
10 has as its foundation equity. That is
11 something that we as a society
12 absolutely have to unpack. And as so
13 many speakers before me have eloquently
14 stated, do the work, the work, to ensure
15 that equity happens. I only hope that
16 in the conversation that I know will
17 follow from today's hearing that some or
18 all of you be the voice for the students
19 with learning differences. Be the voice
20 for students with disabilities. Please
21 do not forget that they represent 15
22 percent of the overall population of
23 students attending public schools in
24 Philadelphia and they have a voice that
25 deserves to be heard. Thank you for

1 this opportunity. Have a wonderful day.

2 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

3 Thank you. Thank you for your
4 testimony.

5 The Chair is going to recognize
6 Councilman David Oh if he has or to open
7 any questions to any member to the
8 Committee of this panel. Councilmember
9 Oh.

10 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
11 much, Chair.

12 I'll just say powerful
13 testimony, expert testimony, very clear
14 communication. I have no questions. I
15 know that we have more witnesses. I
16 appreciate them staying on this virtual
17 meeting. And so, I will not have
18 questions, but I certainly thank the
19 witnesses for spending this time with
20 us, their very valuable time. Thank you
21 so much.

22 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

23 Thank you. And if there are no
24 questions from any of my colleagues, we
25 will move to the next panel.

1 Will the Clerk read the names
2 of the following panel.

3 THE CLERK: The next panel --
4 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
5 Karyn Lynch -- go ahead.

6 THE CLERK: Okay. I'm sorry.
7 The next panel is Karyn Lynch and
8 Dr. Sabriya Jubilee.

9 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
10 Dr. Jubilee and Karyn Lynch, who's --

11 DR. JUBILEE: Yes. Thank you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
13 -- going to go first?

14 DR. JUBILEE: I'll go first.
15 Yes. Thank you. Good morning, members
16 of City Council, and thank you for the
17 opportunity to speak with you today.
18 Councilmember Oh, thank you for
19 scheduling this hearing to discuss the
20 school selection process. For the
21 record, I am Dr. Sabriya Kalia Jubilee,
22 Chief of Equity for the School District
23 of Philadelphia.

24 Since the beginning of
25 education reform movements, one of the

1 stated goals has been to make education
2 accessible to all, a public good. While
3 many have aspired to see education as
4 the great equalizer, most reforms have
5 fallen short of that mission. This
6 history is not only of national impact
7 but have very much been embedded in the
8 history of the School District of
9 Philadelphia. And in 2021, we are still
10 contending with ways to make education
11 accessible and equitable for all
12 students, especially those from
13 historically marginalized communities.

14 On June 15, 2020 in the wake of
15 the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud
16 Aubery, George Floyd and countless
17 others, as a District we released or
18 statement on anti-racism. In this
19 statement, we committed to becoming an
20 anti-racist equitable organization by
21 uprooting policies, deconstructing
22 processes and eradicating practices that
23 create systems of privilege and power
24 for one group over the other.

25 The upending of privilege

1 highlighted here is not simply in
2 reference to a configuration of numbers
3 or an assessment of differences in skin
4 color or features, but rather speaks to
5 the destruction of a system and the
6 dismantling institutionalization of
7 norms. It doesn't just ask for us to
8 set aside seats as a way to appease a
9 few, but rather challenges us to explore
10 questions of why, who and for what.

11 Through the school selection
12 process, we have the opportunity to
13 redesign a process that from inception
14 to current practice has only truly
15 benefited a small group of stakeholders,
16 many of whom do not reflect the majority
17 demographic of our School District or
18 City. But this presentation, I am not
19 speaking solely about visibility, but
20 more about the impact of opportunity,
21 access and power.

22 As a teaching and learning
23 organization, our mission is to deliver
24 on the civil right of every child in
25 Philadelphia to an excellent public

1 school education and ensure all children
2 graduate from high school ready to
3 succeed, fully engaged as a citizen of
4 our world.

5 Our vision is to see all
6 children having access to a great school
7 close to where they live. But in order
8 to do this, we have to start by
9 addressing the areas where the
10 foundational inequities exist. Over the
11 past 20 months in the midst of a global
12 pandemic and ongoing racial tension,
13 there has been an outcry for equity, but
14 seemingly only a tolerance for equality.

15 Equity and equality are not
16 synonymous. Equity in its truest sense
17 is about fairness and the mission to
18 achieve balance, but the conundrum we
19 experience is that the push for balance,
20 this cause for fairness is needed
21 because deficit has been more prominent.
22 Equity is a responsive factor when lack,
23 disenfranchisement and partiality
24 exists. Because of this, the concept of
25 all experiencing the same thing to the

1 same degree cannot actually co-exist.

2 For example, we cannot argue
3 against preferred zip codes, but
4 advocate for automatic matriculation of
5 middle schoolers into high school. We
6 cannot say we care about diversity in
7 schools yet believe that expanding the
8 pool to include more qualified students
9 from marginalized identities will
10 compromise the academic quality.

11 As highlighted in the initial
12 press briefing and several inquiries
13 after, the amendments posed in this
14 year's school selection is a small step
15 in the direction of change. There is
16 still much more we need to understand.
17 We must continue to ask ourselves the
18 hard questions such as where do we see
19 alignment and misalignment between the
20 governing policy for school selection
21 and the way it manifests in schools, is
22 there consistency in the admissions
23 process across schools, who is impacted
24 and how.

25 And the fundamental question of

1 action, how can we create greater access
2 and inclusion for students to
3 participate in the school selection
4 process, especially those most
5 traditionally left out. While some may
6 argue this change feels sudden and
7 therefore should be halted until we can
8 tweak the nuances, in the words of
9 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., justice
10 delayed is justice denied.

11 What's important to understand
12 here is we are not just changing steps
13 in a process. We are working to shift
14 patterns within the system. Our hope
15 and goal is to use our focus on equity
16 as a way to re-envision the entire K-12
17 experience for our students, all of our
18 students. And to do this, we have to
19 take time for unlearning and relearning
20 ways of doing schooling and explore
21 where there is a need for change, both
22 immediate and long-term. The lasting
23 impacts of the amendments made in this
24 year's school selection process cannot
25 be known at this time. And while there

1 are no guarantees, we must courageously
2 strive for change. Our students are
3 owed it.

4 As I close, I want to leave you
5 with this quote by Isabel Wilkerson,
6 author of Caste. "We in the developed
7 world are like homeowners who inherited
8 a house on a piece of land that is
9 beautiful on the outside but whose soil
10 is unstable loam and rock, heaving and
11 contracting over generations. And yes,
12 not one of us was here when this house
13 was built, but here we are the current
14 occupants of a property with stressed
15 cracks and bowed walls and fissures
16 built into the foundation. We are the
17 heirs to whatever is right or wrong with
18 it. We did not erect the uneven pillars
19 or joists, but they are ours to deal
20 with now and any further deterioration
21 is, in fact, on our hands." Thank you
22 for the opportunity to speak. That
23 concludes my comments.

24 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
25 Thank you, Dr. Jubilee.

1 Ms. Karyn Lynch.

2 MS. LYNCH: Thank you. Good
3 morning. Good morning, Councilmembers
4 and members of the public. My name is
5 Karen Lynch and I am the Chief of
6 Student Support Services for the School
7 District of Philadelphia. As it has
8 become the theme today, I will share
9 that I am not a parent of any child that
10 is attending any School District school.

11 I have no relatives with
12 children that are attending School
13 District schools, and my grandchildren,
14 one grandchild, attends school in New
15 York City. Her parents refuse to leave
16 New York City so there's not a thought
17 that she will ever attend a School
18 District of Philadelphia school to my
19 great disappointment.

20 I am a child advocate by trade
21 and by passion, and I have spent I would
22 say 75 percent of my time in
23 Philadelphia dedicated and devoted to
24 the children of this City and to their
25 educational attainment. I don't believe

1 I have any conflict at all, just passion
2 and commitment to the students.

3 I am here today to speak to you
4 about the school selection process
5 conducted annually in the School
6 District of Philadelphia. School
7 selection is a method used by any City
8 resident seeking to attend any available
9 District school in Grades K through 12
10 that is outside of their immediate
11 community. The work that we have
12 engaged in with regard to improving the
13 school selection process is not new.

14 Improvements have been made for
15 the better part of the last 10 years,
16 first starting with the evaluation of
17 our process, who has access to our
18 process, who engages in our process and
19 that process was conducted independently
20 by the Pew Foundation. And each year we
21 have analyzed, evaluated the results of
22 our school selection process in order to
23 determine what worked, what didn't work,
24 how closely we're coming to improving
25 the analysis that was identified by and

1 the recommendations identified in the
2 Pew study.

3 This study and the subsequent
4 evaluations conducted by the School
5 District are readily available this year
6 online and we make them readily
7 available -- is that me making that
8 noise? I'm not --

9 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:
10 No. I'm going to ask Solomon Jones, if
11 you can mute yourself. Thank you.

12 MS. LYNCH: Okay. I thought
13 that might be my microphone. Sorry.
14 And each year we make improvements to
15 the program to our process, looking back
16 to the Pew analysis and determining
17 where there are opportunities for
18 improvement, what worked and what did
19 not work. Due largely to the COVID-19
20 pandemic last year, the School District
21 announced we would not make core
22 changes -- that we would make core
23 changes in the process because we were
24 not utilizing the PSSA results, and that
25 was one of several criteria that we have

1 used throughout for years.

2 At that time, we indicated that
3 we would seek input and feedback on what
4 criteria should be used. Several have
5 made note of the survey that was
6 conducted. We did the survey. We also
7 had several public meetings that were
8 held by our Board of Education where
9 families have the opportunity to give
10 input where we received input from our
11 Board members, and those meetings all
12 allowed for the opportunity for public
13 meeting and for individuals to share
14 their opinions and ideas. One person
15 that we heard from who is on the list of
16 speakers this morning is Stephanie King
17 who's a parent, and I'm going to speak
18 to several of her comments in just a few
19 minutes.

20 In addition to the removal of
21 the PSSA as a criteria for the school
22 selection process last year -- this
23 year, not last year, our District was
24 also impacted by the growing national
25 attention to racism, mainly the murder

1 of George Floyd among others. As a
2 result as an organization, we committed
3 to examining all of our processes,
4 procedures and practices to ensure
5 equity and (inaudible). For more than a
6 year, the School District obtained
7 feedback --

8 (Background interruption.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

10 Karyn, hold on a second. Can someone
11 mute themselves please. Please be
12 considerate of our speakers. Thank you.

13 MS. LYNCH: Shall I continue,
14 Madam Chair?

15 COUNCILWOMAN QUINONES-SANCHEZ:

16 Absolutely. My apologies.

17 MS. LYNCH: Thank you. For
18 more than a year, the School District
19 obtained feedback about the school
20 selection process and listened to
21 individuals and representatives of
22 groups to inform the improvements to the
23 school selection process. Several
24 public meetings held by the Board of
25 Education as its members considered the

1 Board's goals and guardrails.

2 One indicator for the
3 guardrails is ending racist practices as
4 I've shared in our policies and
5 procedures. At these meetings, we
6 listened to Board members who stress
7 their interests and concerns about the
8 school selection process. Board members
9 asked and again the public had the
10 opportunity to hear and participate that
11 our practices provide greater access and
12 transparency to all residents regardless
13 of their ethnicity, the language spoken
14 in their homes, the school that was
15 attended or their demographic and more.

16 Board members questioned
17 individual school criteria, how it was
18 that all schools did not have a
19 standardized criteria and stressed the
20 importance of eliminating criteria that
21 relatively few students could meet.
22 There was also discussion about who
23 actually makes decisions in the school
24 selection process and many attributed
25 the decision-making of who gets into a

1 school and who does not get into a
2 school to an individual person in each
3 of the criteria-based schools and
4 likened it to a wizard standing behind a
5 screen or curtain and arbitrarily
6 deciding based on information that was
7 beyond a student's data and educational
8 experience who would and who would not
9 attend criteria-based schools.

10 At the public meeting for the
11 Board of Education's Policy 206, Board
12 members again asked if we eliminated
13 barriers, and they stressed that we
14 eliminate barriers to student access,
15 maximize opportunities for more students
16 to have access to selective schools and
17 stressed the need to eliminate the
18 perception that middle school enrollment
19 was a means to high school acceptance
20 when there was no policy or procedure
21 that guarantees or promises a student in
22 middle school would be accepted to the
23 same named high school.

24 In fact, students in these
25 middle schools have always been required

1 to apply to the high school through the
2 school selection process. That was not
3 a change. We also conducted a school
4 selection survey which I shared earlier,
5 and asked students, parents, principals,
6 counselors, community members to share
7 ideas and comments about the school
8 selection process and additional
9 criteria that could be used in lieu of a
10 PSSA score. Again, that was not the
11 only input that we received to the
12 process.

13 Over the past weeks, I've been
14 asked why do we not phase in the process
15 improvements. Each year for nearly 10
16 years we have made improvements to the
17 process. For example, the process has
18 evolved over the last 10 years to be one
19 that no longer occurs three times a
20 year, but one that occurs once a year.
21 The process was moved from a paper
22 process to one that is online, so more
23 could have access to the process --

24 (Background interruption.)

25 MS. LYNCH: The process is

1 available now in nine various languages
2 that are frequently spoken within the
3 School District. Students hoping to
4 attend a career technology school, what
5 we call a CTE school, or a city-wide
6 admission school no longer have criteria
7 based on grades, attendance or PSSA
8 scores. This has increased access and
9 enrollment options for more students and
10 it has filled seats that previously were
11 left empty because of criteria. Again,
12 increasing access is extremely important
13 to this process. It's been noted by the
14 Superintendent as well as our Board. It
15 was stressed within the Pew study 10
16 years ago.

17 For years, students applying to
18 attend a noncriteria K to 8 out of
19 catchment or zip code preference school
20 all participated in a lottery. That's
21 right, zip code preference is not new to
22 the School District of Philadelphia's
23 school selection process. Lottery is
24 not new to the School District of
25 Philadelphia's school selection process.

1 Making changes annually to this process
2 is not new to the School District's
3 school selection process.

4 In fact, only 21 of our 250
5 schools did not prior to now use the
6 lottery. And the writing sample is not
7 new. For the past three years, the
8 writing sample has been used as part of
9 the school selection process at Parkway
10 Center City Middle College. In the
11 three years that the sample has been
12 used, no comments have ever been made.
13 No negative comments have ever been
14 made. I repeat, no negative comments in
15 the past three years have been made.
16 When several criteria, school principals
17 asked this year to include the writing
18 sample among the criteria for their
19 school selection process. There was no
20 reason to not agree and support their
21 requests because the writing sample had
22 been used for three years and the
23 principal of Parkway Center City Middle
24 College praised the involvement of the
25 writing sample in the criteria as well

1 as the work with the company that
2 provided the sample for the last three
3 years as well as this year.

4 Along the last year and a half,
5 I would say 18 months, we have heard
6 from many parents as part of our
7 listening, our hearing and our engaging
8 as we work to improve the school's
9 selection process. We heard from
10 parents who believe only children from
11 certain schools have the privilege to
12 attend our more selective criteria-based
13 schools. We heard from parents that
14 said students attending select primary
15 schools have a direct path to elite
16 schools or who you know or the position
17 that you hold determines what schools a
18 child will attend.

19 We heard from child and
20 education advocates who asked why we did
21 not establish priorities in this year's
22 process for homeless children and foster
23 children and special education children.
24 They said we had the chance to make
25 improvements and we didn't go far

1 enough. I mentioned earlier one of the
2 parents who's on your list of speakers
3 today. We have sat and met several
4 times. And most recently, again with
5 Stephanie King, a mother of two children
6 attending one of our District schools.
7 She's passionate about this topic.
8 She's told us that our process
9 contributes to segregation and most
10 recently shared and I quote, "Our
11 changes are a step in the right
12 direction, but we did not go far
13 enough." That was a compliment from
14 Stephanie King.

15 This is all to say that we did
16 not reach these changes. We did not
17 make these changes without input from
18 others, and all of our efforts are to
19 improve access for our students. It is
20 a bold move. Yes, it actually it is.
21 The students in the City of Philadelphia
22 deserve bold moves to support their
23 educational attainment and their
24 educational achievement. Yes, they do.
25 Should we ask students who have been

1 denied access to wait yet another year
2 while we delay, while we phase in
3 improvements? I'll let you internalize
4 the response to that question.

5 We have upheld a process and I
6 use the collectively --

7 (Background interruption.)

8 COUNCILMAN OH: I'm sorry. Can
9 I just interrupt to say that I'm not
10 sure where all that static noise is
11 coming from. Could everyone just double
12 check that you're muted. I can hear,
13 but it is difficult to hear. So, yeah,
14 everybody please check to make sure
15 you're muted today so that we can
16 continue with our witness. Thank you.

17 MS. LYNCH: I'm nearly
18 finished, Councilman Oh. I just have a
19 couple more sentences. We collectively
20 have upheld a process that we've known
21 for years. And again, I cite the Pew
22 study that was conducted nearly 10 years
23 ago. We've known for year that this
24 process is inequitable and in some cases
25 not even equal. This is not the

1 beginning of change as I have pointed
2 out, and this is not the end.

3 I think that as we move forward
4 there are other pressing aspects of this
5 process that we need to examine, and
6 I'll just name a few. Kim Caputo
7 identified special education. That is
8 absolutely something that we are looking
9 at more, although there have been
10 improvements this year to the process of
11 LaGare. Sibling preference is another
12 preference that exists in our process
13 that we should look at.

14 The GPA that you mentioned
15 earlier, Councilman, we actually -- and
16 you and other speakers, we don't have a
17 GPA for the 7th grade or for middle
18 school. And establishing as the GPA
19 just as several of the speakers pointed
20 out would be a much better approach to
21 this effort. So looking at how to do
22 that is definitely on the list for
23 improvements next year.

24 I want to thank you for this
25 opportunity to speak today and to share

1 just a little bit of about the process.
2 I will do my very best to remain in the
3 hearing throughout the entire
4 opportunity for feedback and to hear
5 comments from your speakers. And again,
6 I think it's extremely important to
7 listen and to hear. And I think the
8 hearing you have today, the resolution
9 as well as the hearing each provide the
10 opportunity for us to hear more, to gain
11 more input and more insight. So this
12 concludes my comments today. Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN OH: I believe
14 Councilmember Mark Squilla will be
15 taking over as Chair.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.
17 Thank you very much. I just have a
18 quick question before we open up
19 questions to the Committee.

20 As we heard and I know the
21 School District had set this forth and I
22 understand there was a survey that was
23 sent out there, did we feel it necessary
24 also to meet with the principals of
25 those schools and other stakeholders in

1 that process as this new policy was
2 being implemented?

3 MS. LYNCH: Councilman, I will
4 share with you that Principals,
5 Assistant Superintendents, other chiefs
6 within the School District including our
7 Academic Chief, our Chief of Research
8 and Evaluation, you have met today our
9 Chief of our Diversity Equity Office,
10 DEI is extremely important, there are
11 several other chiefs that have been
12 actively involved as well as principals.
13 Through our equity lens review, we
14 included parents, students, we included
15 not just the principals that are leaders
16 of criteria-based schools, but we
17 included K through 8 principals that are
18 sending students to criteria-based
19 students as well as principals who are
20 managing and leading criteria-based
21 school. So K to 8 principals were
22 included, yes. Counselors --

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
24 everybody thought that these policies
25 set forth was a good idea and that that

1 would enhance what we're trying to do
2 with equity and inclusion. And you
3 heard some of the concerns from at least
4 several of early testifiers, including
5 our State Rep Donna Bullock and the
6 concerns that you have heard. Do you
7 think this policy addresses that?

8 MS. LYNCH: I would answer by
9 saying that each time I have an
10 opportunity to speak about the process,
11 people become more informed. I would
12 say that what has been attributed to the
13 changes that took place this year have
14 been processes that have -- have been
15 elements of the process that have
16 existed for years. I would share that
17 when the representative spoke to middle
18 schoolers and their enrollment in the
19 high school, that that has been a
20 de facto process that specifically has
21 been addressed at public hearings where
22 we were actually given the direction
23 that we should make the seats that are
24 available in all of our schools
25 accessible to students from across and

1 beyond.

2 Do I think that each person has
3 a perspective that merits consideration?

4 I would respectfully say yes that I do.

5 And I will say that, as I just shared,
6 this is the beginning. This is the
7 beginning with more to come with regard
8 to access and equity, and I take the
9 comments that were offered into
10 consideration.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. It
12 is the beginning, but I mean it's a
13 policy that's in place. It's not the
14 beginning of a process. I mean, there's
15 already decisions made. So I think that
16 is what is concerning. And also, if
17 we're looking at that, are we looking to
18 grow our facilities and grow the number
19 of people, and we talked about middle
20 school and how that proceeds into high
21 school. But instead of limiting the
22 number of seating, increasing those
23 seats in these schools so that more
24 people have access to them. Is that
25 also a consideration?

1 MS. LYNCH: I think that you
2 have hit on something that absolutely
3 has to be a consideration and is a
4 consideration. And making more seats
5 available is absolutely something that
6 we should do, that we have to do and
7 that it has been a consideration, and
8 we're actively trying to make that
9 happen.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay. I
11 mean, whether it's using these schools
12 and moving them into bigger spaces or
13 swapping with another school or moving
14 the middle school out of one school and
15 adding more high school spots, whatever
16 it may be, I think those conversations
17 are also important.

18 I know there are several
19 questions by some of our colleagues. I
20 would say, Councilmember Oh, if you have
21 a couple of questions.

22 MS. LYNCH: I thank you for
23 your support with the idea of increasing
24 the number of seats. That support is
25 valuable. Thank you.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes. Very
2 much so.

3 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you,
4 Chair. I have some questions.

5 To either witness, I appreciate
6 the work you've put in. I know it is a
7 complex topic. I have stated my
8 concerns. I actually do not agree with
9 it. However, I do recognize that it is
10 something that you feel passionately
11 about and you are responding to the
12 instructions of the School Board.

13 I will note for the record that
14 we did invite the Board Chair and we did
15 invite Dr. Hite. They are not before
16 this Committee. And so, it may be
17 unfair to pose some of these questions
18 to you, but I will. And if you cannot
19 answer them, just let me know.

20 Based on the concerns that were
21 raised by the first panel, computer
22 selection, a kind of blunt use of zip
23 codes, lack of more data in terms of
24 refining between one candidate and the
25 next and the sudden to many people,

1 albeit you've talked about the process,
2 but to many, many people the sudden
3 surprise of a new process, are you in a
4 position to pause this process or do we
5 have to talk to the Chair, the Board,
6 Dr. Hite or somebody else?

7 MS. LYNCH: You know, I
8 definitely will encourage you to talk to
9 others, but I will share with you just a
10 few things that I know about this
11 process. So this is the process by
12 which students are identified to attend
13 certain schools. We have close to
14 20,000 students, both School District of
15 Philadelphia students as well as
16 students who reside in the City who are
17 dependent on this process as we have
18 shared today to determine what their
19 options are going to be for attending
20 school next year.

21 This process is not just a
22 process for enrollment into other
23 schools. This is a process that also
24 feed into our budgeting process so that
25 we can determine based on not just

1 enrollment in schools, but certainly
2 consideration of enrollment in schools,
3 but the budgets will be for individual
4 schools based on how many students are
5 attending. And it also feeds into the
6 hiring process for teachers and
7 school-based staff in all of our
8 schools, which is predominantly or
9 greatly I would say, dependent on the
10 enrollment.

11 So if this process does not
12 continue or if this process is further
13 delayed, it's going to impact the
14 budgets for schools, therefore, the
15 budgets and the timing of the budget to
16 our Board, the timing of the budgeting
17 process with regard to the City Council.
18 It will impact hearings. It will impact
19 how dollars will be allocated. It will
20 impact the hiring of sufficient staff or
21 the attempt to hire sufficient staff and
22 determine where they are going to work
23 for the fall.

24 And so, all of those factors
25 that I put at the top of the list,

1 students knowing what their future is
2 going to be and students knowing where
3 they are going to attend school in the
4 next few months as they are making
5 decisions now as other options outside
6 of the School District of Philadelphia
7 are also presenting themselves with
8 regard to other public schools as well
9 as private schools. The timing is such
10 that families will want to know exactly
11 what the outcomes are going to be for
12 their child so they will be in a
13 position to make those decisions. I
14 hope that's helpful.

15 COUNCILMAN OH: Yes. Thank you
16 for your answer. I will say that I do
17 interpret the situation differently. I
18 think people, at least who I've heard
19 from and I have not heard from
20 everybody, want a fair process, an
21 insightful and just process and a
22 predictable process.

23 And I think that raises this
24 other point, that part of it is that
25 Philadelphia is the only school district

1 out of 707, I guess it depends on how
2 you define the school districts, in
3 Pennsylvania that does not have an
4 elected School Board. Basically, the
5 people do not elect their School Board
6 representative. They don't know who's
7 their School Board representative. It's
8 a very distant process as far as I've
9 ever seen, because the Mayor basically
10 appoints nine people, confirmed by
11 Council since the return of the School
12 District from the SRC, but people do not
13 feel in many cases that their School
14 District is responsive to them, and
15 perhaps this is a watershed moment where
16 people are trying to express themselves.
17 And whether the School Board agrees or
18 doesn't agree, they are frustrated that
19 somehow what they're saying is not being
20 received in a way that they feel is
21 meaningful.

22 I think basically -- and I will
23 say that I did introduce a bill that we
24 would have five elected School Board
25 members, let the Mayor appoint four and

1 there's no alternative to that. Nobody
2 has introduced a bill that all nine will
3 be elected, so I will put that out
4 there, that I've had this existing
5 concern.

6 But I see the problem as being
7 that there are many students who want a
8 good education. There are many students
9 who drop out of our schools. There are
10 many unfortunate situations where there
11 are not parents at home to guide them
12 and many other things. But there are
13 many students and parents who want their
14 child to have a good education, but
15 there are very few seats.

16 So we then got charter schools,
17 which you have to hit a lottery in order
18 to go, and people apply for all
19 different types of charter schools,
20 whatever it is. If they hit a lottery,
21 they can go, but most people can't hit
22 the lottery so then they look at their
23 neighborhood school.

24 They could go to a private
25 school if they had the money. Most

1 people don't. Some people can leave the
2 City, and I think we've had 35,000
3 African Americans, mostly in middle
4 class, leave our City for a less
5 expensive lifestyle outside of the City
6 with better school choices. So charter
7 schools, private schools outside of
8 Philadelphia and that leaves the magnet
9 schools, the criteria-based schools.

10 Up until now -- and those seats
11 have not increased. Up until now, there
12 was a level of self-discrimination,
13 effort, grit, planning to get themselves
14 into the school, but now that's a
15 lottery. I think that is what's most
16 disturbing that they are trying to
17 express to the School District. And
18 basically what I'm hearing is that the
19 process will continue the way it is.

20 MS. LYNCH: Councilman, I can
21 share several things with you. First, I
22 would share with you that over the last
23 10 years there have been increases in
24 the number of seats, so there's more
25 seats available in criteria-based

1 schools than there were 10 years ago.

2 I would also share with you --
3 and I can't speak to, you know, I don't
4 have an opinion one way or another,
5 although I understand your point about
6 elected versus voluntary. But I will
7 share with you that the nine members
8 that are our School Board members, and
9 many will be shocked to hear me say
10 this, they spend an incredible amount of
11 time working to understand, to know, to
12 impact. Their domain is policy and they
13 are actively involved as volunteers.
14 They spend inordinate amounts of time,
15 not just in meetings, but also
16 advocating for the School District of
17 Philadelphia and more importantly for
18 the children of Philadelphia to obtain
19 strong, good educational attainment.

20 I'd also point out the approach
21 that the Board is taking with regard to
22 the goals that it has established and
23 the guardrails to protect those goals,
24 but the Board is not just saying, but
25 their actions are actively involved in

1 the process of ensuring the improvements
2 for all students of looking at the data
3 that is available and they request for
4 student achievement with the goal of
5 improving the quality of our schools,
6 the education that students are able to
7 receive and the Board's goals and
8 guardrails process also allows on a
9 monthly basis for members of the
10 community to tune in and find out about
11 the status of our schools and hold us
12 accountable, the Superintendent as well
13 as all of us who work for the
14 Superintendent accountable for achieving
15 those goals and monitoring on an ongoing
16 basis of progress.

17 And I lastly will say to you I
18 know of no other system in this City,
19 and you can correct me if I'm wrong,
20 that allows any citizen to come forward
21 and speak each and every month at a
22 Board meeting for three minutes about
23 the topic of their choice. And trust
24 me, last Board meeting I was here until
25 11:45. And probably one of the most

1 important parts of the evening was
2 hearing from citizens, residents,
3 parents, students about our processes,
4 our procedures. And the Board holds us
5 accountable for the things that we hear
6 and the things that people say, and they
7 investigate every concern and they
8 actively pursue every issue. And so,
9 those are the few things that I would
10 say in response. I thank you.

11 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
12 much. I would like to say that while I
13 do disagree, I have tremendous respect
14 for you and I appreciate your work. And
15 while I don't know Dr. Jubilee, I
16 appreciate the passion and the work.

17 My last question, Chair, is
18 this: So as we look at our magnet
19 schools, for example, Bodine or Bodeen
20 50 percent African American; 21 percent
21 Latino; 9 percent Caucasian; 12 percent
22 Asian; School to the Future 98 percent
23 African American; Palumbo, 40.4 African
24 American, 9.5 Latino, 9 percent
25 Caucasian -- I'm sorry, 9.5 percent

1 Latino, 14 percent Caucasian, 31.1
2 percent Asian; Carver, 65.3 African
3 American, 9.7 percent Latino, 6.9
4 percent Caucasian, 12.6 percent Asian;
5 Parkway 72.4 African American, 15.1
6 percent Latino, 2.2 percent Caucasian,
7 6.7 percent Asian. And finally Girls
8 High, 66.4 African American, 10.1
9 Latino, 8.6 percent Caucasian, 14.9
10 percent Asian.

11 So as you said, there are
12 magnet schools. And among all of the
13 magnet schools, what is the reason for
14 example choosing Carver or Parkway or
15 Palumbo over for example Girls High or
16 School of the Future or Bodine? I mean,
17 they seem pretty diverse in the sense
18 that when we're looking at, especially
19 the issue today, having opportunities
20 for especially underserved children or
21 African Americans or other minorities to
22 go to magnet schools? From what I've
23 seen, the majority population in all
24 magnet schools in Philadelphia are
25 minority, although the breakouts are

1 different, but primarily in Masterman
2 and Central. Could you explain how one
3 criteria-based school was selected over
4 the other for the process?

5 MS. LYNCH: We have 21
6 criteria-based schools. One of the 21
7 has used -- you said the writing sample,
8 yes?

9 COUNCILMAN OH: Well, no. Is
10 it because they have a -- like in other
11 words for Carver, is it because they are
12 a feeder school? Is it because Carver
13 has a middle school? Is it because
14 Masterman has an elementary school? Is
15 it an effort to kind of change the fact
16 that a lot of these kids in the
17 elementary school or middle school will
18 then go into Carver or Masterman at a
19 higher rate than is available to the
20 entire City or what is the reason -- for
21 example, Parkway, 72.4 percent African
22 American. Why does that need to be
23 overhauled?

24 MS. LYNCH: Okay. You're
25 looking at the racial demographic of

1 each of these schools --

2 COUNCILMAN OH: Yes.

3 MS. LYNCH: -- and a good deal
4 of the discussion has been about access
5 and equity to these schools, so it's not
6 just based on racial dynamics. It's
7 based on students who traditionally have
8 been disenfranchised from the process.
9 Students who meet the qualifications,
10 who live in areas where they have not
11 had the opportunities that others have
12 had because the decision-making has been
13 by data based more on the school that
14 they attended perhaps than their
15 educational qualifications. And that's
16 how we looked at the zip codes. The zip
17 codes are not reflective of the
18 demographics you're talking about. The
19 zip codes are reflective of students
20 living in areas of the City that had the
21 qualifications to attend, but the lowest
22 representation in four of our schools.

23 COUNCILMAN OH: I understand
24 that. And I will state that the issue
25 was raised, but the students in those

1 zip codes could be wealthy White
2 children, could be -- in other words,
3 the preference now given to the zip code
4 may, in fact, increase the number of
5 students, but it may actually result in
6 less diversity of race and
7 socioeconomic, but it will increase
8 perhaps the number of students from that
9 zip code. Anyway that's the quandary.
10 I'm going to stop because I know there's
11 more witnesses, and I appreciate your
12 answering the questions.

13 Thank you very much, Chair.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
15 Councilmember.

16 I know Councilmember Brooks
17 also had some questions for this panel.
18 Councilmember, are you available?

19 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yes. I
20 have just a few questions. Earlier on
21 someone mentioned about special admits
22 and children with special needs or
23 English language learners. What
24 supports will be in place to make sure
25 that all children are successful in

1 special admit schools and are there
2 already things in place for all children
3 to be successful in these special
4 admission schools once they get access?

5 MS. LYNCH: I would say to you
6 that that is extremely important. I
7 would say to you that accommodations
8 have been made through the school
9 selection process for students that are
10 English language learners as well as
11 students who have special education
12 needs. I would say to you that it's
13 extremely important for those resources
14 to be available and built in schools for
15 students that have additional needs.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: And I
17 just also want to say it's good to see
18 that the District is making important
19 steps moving forward and trying to stay
20 true to the equity lens, but I'm hoping
21 to see more transparency in the future
22 so we can kind of prevent some of the
23 deeper -- this discussion that we're
24 having around the process. So I do want
25 to recognize the changes that I've seen.

1 All of my children have went to
2 a special admit high school. And all of
3 my children are like 5 to 10 years
4 apart, so I've been doing this whole
5 thing for a long time and I've noticed
6 the changes that have been made, but I
7 just want to make sure that more
8 transparency is in the process. And
9 also, what or how or both in the zip
10 codes that are being recognized inform
11 that this was something that was coming
12 down the pike. Was there any work
13 around that, like the outreach to the
14 specific zip codes that will be
15 impacted?

16 MS. LYNCH: The outreach that
17 we did with regard to the zip codes was
18 to share with individuals that are in
19 the zip codes the opportunity to be able
20 to -- the recognition that there will be
21 a priority that will be given, that was
22 for our internal students, and as well
23 we've shared information on our web page
24 and highlighted the zip codes each time
25 that we got the opportunity to speak

1 about the prioritization. But I would
2 share with you that the prioritization
3 is going to happen automatically through
4 our system, and it's not something that
5 parents have to sign up in order to
6 benefit from.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yeah, I
8 wasn't thinking about in terms of
9 signing up. I was just wondering how
10 parents would know that that would be
11 something that they should be paying
12 closer attention to in various zip
13 codes, and I'm primarily talking about
14 parents in traditional neighborhood
15 elementary schools trying to get into
16 middle or traditional K to 8 trying to
17 get into high school.

18 Was there any indication or any
19 information sent out directly to parents
20 within those zip codes for them to be
21 paying closer attention to the process?

22 MS. LYNCH: I believe as I said
23 that there was information that was sent
24 as well we shared with counselors,
25 school principals, school-based staff so

1 that they could promote among the
2 families within their schools the zip
3 codes. And the zip codes are on the Web
4 as we've encouraged people as they've
5 applied to note that.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay.
7 Thank you so much for that. And I think
8 what I want to kind of put in this space
9 is that the real goal is a Philadelphia
10 where every child has the supports they
11 need at every school. And our parents
12 don't have to feel like you have to earn
13 or win your way into an excellent
14 education. That's not what education
15 should be about. And I'm hoping for us
16 to continue to change the trajectory of
17 what a quality education looks like for
18 our kids so it's not about earning or
19 winning your way into a good education,
20 but it's something that all kids in all
21 schools in every neighborhood have the
22 opportunity to be a part of. So thank
23 you so much for your time.

24 MS. LYNCH: Councilwoman, your
25 support as we work to do that is going

1 to be extremely important and very much
2 appreciated.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: I have a
4 child that's in this process right now
5 so I am full fledge in the process and I
6 will continue to be paying attention and
7 watching closely. But thank you again
8 for your time.

9 MS. LYNCH: Thank you.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
11 Councilmember Brooks.

12 Are there any other questions
13 from anybody on the Committee for this
14 panel?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hearing
17 none, hopefully you guys can hang in
18 there for a little bit and listen to
19 some of the people testify on the next
20 panel. Thank you so much for your
21 testimony.

22 We'll now go into Panel 3.
23 Sherice Sargent, if you're connected if
24 you could unmute and then state your
25 name for the record and proceed to

1 testify. Before you do that, just to
2 let you know that Tanya Folk will be up
3 next after Sherice. Go ahead, Sherice.

4 MS. SARGENT: Good morning. I
5 am Sherice Sargent. Thank you all
6 elected officials of City Council, other
7 panelists and those attending virtually
8 throughout our City. I thank you for
9 this opportunity to welcome parent and
10 community engagement to this matter. I
11 am Sherice Sargent. While it states I
12 am an organizer for all parents for
13 equity, please note we are not a formal
14 organization versus parents with a
15 common goal to support a better process
16 for students of this District.

17 Today I testify as a proud
18 parent of a current 12th grader and 8th
19 grader at G.W. Carver High School of
20 Engineering and Science with a vested
21 interest in my children and their peers'
22 education. I've held trusted positions
23 in my school community as an officer of
24 the Carver E&S Home and School
25 Association and continue to do so as a

1 committed volunteer.

2 As the HSA President and
3 Treasurer, I was nominated and elected
4 by Carver E&S parents to represent them
5 in many ways. I also supported other
6 communities to promote parent advocacy
7 and support. As the current HSA
8 President, specifically I partnered with
9 the Carver principal and teachers as a
10 trusted advisor to represent the parent
11 body during many forums, including
12 promoting the School District surveys,
13 school admission process inclusive of
14 tours, new family orientation and open
15 houses. I shared my experiences to
16 promote the school, welcomed parents
17 echoing the sentiments of the principal
18 and explained the current culture,
19 community and middle school transition
20 into high school at Carver E&S.

21 As the HSA President, I was
22 personally introduced to the School
23 Board President Wilkerson at our Blue
24 Ribbon ceremony on September 26, 2019
25 when she commended Carver for diversity,

1 equity, student success and strong
2 parent body. I was there when Board
3 President Wilkerson applauded Carver
4 which State Representative Bullock
5 referenced earlier today. I take great
6 pride as I represent Carver parents and
7 citizens of the City.

8 So I ask today why is Carver
9 undergoing this overhaul creating a
10 major risk to disrupt our community in
11 which you commended its achievement? If
12 you have known about the needed changes
13 to become more equitable and equal, why
14 institute this now after COVID, more
15 importantly, as this Administration's
16 term is ending.

17 This also leads me to question
18 other magnet schools that are already
19 diverse and/or have newly implemented
20 practices in place to increase diversity
21 with intentional and student-driven
22 plans with human judgment of our
23 talented administrators. Thank you,
24 Councilman Oh, for those demographics to
25 highlight the already in place diversity

1 communities of the magnet schools.

2 So when the parent notification
3 regarding changes to the school
4 selection application to criteria-based
5 formerly known as special select schools
6 occurred on October 6th at 1:49 p.m.,
7 you can imagine my phone by 2:00 p.m. I
8 had over 30 calls and texts just from
9 Carver parents and other schools. I
10 instantaneously went to Carver to speak
11 with the principal as the outrage and
12 fear of Carver Middle School parents was
13 at a high.

14 As an invested parent, I wanted
15 to bring this matter to his attention.
16 I knew I had a small window because the
17 announcement occurred just three hours
18 shy of the application opening. I, like
19 many other current 7th and 8th grade
20 students, removed their current student
21 from their previous school which was K
22 through 8 for the full Carver experience
23 of Grades K through 12. This was never
24 presented as an incentive for student
25 success, as my child and her peers were

1 successful prior to entering Carver,
2 thus their admission.

3 In addition, I reject the
4 sentiment of parents acting in
5 privilege, as my daughter's hard work
6 where she continues to sustain as a high
7 standard because I set the expectations
8 at home in which the school as well.
9 She along with Carver Middle School
10 students with the support of a great
11 teaching staff earned their achievements
12 and abilities to meet goals set forth.
13 Since this was a seven-year practice and
14 message from the principal, I never
15 questioned if it was a written policy.
16 It is not my role. My role as a parent
17 is to trust and support my school and
18 its leader, to have such trust in you,
19 the District, as a Philadelphia resident
20 and a taxpayer.

21 Philadelphia School District,
22 why did you allow such a practice to
23 occur without a policy for the last
24 seven to eight years? Where was your
25 oversight of the principal and other

1 school leadership? How do you sustain
2 the middle school such as Carver, SLA
3 Beeber and Hill-Freedman if you believe
4 parents arrived knowing that it was only
5 a two- or three-year commitment with no
6 choice to continue? You are now
7 enforcing a policy versus promoting
8 school choice.

9 Philadelphia School District, I
10 trusted your decision as you appointed
11 the principal to be the leader of over
12 900 students at Carver. I trusted the
13 principal so much that I repeated the
14 practice known as the Carver middle
15 school transition as a parent leader and
16 HSA President. The lack of oversight
17 places me in a compromising position as
18 I promoted a practice in which you now
19 say does not exist as a policy. What
20 should I trust and promote as a parent
21 and as a taxpayer in the City?

22 I do not trust the rushed
23 implementation as a stakeholder, as I
24 was excluded from knowing all the facts.
25 Parents and I were left to research and

1 organize to support our children. So
2 across the City all parents for equity
3 in education began as you abandoned us
4 in this process. In October, we
5 proposed many changes directly to you,
6 School District, to support the new
7 process with adjustments to the current
8 process to lessen the harm of middle
9 school children and other marginalized
10 students.

11 You declined without hearing a
12 full discussion and denied an
13 opportunity of a two-way engagement. As
14 a result, parents were left with no
15 choice but to ask our elected officials
16 to hear us because you did not. So
17 thank you again, Councilmembers Oh,
18 Squilla, Gilmore Richardson and my
19 Representative Cindy Bass for sponsoring
20 the resolution today.

21 When Dr. Hite announced the
22 school selection change, he provided the
23 reasoning of I quote, "this past year in
24 alignment with our commitment towards
25 anti-racism and equity as outlined in

1 the Board of Education's goals and
2 guardrails, the school selection process
3 underwent an initial equity review
4 during which we collected feedback from
5 various stakeholders, including parents
6 and families."

7 When you look at the four
8 guardrails, this process is not
9 reflective. Guardrail 1, welcoming and
10 supportive schools; Guardrail 2,
11 enriching and well-rounded school
12 experience; Guardrail 3, partnering with
13 parents and families; Guardrail 4,
14 addressing racist practices. While all
15 this seems like a true concept in
16 theory, what is written is not
17 practiced. And we've seen so many times
18 just this year of many changes inclusive
19 of the school selection process, the
20 change of the school schedule and school
21 bus issue.

22 So the changes in Policy 206,
23 assignment within a district, which
24 states the purpose is to promote the
25 best interests of children and utilize

1 clear and transparent processes and
2 procedures and create community whose
3 members have a diverse background and
4 life experiences that enhance equity,
5 reflect the City's population does not
6 seem apparent or transparent to me.

7 Unfortunately, the recent
8 efforts do not meet the intent and
9 interests because there is an adverse
10 effect to Black and Brown children,
11 students with different learning styles
12 and students with English as a second
13 language. While I present my
14 disappointment in the recent decision of
15 the process, I want to state for the
16 record I am open to accept the
17 invitation to join any efforts to meet
18 the intended goals for all students in
19 Philadelphia.

20 For now I ask if the current
21 process continues, current middle
22 schools and magnet schools who meet the
23 criteria be excluded from the new
24 selection process as we were not given
25 an opportunity to truly vet other school

1 choices last year during COVID. Please
2 honor the practice in which I along with
3 many parents of Carver, SLA Beeber,
4 Hill-Freedman and Masterman enrolled our
5 children.

6 Number 2, if the writing
7 assessment remains, add an appeals
8 process for students to include other
9 data points as children are more than a
10 score. Also, to thoroughly review and
11 ensure all modifications and
12 accommodations for students with
13 different learning styles are reviewed
14 as set forth by their learning
15 environment and the applicable laws.

16 Number 3, remove all zip code
17 preference to welcome all families
18 across the City an opportunity to
19 receive a quality education. And number
20 4, most importantly fund all schools to
21 have equitable resources and close the
22 gap between magnet and catchment
23 schools. This will immediately impact
24 student achievement directly and
25 swiftly. Thank you for your time today.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
2 so much for your testimony, Sherice.

3 Next we'll have Tanya Folk. If
4 you're available after Tanya, Wallette,
5 be ready. Just state your name, Tanya,
6 and proceed with your testimony.

7 MS. FOLK: Okay. Good morning.
8 My name is Tanya Folk and I was born and
9 raised in Philadelphia. My husband and
10 I have five children. Our two oldest
11 graduated from Central. We have two
12 that are at Carver. One is in 8th and
13 one is in 10th, and we have a daughter
14 at Masterman in 5th grade.

15 While I understand the need for
16 change, I have serious concerns about
17 the new school selection process. I
18 remember participating in a School
19 District survey back in May or June.
20 And as I went through the questions, I
21 did not envision the current process as
22 the outcome. The survey on how to
23 improve the school selection process ran
24 between May 17th and June 11th. After
25 the survey closed, there was no

1 engagement that I am aware of with
2 parents and students to help develop the
3 process.

4 There was no indication that
5 this survey would impact current 8th
6 graders enrolled in middle schools
7 attached to high schools. The School
8 District added the written assessment
9 even though it ranked 7th on its survey.

10 And they added a lottery system even
11 though it was rated last as an option
12 for improving the process. Some of
13 those responses included and I quote, "A
14 lottery is the worst idea I have ever
15 heard, this wouldn't ensure equity at
16 all." Another person said, A lottery
17 for school admission is a horrible idea.
18 Because transparency is really
19 important, as a parent how would I know
20 for sure that my child was entered into
21 all eligible lotteries. This is
22 important to know before the lottery is
23 conducted to give parents to a chance to
24 make sure no mistakes were made. We
25 need transparency.

1 It's a challenges to support
2 the lottery in its current form because
3 it includes these 8th graders, which it
4 should not. Families and students
5 should not have to endure the
6 uncertainty that a dual lottery brings.
7 Also, many of these 8th graders did not
8 research high schools in 7th grade
9 because they planned to stay in their
10 schools for high school.

11 According to the School
12 District survey results, 53.3 percent of
13 students planned to stay in their
14 current school for the 2022-23 school
15 year. Some of those written responses
16 include and I quote, "My child is
17 already at a special admission school
18 and as far as I know, we don't need to
19 reapply." Another parent said, Already
20 at special admission school for 7th
21 grade. More than half plan to stay in
22 their current schools. This should have
23 given pause to creating a new process
24 that will result in removing schools
25 from these schools like Carver, Hill-

1 Freedman and (inaudible).

2 The School District added zip
3 code priority, another new aspect of the
4 process. If using a lottery system, why
5 add zip code priority. You've removed
6 the mismanagement of admissions that you
7 stated was occurring at the school level
8 by replacing principals with an
9 electronic lottery system. Why are
10 these zip codes underrepresented in four
11 of the magnet schools? What are the
12 barriers? Are they being addressed?

13 Without addressing all barriers
14 and allocating the exact resources
15 needed by students, then a lottery even
16 with zip code priority will not get us
17 to equity. I hope we can get to an
18 equitable solution so that all students
19 and families can relax and enjoy the
20 upcoming holiday. So please, can you
21 exclude current 8th graders in this new
22 process for the schools in which they
23 are already students, then have the
24 remaining seats go to the lottery. If
25 you can't do that, please explain why.

1 Please do not give the written
2 assessment too much weight. According
3 to the District's own frequently asked
4 questions, the assessment is one data
5 point for consideration so it should not
6 be able to knock a student out of the
7 lottery because they missed by half a
8 point. And last, please add an appeals
9 process. Thank you.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
11 Tanya, for your testimony.

12 Next we have Walette Carter.
13 After Walette, we'll have Miriam Hill
14 and then Eric Santoro. Walette, if you
15 just want to state your name for the
16 record and proceed with your testimony.

17 MS. CARTER: Good morning.
18 Walette Carter. Good morning. My name
19 is Walette Carter and I am a
20 grandparent of a student at SLA @
21 Beeber. Today I come before you not
22 only for our children at SLA @ Beeber,
23 but for all children in the School
24 District of Philadelphia. The last
25 couple of years has been a toll not only

1 on our students and teachers, but on our
2 families and communities. For the
3 School District of Philadelphia to once
4 again put a burden and a wrench in the
5 system at this time is truly detrimental
6 to us.

7 But I would like to say SLA
8 Beeber has not only gone through this
9 problem this year, but it has also been
10 impacted by a construction problem for
11 the capital improvements. We as a
12 school have been taken out of our
13 schools. Our middle school is no longer
14 at SLA @ Beeber. We are now over at
15 Powell. The School District didn't
16 decide to do this until the day before
17 school started. So this is the second
18 year that our children are displaced,
19 and now you're trying to take our
20 children and put them into a school
21 where they don't have any family or
22 maybe have any friends because of a
23 lottery system, because of a reading
24 assessment.

25 All of our children are not

1 able to get a 22 or a 17. Some of them
2 got a 10 or a 5 because they are not in
3 their place of environment. Now, how do
4 we announce the day before this starts
5 that it's going to change? I admit a
6 lot of our children as previously stated
7 were not looking at schools in 7th grade
8 because they were in a pandemic, they
9 are at home learning, but that shouldn't
10 have caused them not to be able to do
11 what they needed to do in 8th grade.
12 But I do understand that a lot of things
13 have changed within the School District.
14 I am starting to learn more
15 about very much in the School District
16 and I am starting to be a part of the
17 PCAC, which is the Parent Community
18 Advisory Council, which is attached to
19 the Board. I've also joined into the
20 Face Action Group so that I could become
21 more and more involved in schools within
22 the Philadelphia school system. If
23 those things are not there, then how can
24 we expect them to be educating our
25 children.

1 In reference to the school
2 selection program -- I'm sorry, I'm
3 going back again -- how do you start
4 something that was not completed. I
5 understand that at this point it is not
6 completed. No, no type of advisory --
7 not advisory, no type of -- oh, I just
8 lost my thought, please forgive me. No
9 type of appeal process, thank you,
10 appeal process is in place for this and
11 that is very disgusting.

12 We talked to at the School
13 Board when I was listening this last
14 Thursday there was a parent that said if
15 a child got a 22.1 -- sorry, a 21.9 were
16 they going to be left out. Ms. Lynch
17 politely said without flinching yes.
18 They haven't even thought of an appeal
19 process for this school selection. This
20 is not fair. How do we decide to give
21 part of the program and not the complete
22 program from the beginning. How do we
23 say that this is what the community
24 wants.

25 Yes, you did a survey of about

1 out of 120,000 families. You only got
2 5,000 responses. Responses that don't
3 even talk about a lottery as previously
4 stated. Yes, I am saying the system
5 needs to be changed. Yes, there is bias
6 and prejudice and there's a picking and
7 choosing. And, yes, this is not fair
8 either. But what we are doing is not
9 fair, so two wrongs don't definitely
10 make a right. It's time for you to stop
11 this system of school selection as it
12 was in the past and as you have
13 presented it now.

14 No, I believe in special school
15 selections and some schools offer
16 different learning techniques that some
17 schools don't, but your K through 8
18 needs to be equal so that all of the
19 school selection process that has an
20 existence will be open to every child in
21 the School District of Philadelphia no
22 matter where they are, no matter who
23 they are, no matter what they are and no
24 matter where they live.

25 For you to fix the School

1 District, not just one part, not just
2 one section, but the whole thing stops,
3 trying to build a house from the top
4 down. That foundation for every child
5 should be in every Philadelphia school.
6 And when you lay that foundation and
7 build a strong first floor, second
8 floor, third floor, all the way up to
9 the 12th floor, then you will have the
10 best school district in Philadelphia,
11 which is equitably equal, diversity and
12 community-minded.

13 I have stated this for me
14 (inaudible) to be in the action group,
15 and I hope that you as City Council will
16 definitely look into doing whatever is
17 possible to help our children become the
18 exceptional children that each and every
19 one of them had the opportunity to be.
20 Thank you.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
22 Wallette. Thank you for your testimony.

23 Miriam Hill. And then after
24 Miriam, we'll have Eric Santoro and then
25 we'll have Solomon Jones. Miriam, just

1 state your name for the record and then
2 proceed with your testimony today.

3 MS. HILL: Yes. Thank you.

4 I'd like to thank Council for listening
5 to all of us today. My name is Miriam
6 Hill and I'm the proud parent of an 8th
7 grader at Carver Engineering and
8 Science. I understand the deep need for
9 equity in this District and I see that
10 change is necessary, and I even think a
11 lottery might be a good idea. I think
12 the District's intentions were good, but
13 I'm here today because the District
14 failed to think out the details and has
15 created a process that will harm some
16 kids.

17 I have three requests: Please
18 be fair to the 8th graders at Carver,
19 SLA Beeber, Masterman and other schools
20 that have a middle school with an
21 associated high school. At Carver, we
22 have 60 8th graders and about 200 high
23 school seats. This is such a small
24 number of kids. I can't understand why
25 the District won't even listen to us or

1 talk to us in a real way about this
2 question.

3 As others have said when our
4 kids applied to Carver, the principal
5 told us that if our kids got A's and B's
6 in 7th and 8th, they would get strong
7 preference to admission to Carver High
8 School. We knew we had to reapply, but
9 it was something close to a promise from
10 the principals if our kids did the work,
11 and this was not a perception. We have
12 video that I've shared with some of you
13 of the Carver principals explaining the
14 school exactly this way.

15 Now, the District is saying
16 that because there was no written
17 policy, they don't have to honor what
18 the principals, the District employees
19 said. Are parents expected to ask for a
20 written policy every time a principal
21 gives us information? Our kids worked
22 hard based on what principals told them.
23 Now, the District is saying never mind,
24 and they hit our kids with this when
25 they were finally back in school after a

1 pandemic year starting to make friends
2 and getting an inperson instruction.
3 Things were starting to seem normal and
4 then this came, which by the way was
5 announced by robocall.

6 So my first request is that you
7 find a way to honor the commitment made
8 to the middle schoolers. We believe
9 there are simple solutions, because most
10 of these schools have room for current
11 8th graders, hundreds of children from
12 the lottery. My second request is that
13 the District start communicating with
14 parents, teachers and staff in a fair
15 and a human way. This District's
16 top-down approach has hidden deadly
17 asbestos and environmental problems and
18 have thrown parents and kids into
19 disarray with its random announcements.

20 The District claims there was a
21 public process about the lottery. If
22 their communications were effective, why
23 were so many parents completely
24 surprised by this change. Please take
25 the opportunity that comes with a new

1 superintendent to create a system of
2 open, transparent communication. One
3 with lots of room for discussion and
4 time for parents to plan for changes.

5 Honestly, if you had given me a
6 year to deal with this, maybe I wouldn't
7 have been so angry and dismayed. But as
8 many have noted, they gave us a few
9 weeks to visit schools, think about
10 private schools. Some of us are
11 thinking about moving to the suburbs,
12 and it was just shocking to me that they
13 would do this, and we all have jobs.

14 My final request is that we all
15 work together to create excellent
16 schools throughout the City. The
17 District says our kids can go to
18 neighborhood schools. And as a person
19 of some racial and economic privilege, I
20 really had to ask myself am I right to
21 fight this fight. And I keep coming
22 back to a moment I had with my fellow
23 Carver parents on a Zoom call when one
24 by one the parents said some version of
25 I can't send my child to Roxborough, I

1 can't send my child to Strawberry
2 Mansion, I can't send my child to
3 Lincoln. This is the root problem and
4 we want to work with you to create more
5 excellent high schools to fight for fair
6 funding and other much-needed changes,
7 but we need your help. We need a
8 District that sees us as partners, not
9 as problems. Thank you very much.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
11 Miriam, for your testimony.

12 Next we have Eric. If you just
13 want to just state your name for the
14 record and then proceed, and then we'll
15 go on to Solomon Jones.

16 COUNCILMAN OH: Chair, I'm
17 sorry for interrupting. I'd just like
18 to note, Ms. Wallette, you have not
19 muted your microphone, if you can do
20 that. We don't want to hear any private
21 conversations you may have. If everyone
22 could double check your microphones,
23 make sure they're muted. Thank you very
24 much.

25 MR. SANTORO: Okay. Members of

1 Council, good morning. My name is Eric
2 Santoro and I'm the proud parent of
3 three Masterman students. Many of the
4 problems with the school selection
5 process have already been outlined in a
6 petition signed by more than 1500 people
7 that was already sent to City Council so
8 I won't repeat all of them. But really,
9 all of issues stem from one overarching
10 fundamental flaw. The District ramroded
11 through the changes at the very last
12 minute without meaningful engagement or
13 feedback from students or parents, and
14 we've heard about that today.

15 But to give you just one
16 example, at several School Board
17 meetings many parents, including myself,
18 spoke up and warned the writing
19 requirement was poorly designed and
20 callously implemented to inevitably
21 cause mental distress and humiliation.
22 As you heard this morning from a pile of
23 experts, these concerns unfortunately
24 proved accurate. All the predicted
25 problems actually occurred, and this

1 could have been avoided had the District
2 merely engaged in parents before making
3 changes.

4 This is a city that understands
5 the need for public feedback. For the
6 redesign of the Ben Franklin Parkway,
7 extensive time is set aside for meetings
8 with the public, meeting with the public
9 to engage prior to starting. And if we
10 could seek public feedback for a
11 landscaping project, we surely could do
12 the same for a policy that will
13 dramatically alter educational
14 opportunities for thousands of students.

15 8th graders attending city-wide
16 middle schools left the comfort of their
17 neighborhoods to study rigorous
18 education curricula with an
19 understanding that if they show up every
20 day, work really hard and do well, they
21 would almost certainly be admitted into
22 their corresponding high school. For
23 the District can now pretend otherwise
24 is really just patronizing to us.

25 Some 10- to 14-year-olds travel

1 more than 90 minutes each way on public
2 transit. Now, we're telling them that
3 none of it mattered. Whether they stay
4 is just up to a lottery. What kind of
5 lessons are we sending these students.
6 Moreover, other schools like CAPA, GAMP
7 and Carver cater to particular skills
8 and interests. Lotteries that admits
9 students by chance will inevitably
10 undermine these schools' unique
11 missions.

12 The justification for the
13 changes from everything I've heard prior
14 to today and everything I've heard this
15 morning seems to be Masterman, that
16 supposedly lacks diversity and is
17 "bastions of privilege." I admittedly
18 have not studied this, but my children's
19 experience has not been consistent with
20 this narrative. I've taken my children
21 all over the City to visit Masterman
22 Friends who come from a wide variety of
23 racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds.
24 They also have friends whose families
25 come from all parts of the world,

1 including the Caribbean, Latin America,
2 Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe,
3 South and East Asia and several others.

4 And I understand in last year's
5 entering class, the percentage of Black
6 students tripled compared to the prior
7 year. That alone should give pause to
8 anyone advocating for lotteries. This
9 cultural diversity is one of the reasons
10 my family values Masterman. It is
11 indeed ironic that to improve the
12 diversity at Masterman, the District is
13 employing a writing statement that is
14 really just an English language
15 proficiency test, which unequivocally
16 discriminates against non-English
17 language -- unequivocally discriminates
18 against English language learners. The
19 demographics of Philadelphia are
20 changing and we risk inadvertently
21 replacing perceived racism with
22 nativism.

23 I urge a pause to all the new
24 changes to the school selection process
25 and instead urge the District to

1 actually engage with the families who
2 are being impacted in a thoughtful
3 collaboration to better design a
4 selection process that will both promote
5 equity and better meet the needs of the
6 impacted students. I thank you all for
7 your time and consideration.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
9 Eric, for your testimony.

10 Solomon Jones, if you're
11 available. And then after that, we'll
12 go to Neha Vapiwala. Solomon, please
13 state your name for the record and
14 proceed.

15 MR. JONES: My name is Solomon
16 Jones. I'm a lifelong Philadelphian,
17 radio host, columnist and leader in our
18 community. I want to share something
19 with you that was told to me as we did a
20 study on gun violence. A 26-year-old
21 young man said this: "We all go to one
22 school because we C grade or below, so
23 we got to go to that school and be
24 around the kids that don't want to learn
25 nothing. So they put us in that setting

1 and it's like give up. That's basically
2 what it is. The solution is just stop
3 with that. They need to get rid of
4 feeder schools, period. I'm talking
5 about from 9th grade. When I found out
6 what it was, oh, this is a feeder
7 school. This is what we got to go to
8 because we didn't get our right grades,
9 but I'm like, oh, I applied for Central,
10 I applied for School of the Future, I
11 applied to Saul, yo, can y'all give me
12 some help so I can get into one of
13 these. So basically it's like you guys
14 want me to turn into a monster because
15 you're putting me around with other
16 monsters, so I had no option to become
17 that too to protect myself."

18 These are the words of a
19 26-year-old man from North Philly whose
20 life was impacted by gun violence. His
21 brother's arm was shattered by gunfire.
22 His cousin was murdered just days after
23 he made this statement. He was someone
24 who experienced gun violence for
25 himself, but the gun violence started

1 long before anybody pulled the trigger.
2 It started in neighborhood schools that
3 were underresourced and underfunded. It
4 started with schools where his hunger
5 for knowledge was swallowed up in
6 classrooms where learning was
7 impossible, starting where he had no
8 opportunity to get into the magnet
9 schools he longed to attend.

10 Like so many of our Black
11 children, he was fed into a system that
12 churns out far too much hopelessness,
13 fed into a system that churns out far
14 too much apathy, fed into a system that
15 forces too many of our kids to choose
16 between becoming monsters or becoming
17 victims. That's the reality of our
18 children in our most challenged
19 communities, and that can't be their
20 only option.

21 Our magnet schools are a
22 shining light within this beleaguered
23 school system. They're places that
24 provide children the opportunity to rise
25 above economics, to rise above social

1 ills, to rise above broken families, to
2 rise above expectations. I know this
3 because I attended Masterman Middle
4 School. And even after my parents
5 divorced and our economic situation
6 changed and our family structure changed
7 and our reality changed, Solomon Jones,
8 this child of a single mother from North
9 Philly, had the opportunity to go to
10 school with the children of newspaper
11 editors and doctors and lawyers and
12 business owners and mayors. I learned
13 Latin with Dr. DiPace and History with
14 Mrs. Waters and Impressionist Art with
15 Mrs. Linder.

16 I learned that there was a
17 world beyond 25th and Oxford, a place
18 that was at the time challenged by
19 poverty, but where the neighbors loved
20 each other and shared what little we
21 had. That education became the
22 foundation for who and what I would
23 later become. So even when the drugs
24 that had decimated my community overtook
25 me and left me homeless, I could lean on

1 the education I had received at
2 Masterman, knowing they could never take
3 that away from me. That education,
4 that's why I survived poverty. It's why
5 I survived homelessness. It's why I
6 survived the streets, and it's why I can
7 now be a voice for my community.

8 But now the School District is
9 breaking the promise of magnet schools
10 by reneging of the promises made to
11 parents of those who attended these
12 middle schools. At Carver Engineering
13 and Science where my son is now a
14 senior, parents were told that their
15 middle school students could attend the
16 high school if their grades and behavior
17 were good. There are other magnet
18 middle schools where the same promises
19 were made and now those promises are
20 being broken. Not only that, the School
21 District have selected zip codes that
22 are rapidly gentrifying and giving them
23 priority when it comes to attending
24 magnet schools. Why should students in
25 now what is called Brewerytown get

1 priority where there are houses in that
2 community that sell for \$400,000.
3 That's a setup. Because if that
4 community continue to gentrify, Black
5 communities will disappear and Black
6 children will have yet another barrier
7 to receiving the highest quality
8 education that our City has to offer.

9 And as a professional writer,
10 I'm offended that a writing test judged
11 by a computer will be used as an
12 admissions tool for these schools, not
13 only because our community schools don't
14 prepare our children to be good writers,
15 they don't, but because writing is the
16 one discipline that can never be judged
17 by a computer. Good writing touches the
18 heart. It finds a thing that makes us
19 human and gives it life. It speaks to
20 us in quiet places that can't be judged
21 by a machine.

22 I'm testifying today not just
23 for the students who currently attend
24 our magnet schools, but for the ones who
25 could not attend and was swallowed up by

1 the criminal justice. I testify for the
2 ones who could not attend and were
3 trapped in a cycle of poverty. I
4 testify for the ones who could not
5 attend and lost their lives to gunfire.

6 Education in America has always
7 been a tool that's been used to keep
8 Black children from competing on equal
9 footing. It's why we had to fight
10 through Brown vs. Education. But even
11 then, schools were not desegregated. I
12 know because right here in Philly it
13 wasn't until 2009 that the School Reform
14 Commission voted to end 40 years of
15 desegregation litigation and committed
16 to implementing a plan that would
17 improve achievement in the District's
18 racially isolated schools. That
19 improved achievement is still not a
20 reality. But in our magnet schools, our
21 kid have a fighting chance.

22 So let me be blunt. I believe
23 the School District's changes to the
24 magnet school admission process will set
25 up generations of Black children to be

1 left out of these schools at even
2 greater numbers, so this is more than a
3 matter of education. It's a matter of
4 economics. It's a matter of racial
5 justice. It's a matter of life and
6 death. Our children are dying.

7 And so, this is what I am
8 demanding and this is what I'll be
9 taking to our community: One, no
10 changes to the magnet school admissions
11 process should be made until a new
12 superintendent is appointed. Two,
13 children who currently attend magnet
14 middle schools should be allowed to stay
15 and attend high schools as they were
16 promised. Three, a computerized writing
17 test should not be used to determine
18 admittance to magnet schools. And four,
19 the current list of preferred zip codes
20 should be thoroughly reviewed before
21 they are implemented. We will not stop
22 advocating for our children. So dig in
23 and get ready for a fight. Thank you
24 for allowing me to testify this morning.

25 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,

1 Solomon, for your testimony.

2 Doctor, if you want to proceed.

3 And then after Doctor, we have

4 Archbishop Mary Floyd Palmer.

5 DR. VAPIWALA: Thank you. And

6 I want to start by thanking all of the

7 panelists who have spoken this far for

8 sharing your truth. And I want to thank

9 all of the City Councilmembers for your

10 tireless individual and collective

11 dedication to our City and for this

12 opportunity today to discuss the school

13 selection process so we can reinforce

14 our shared goals of promoting diversity,

15 equity and inclusion within our schools

16 and throughout our community.

17 I'm here today representing my

18 personal perspectives as a longtime

19 resident of Philadelphia, as a

20 practicing physician, as a medical

21 school educator and administrator and a

22 mother of a 5th and 6th grader in the

23 magnet school system. I work in the

24 City as a cancer doctor. But in

25 addition to caring for patients, I

1 conduct research to help identify and
2 reduce existing health care disparities,
3 impacting Black and Latino men in
4 Philadelphia. I publish extensively on
5 the lack of diversity in our national
6 scientific and medical workforces, and I
7 have the tremendous honor of recruiting
8 and teaching students and junior doctors
9 who hail from incredibly diverse
10 backgrounds.

11 And I just want to explain that
12 I'm an immigrant, I'm also an immigrant
13 who grew up in an impoverished village
14 in India. My father arrived to this
15 country with \$70 and zero professional
16 training. He worked at a gas station
17 for several years before saving up
18 enough funds to sponsor my grandmother,
19 mother and me so we could make the
20 arduous journey and embark upon this
21 proverbial American dream. And for
22 years we lived in a cramped one-bedroom
23 apartment that was infested with
24 rodents, but filled with gratitude for
25 the present and hope for the future.

1 And for even more years, my
2 parents were and continue to be subject
3 to countless racial epithets, and I was
4 teased mercilessly at school, ostracized
5 for my accent, my broken English, my
6 skin color, my strange name. But beyond
7 my family, it was my public
8 schoolteachers and my public school
9 education that made the greatest
10 impression on me.

11 It was my public schoolteachers
12 who reminded me why we risked so much to
13 start a brand new life in the United
14 States. It was they who reassured me
15 that despite my differences and the
16 prejudice that these differences
17 provoked that I did, in fact, belong
18 there, and it was my public
19 schoolteachers who instilled in me the
20 realization that education is the
21 foundation upon which all opportunities
22 are built, upon which the cycle of
23 poverty is broken and upon which our
24 children's dreams are realized.

25 Here in Philadelphia there are

1 countless families no matter their race
2 or ethnicity or zip code who do not have
3 the financial means to consider private
4 schools or other options. Magnet
5 schools are one beacon of hope and they
6 can offer a life-changing path for so
7 many of our kids. I'm empathetic with
8 and stand in support of all the families
9 who are immediately impacted by the
10 recently introduced high school student
11 selection process.

12 I'm not part of that immediate
13 impact, but I feel for what they are
14 going through. And I implore
15 Councilmembers to listen to these
16 parents and students, to hear their
17 anguish and to promptly address their
18 concerns regarding the educational
19 opportunities that they fear have been
20 destroyed as a result.

21 I also fully appreciate
22 firsthand from my own role in overseeing
23 admissions for a large prestigious
24 medical school and my professional
25 commitment to increase our population of

1 public students from historically
2 underrepresented backgrounds, something
3 that I consider my passion.

4 I truly appreciate that student
5 selection is an incredibly complex and
6 complicated process. Using zip codes as
7 a proxy for diversity is inherently
8 specious and it risks the opposite of
9 the intended outcome, as you've already
10 heard from so many folks earlier today.
11 Lottery-based admissions will absolutely
12 overlook some of our most talented and
13 capable youth from all corners of the
14 City. So I also stand ready to support
15 the necessary work to accomplish the
16 Board of Education and School District's
17 daunting task of ensuring a fair and
18 more equitable process for high school
19 admission.

20 There are several critical
21 evidence-based approaches that we can
22 undertake and that would improve access
23 for many of our deserving, but currently
24 underrepresented students. For example,
25 the selection process can include

1 weighted factors to acknowledge and
2 account for a student's resources or
3 lack therein, for a student's hardships
4 or lack therein and recognize and value
5 the importance of character and
6 integrity and potential that may not and
7 frankly are not reflected in traditional
8 measures. And this holistic approach
9 can achieve equity without dashing the
10 hopes of deserving students who just
11 happen to reside in the wrong zip code
12 that particular year or they strike out
13 in the lottery.

14 These kind of multi-factorial
15 admission approaches, they require time,
16 they require resources, thoughtful
17 discourse and frankly sensitivity
18 towards all affected from all
19 backgrounds. So today's hearing is
20 about ensuring that we do not compromise
21 educational opportunities for current
22 8th graders not this year, not ever.
23 But beyond today, we need significant
24 investment in all of our neighborhood
25 schools. We need validated research.

1 We need expansion of seats in criteria-
2 based schools, and we need institution
3 of meaningful metrics to demonstrate
4 meaningful gains in equity, not token
5 gains while we maintain, if not,
6 enhanced the standards and quality of
7 our children's educational experience.

8 So right now we ask for
9 emerging action from the leadership of
10 this City to address the myriad issues
11 that have been raised today. But real
12 and durable solutions will require
13 Councilmembers to commit to ongoing
14 prioritization of all of our schools,
15 broad stakeholder engagement, inclusion
16 of relevant counsel from experts who are
17 ready and willing to collaborate with
18 the School District and Board of
19 Education to give of our time and our
20 expertise, and it's only through this
21 longitudinal commitment that we can
22 elevate education to the platform it
23 deserves, that we can implement fair and
24 holistic school and student selection
25 approaches, and that we can realize our

1 shared imperative to increase diversity,
2 equity, inclusion and opportunity to a
3 high quality public school education for
4 all Philadelphians. And I want to thank
5 you for this opportunity to share those
6 thoughts today.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.
8 Doctor, for your testimony. Much
9 appreciated.

10 I know we have Archbishop Mary
11 Floyd Palmer. Are you available to
12 testify? Please state your name for the
13 record and proceed.

14 ARCHBISHOP FLOYD PALMER: Yes.
15 Archbishop Mary Floyd Palmer. Can you
16 hear me?

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.
18 Please proceed.

19 ARCHBISHOP FLOYD PALMER: Okay.
20 Oh, good afternoon to Chairperson
21 Sanchez, to Chairman Representative
22 Squilla, to esteemed Committee members,
23 prestigious panelists, other elected
24 officials, the community at large and
25 the City of Philadelphia, concerned

1 parents and most importantly, our
2 impacted students along with our School
3 District representatives.

4 I am Archbishop Mary Floyd
5 Palmer and I am First Archbishop in the
6 City of Philadelphia and the state of
7 Pennsylvania where I serve also as
8 President and presiding Bishop of the
9 Philadelphia Council Clergy as a
10 community activist and radio show host,
11 but more importantly, I'm a lifelong
12 citizen of this City.

13 I am also the parent of five
14 adult children. Four of which all
15 graduated from the School District of
16 Philadelphia. I'm the grandmother of
17 seven, where all presently attend public
18 school systems except for one. Six of
19 seven, Central High, TECH Freire, Fidler
20 Academics and private day care, and a
21 great grandmom of an almost 1-year-old
22 grandson who also will be coming through
23 this august educational system, which I
24 am most proud.

25 I am also a graduate of the

1 Philadelphia High School for Girls,
2 class of 1980, and one who was proud to
3 attend a school where such diversity
4 allowed me the opportunity to get an
5 excellent education. This was guided
6 through me and was pivotable in my
7 career no matter what station in life.
8 As Mr. Jones said, it helped me in bad
9 parts of my life when things were not so
10 great, but it was my education that
11 carried me and afforded me the
12 opportunity to seek employment and to be
13 stellar at whatever assignment I had.

14 As a faith leader, I have
15 listened intently to more than a few
16 parents who shared with me their
17 condition and their angst to this
18 current situation. My role is to listen
19 and to provide comfort and support to
20 them. I have watched them as they
21 cried, as they shed tears, fearful for
22 what this will do to their children,
23 their question, their word and their
24 supports felt subject to being
25 scrutinized.

1 How do you respond to a child
2 who says, Mom, Dad, why are we changing?
3 Why can't I go back and be with my
4 friends? Why is that happening now?
5 How can anyone stand there and see tears
6 on any child's face and not be impacted.
7 I do not believe that anyone on this
8 panel is against improvement against
9 equity or equality. I believe that the
10 wholehearted opportunity is for all of
11 us to be able to get the best education.
12 This of course is pivotable upon five
13 schools or more where there is a process
14 that has been implemented. But more
15 importantly, this is not just about
16 these children now because it is
17 highlighted, but it's about all children
18 as previously has been said having the
19 same opportunities of education across
20 all sectors and sections of our City.

21 I've lived in Philadelphia all
22 of my life. I was afforded an
23 opportunity. When I wanted to apply to
24 the Philadelphia High School for Girls,
25 coming from a private education I was

1 told what the process was two years in
2 advance. I was not only given
3 assistance, but support, study helps, if
4 needed, for me to be able to take an
5 entrance exam to attend this particular
6 school. It was a selection process, but
7 I was readily prepared and my parents
8 expected me to do the best that I could,
9 and thankfully I did well.

10 To change an opportunity for
11 children after a promise has been made
12 would make any parent or any leader
13 subject to wondering can they be
14 trusted. Transparency is necessary when
15 it comes to us as leaders, whether we
16 are parents, community activists,
17 politicians, elected officials or even
18 if we run a company. It is the duty of
19 those of us in leadership to be
20 transparent and honest with all who we
21 oversee.

22 It is important for us as
23 parents to be able to tell our children
24 that honesty is the best policy and to
25 make and ensure an environment with

1 transparency is key. There is nothing
2 in life that can do any alteration that
3 we can always predict the outcome.
4 However, we do have a voice that can
5 help to transform. Part of this
6 transformation is being able to be
7 informed, involved and then come to the
8 right solution at the right time.

9 I would venture to say from the
10 number of people that have reached out
11 to me both publicly and/or privately
12 either through the radio show or even
13 inboxing me, that there is a great
14 concern that at this time is a concern.
15 Should we be throwing our children into
16 additional trauma after coming from a
17 pandemic. How many of us even as adults
18 have adapted to a new and involved or
19 reviewed or reformed way of life due to
20 the pandemic? How are we okay? Many of
21 us are not, but we are existing because
22 there was a need to. And for us to now
23 put this burden on our children when
24 they yearn to be back in a social
25 environment that only help in their

1 educational achievements and then to
2 say, sorry, we don't have a process or,
3 sorry, this process is now or, sorry,
4 you don't have a voice or even worse
5 than that, if you don't like it, go
6 somewhere else. Is this how we handle
7 adult situations? Is this a democracy?
8 Is this what we are about?

9 I am a proud parent, a proud
10 grandparent and I have always taught my
11 children that if there is something that
12 is not right, to speak up. I'm speaking
13 not only as a leader and a community
14 activist, but I'm also speaking as one
15 of who have gone through the public
16 school system and years later expect my
17 children to be proud of the same process
18 that their parents and I and other
19 taxpayers are paying for.

20 I believe the School District
21 of Philadelphia has good intentions. I
22 want to believe that they are advocating
23 what is best for our children. But when
24 a process brings more harm than good, it
25 is time to revisit it, it is time to

1 look at it and it is time to carefully
2 and thoughtfully figure out is this the
3 best time.

4 At the end of the day, it is my
5 hope that we as leaders who are supposed
6 to be exhibiting ethics and morals and
7 protecting the gentle minds of our
8 children will help us be honorable
9 people before them. This pandemic has
10 isolated us as humans, and many of us
11 suffer trauma, trauma in not being able
12 to grieve the way we used to, trauma in
13 not being able to speak and being
14 isolated.

15 Now, we are deemed back to a
16 time where we can enjoy one another's
17 presence. How can we ensure that safety
18 and security of our precious children's
19 minds and prevent additional trauma that
20 emotionally can cause many of them to
21 shut down, no desire to learn and end up
22 becoming the worst part of our society.
23 Is failure our ultimate goal or are we
24 as adults supposed to do everything we
25 can to keep our word.

1 I do not believe that
2 improvement is an issue. I do not
3 believe that a process is an issue.
4 Transparency is. Open communication is.
5 And at the end of the day, is it best
6 for our most precious commodity that
7 anyone on this panel may have and, that
8 is, our children. I don't know if you
9 can agree with anything that would bring
10 more harm than good to them. As for me,
11 I certainly cannot. And I hope that
12 from the passion that I am speaking as a
13 mother, as a grandmother, as a proud
14 great grandma that I will be able to
15 embrace a school system that cares
16 passionately about them as I do. I
17 thank you for this opportunity to speak
18 to you and I hope that transparency will
19 strengthen the trust that we want to
20 have in a working relationship with all
21 involved. Thank you and may God bless
22 you.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
24 Archbishop, for your testimony. Much
25 appreciated.

1 Next we have Sharen Finzimer
2 and then Dr. Helene Furjan and then
3 Michael Zhang. Sharen, would you like
4 to state your name for the record and
5 then proceed.

6 MS. FINZIMER: (Muted).

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: You're
8 muted, Sharen.

9 MS. FINZIMER: Okay. My name
10 is Sharen Finzimer. Can you hear me?

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

12 MS. FINZIMER: Okay. Good
13 afternoon, Councilmembers and guest
14 speakers. Thank you for the opportunity
15 to speak today from a principal
16 perspective. My name is Sharen
17 Finzimer. I'm a retired principal of
18 the Franklin Spencer Edmonds School in
19 the Philadelphia School District where I
20 served as principal from 2002 to 2015.
21 Prior to that, I was the principal of
22 the Julia Ward Howe School from 1995
23 through 2002.

24 I appreciate the opportunity to
25 appear before Council today and offer my

1 views regarding the magnet schools'
2 selection process in Philadelphia.
3 During my 20 years as principal, every
4 year many of my students would apply to
5 the District magnet schools. It's a
6 stressful process for the applicants and
7 the School District must take that into
8 account when altering a selection
9 process. Changing the process without a
10 pilot program for eval before making
11 significant adjustments, it's not fair
12 to the students who are then
13 anticipating and preparing for a
14 different process.

15 I'm expressing my support for
16 the concerns of many that came forward
17 to object to the current changes
18 proposed by the School District in the
19 selection process. I'll address some of
20 the reasons quickly: Computer-graded
21 writing sample has many problems as
22 we've heard all morning for a variety of
23 reasons. Those who design such programs
24 advise against using these programs for
25 grading purposes. It's a program used

1 to improve student writing ability, not
2 to grade writing ability. Introducing a
3 program and then to utilize the results
4 as part of the selection process is
5 unduly stressful and not fair to the
6 student applicants.

7 I'm also a principal that
8 represented learning support students,
9 emotional support students and autistic
10 support students, so I know firsthand
11 what Kim Caputo addressed in reference
12 to 504 accommodations and accommodations
13 for our special needs students.

14 Deleting the results of standardized
15 test scores takes away a significant way
16 to level the playing field among
17 applicants and identify students with
18 significant potential.

19 These tests measure where the
20 students are on their educational
21 development against their peers and
22 against the curriculum standards.

23 Eliminating standardized test scores as
24 one of the eval components removes an
25 important tool to compare applicants.

1 Since the change process was not
2 transparent and there was no pilot
3 program to eval for admission,
4 apparently applicant zip code will be
5 used as an input for the evaluation
6 process. The weight of zip code will
7 also be used as an input for the
8 intended consequence of eliminating
9 those the new process seeks to help.

10 The curriculum in the five
11 schools impacted is very demanding and
12 it's important to admit those schools
13 who have the best chance to succeed.
14 The zip code where a student lives is
15 not a valid predictor of future academic
16 performance. Test scores are at least a
17 valid predictor. The impact of
18 eliminating scores and adding zip codes
19 need to be carefully evaluated and
20 explained. Bottom line as a principal
21 in the Philadelphia School District, I
22 was always very careful to make it my
23 priority to engage all family and
24 community stakeholders in the decision-
25 making process regarding our

1 Philadelphia students. The fact that
2 the new selection process did not
3 include public comment or involvement
4 is contrary to what the School District
5 represents.

6 I strongly recommend the School
7 District pause the proposed changes to
8 the selection process. More work needs
9 to be done. A leadership team needs to
10 be put in place that includes family and
11 community engagement. The top
12 educational resources in Philadelphia
13 need to be effectively used to let our
14 best and brightest excel. The new
15 admission criteria and overall policy
16 that governs the magnet school selection
17 process must come forth from a
18 collaborative and identification of
19 those creators who are accountable for
20 impactful policy change. Many such
21 (inaudible) insignificant change with
22 little or no transparency is not good
23 public policy. Thank you. It's
24 wonderful meeting you all and
25 participating in today's hearing. Thank

1 you.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

3 Thank you for your testimony, Sharen.

4 Dr. Helene, if you want to
5 state your name for the record and then
6 proceed with your testimony.

7 DR. FURJAN: Hello. Thank you
8 for listening to me. My name for the
9 record is Dr. Helene Furjan and I am an
10 adjunct professor at Drexel where I
11 specialize in community-based learning
12 and social, racial and economic justice
13 work. And like everybody who have
14 spoken today, we absolutely agree with
15 the comments that Dr. Jubilee made about
16 improving equity and equality and
17 understanding that those two terms are
18 not the same. But I do want to say like
19 most people have spoken today I have
20 grave concerns about the process.

21 Now, I know that we're running
22 late and I want to keep my comments very
23 brief. So what I'm going to do today is
24 just give you some background
25 information on the student experiences,

1 all of the writing tests as it's played
2 out across the School District. And as
3 we heard from Dr. Joshua Wright, that
4 process is deeply flawed. And I think
5 fatally flawed to the point where it has
6 to be removed from the evaluations.

7 What we have seen and given
8 Dr. Wright's testimony, we understand
9 why we've seen what we've seen, is that
10 rather than the schools on those tests
11 roughly reflecting benchmarks and GPAs
12 as you would expect, that they, in fact,
13 haven't. And what we have seen in many,
14 many instances across the school and
15 including my child's own school is that
16 the highest grades have actually gone to
17 the lowest performing writers in the
18 school based on those benchmarks and GPA
19 as well as students who are extremely
20 gifted writers have scored low and in
21 numerous cases have actually scored
22 below 22. And these are students with
23 GPAs of close to 100, consistently over
24 numerous years. That I think is in part
25 by the fact that content was not

1 evaluated in that. And these are
2 students who excel at producing content
3 and argument, so who are creative
4 writers, who are thoughtful writers and
5 whose emphasis would have been on the
6 production of content. That that's not
7 evaluated is effectively flawed, right.

8 Part of the education that they
9 receive in writing is content-based.
10 It's not just about the bare-bones of
11 grammar and structure. The prompts also
12 tended to prioritize content and
13 (inaudible), and that means that's what
14 students will have pushed their
15 attention to. I also want to point out
16 that what we observed is that those
17 prompts were massively inconsistent.

18 So there prompts that said
19 things like choose a super power, define
20 success, why is your school great,
21 right, up against prompts that said
22 things like how could your school
23 incorporate community service into its
24 curriculum, discuss the ban on phone use
25 while driving, athletes need Cs to play.

1 These are prompts that are not available
2 to the experience or knowledge of a
3 middle schooler and certainly not to all
4 middle schoolers as they have to be in
5 order for them to be fair.

6 I know of a number of instances
7 of students essentially balking at the
8 prompt they were given and not knowing
9 how to address it, not knowing how to
10 write an answer and that impacted those
11 students. Furthermore, prompts that
12 were sent up by the District as examples
13 to teachers and students to practice
14 with the absolute promise that they
15 would not be on the test were, in fact,
16 on the test, right. So that means that
17 some students lucky enough to receive
18 those prompts were able to write back
19 out what they had practiced in class
20 with teachers' assistance. That means
21 that the scoring that we have is in no
22 way representative of skill or ability
23 and is not in any way fair, equitable or
24 equal, right. And that is completely
25 and unacceptably flawed.

1 Therefore, I want to argue as
2 other people have today that those
3 scores aren't (inaudible), that they
4 need to be replaced with a different
5 kind of writing sample. And I want to
6 refer back to the early comments made by
7 a parent talking about their child
8 having expected to be able to write
9 their story to talk their own
10 challenges, their own needs relative to
11 school in a way that allows the schools
12 to choose its students based on a really
13 nuance understanding of who each student
14 is. That needs to be returned. All
15 that we need to at the very least use a
16 communicative score that includes GPAs
17 and benchmark and STAR evaluations. And
18 students with high grades in writing
19 should be permitted to appeal scores
20 that were below 22 or 17, as the case
21 may be.

22 I think that another point that
23 needs to be made is that GPAs in fact
24 are not beyond the reach of the
25 District. They manage a gradebook which

1 is the formal grade register for all
2 students in the District, which has
3 quarterly and annual grades listed.
4 Therefore, working out what a GPA is, is
5 a very simple step beyond that.

6 And another point that I want
7 to reiterate is the shame and trauma
8 that has been imposed on students who
9 did not score well on that test,
10 particularly students who are expecting
11 to score high based on their GPAs, and
12 the grave consequences that will have on
13 student confidence, health and well-
14 being district-wide, particularly for
15 students who suffer from conditions like
16 anxiety, depression, PTSD and other
17 neuroatypical conditions or
18 disabilities, right.

19 I also want to point out that
20 the failures of this writing piece
21 highlights the lack of equity and
22 equality in the admissions process is
23 generally. And in its current form it's
24 effectively an additional lottery. I
25 want to point out that lotteries are

1 arbitrary by definition and cannot
2 ensure inclusivity unless they're highly
3 manipulated, that they divide and
4 isolate and that they increase
5 uncertainty and stress. And one of the
6 most common things that I have heard and
7 that many other parents have heard
8 across the District is the great fear
9 that students have that they will not be
10 able to maintain their cohorts and
11 support groups as they move onto high
12 school, that they have no idea if they
13 will be with their friends, with the
14 people who are so important to their
15 maintaining their health and mental
16 health, that they are already concerned
17 about the year, the 18 months they have
18 all just been through, whether we're
19 talking about the issues around Black
20 Lives Matter and the other questions
21 that have sort of been brought to
22 everybody's attention in really
23 important ways, but also because of
24 homeschooling and the ongoing pandemic,
25 the losses that they've all individually

1 suffered, the hardships that have
2 increased in our communities. And most
3 students in the 8th grade see this as
4 the District essentially continuing to
5 be mean and cruel to them at a moment
6 where they most need support and care.

7 So in conclusion, the District
8 has admitted they do not know if this
9 will work. But a dramatic change like
10 this in process should know if it will
11 work. It should be backed by research,
12 data, community and professional
13 consultation and testing that ensures it
14 will achieve its goals before it's
15 implemented, not experimenting and
16 potentially in vain with the high stakes
17 of children's futures. Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Doctor,
19 thank you so much for your testimony.
20 Much appreciated.

21 Next we have Michael Zhang and
22 then Natalie Morales will wind up the
23 testimony. So, Michael, if you're
24 available, state your name for the
25 record and then proceed with your

1 testimony. Thank you.

2 MR. ZHANG: Yes. Good morning,
3 everybody. My name's Michael Zhang and
4 I'm here as a spokesperson on behalf of
5 the Chinese American parents opposing
6 the new admissions process. I am also a
7 parent of the School District. I am
8 also a proud parent of a 10th grader at
9 Central and a 7th grader at Masterman.

10 My wife and I decided to move
11 our children from Brandywine School
12 District in Delaware with our goal of
13 bringing our children to Masterman and
14 Central because we knew these schools
15 had high expectations and standards, and
16 we have always told our children that if
17 they study hard, they can get into these
18 schools and they become who they want to
19 be. They've participated in many
20 extracurricular activities and community
21 services, and they also study very hard,
22 often sometimes late into the night.
23 And we always told them if they study
24 hard, they will achieve their success.
25 And it is not fair that they will now be

1 put into a lottery system.

2 I came to this country as a 3rd
3 grader and an ESL student, and I got
4 into a magnet program by 7th grade. I
5 came in 1987, my whole family came here,
6 and we started with nothing and built
7 everything up. And I can personally
8 relate to the immigrant students and the
9 impact that this policy has on them as
10 well as first-generation immigrant
11 parents. My family came here for better
12 opportunity and my family, my mother
13 especially, has sacrificed everything
14 for my sister and my future.

15 She always inspired us to work
16 hard and we contributed to society. She
17 is no longer with me today. She had
18 passed away a few years ago. And we are
19 here today because according to the
20 District's budget plan for the Fiscal
21 Year 2021 which was provided funding for
22 about \$4 billion in revenues funded by
23 tax dollars paid for taxpayers, it is
24 imperative that the voices of the
25 taxpayers be heard.

1 Many parents in the Chinese
2 community have reached out to me after
3 they got to know me from the Christie
4 Lou Stop Hate and City of Brother Love
5 Rally. As Dr. Martin Luther King had a
6 dream that one day all of our children
7 can live in a nation that will not be
8 judged by the color of their skin but by
9 the content of their character. We
10 believe that by this, all communities
11 should come together so that we can
12 achieve Dr. King's dream one day.

13 It is the duty of the School
14 District to improve education for all
15 children and to provide a safe and
16 secure environment that is conducive to
17 learning. It is the duty of every
18 parent and educator to instill upon the
19 minds of our young children knowledge
20 and wisdom by planting seeds of love and
21 produce the fruit of compassion for our
22 neighbors. We must choose (inaudible)
23 with their unique gift and talent. We
24 must liberate their minds so they have
25 the power to become the change that they

1 want to see in this world.

2 As Nelson Mandela also said,
3 education is the most powerful weapon
4 that we can use to change a world. We
5 must inspire our young children. We
6 must inspire them to become who they
7 want to be so that one day they may
8 render (inaudible) in hope for uniting
9 humanity. And it is also a slogan of
10 the United Negro College Fund that a
11 mind is a terrible thing to waste.

12 And many Asian immigrant
13 parents and children have the question
14 why none of the zip codes in those
15 neighborhoods aren't represented, many
16 of the low-income Asian families like
17 Chinatown and some areas in South Philly
18 and areas in Northeast where there are
19 many low-income working class Asian
20 Americans. They work in restaurant
21 kitchens and as waiters and delivering
22 food and supermarkets and warehouses.

23 Each school has a different
24 magnet program that specializes in
25 different areas of interest. The new

1 process is unfair to all families
2 regardless of race or socioeconomic
3 background. It is unfair to all those
4 who has made tremendous sacrifice for
5 the sake of their children's education.
6 Many immigrant parents who work long
7 hours while their children study on
8 their own. Many themselves have only
9 elementary school-level education and do
10 not even speak English. They did
11 everything they could to be able to help
12 their children qualify by merit into
13 these top-performing schools.

14 Each child is unique and they
15 are very different in their own special
16 ways, but every child should be allowed
17 to pick the school that match best to
18 their interests and their academic
19 abilities. The new process denies our
20 children of that choice. Many Asian
21 American parents did not get involved in
22 their children's school activities
23 because they do not know many issues at
24 our schools because they didn't speak
25 English and they don't understand a lot

1 of the issues that we are dealing with.

2 Many work long hours and they
3 do manual labor jobs. And no
4 information about this new process was
5 ever sent to them in a language that
6 they can understand, and they were never
7 asked to participate in this process.

8 The writing test is not fair to
9 immigrant students who may write
10 perfectly in their native language, but
11 they struggle with -- sorry, but they
12 struggle with English and grammar. And
13 students among the top of their class
14 may not be among their friends next year
15 if they lose the lottery. How is it
16 fair that a poor student regardless of
17 race that perform at the top of their
18 class because they value education and
19 study hard might lose a seat to someone
20 less qualified and may even be from a
21 wealthier family.

22 What kind of message are we
23 sending to our children that their
24 grades and efforts do not matter. The
25 entire process undermines the principle

1 of merit and academic integrity that are
2 of the essence and maintain the high
3 standard of quality at top performing
4 schools like Central and Masterman.

5 Our children are competing
6 globally with students from all over the
7 world for spots in our universities. No
8 other country will use a lottery system
9 to qualify their top students into their
10 top schools. This new policy is unfair
11 to all families regardless of race or
12 economic background, especially to those
13 children who have worked hard to meet
14 the admissions criteria under the merit-
15 based system.

16 My question is why not improve
17 education at all levels by creating more
18 classrooms with students that can
19 qualify into these magnet schools at all
20 levels, even in grade schools through
21 merits rather than lowering
22 qualification standards and there
23 wouldn't be a need for the use of a
24 lottery system.

25 With \$4 billion of funding for

1 our School District according to the
2 School District's 2021 Fiscal Year
3 budget proposal, we can improve
4 education by expanding school buildings,
5 adding more classrooms, hiring more
6 qualified teachers and support staff.
7 We can build more schools and make more
8 magnet seats available so that all who
9 qualify may earn a seat. Criteria-based
10 schools should select students based on
11 academic achievements and scholastic
12 abilities, along with the student
13 attendance records, behavioral history
14 and essay review by a panel of real
15 teachers and real school staff which are
16 essential.

17 We should focus on improving
18 education, not tearing down schools that
19 took years to build up and rank them on
20 the top of our nation. I suggest we
21 expand our school buildings to have more
22 advanced classes and language programs
23 and hire more qualified teachers to
24 improve education at a much earlier
25 grade at a catchment and neighborhood

1 level so that students in all zip codes
2 may qualify by merits rather than by
3 lottery.

4 I believe the School Board has
5 abusive power to implement the new
6 admissions policy without any regards
7 for public input or accountability.

8 This is a fake system. It is a fraud
9 and a scheme perpetrated in the name of
10 equity to destroy our top-rated schools
11 like Masterman and Central, Carver and
12 SLA. The District has failed to improve
13 education at all levels.

14 Let the \$4 billion funding
15 received through taxpayer money -- we as
16 taxpayers must demand the School
17 District be fair to all students,
18 respect all parents and be transparent
19 with all process. Until the School
20 District can meet these demands, we ask
21 the process be stopped and consider
22 alternatives so that no student may be
23 harmed in this process. Our children
24 are our future, and I want to thank
25 everyone who has joined to participate

1 today. Thank you.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
3 Michael, for your testimony. And the
4 last person testifying, Natalie Morales.
5 If you're available, just state your
6 name for the record and proceed with
7 your testimony.

8 MS. MORALES: Okay. Hello. My
9 name is Natalie Morales of Feltonville
10 Arts & Sciences and I'm in the 8th
11 grade. I would like to thank you for
12 you having me here. I believe this
13 policy is highly unfair. It doesn't
14 score how good students write on it.
15 And it puts unnecessary amount of stress
16 on students, and that also causes them
17 to perform worse.

18 Coming from my own experience,
19 this test only made me feel like a
20 failure. It got to the point where I
21 couldn't even look my own mother in the
22 eye because I felt like I failed her.
23 And I'm not testifying only for myself.
24 I'm testifying for other students in the
25 District, probably over hundreds and

1 thousands. I'm sorry for the
2 background.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: That's all
4 right. Take your time. Not a problem.

5 MS. MORALES: Well, that's
6 really all I have. Once again, I would
7 like to thank you for your time and
8 consideration.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
10 for the courage to come out here and
11 testify. It's important to hear the
12 voice of the students also. We much
13 appreciate it. Thank you.

14 Is there anyone else here to
15 testify on this bill? We do have
16 written testimony that's going to be
17 submitted for the record for Blair
18 Downey, Janira Amedeo, Brett Camarato
19 Miller, Kelly Collings, Dr. Steven
20 Newman and Mitchell Horenstein, so we do
21 have that written testimony.

22 And if there's not any
23 questions, we will now go into a public
24 comment period. We will ask our IT
25 folks to give us a little bit of time I

1 guess to connect those folks onto this
2 call. Modesto, are you available to do
3 that?

4 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: Yes, we
5 will, Councilman. We need a few minutes
6 to connect public comment.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: While he's
8 doing that, we want to thank everyone
9 who testified. We have a lot of
10 important information that we shared.
11 We have a lot of concerns that we need
12 to address, and this is a very important
13 hearing and looking forward to
14 continuing conversations as we move
15 forward. Once we have the public
16 commenters on, we will ask IT to read
17 out the names as they are ready.

18 (Brief recess.)

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
20 all. We're back at our public hearing
21 on the Education Committee on Resolution
22 No. 210978. We do have a public comment
23 period now. I believe if we can see who
24 is on the line, I have a list but not
25 sure what order, if everybody is

1 connected.

2 For the record, I just want to
3 announce that Councilmember Thomas is
4 present at the hearing. Modesto, do we
5 know who is available?

6 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: We have
7 Councilwoman Blackwell.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
9 Councilmember Blackwell, thank you.
10 Hope you're connected. Just state your
11 name for the record and then proceed
12 with your testimony. Thank you for
13 being here.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Hi,
15 it's Jannie Blackwell. How are you
16 doing, Councilman?

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We're
18 doing great. Thank you for --

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Can
20 you hear me?

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We hear
22 you well.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I've
24 been listening to you all morning. I
25 heard the opening comments. And

1 certainly, I want to thank Councilman Oh
2 for his legislation. I should have got
3 on the list early. I've been listening
4 to it since you all made your opening
5 comments and since the State Rep spoke,
6 Head of the Black Caucus. One of my
7 favorite ministers spoke.

8 And I had to call to say how
9 important this is. And when you look at
10 it, everybody, you've had 100 percent of
11 the people testify who agreed that this
12 is not the way to go. And I guess
13 Solomon Jones is one of the most
14 outspoken in his remarks that he's ready
15 for a fight, but everybody feels the
16 same way. And it's very disappointing
17 that outgoing Superintendent and this
18 School Board would not realize that they
19 need to make a change.

20 So certainly, I wanted to thank
21 you. I wanted to say that I look
22 forward to supporting you. There's no
23 way I cannot deal with this whole issue
24 of education that you all are doing a
25 great job in keeping up with.

1 Councilman Oh, I appreciate
2 you. You've always stayed on top of
3 myriad issues. Thank you, Mark, as
4 well. God bless you. I'm there for you
5 and thank you for doing the people's
6 work in trying to make sure that our
7 children and education are protected.
8 God bless you.

9 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you,
10 Council Lady.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
12 Councilmember. Thank you for all your
13 hard work and dedication to the City.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.
17 Marquita Washington, if you are
18 connected, can you just state your name
19 for the record and proceed with your
20 comments.

21 MS. WASHINGTON: Yes. My name
22 is Marquita J. Washington. Philadelphia
23 City Council Committee on Education,
24 good afternoon. And I thank you for
25 allowing me to be heard. Today I come

1 to you as a former teacher, educator in
2 the School District of Philadelphia and
3 as a quiet activist for children,
4 usually preferring to be in the
5 background.

6 However, today I am compelled
7 to speak on behalf of children who are
8 being affected by the new policy on
9 criteria-based schools. These children
10 include my two grandsons. A whirlwind
11 of thoughts and emotions overcame me
12 when I became aware of this situation.
13 For the sake of time, I will only
14 mention a few. Some of these points
15 might be repetitive, but they are my
16 thoughts.

17 My first thought as an educator
18 was to look at the assessment tool with
19 which these students are being judged,
20 MI Write. In 2019 in a published
21 position paper, MI Write by their own
22 admission wrote that this is a tool that
23 should be used for scoring and giving
24 students comprehensive lessons on
25 writing essays and get prompt feedback

1 on their strengths and weaknesses.

2 After providing several reasons
3 why MI Write should not be relied upon
4 as an assessment tool, the paper
5 concludes by stating and I quote, "While
6 PEG is amazing, it is important to
7 remember that it is a machine, not a
8 brain and can only do what it's trained
9 to do. It would be very unfair to
10 assign a grade to a student based on its
11 evaluation of an essay. One student
12 might benefit from transferring PEG
13 scores to grades while another might be
14 penalized. MI Write were designed to
15 help students practice their skills and
16 to improve them based on feedback. This
17 is a great tool, but it's not the only
18 tool for teaching writing nor for
19 assessing."

20 A system of assessments should
21 provide opportunities for students that
22 demonstrate what they know and what
23 they're able to do in a variety of ways.
24 It should assure that multiple forms of
25 evidence about student progress and

1 achievement are available and that they
2 are used collaboratively to make
3 judgments about students. With such
4 high stakes attached ensuring our
5 children's learning progress, where is
6 the data to show if MI Write is a valid
7 and reliable tool for assessment. Does
8 MI Write measure their full true
9 potential as an active learner or just
10 their ability to write.

11 I suggest that it provides a
12 fragmented picture of the learner's
13 ability as a writer that completely
14 takes the teacher and teaching out of
15 the equation. It deeply concerns me
16 that for nearly two years these students
17 have been faced with many uncertainties
18 of life that make a person who has been
19 on this planet for 70-plus years shutter
20 in disbelief.

21 Research forecasting the impact
22 of school closings and virtual learning
23 on progress and achievement has yet to
24 be determined. We are only scratching
25 the surface of the short-term and long-

1 term academic impacts of COVID. I
2 contend the two years of fragmented
3 learning would affect the student's
4 writing and writing process more
5 adversely than other content areas.

6 And I'll pause for a moment.
7 Because as a teacher, I realize what it
8 was like to get a writing piece from my
9 students. It was definitely a process
10 and not something that they could sit
11 down in front of a computer and generate
12 with 100 percent proficiency. Finally,
13 my soon to be 13-year-old, a curious,
14 responsible and amazing person, during
15 these most unprecedented times said to
16 me, Mommom, they don't understand the
17 position that they're putting us in.
18 I'm angry. For three years they have
19 told us to work hard, get the best
20 grades that we can so that we can get to
21 where we want to go. He told me it's
22 all been for nothing.

23 One of his classmates said,
24 that this is an experiment and we are
25 the lab rats. He is a student at

1 Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration
2 School. I venture to say that many
3 students throughout the City are feeling
4 this way. I applaud you today on your
5 efforts to address equity in the School
6 District.

7 In conclusion, in the words of
8 the MI Write paper I referred to
9 earlier, substituting MI Write for a
10 teacher-assessed essay does not make a
11 dependable summative grade. In the name
12 of equity and in consideration of the
13 unprecedented time, do not throw the
14 baby out with the bath water. Take a
15 pause, re-evaluate, listen to the
16 solutions being proposed today and
17 please do not allow our 8th graders to
18 suffer the brunt of hasty decisions
19 yielding terrible results. Thank you
20 very much.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.
22 Thank you for your testimony, Marquita.

23 Next we have Shonda Corbett.
24 If you're available, Shonda, just state
25 your name for the record and proceed

1 with your testimony.

2 MS. CORBETT: Yes. Hi. My
3 name is Shonda Corbett. My son is an
4 8th grader at Hill-Freedman World
5 Academy. When we joined Hill-Freedman
6 in the 6th grade, the principal told us
7 that Hill-Freedman middle schoolers got
8 preference for admission to high school.
9 The policy is always spelled out in the
10 student handbook, which describes the
11 middle school year program as 6th
12 through 10th grade. We have 150 high
13 school seats and only 60 8th graders.
14 There is enough space for Hill-Freedman
15 middle schoolers and for children from
16 the lottery who we welcome to join us.

17 After speaking to other
18 parents, I discovered that they did not
19 know anything about the lottery. After
20 further investigation, I found out that
21 the majority of the parents voted
22 against the proposal. But the Board
23 still pushed it through anyway. I feel
24 like we're being bullied to do something
25 or to go along with the Board with

1 something that I would not have voted
2 for had I known about the proposal
3 myself.

4 The School Board has a
5 nonbullying policy for our students.
6 And at this point as a parent, I feel
7 like I'm being bullied. It would be so
8 easy to honor the commitment that your
9 principals and employees made to our
10 children. Why should we believe
11 anything tells us at this point when
12 they keep going back on their word.

13 Under the new system, why would
14 any parent choose these middle schools
15 knowing that they face another lottery
16 in a few years. Why are we disrupting
17 the children at Hill-Freedman, a
18 majority Black school that has twice
19 been named a Blue Ribbon school because
20 there is a lack of diversity in other
21 schools. The need to improve equity is
22 huge, but I don't think the District
23 thought out the details of the new
24 policy carefully.

25 The middle school issue is only

1 one of many problems. How does the new
2 admission policy help neighborhood
3 schools which are so lacking in
4 resources that many parents won't even
5 consider them. Why did they and are
6 they taking such a big part of our
7 children's future allowing it to rest on
8 this writing, MI Writer. Did you know
9 that the company -- I'm sure you do
10 because she just spoke about it -- says
11 that it shouldn't be used for grades. I
12 would like to know some of these answers
13 to some of these questions as soon as
14 possible. Thank you.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
16 again for your testimony, Shonda.

17 Beth McRovian. If you're
18 available, state your name for the
19 record and then proceed if you're
20 connected with your testimony.

21 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: She will
22 not be testifying today, Council Chair.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Beth is
24 not available?

25 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: Correct.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Mitchell
2 Horenstein. Mitchell, if you're on --

3 MR. HORENSTEIN: Hi. Good
4 morning -- good afternoon rather. My
5 name is Mitchell Horenstein. I'm an
6 educator, a Professor of Russian and
7 East European Studies at University of
8 Pennsylvania. I've lived in the City
9 since 2007. I've served on University
10 admissions committees, and I have a
11 child who loves, I mean loves, attending
12 a public magnet school here in
13 Philadelphia.

14 I want to thank Councilmember
15 Oh for organizing these hearings,
16 Councilmembers Squilla, Thomas and
17 Blackwell and all Councilmembers and
18 community members for their
19 participation. Professor Josh Wilson of
20 the University Delaware, an author of 17
21 articles on automated writing assessment
22 stated that the use of MI Write for high
23 stakes decisions like admissions was
24 problematic, and boy, was he right.

25 The way the writing assessment

1 was rolled out was not only unfair, but
2 also subject to many irregularities that
3 have yet to be fully aired. Some were
4 mentioned before. But MI Write is on
5 one of the damaging aspects of the new
6 selection process. The lottery
7 undermines the principle of merit. To
8 me, honestly that's the biggest problem.

9 The existing zip code
10 preference does little to address
11 widespread problems of equity in our
12 City, and the system does not account
13 for schools that admit not in 9th grade,
14 but in middle school. I support a
15 school selection system based on merit,
16 measures of socioeconomic disadvantage
17 that can be calculated for the entire
18 city rather than just a few zip codes,
19 and some carve-outs for high schools
20 that have their own attached middle
21 schools.

22 But first, let's talk about the
23 process that got us here. The
24 deficiencies of the school selection
25 process along with the environmental

1 health and safety issues, Council will
2 consider later today, both arise from
3 the poor policy process of the School
4 District of Philadelphia. The District
5 tries to do things secretly. It does
6 not sufficiently consult experts. It
7 makes rushed decisions. It gets
8 criticized harshly as it has today. It
9 circles wagons, tries to avoid and
10 repeats. We need to work with the
11 District to break this cycle, and we
12 need solutions.

13 So how do we solve the problem
14 of diversity with excellence. The data
15 exists to design a better approach
16 today. Excellence demand that the best
17 students with the best grades and test
18 scores are rewarded. Equity demands if
19 students from disadvantaged backgrounds
20 are not punished for circumstances
21 beyond their control.

22 To combine these goals together
23 requires a simple composite measure for
24 each student, a school weighted GPA,
25 test scores in reading and math and

1 perhaps a revised writing sample. Plus,
2 it requires a more nuance measure of
3 disadvantage or advantage calculated not
4 by zip code, which are very large,
5 diverse, but by the much smaller and
6 more precise area in which they live and
7 on which the School District already has
8 a lot of data.

9 Simply weight, the education
10 excellence measure by a measure of
11 disadvantage and reward the best
12 students, while boosting all students
13 fighting significant disadvantage up the
14 ranking, no lottery. Use those rankings
15 for admissions and to compose the wait
16 list at each school. Allow students to
17 rank order their school preference. For
18 those high schools with attached middle
19 schools with an entry point in 6th or
20 7th, allocating spaces to those middle
21 schools is appropriate. The
22 circumstances vary and must be tailored
23 to each school.

24 By contrast, the approach the
25 District has chosen to achieve equity is

1 perverse and unfair. When the District
2 finally announced the preferred zip
3 codes several weeks after the selection
4 process was announced on October 6th,
5 only 6 zip codes out of approximately 50
6 in the City were designated for
7 preference in the lottery. But I ask
8 you, does anyone believe that those zip
9 codes are the only places where
10 socioeconomic or racial injustice is in
11 the City.

12 These zip codes do not include
13 any in West Philadelphia or Southwest
14 Philadelphia or Chinatown. In fact, the
15 majority of disadvantaged people in the
16 City are most likely left out of this
17 system. Many Philadelphia parents,
18 including my wife and I, depend on
19 magnet schools because local catchment
20 schools have a very poor record of
21 preparing students for college.

22 If you are a parent who needs
23 your child to be prepared for college,
24 you need your magnet school. This need
25 is most pronounced for disadvantaged

1 groups that have no other choice.
2 Magnet schools provide a vital pathway
3 of opportunity in the City. Let's not
4 lose sight of that. Magnet schools
5 selection matters deeply to a majority
6 of parents, but different races and
7 socioeconomic status throughout the
8 City. That is why we see such an outcry
9 on this issue today.

10 Philadelphia also I should
11 underline has an enormous opportunity
12 here. If we can achieve diversity with
13 excellence in our public magnet schools
14 in a way that has been lauded by so many
15 other major cities, Philadelphia could
16 become a leading example for the entire
17 country. The stakes are high. I want
18 the City of Philadelphia to be known for
19 the diversity and excellence of the
20 schools. I do not believe in this great
21 City that that goal is out of reach.
22 And I thank all of you for your
23 participation.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
25 Mitchell. Thank you for your testimony.

1 Next we will have Michael
2 Young. Michael, if you're connected,
3 please state your name for the record
4 and proceed with your --

5 MR. YOUNG: Hi. I'm here.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We hear
7 you.

8 MR. YOUNG: Hi. My name is
9 Michael Young and I'm the parent of a
10 5th grader at Masterman. And I oppose
11 this admission system for all the
12 reasons which you've already heard. I
13 just want to touch on two. One of which
14 I think has not had enough play. The
15 first one is that we're throwing our 8th
16 graders under the bus. We are breaking
17 promises to them, and I want to make
18 sure that point is made strongly enough.

19 The second point is that we're
20 lowering the criteria for entry into
21 some of the highest ranking schools.
22 We're lowering the criteria. It used to
23 be in Masterman, for example, that all
24 A's in 8th, great performance throughout
25 5th through 8th grade would get you into

1 the high school. You had 50 percent
2 chance at worst, and probably 100
3 percent chance of you were in the top
4 half of the school.

5 Today for these 8th graders,
6 they're facing less than a 10 percent
7 chance of continuing from 8th grade to
8 9th grade. The Carver students were
9 made a promise and that promise is being
10 broken as well. I don't want to belabor
11 all of this because I have very little
12 time.

13 What I would like to do is
14 propose a solution, and the solution
15 isn't that difficult. It's not perfect.
16 It doesn't solve all the problems. But
17 we're in a pickle here, that the
18 District has put us in a position where
19 any major change to what they're already
20 doing will be difficult, will take time
21 and lots of thinking. It will turn the
22 plan upside down, and they've already
23 turned a bunch of students upside down
24 in order to get this far. So I'm going
25 to propose a plan or two which we can

1 implement quickly and solve most of the
2 problems.

3 We should move immediately to a
4 50/50 plan, where 50 percent of the
5 admissions will be chosen by lottery in
6 accordance with all the criteria that
7 has been set out by individual schools
8 for entry into those schools. The
9 second 50 percent will go back to being
10 chosen by the principals. So they will
11 pick their own 8th graders based on
12 merit and taking into account the essay,
13 but not using the essay as a hard stop
14 on admissions and applying other factors
15 such as you've heard a few ideas about
16 weighing continuous scores, et cetera.

17 The principal will choose the
18 second 50 percent. The zip code kids
19 will go first. I don't think this was a
20 great policy. I don't think it's a
21 great idea, but it's in place and I
22 don't know if it's too late to change it
23 without having an outcry for those
24 communities. So the zip code kids will
25 go first, but we should put a cap on how

1 many given to any particular school, cap
2 at 20 percent. So in other words, the
3 zip code kids go first. If they
4 qualify, they get into the school of
5 their choice with a cap of 20 percent.

6 The lottery chooses the next 50
7 percent of the students into the school.
8 And then the principals do what
9 principals can do within a committee
10 that they choose, a couple of teachers,
11 the principal, a couple of experts they
12 will choose. The other 50 percent of
13 their students who will enter their 9th
14 grade.

15 What we can't do is go back and
16 ask these 8th graders to do anything
17 more than they've already done. They
18 survived the pandemic. They've worked
19 their butts off for the last four years
20 to keep all A's, to get good grades, to
21 go on to school. They've been forced to
22 take this essay, which is wrong, wrong-
23 minded and harsh. We shouldn't impose
24 any new testing or any criteria on these
25 8th graders. We should be able to make

1 this decision with the information we
2 have at hand.

3 As a second plan, if you wish
4 to add seats you can do that as well.
5 What we could do is there's roughly I
6 believe 20 million square feet of vacant
7 office space in Center City,
8 Philadelphia. And I think that's a
9 number from before the pandemic. We
10 have no idea how soon all of the people
11 who will be coming back or if they'll
12 come back to fill those buildings. A
13 school like Masterman is already
14 overcrowded. But you can take a
15 Masterman, you can add 60-plus seats to
16 the 9th grade, do so for the next four
17 years and move Masterman to a Center
18 City location and a high-rise.

19 You can move a couple of other
20 schools into Center City as well and
21 increase their 9th grade for the next
22 four years as well, and then go back and
23 renovate those old schools for the
24 schools return or for use by another
25 school or use as a new school. And then

1 you go to the same plan that I just laid
2 out, the 50/50 plan. Zip code kids go
3 first, capped at 20 percent. And then
4 the lottery of 50 percent of what's
5 left, and then the principals make a
6 selection. I have faith in the
7 principals. I think they can make an
8 unbiased selection.

9 So please consider this plan.
10 It helps mitigate any harm from the new
11 lottery policy. It's measured. It's
12 thoughtful. It's fair. It can be
13 implemented with a minimum of adjustment
14 to the announced plan, and it requires
15 nothing more than from the stressed-out
16 group of 8th graders, and it fulfills
17 the promises made to them. It tamps
18 down the controversy with the parents
19 and students, and then it allows us to
20 spend our time trying to reimagine the
21 school system, and Philadelphia needs
22 reimagining.

23 The Philadelphia scores for
24 math proficiency and for reading
25 proficiency are in the mid 20s and low

1 30s, and that's not good for the City.
2 The City needs better schools. We
3 should start from scratch. And I have a
4 ask for City Council. The ask is that
5 you form a commission of experts and
6 bring them in and study the subject of
7 how can we turn the Philadelphia school
8 system into a model education system for
9 urban environments. We can be the model
10 for the world, and have this commission
11 working with the District, working with
12 the Board, pulling in experts when they
13 need to, rethink, reimagine the
14 Philadelphia's school system. It's not
15 that crazy an idea.

16 We can use lots of tools that
17 are available today to get it done and
18 we can be the number one school system
19 in the state of Pennsylvania, top of the
20 crowd in this country and better able to
21 compete against the rest of the world.

22 Thank you.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
24 for your testimony, Michael.

25 Next we have Maggie Li Zhang.

1 COUNCILMAN OH: Chairman, can I
2 interrupt for a second as you call
3 Maggie Li Zhang. Just to state that we
4 are running against the clock. There's
5 a 2 o'clock meeting, and I would just
6 request that the witnesses just keep in
7 mind that we have about eight more
8 witnesses. It's typically about three
9 minutes, so we can get everybody in.
10 Thank you very much, Chairman.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
12 Councilmember.

13 Maggie, if you're on, can you
14 state your name for the record and then
15 proceed?

16 COUNCIL TECH SUPPORT: Maggie
17 is not present, Councilman.

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.
19 That's one less. That's good.

20 Ivan Zhou. Ivan. Are you
21 present?

22 COUNCILMAN TECH SUPPORT: Not
23 present, Councilman.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.
25 That's good.

1 Stephanie King.

2 MS. KING: Hello.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hey,
4 Stephanie. Just state your name for the
5 record. We hear you and then proceed
6 with your testimony. Thank you.

7 MS. KING: Sure. My name is
8 Stephanie King. I'm the parent of two
9 children at General Philip Kearney
10 School and the member of Parents United
11 for Public Education. I want to thank
12 Councilmembers for being here today and
13 being interested in this issue.

14 But I am here today to talk
15 about in favor of the change in
16 admissions policy. I have been among
17 the education activists petitioning the
18 District to make magnet school
19 admissions more equitable for years, and
20 I am very disheartened by the reaction
21 to this new policy, including the way it
22 has been misrepresented by so many
23 people today, including Councilmember
24 Oh.

25 This new policy has been

1 portrayed as giving spots to undeserving
2 students or meaning their hard work is
3 no longer important or lowering
4 standards. So let me say it again, the
5 lottery for these schools is for all
6 qualified students. Qualified means
7 that they have met the high standards
8 for admission. These students have
9 still had to make excellent grades, show
10 excellent attendance and keep a clean
11 disciplinary record. Students who are
12 not qualified will not be eligible for
13 the lottery.

14 Weighting for zip codes
15 acknowledges that some students have
16 struggled in underprivileged schools
17 this City and this Council gave them and
18 still came out qualified, but these
19 people who are able to buy their house
20 in a neighborhood or use school
21 selection to transfer into a gentrifying
22 school believe that their children's
23 hard work counts.

24 To be blunt, much of the
25 objection to this policy is privileged

1 and racist. The only exception is
2 objection to the timed writing test,
3 which people on all sides agree must be
4 abolished. Though I noticed that not
5 many of these voices objecting to high
6 stakes testing were there when it was
7 the PSSA instead. Some of these
8 objections are from privileged parents
9 who are simply except that they rigged
10 their game towards the wrong test.

11 Statistics do not lie.
12 Philadelphia's magnet schools are not
13 representative of Philadelphia's
14 demographics or zip codes and have
15 become overwhelmingly a concentration of
16 privilege. This policy levels the
17 playing field while still requiring
18 excellence. The people protesting it
19 are of self-interest, should be ashamed
20 of themselves. And while we're at it,
21 it's telling that this process seems to
22 have blindsided people on Council when
23 it was in the works for over a year. It
24 was a whole bunch of focus groups and a
25 survey in the spring of 2021 that I

1 participated in.

2 I'm sorry, but if this change
3 took you legislators completely by
4 surprise, you were not paying attention.

5 I am doing this for free in your paid
6 six figure. But now, there are all
7 these new voices suddenly claiming to
8 care about what's fair in these schools.

9 Now, that it's no longer a cakewalk
10 directly into magnet schools for your
11 most privileged constituents. Your
12 wringing your hands over a couple of
13 extra points for an underprivileged zip
14 code, when you had no problem when the
15 zip codes getting preference were the
16 zip codes of Meredith or Greenfield or
17 Sadie Alexander because that was what
18 was happening.

19 If these Councilmembers
20 complaining and parents protesting just
21 don't want to send your kids with poor
22 people even when they're qualified, then
23 just say that instead of this fake
24 concern, and take the word fair out of
25 your mouth. Thank you.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
2 for your testimony.

3 Next we will have Marc Stein.
4 Are you connected?

5 MR. STEIN: Hello.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA Hello,
7 Marc. State your name for the record
8 and then proceed with your testimony.

9 MR. STEIN: Hi. My name is
10 Mark Stein. I am the parent of an 8th
11 grader in the School District. As it
12 happens, I also taught English
13 literature in writing at the University
14 and high school level in this City and
15 overseas for a long time. You, however,
16 don't have to have had my experience to
17 know and understand that the computer
18 rating of a writing assignment as was
19 used in the District is so fundamentally
20 and fatally flawed has to be
21 irredeemably hopeless.

22 However, what I really want to
23 talk about today very briefly is to tell
24 you about what was happening on the
25 ground in the schools leading up to,

1 during and after the writing exam and
2 add some color and detail that you may
3 not have heard about yet.

4 Dr. Furjan testified that the
5 writing exam was not given
6 simultaneously and, therefore, the
7 prompts and there were only 18 of them
8 circulated like wildfires, as you can
9 imagine. You can't blame the students
10 for that happening. The students then
11 could practice writing essays to the
12 prompts that they would actually
13 receive. Some students moreover were
14 able to locate automated grading
15 software that mimicked the software that
16 was actually used, put their essays into
17 that software and get an assessment, a
18 grade. They could then tinker with
19 their essays and understand what the
20 software was looking for.

21 Moreover, cheat sheets on how
22 to gain the system. One of them written
23 by an adult with familiarity with the
24 software was also circulated, giving
25 tips like what kind of vocabulary words

1 to use, what kind of punctuation to use
2 bump up your score. Again, I don't
3 think you can blame the students, the
4 teachers, the parents for driving
5 through the enormous holes that were
6 left open in the process and taking
7 advantage of them.

8 I happen to know, and this is
9 firsthand knowledge, that something very
10 different was going on in certain
11 charter schools. Some schools didn't
12 know anything whatsoever about this exam
13 until November 14th. Calls to the
14 District were not returned. Some
15 students had to register for the exam,
16 verify an account and then had to be
17 removed to another location to take the
18 writing exam.

19 Now, briefly what happened
20 during the actual exam, it hasn't been
21 noted yet that some students found that
22 automated punctuation spell check
23 software was enabled on their computers
24 during the exam. That was not the case
25 for other students. Moreover, as you

1 also know the Internet connections were
2 lost, at least one school. And now,
3 after the exam was over, as we have
4 heard today, the students immediately
5 receive their scores. You can imagine
6 what that was like. Some students found
7 they had achieved scores above their
8 desired cut-off. They were
9 understandably jubilant, joyous, happy.
10 Others were -- sorry, sorry about that.
11 Other students finding out that their
12 score was below the cut-off were
13 publicly shamed and humiliated
14 simultaneously in front of their peers.

15 I don't think it is too much of
16 an overstatement to say that it was a
17 traumatic event for those children, a
18 completely needless and useless problem.
19 To me, the way this exam was carried out
20 was so fundamentally flawed in theory
21 and in execution that it cannot and must
22 not be used in the admissions process.

23 If this kind of process were
24 allowed in any other context, I think it
25 can be fairly labeled as fraudulent. So

1 I would ask that if this body, that
2 Council, has the authority to revoke the
3 exam, it should exercise it. Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
5 for your testimony, Marc. Much
6 appreciated.

7 Next is Jupiag Zhou. Is Jupiag
8 connected?

9 MS. ZHOU: Yes.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Okay.
11 Just state your name and proceed with
12 your testimony.

13 MS. ZHOU: Okay. My first name
14 is Jupiag, J-u-p-i-a-g. Last name is
15 Zhou, Z-h-o-u. Yeah, Jupiag Zhou. See,
16 I don't have a children right now, but
17 my daughter went to Central High school
18 in 2000, so I really appreciate
19 Philadelphia. You know, they did have a
20 study group and if you do the group,
21 it's good to take it for you.

22 I think about the need for just
23 go to lottery, some people going to be
24 saying who handles the lottery. The
25 lottery is going to be fair or not fair.

1 For example, if I handle the lottery,
2 maybe I can play the lottery. Maybe my
3 friends or my family or somebody can go
4 to the school, not because of the school
5 study, they can go to a gooder school.

6 So I have four properties here.

7 I think I pay the school tax. I think
8 Philadelphia good. I think Philadelphia
9 is good because of what we have good
10 schools here and the rest of you pay, so
11 people are going to be -- more people
12 want to stay in Philadelphia. People
13 want to get more jobs, so you're going
14 to get more taxes from everybody here,
15 right.

16 But if the school goes to the
17 lottery, I think the school's maybe
18 quality may be going down, and maybe
19 everybody will want to move out. So
20 really, it's not a good idea. I don't
21 think that the lottery is fair. Like
22 people have the professional person, you
23 know, the tax. When you take a tax,
24 when (inaudible) or any tax rating, the
25 tax doesn't know you're White or Black

1 or race. They use the fair just like
2 the law.

3 You meet here and then you go
4 there. If you don't meet here, you
5 don't go there. And the schoolteacher,
6 they really want to go to the quality,
7 right. They want every year more
8 students go to the university, so
9 schoolteacher want to be good. So why
10 we just let the school do better job.
11 Because if the school -- I have my
12 family, they send the children like an
13 international student. They pay the
14 money for the best school, even the
15 public school too.

16 So if your school is good, you
17 also can get (inaudible). If you draw
18 out the school for quality, you make
19 everything mess up. I really don't
20 think the lottery is good. That's why I
21 really want them to some point. I'm
22 sorry about that. Maybe I say
23 something -- I don't like it. Okay.
24 I'm finished.

25 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.

1 Thank you for your testimony.

2 Next we have Blair Ryan. Then,
3 Blair, if you're there, state your name
4 for the record and continue. And then
5 Ling Lin is followed.

6 MR. RYAN: Yes. My name is
7 Blair Ryan and I'm a proud father of
8 three wonderful children, and all of
9 whom attended schools in Philadelphia,
10 the Philadelphia area. Now, my youngest
11 son Trey just graduated from Carver
12 Engineering and Science with the class
13 of 2020.

14 When my son and I discovered in
15 2015, the admissions process was very
16 clear, simple and straightforward. Yes,
17 can you hear me?

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes, we
19 can hear you fine. Please proceed.

20 MR. RYAN: Okay. Great. So
21 when my son and I first discovered
22 Carver in 2015, the admissions was very
23 clear, simple, straightforward and
24 equitable. So the prerequisites were
25 exemplary academic performance,

1 behavior, attendance and recommendation
2 letters from teachers.

3 Now, we live in the Ogontz
4 section of Philadelphia with Carver
5 being at 16th and Norris Street. At the
6 time the school was comprised of 77
7 percent Black students with the
8 remaining 23 percent dispersed among
9 White, Asian and Hispanic students.

10 Now, the student population was drawn
11 from across every zip code in the City.
12 As the principal at the time, Principal
13 (inaudible) many times over the years
14 that my son attended the school.

15 Now, think about this for a
16 second. What could be more "equitable"
17 than the standard adhered to where any
18 child no matter from what zip code he or
19 she hailed could be accepted into any
20 special admission schools across the
21 City based solely on merit, academic
22 achievement, behavior and teacher
23 recommendation.

24 An essay was required as an
25 intrical part of the application, but

1 not separate and apart, not timed and
2 certainly not graded solely by a
3 computer. In addition to the student
4 population representing every zip code
5 the school was cited by the President of
6 the School Board as an outstanding
7 example of diversity among all the
8 schools.

9 Later in my son's time at
10 Carver, as President of the Carver Home
11 and School Association, we worked
12 diligently with the HSA Board and
13 general membership to support efforts
14 along with the principal of maintaining
15 Carver's status as an equitable and
16 academic gem. Such efforts is
17 supporting the SAT workshops at Carver
18 and college tours for Carver students
19 among others.

20 All of these efforts culminated
21 receiving the Blue Ribbon award in 2019.
22 Now, given all of the above statements,
23 if fair access, inclusiveness and
24 academic achievement is the pretended
25 goal of the School Board, in Carver's

1 case what needed to be changed. And
2 what needed to be changed and similarly
3 constituted and directed special
4 admission schools. Do the proposed
5 changes aid, abet, promote and maintain
6 Carver's current stellar track record in
7 the above-mentioned area? How do the
8 actions of the School Board,
9 nontransparency in the process of
10 formulating the new proposals, the
11 sudden disruptive ill-tied
12 implementation of the proposals,
13 proposals that threaten the smooth or
14 certain transition of the 8th graders
15 into the 9th grade.

16 The principal stated to the
17 fact that the middle school was formed
18 to groom and acclimate the accepted
19 students from matriculation into the
20 high school. Given a candid and factual
21 presentation of the current status of
22 the position of Carver, may the School
23 Board respond. Hopefully, candidly and
24 factually to the above questions.

25 Trey and I were lucky. We are

1 spared the plight of being told abruptly
2 and unsuspectingly in the midst of the
3 admissions process that the process was
4 changed effective immediately, causing
5 the severest anxiety disruption and
6 dislocation as forced upon the parents
7 and students of this current Carver 8th
8 grade. Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
10 for your testimony.

11 Next we have Ling Lin. Ling,
12 if you're available.

13 MS. LIN: Yes.

14 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Just state
15 your name and then proceed with your
16 testimony.

17 MS. LIN: Hello. Can you hear
18 me?

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes, we
20 hear you good.

21 MS. LIN: Okay. I speak
22 Chinese Mandarin, so my daughter will be
23 helping translate for me.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Ling.

25 MS. LIN: Yes.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: State your
2 name and then proceed.

3 MS. LIN: Okay. My name is
4 Ling Lin and today I will be speaking
5 Chinese Mandarin, and then my daughter
6 will be helping me translate for me.
7 Good afternoon, Councilmembers. Hi, my
8 name is Ling Lin. My oldest daughter
9 Dana (inaudible) will be speaking on
10 behalf of me. I am a first generation
11 Chinese immigrant and the mother of
12 three children. I have two daughters
13 who are high school students, the
14 youngest son at elementary school.

15 As a first-generation Chinese
16 immigrant, I can't speak the English
17 language. My oldest daughter applied to
18 Central High three years ago and did not
19 get accepted. During that time she told
20 me that her classroom grades were not as
21 outstanding to apply for Central.

22 At that moment, I told her you
23 have to try harder. If you get
24 accepted, I'm afraid you will not be
25 able to handle the workload and will

1 suffer from stress and pressure. My
2 second daughter was standing next to me
3 and she will be applying to high school
4 within two years. After overhearing the
5 conversation, she put in twice the
6 effort compared to her sister.

7 This year she finally got
8 admitted into Central High where she had
9 been working hard the past eight years.
10 My son is 10 years old. On December
11 9th, I took him and his two sisters to
12 join the protest. He visualized and
13 learned why so many community parents
14 and students came out to protest.

15 When we returned home, he
16 asked, Mom, we live in the underpoverty
17 area, the zip code 19133, so does that
18 define that I have the advantage to get
19 accepted into the top school in the City
20 while having good grades? I said, Son,
21 you have no advantage. My son was sad
22 and frustrated. And then he told me, it
23 is obviously useless for me to study
24 hard and it is useless to live in a poor
25 area. I have low luck and can't draw

1 the lottery. Meaning, that I can't get
2 into my top choice of school.

3 Using his anger so he asked,
4 why should I study hard, I don't want to
5 study anymore. So why am I born into
6 Asian household, why do you have to live
7 in this poor area and work every day. I
8 thought living in a poor area means that
9 we have some kind of advantage. Is it
10 because I am Asian American so I don't
11 have the advantage.

12 So as an Asian mother, I would
13 like to ask everyone what kind of
14 responses should I give to my child. I
15 would like to ask the School District,
16 isn't school a place for children to
17 achieve their dreams and (inaudible).
18 Shouldn't school pay attention to
19 nurturing children's morality, wisdom
20 and values. Now, that you're teaching
21 children to obtain things while making
22 efforts to hate their own skin, to hate
23 their own ethnicity and to hate other
24 ethnic groups, are you intensifying
25 tension between ethnic groups. Isn't

1 the School District accountable for
2 these actions?

3 Speaking of the perspective of
4 many Asian Americans, we hoped and think
5 the potential of the United States
6 striving for a better life. Our
7 American dream is what our children and
8 grandchildren achieve their own American
9 dream and build in the United States.
10 But our School District is now
11 destroying children's dreams and all the
12 parents' efforts into achieving our
13 children's dreams.

14 Martin Luther King, Jr. once
15 said, I have a dream that my four
16 children will one day live in a nation
17 where they will not be judged by the
18 color of their skin, but by the content
19 of their character. Please let every
20 student pursue their dream fairly and
21 freely. Dreams should not be realized
22 by efforts, nor by luck, nor by
23 privilege. Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
25 so much for your testimony. Appreciate

1 it.

2 Last, Felicia Evans.

3 MS. EVANS: Hello. My name is
4 Lakeisha Evans.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Lakeisha,
6 sorry.

7 MS. EVANS: No, no worries.
8 Thank you for the opportunity to address
9 the Committee this afternoon now. I'm
10 not going to belabor my response. I
11 think so many people echoed a lot of the
12 sentiments I have and the way that I
13 feel. I'm speaking from the perspective
14 of I run afterschool programs in the
15 heart of North Philadelphia so I see the
16 need in this area, but I also am the
17 mother of an 8th grade student who's
18 enrolled in Hill-Freedman Academy. And
19 raising a young boy of color in the City
20 of Philadelphia, so the stakes are very
21 high and different for me as a mother as
22 well as an employee here working in the
23 heart of North Philadelphia.

24 I'm all for a more equitable
25 process, but I think everyone needs to

1 be very clear that equity does not mean
2 equal for all. And while this new
3 process may seem to be equitable for
4 some children, it in turn truly is not
5 equal or fair at all. There is a
6 significant number of details that have
7 not been shared with parents at all
8 about how exactly this process was
9 determined and also how it will be
10 rolled out.

11 So how do we really know truly
12 if it is equitable. There's over 80 zip
13 codes in the City of Philadelphia. How
14 are only 6 determined. Was income a
15 factor? Why not explore more income-
16 based lottery system. I think it really
17 doesn't answer a lot of parents'
18 questions or concerns about if they live
19 in zip codes that weren't selected and
20 know there aren't any students in their
21 current zip codes that are attending
22 these illustrious schools, how is that
23 equitable for these students and their
24 communities. I'm still not really clear
25 on how these zip codes were selected, as

1 I know many other parents aren't.
2 How many slots -- it also
3 wasn't shared how many slots at schools
4 have been reserved for this lottery.
5 That also is not clear for people, which
6 I think has led to this increased
7 concern for parents like myself whose
8 son is enrolled in Hill-Freedman World
9 Academy, which is a special admit
10 school, who are feeling like, well, are
11 our students going to be pushed out to
12 accommodate to this new lottery system.
13 That wasn't made clear either. And how
14 was it determined how many students will
15 be enrolled at special admit schools
16 that would potentially be pushed out by
17 this process? I think none of those
18 questions were either asked and/or
19 answered or provided to parents, which I
20 think makes this process during this
21 particular time as we're coming up on
22 almost two years of dealing with an
23 unprecedented global pandemic, just
24 really adds to a lot more fear and
25 concern that we all have.

1 Faculties, schools, staff,
2 parents and students have been stretched
3 way beyond capacity over this time and
4 are just trying to figure out how best
5 to serve their families' needs, their
6 students' needs and to make the right
7 decision. So school administrators
8 themselves not even having a clear
9 understanding of this process while
10 they're supposed to be providing
11 guidance to parents and students also
12 has been very anxiety-ridden for me as a
13 parent of a student enrolled in the
14 school where I have school counselors or
15 even principals who are unsure of how
16 this process is going to roll out when
17 acceptances start to roll in.

18 My son, again, a student of
19 color who's going to be faced with so
20 much in his young life as well as in his
21 adult life mainly because of who he is
22 and so many others who look like him,
23 but who also works really, really hard.
24 He's an honor roll student in the midst
25 of a pandemic who's working really,

1 really hard. I too feel a lot of the
2 parents' sentiments. What am I supposed
3 to tell my son while I'm also trying to
4 keep him safe in a city where it's
5 increased violence.

6 Students enrolled in the
7 Philadelphia public school system as
8 early as kindergarten are not being set
9 up for success. The system is flawed
10 and have failed many of them, rendering
11 them hopeless and helpless which indeed
12 has to be one of the largest
13 contributors to the increased and deaths
14 in the City.

15 This is the reason why parents
16 are going to feel the way they're going
17 to feel about this process, are going to
18 have these concerns, are going to have
19 these fears. Because as a parent, you
20 just want to protect, provide and
21 nurture your children and you cannot do
22 any of this during this process, which
23 is just extremely difficult. Any other
24 educated person -- I'm struggling even
25 more because one would think you come

1 with some of that expertise and I can't
2 answer my son's questions, and it's just
3 hard for me as a parent.

4 I just wanted to take the time
5 today to share that sentiment as a
6 mother as well as someone who works in a
7 community of need and understands the
8 need for the support of the students
9 that I support every single day that
10 look like my son, and just wanted to
11 make sure that I'm making sure that my
12 son's voice is being amplified during
13 this process. So thank you for the
14 opportunity to address the Council
15 today.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.
17 Thank you for your testimony. Is there
18 anybody else to testify?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hearing
21 none, any questions from the Committee?

22 MS. ZHANG: Hello.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

24 MS. ZHANG: Can you hear me?

25 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Yes.

1 MS. ZHANG: Oh, hi. Thank you
2 so much. My name is Maggie Li Zhang.
3 Thank you for --

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hi,
5 Maggie. I called you earlier. I
6 apologize. Proceed with your testimony.

7 MS. ZHANG: Okay. Thank you.
8 My name is Maggie Li Zhang. I am a
9 first-generation immigrant parent of my
10 9th grader and a 4th grader of the
11 School District of Philadelphia. I'm
12 also a licensed professional counselor
13 and my specialty is helping Asian
14 American families with middle school
15 students and high school students.

16 I'm hoping that all who are
17 involved in this year's school selection
18 process can realize what kind of impact
19 it has had on our 8th grade students and
20 their families so far. So the process
21 can be paused in order to cause no more
22 harm. I'm here to share with you what
23 some 8th grade students and their
24 parents shared with me.

25 The students can't be here

1 today since they are in school, although
2 it was a delight to hear from Natalie.
3 A lot of parents they have very limited
4 English skills. Again, I was so happy
5 to hear Ms. Ling Lin's testimony with
6 her daughter's help. I believe their
7 voices are just as important and I want
8 to share more parents and the students
9 voices.

10 The students felt concern and
11 confused before the MI Write test as
12 even the teachers couldn't give them
13 clear information until maybe the middle
14 of November. And then they experienced
15 anxiety and panic when they were told
16 during the test that their work couldn't
17 be saved when there was only 20 minutes
18 left. They felt the School District
19 lacks empathy to have the students take
20 the test and get the score right away on
21 a full school day when some students
22 suffer from anxiety and despair of not
23 receiving the minimum score that they
24 need to get into their desired school.
25 Because of the new selection process,

1 especially the MI Write at the lottery
2 system, the student felt the School
3 District and I quote, "seem to manage to
4 lack students' morale and hope which
5 causes the students to destruct the
6 School District and even actively hate
7 it."

8 And I would like to read a
9 letter from testimony from a Chinese
10 parent in Chinese because she couldn't
11 write in English, and then I will
12 translate it into English: We
13 immigrated to the U.S. barely speaking
14 any English so did our daughter. She
15 had to work really hard all by herself.
16 As parents, the best we could do is to
17 work day and night so we could afford to
18 hire a tutor to help her pass her ESL
19 test, and she worked extremely hard in
20 order to get into a good high school and
21 then college. And now it seems that we
22 all did change this.

23 All these students and the
24 families are negatively affected by this
25 new selection process. It is the right

1 thing to do to pause it right now and to
2 reconsider it based on the suggestions
3 and the requests given by the experts,
4 the parents and the wider community.
5 And that is truly called doing right by
6 our students. Thank you.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you
8 for your testimony.

9 Is there anyone else to
10 testify?

11 (No response.)

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hearing
13 none, any comments or questions from the
14 Committee?

15 COUNCILMAN OH: If I could,
16 Chairman, I'll make a comment.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Sure. Go
18 ahead. Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN OH: This is a
20 hearing based on a result in response to
21 an outpouring of concern, confusion,
22 anger and most of all, frustration that
23 people were not being heard, parents,
24 students, including experts in the
25 field. And I think that is very

1 concerning.

2 I understand passion and I
3 understand research and believing you're
4 right. As a Councilman, there's things
5 that I do and sometimes I have to walk
6 it back. Sometimes the people speak and
7 I have to walk it back. And I feel that
8 is the right thing to do when the
9 evidence, when the information is
10 presented that perhaps I did not
11 consider everything or I did not hear
12 from every expert that was available,
13 those type of things.

14 I do think it is important for
15 the School District to listen. And I
16 want people to understand the School
17 District is an independent body of
18 government. We do not have the power
19 over it to tell the School District what
20 to do. I do think there's something
21 lacking in that. However, there is
22 something that can be done and I think
23 it has to be done quickly.

24 I don't know the outcome. But
25 based on what I've heard today, I will

1 make an effort to either present a
2 letter or a resolution calling for the
3 halt of this process. There are good
4 goals of course, but the process should
5 not be worse than the one that already
6 exists. And sometimes the one that you
7 know is the one that you can work
8 within, and a new process creates
9 confusion and problems. But there has
10 been plenty of just data and
11 information, very objective, that
12 clearly states that there's something
13 wrong with this process as it is.

14 However, it does lead to
15 problems even if it is paused, but that
16 is a problem created by what I think is
17 the School District rushing in to do
18 this, taking the opportunity during
19 COVID when there's a lot of confusion to
20 introduce a massive change like this
21 while people are distracted, discouraged
22 and other things. Perhaps I'm wrong in
23 that assessment, but I find that to be a
24 very reasonable assessment as to why
25 something like this would be announced

1 and already implemented with such little
2 input and consideration. People, if you
3 like this process, speak up. If you
4 don't like this process, speak up
5 because action will have to be taken
6 rather quickly.

7 That's what I have to say,
8 Chairman. I appreciate the time. And
9 let me thank Chairwoman Maria Quinones-
10 Sanchez. Timing was very important.
11 We're about to go to our last session
12 tomorrow. And so, this hearing was
13 granted. She included it, and I
14 appreciate all the Councilmembers who
15 sponsored, who voted and passed
16 unanimously and all the Councilmembers
17 who are on the call and listening and
18 participated.

19 Thank you, Chairman.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
21 Councilmember Oh, and thank you for your
22 resolution. It's important
23 conversation. And what we'll do is
24 we'll leave it to the call of the
25 sponsor if we need to have another

1 hearing in the Education Committee to
2 work with Chairwoman Sanchez on that.

3 If there are no other comments
4 and no one else here to testify, that
5 will call an end to our hearing and
6 thanks everyone who gave their time and
7 efforts. There being no further
8 questions from members of the Committee
9 and no other witnesses to testify, this
10 concludes the business before the
11 Committee on Education today. Thank you
12 all for your attendance. Thank you for
13 your testimony, your passion and desire.
14 Looking forward to working with the
15 School District to come up with a system
16 that could work for all. Have a great
17 day, everyone. Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Have a
20 happy and healthy New Year.

21 (Committee on Education and
22 Youth concluded at 1:40 p.m.)
23
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the
proceedings and evidence noted are contained
fully and accurately in the stenographic notes
taken by me in the foregoing matter, and that
this is a correct transcript of the same.

TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 1

A	absolutely	98:12	196:12	231:17	addressed	209:22	173:14
A's 55:18,20	79:25	101:19	220:25	activities	13:25	214:8	178:7
55:20,23,25	81:12	102:1	222:12	194:20	106:21	216:2	236:23
149:5	94:16	107:8,24	249:17	198:22	141:12	223:11	254:21
223:24	103:8	121:4	250:8	actual 69:4	183:11	232:8	adults 177:17
226:20	108:2,5	123:4	achieved	237:20	addresses	243:20	179:24
a.m 1:5	169:11	169:22	13:21	adapted	106:7	245:4	advance
aback 49:7	186:14	244:23	238:7	177:18	addressing	admissions	176:2
abandoned	abusive	accessible	achievement	add 49:19	13:14 49:6	9:13 10:15	advanced
134:3	202:5	75:11,15	101:24	53:14	86:9	15:13	201:22
abet 245:5	academic	84:2,11	117:4	67:18	135:14	28:20	advantage
abilities	10:12 38:1	106:25	130:11	137:7	141:13	29:25	53:22
132:12	61:2 72:17	acclimate	137:24	141:5	adds 253:24	33:15	220:3
198:19	87:10	245:18	163:17,19	142:8	adhered	65:24	237:7
201:12	105:7	accommod...	211:1,23	227:4,15	243:17	87:22	248:18,21
ability 30:9	184:15	253:12	243:22	236:2	adjunct	141:6	249:9,11
46:5,21	198:18	Accommod...	244:24	added 139:8	186:10	162:12	advent 12:20
183:1,2	200:1	77:5 78:8	achievements	139:10	adjust 21:16	164:10	adverse
189:22	201:11	79:11	132:11	141:2	adjusted	168:23	136:9
211:10,13	212:1	accommod...	178:1	adding	59:19	169:11	adversely
able 12:11	242:25	59:9 123:7	201:11	108:15	adjustment	191:22	212:5
42:19	243:21	137:12	achieving	184:18	10:22	194:6	advise 182:24
117:6	244:16,24	183:12,12	117:14	201:5	228:13	200:14	advisor
124:19	academical...	accomplish	250:12	addition 38:2	adjustments	202:6	129:10
142:6	47:9	169:15	acknowledge	63:4 68:13	134:7	217:10,23	advisory
144:1,10	Academics	account 8:1,2	26:8 30:16	93:20	182:11	220:15	144:18
175:11	173:20	170:2	170:1	132:3	administer	225:5,14	145:6,7
176:4,23	Academy	182:8	acknowled...	165:25	33:2 60:10	231:16,19	advocacy
177:6	64:14,18	218:12	232:15	244:3	administra...	238:22	78:11
179:11,13	76:17	225:12	Act 5:18	additional	30:5 32:7	242:15,22	129:6
180:14	214:5	237:16	acting 132:4	51:21 97:8	Administra...	246:3	advocate
189:18	251:18	accountabil...	action 88:1	123:15	130:15	admit 76:25	87:4 90:20
190:8	253:9	202:7	144:20	177:16	administra...	123:1	advocated
192:10	accent 167:5	accountable	147:14	179:19	165:21	124:2	26:10
198:11	accept	117:12,14	171:9	191:24	administra...	144:5	advocates
210:23	136:16	118:5	263:5	Additionally	33:6	184:12	100:20
226:25	acceptance	185:19	actions 26:21	5:10	130:23	218:13	advocating
229:20	96:19	250:1	33:21	address	254:7	253:9,15	116:16
232:19	acceptances	accounts	116:25	19:19	admission	admits	156:8
236:14	254:17	9:25	245:8	26:11	4:21 12:22	122:21	164:22
247:25	accepted	accurate 45:6	250:2	27:23	13:4 18:13	155:8	178:22
abolished	96:22	46:4	active 211:9	30:17 33:7	62:5,20	admittance	AES 38:22
233:4	243:19	153:24	actively	36:12	66:20 98:6	164:18	39:11,17,23
above-men...	245:18	accurately	105:12	43:14	123:4	admitted	40:6 41:3,5
245:7	247:19,24	265:4	108:8	47:17	129:13	31:24 64:2	41:7,11,15
abruptly	248:19	achieve 26:23	116:13,25	168:17	132:2	154:21	42:9 44:7
246:1	access 10:10	27:24	118:8	171:10	139:17	193:8	44:11
absence	27:1 30:17	30:20	259:6	182:19	140:17,20	248:8	47:16
23:22	78:4,18	32:13	activist	189:9	149:7	admittedly	affect 212:3
37:24	85:21 86:6	33:21 34:9	173:10	205:12	163:24	155:17	affirmatively
Absent 45:3	88:1 91:17	86:18	178:14	213:5	169:19	adopt 38:16	37:2 50:21
absolute	95:11	170:9	209:3	218:10	170:15	adopted	74:6
189:14	96:14,16	193:14	activists	251:8	184:3	30:11	afford 259:17
	97:23 98:8	194:24	176:16	256:14	185:15	adult 78:12	afforded

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 2

174:11	79:15,16	alteration	92:16	84:18	applicable	239:18	212:5
175:22	alarming	177:2	analyzed	134:25	137:15	250:25	argue 87:2
afraid 247:24	13:2 76:6	altering	91:21	anti-racist	applicant	263:8,14	88:6 190:1
Africa 156:2	albeit 110:1	182:8	and/or 79:11	84:20	184:4	appreciated	argument
African 6:20	Alexander	alternative	130:19	anticipating	applicants	127:2	188:3
13:3 16:24	234:17	114:1	177:11	182:13	182:6	172:9	arm 158:21
17:1,4	Algebra 29:5	alternatives	253:18	anxiety	183:6,17,25	180:25	arrive 46:19
115:3	69:24,25	10:13	265:21	191:16	application	193:20	arrived 47:24
118:20,23	71:16,21	202:22	anger 249:3	246:5	21:10	239:6	133:4
118:23	algorithm	amazing	260:22	258:15,22	28:10 32:6	approach	166:14
119:2,5,8	29:15	210:6	angry 151:7	anxiety-rid...	77:12	14:8 33:13	Art 160:14
119:21	34:13	212:14	212:18	254:12	78:24 79:6	60:7 81:2	articles 37:13
120:21	62:16	Amedeo	anguish	anybody	131:4,18	103:20	217:21
afternoon	algorithms	204:18	168:17	127:13	243:25	116:20	Arts 203:10
172:20	15:25 16:6	amendments	announce	159:1	applications	150:16	asbestos
181:13	16:15	87:13	144:4	256:18	9:12 16:14	170:8	150:17
208:24	17:20	88:23	206:3	anymore	applied 31:21	219:15	ashamed
217:4	18:17	America	announced	249:5	33:4 126:5	220:24	233:19
247:7	32:20	156:1	7:22 9:11	anyway	149:4	approaches	Asia 156:3
251:9	38:24	163:6	28:9,11	122:9	158:9,10,11	51:7	Asian 25:7
after school	42:14 63:7	American	70:21	214:23	247:17	169:21	118:22
251:14	alignment	6:20 13:3	92:21	apart 20:17	applies 78:1	170:15	119:2,4,7
aggressive	87:19	16:24 17:1	134:21	124:4	apply 77:24	171:25	119:10
29:11	134:24	17:4	150:5	244:1	97:1	appropriate	197:12,16
ago 19:8	allocated	118:20,23	221:2,4	apartment	114:18	29:9 41:18	197:19
28:18	111:19	118:24	228:14	166:23	175:23	220:21	198:20
98:16	allocating	119:3,5,8	262:25	apathy	182:4	appropriat...	243:9
102:23	47:1	120:22	announcem...	159:14	247:21	44:4 45:3	249:6,10,12
116:1	141:14	166:21	2:8 15:11	apologies 6:5	265:19	approxima...	250:4
195:18	220:20	194:5	25:23 31:6	48:13	applying	75:24	257:13
247:18	allow 5:15	198:21	31:12,17	50:12 65:7	50:25	221:5	aside 85:8
agree 30:16	36:9 60:2	249:10	131:17	94:16	98:17	arbitrarily	154:7
53:25	63:16	250:7,8	announcem...	apologize	225:14	96:5	asked 74:12
69:25	132:22	257:14	150:19	12:7 257:6	248:3	arbitrary	95:9 96:12
99:20	213:17	Americans	announcing	apparent	appoint	192:1	97:5,14
109:8	220:16	115:3	14:2 33:14	136:6	113:25	Archbishop	99:17
113:18	allowed	119:21	annual 191:3	apparently	appointed	165:4	100:20
180:9	93:12	197:20	annually	184:4	133:10	172:10,14	142:3
186:14	164:14	250:4	91:5 99:1	appeal 145:9	164:12	172:15,19	199:7
233:3	174:4	amount	another's	145:10,18	appoints	173:4,5	248:16
agreed	198:16	56:16,20	179:16	190:19	113:10	180:24	249:3
207:11	238:24	116:10	answer 106:8	appeals	appreciate	arduous	253:18
agrees	allowing 59:9	203:15	109:19	33:10	11:23 22:1	166:20	asking 8:12
113:17	59:16	amounts	112:16	137:7	36:20 50:8	area 220:6	28:6
ahead 71:1	61:15 65:2	14:17	189:10	142:8	80:1 81:9	242:10	aspect 141:3
83:5 128:3	74:8	40:14	252:17	appear 75:25	82:16	245:7	aspects 43:13
260:18	164:24	116:14	256:2	181:25	109:5	248:17,25	45:20
Ahmaud	208:25	amplified	answered	appears 9:9	118:14,16	249:7,8	103:4
84:15	216:7	256:12	253:19	52:10	122:11	251:16	218:5
aid 6:24 8:9	allows 20:22	analysis	answering	appease 85:8	168:21	areas 20:1,7	aspiration
245:5	117:8,20	13:14	122:12	applaud 28:5	169:4	86:9	52:3
aired 218:3	190:11	54:21	answers	213:4	181:24	121:10,20	aspired 84:3
alarmed 7:12	228:19	68:17	216:12	applauded	204:13	197:17,18	assess 63:24
64:23	alter 154:13	91:25	anti-racism	130:3	208:1	197:25	assessed

71:17 assessing 61:23 210:19 assessment 29:14 30:6 31:19 32:12 33:3 41:14 44:7 46:2,15 47:2,7,12 47:25 51:7 51:12 62:4 62:11,19 63:12,22 67:18,22 79:18 85:3 137:7 139:8 142:2,4 143:24 209:18 210:4 211:7 217:21,25 236:17 262:23,24 assessments 32:8 47:23 62:24 210:20 assign 38:24 39:2 210:10 assignment 135:23 174:13 235:18 assignments 62:14 64:7 assigns 39:14 assistance 176:3 189:20 Assistant 105:5 Associate 37:8 65:11 associated 148:21 Association 128:25 244:11 assume 55:2	assure 210:24 assuring 16:17 athletes 188:25 attached 44:21 45:10 48:2 77:7 139:7 144:18 211:4 218:20 220:18 attainment 90:25 101:23 116:19 attempt 111:21 attempted 28:13 attend 21:13 25:12 69:1 90:17 91:8 96:9 98:4 98:18 100:12,18 110:12 112:3 121:21 159:9 161:15 162:23,25 163:2,5 164:13,15 173:17 174:3 176:5 attendance 2:24,25 39:7 58:2,6 59:11,15 69:16 98:7 201:13 232:10 243:1 264:12 attended 6:17 13:11 95:15 121:14 160:3 161:11	242:9 243:14 attending 58:19 69:4 81:23 90:10,12 100:14 101:6 110:19 111:5 128:7 154:15 161:23 217:11 252:21 attends 90:14 attention 49:2 72:21 93:25 125:12,21 127:6 131:15 188:15 192:22 234:4 249:18 attorney 74:15 attributed 95:24 106:12 Aubery 84:16 audio 48:10 august 173:23 174:17 author 89:6 217:20 authority 239:2 autistic 183:9 automated 37:11,11 38:20,22 39:20 40:6 40:9,10,11 41:3 51:9 51:20 52:15 217:21 236:14 237:22 automatic	87:4 automatica... 79:17 125:3 Automating 32:14 automation 46:13 available 5:14 29:6 60:22 75:15 76:19 77:8 91:8 92:5,7 98:1 106:24 108:5 115:25 117:3 120:19 122:18 123:14 138:4 157:11 172:11 189:1 193:24 201:8 203:5 205:2 206:5 211:1 213:24 216:18,24 229:17 246:12 261:12 average 46:24 avoid 219:9 avoided 154:1 award 34:8 244:21 aware 5:3 49:9 139:1 209:12 B B 58:5 B's 55:18,20 55:20,21,25 149:5 baby 213:14	back 12:9 28:1 54:2 92:15 138:19 145:3 149:25 151:22 175:3 177:24 179:15 189:18 190:6 205:20 215:12 225:9 226:15 227:11,12 227:22 261:6,7 backed 193:11 background 58:7 70:4 74:25 94:8 97:24 102:7 136:3 186:24 198:3 200:12 204:2 209:5 backgrounds 35:18 155:23 166:10 169:2 170:19 219:19 bad 41:4 56:25 174:8 balance 86:18,19 Baldwin 11:4 balking 189:7 ban 188:24 bar 59:14 63:17 bare-bones 188:10 barely 259:13 barrier 78:18	80:12 162:6 barriers 29:4 67:5 69:13 70:6 96:13 96:14 141:12,13 based 34:12 39:15 58:20 71:20 72:8 96:6 98:7 109:20 110:25 111:4 121:6,7,13 149:22 171:2 187:18 190:12 191:11 200:15 201:10 210:10,16 218:15 225:11 243:21 252:16 260:2,20 261:25 basic 40:1 44:19 basically 113:4,9,22 115:18 158:1,13 basis 9:5 69:12 72:16 117:9,16 Bass 134:19 bastions 155:17 bath 213:14 beacon 168:5 beautiful 66:11 89:9 becoming 84:19 159:16,16 179:22 Beeber 27:15 133:3 137:3	142:21,22 143:8,14 148:19 began 21:7 134:3 beginning 83:24 103:1 107:6,7,12 107:14 145:22 behalf 80:21 194:4 209:7 247:10 behavior 39:7 161:16 243:1,22 behavioral 201:13 behaviors 33:7 belabor 224:10 251:10 beleaguered 159:22 belief 66:6 believe 18:10 29:9 41:17 68:16 73:14 87:7 90:25 100:10 104:13 125:22 133:3 146:14 150:8 163:22 175:7,9 178:20,22 180:1,3 196:10 202:4 203:12 205:23 215:10 221:8 222:20 227:6 232:22 258:6	believed 7:10 believes 35:12 believing 261:3 belong 167:17 beloved 35:3 Ben 154:6 benchmark 190:17 benchmarks 187:11,18 benefit 66:13 77:22 125:6 210:12 benefited 85:15 benefits 27:2 40:25 47:17 best 26:7 35:12,13 38:1 51:3 104:2 135:25 147:10 175:11 176:8,24 178:23 179:3 180:5 184:13 185:14 198:17 212:19 219:16,17 220:11 241:14 254:4 259:16 bet 57:4,6 Beth 216:17 216:23 better 9:22 11:10 15:21 16:19 23:1 47:1 53:20 57:10 59:6 91:15 103:20 115:6
--	--	---	--	---	--	---	---

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 4

157:3,5	163:8,25	144:19	Breonna	195:20	call 2:23 3:5	98:4 174:7	244:10,10
195:11	166:3	145:13	84:15	201:3	5:20 6:11	careful	244:17,18
219:15	192:19	153:16	Brett 204:18	budgeting	11:9 30:7	184:22	245:22
229:2,20	207:6	169:16	Breweryto...	110:24	62:13 98:5	carefully	246:7
241:10	215:18	171:18	161:25	111:16	151:23	76:20	Carver's
250:6	240:25	202:4	brief 3:2	budgets	205:2	179:1	25:19
beyond 18:7	243:7	207:18	12:10	111:3,14,15	207:8	184:19	244:15,25
18:13	Blackwell	214:22,25	186:23	build 15:20	230:2	215:24	245:6
26:19 96:7	206:7,9,14	215:4	205:18	30:25	263:17,24	caregivers	case 7:19
107:1	206:15,19	229:12	briefing	33:16	264:5	74:16	12:11 27:3
160:17	206:23	244:6,12,25	87:12	51:18	called 3:1	cares 180:15	27:10
167:6	208:14	245:8,23	briefly	147:3,7	4:11 38:23	Caribbean	44:23
170:23	217:17	Board's 95:1	235:23	201:7,19	161:25	156:1	59:18
190:24	Blair 204:17	117:7	237:19	250:9	257:5	caring	190:20
191:5	242:2,3,7	Bodeen	brightest	buildings	260:5	165:25	237:24
219:21	blame 236:9	118:19	185:14	201:4,21	calling 4:18	carried	245:1
254:3	237:3	bodies 20:22	bring 26:4	227:12	77:1 262:2	174:11	cases 102:24
bias 32:12,16	bless 180:21	Bodine	59:15 61:5	built 89:13	callously	238:19	113:13
38:11	208:4,8	118:19	131:15	89:16	153:20	CARROLL	187:21
47:14	blindsided	119:16	180:9	123:14	calls 18:15	265:11	Caste 89:6
53:24 54:7	233:22	body 129:11	229:6	167:22	131:8	Carter	catchment
54:20	Blue 25:15	130:2	bringing	195:6	237:13	142:12,17	76:6 98:19
146:5	129:23	239:1	194:13	bullied	Camarato	142:18,19	137:22
biased 39:5	215:19	261:17	brings 41:7	214:24	204:18	carve-outs	201:25
54:9	244:21	bold 101:20	140:6	215:7	cancer	218:19	221:19
biases 38:18	blunt 68:12	101:22	178:24	Bullock 5:24	165:24	Carver 24:11	catchment...
big 52:21	69:5	book 32:14	broad 30:12	23:7,10,18	candid	24:14,20	73:13
216:6	109:22	boosting	68:21	24:3 36:16	245:20	27:14,18	cater 155:7
bigger	163:22	220:12	171:15	70:9 106:5	candidate	31:21 33:9	Catholic 6:25
108:12	232:24	border 57:17	broader	130:4	109:24	35:1 61:18	Caucasian
biggest 218:8	bluntness	born 138:8	41:13	bump 60:1	candidly	64:21	118:21,25
bill 37:18	67:4	249:5	broken 160:1	237:2	245:23	119:2,14	119:1,4,6,9
113:23	Board 17:17	boss 23:21	161:20	bumpy 22:13	cap 225:25	120:11,12	Caucus 24:6
114:2	17:19 22:6	bottom 10:3	167:5,23	bunch 224:23	226:1,5	120:18	207:6
204:15	22:21	184:20	224:10	233:24	CAPA 155:6	128:19,24	cause 45:6
billion	25:16	bowed 89:15	Brooks 1:9	burden 143:4	capable	129:4,9,20	86:20
195:22	30:11	boy 217:24	3:12,13	177:23	169:13	129:25	153:21
200:25	39:23 93:8	251:19	122:16,19	bus 135:21	capacity	130:3,6,8	179:20
202:14	93:11	brain 210:8	123:16	223:16	65:14	131:9,10,12	257:21
Bishop 173:8	94:24 95:6	brand 14:2	125:7	business	254:3	131:22	caused
bit 54:2,3	95:8,16	167:13	126:6	160:12	capital	132:1,9	144:10
56:1,6 62:7	96:11,11	Brandywine	127:3,11	264:10	143:11	133:2,12,14	causes 33:20
69:15	98:14	194:11	Brother	butts 226:19	capped 228:3	137:3	203:16
104:1	109:12,14	bravery	196:4	buy 232:19	Caputo 6:1	138:12	259:5
127:18	110:5	46:12	brother's	buy-in 33:25	23:9 74:1,3	140:25	causing
204:25	111:16	break 219:11	158:21		74:7,11	148:7,18,21	246:4
bits 56:6	113:4,5,7	breaking	brought	C	75:4 103:6	149:4,7,13	Cedar 20:13
Black 19:11	113:17,24	161:9	192:21	C 157:22	183:11	151:23	census 29:1
24:6 25:7	116:8,21,24	223:16	Brown	265:1,1	care 87:6	155:7	Center 99:10
73:15	117:22,24	breakouts	136:10	cakewalk	166:2	161:12	99:23
136:10	118:4	119:25	163:10	234:9	173:20	202:11	227:7,17,20
156:5	129:23	breaks 33:18	brunt 213:18	calculated	193:6	224:8	Central 7:19
159:10	130:2	breathhtaking	budget 26:22	218:17	234:8	242:11,22	7:20 23:12
162:4,5	135:1	70:10	111:15	220:3	career 61:22	243:4	35:1 61:17

76:16	Chairman	196:25	chapter	187:15	231:9	21:12	117:18
120:2	172:21	197:4	35:14	children	238:17	119:14	120:20
138:11	230:1,10	207:19	character	13:10 20:4	239:16	146:7	121:20
158:9	260:16	224:19	170:5	28:2 53:19	241:12	chosen	128:6,8
173:19	263:8,19	225:22	196:9	76:4 86:1,6	242:8	220:25	130:7
194:9,14	Chairperson	231:15	250:19	90:12,24	247:12	225:5,10	133:21
200:4	172:20	234:2	charter	100:10,22	249:16,21	Christie	134:2
202:11	Chairwoman	259:22	114:16,19	100:23,23	250:7,16	196:3	137:18
239:17	3:9 4:6	262:20	115:6	101:5	252:4	churns	147:15
247:18,21	23:20,23	changed	237:11	116:18	255:21	159:12,13	151:16
248:8	263:9	24:12	chat 5:14,18	119:20	children's	Cindy 134:19	153:7
ceremony	264:2	144:13	CHC 63:20	122:2,22,25	155:18	circles 219:9	154:4
129:24	challenge	146:5	cheat 236:21	123:2	167:24	circulated	155:21
certain 76:12	18:14	160:6,6,7	check 102:12	124:1,3	171:7	236:8,24	162:8
100:11	challenged	245:1,2	102:14	128:21	179:18	circumstan...	165:9,11,24
110:13	77:10	246:4	152:22	134:1,9	193:17	78:15	169:14
237:10	159:18	changes	237:22	135:25	198:5,22	219:20	171:10
245:14	160:18	21:10,17	checked	136:10	211:5	220:22	172:25
certainly	challenges	28:11 29:4	35:10	137:5,9	216:7	cite 102:21	173:6,12
9:23 11:11	34:16 38:3	29:8,11	Chestnut	138:10	232:22	cited 244:5	175:20
13:7 14:22	51:22 85:9	31:2,5,12	61:21	142:22,23	249:19	cities 222:15	196:4
60:5,15	140:1	92:22,23	Chicago	143:18,20	250:11,13	citizen 86:3	208:13,23
82:18	190:10	99:1	28:19	143:25	Childs 35:22	117:20	213:3
111:1	challenging	101:11,16	Chief 83:22	144:6,25	Chinatown	173:12	217:8
154:21	26:23 38:6	101:17	90:5 105:7	147:17,18	197:17	citizens 118:2	218:12,18
180:11	70:14	106:13	105:7,9	150:11	221:14	130:7	221:6,11,16
189:3	chance 27:19	123:25	chiefs 105:5	155:20	Chinese	city 1:1 2:10	222:3,8,18
207:1,20	50:23	124:6	105:11	159:11,18	194:5	10:17	222:21
244:2	62:16,17	130:12	child 26:7	159:24	196:1	11:16 13:6	227:7,18,20
certification	100:24	131:3	75:8 78:25	160:10	246:22	14:12 17:4	229:1,2,4
265:18	139:23	134:5	85:24 90:9	162:6,14	247:5,11,15	17:6,23	232:17
certify 265:2	155:9	135:18,22	90:20	163:8,25	259:9,10	19:4,14	235:14
certifying	163:21	151:4	100:18,19	164:6,13,22	choice 117:23	20:21	243:11,21
265:22	184:13	152:6	112:12	173:14	133:6,8	21:24 25:2	248:19
cetera 225:16	224:2,3,7	153:11	114:14	174:22	134:15	25:22	251:19
Chair 1:8	change 13:16	154:3	126:10	175:16,17	198:20	27:16 28:5	252:13
3:21 4:1	13:20 15:3	155:13	127:4	176:11,23	222:1	28:16 29:1	255:4,14
6:3,6,10	16:18,19	156:24	131:25	177:15,23	226:5	29:17	City's 20:2
11:22 12:3	33:4 87:15	163:23	139:20	178:11,17	249:2	33:24 34:7	20:24
12:7 18:8	88:6,21	164:10	140:16	178:23	choices 55:5	34:8,25	136:5
18:20,23	89:2 97:3	182:17	145:15	179:8	71:2 115:6	35:3,17	city-wide
19:2 22:2	103:1	185:7	146:20	180:8	137:1	36:8 37:6	28:22 98:5
24:5 48:14	120:15	245:5	147:4	194:11,13	choose	66:11	154:15
48:19 49:4	126:16	changing	151:25	194:16	159:15	68:23	civil 85:24
50:7 82:5	134:22	10:14	152:1,2	196:6,15,19	188:19	69:11	claim 27:23
82:11	135:20	88:12	160:8	197:5,13	190:12	83:16	claiming
94:14	138:16	156:20	175:1	198:7,12,20	196:22	85:18	234:7
104:15	144:5	175:2	190:7	199:23	215:14	90:15,16,24	claims 150:20
109:4,14	148:10	182:9	198:14,16	200:5,13	225:17	91:7 99:10	clarify 37:23
110:5	150:24	chaos 14:7	217:11	202:23	226:10,12	99:23	clarity 31:20
118:17	176:10	15:18	221:23	208:7	chooses	101:21	Clarke 23:23
122:13	184:1	70:11 71:1	243:18	209:3,7,9	28:21	110:16	class 14:22
152:16	185:20,21	71:13	249:14	214:15	226:6	111:17	25:1 27:17
216:22	193:9	chaotic 22:13	child's 175:6	215:10,17	choosing	115:2,4,5	62:15 68:4

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 6

115:4	closer 125:12	221:3,5,9	254:19	204:24	205:21	144:17	complaining
156:5	125:21	221:12	columnist	205:6,22	208:23	145:23	234:20
174:2	closings	232:14	157:17	260:16	226:9	157:18	complete
189:19	211:22	233:14	combine	commented	251:9	160:24	46:21
197:19	co-exist 87:1	234:15,16	219:22	185:3	256:21	161:7	145:21
199:13,18	co-qualific...	252:13,19	combines	commenters	260:14	162:2,4,13	completed
242:12	71:9	252:21,25	40:10	205:16	264:1,8,11	164:9	145:4,6
classes	Cobbs 6:15	coherence	come 2:22	comments	264:21	165:16	completely
201:22	20:11	39:14	19:14	5:12 33:16	committees	172:24	150:23
classmates	code 19:24	cohesion	25:10	89:23	2:11,16	173:10	189:24
35:15 68:8	20:6,16	39:14	62:12	93:18 97:7	217:10	176:16	211:13
212:23	29:15	cohorts	63:20	99:12,13,14	commodity	178:13	234:3
classroom	31:19 33:3	192:10	71:20	104:5,12	180:6	184:24	238:18
247:20	67:3 68:11	collaborate	107:7	107:9	common	185:11	complex
classroom-...	69:1 98:19	171:17	117:20	186:15,22	128:15	188:23	109:7
41:22	98:21	collaboration	142:21	190:6	192:6	193:12	169:5
classrooms	122:3,9	36:21	155:22,25	206:25	Commonw...	194:20	complexity
17:22	137:16	157:3	177:7	207:5	74:16	196:2	63:9
34:24	141:3,5,16	collaborative	185:17	208:20	communicate	217:18	complicated
159:6	168:2	185:18	196:11	260:13	80:17	248:13	17:16
200:18	170:11	collaborati...	204:10	264:3	communica...	256:7	28:23 61:7
201:5	184:4,6,14	211:2	208:25	commission	80:13	260:4	169:6
clean 232:10	218:9	colleague	227:12	163:14	150:13	community...	compliment
clear 11:11	220:4	13:24	255:25	229:5,10	communica...	186:11	101:13
66:2 82:13	225:18,24	colleagues	264:15	commit	82:14	community...	comply 5:17
136:1	226:3	3:10,21 4:1	comes 27:2	171:13	151:2	147:12	components
242:16,23	228:2	11:24 22:9	34:17	commitment	180:4	companies	183:24
252:1,24	234:14	50:4 82:24	65:16	7:8 17:10	communica...	32:25	compose
253:5,13	243:11,18	108:19	150:25	25:19	150:22	company	44:13 46:8
254:8	244:4	collected	161:23	66:18 91:2	communica...	51:21	220:15
258:13	248:17	135:4	176:15	133:5	190:16	67:25	composite
clearly 31:9	codes 8:19,21	collective	comfort	134:24	communities	100:1	59:20 60:2
67:15	8:22,24,25	165:10	154:16	150:7	9:3 63:3	176:18	60:24
262:12	9:1,2 20:9	collectively	174:19	168:25	84:13	216:9	219:23
Clergy 173:9	29:2 68:19	102:6,19	coming 35:24	171:21	129:6	comparabil...	comprehen...
Clerk 2:23	69:6 70:23	college 25:13	69:17	215:8	131:1	56:24	76:2
3:5,7,11,15	87:3	39:22	91:24	commitments	143:2	compare	209:24
3:18,23 4:3	109:23	61:21,24	102:11	66:1	159:19	183:25	comprised
4:6,15,17	121:16,17	64:2 99:10	124:11	committed	162:5	compared	243:6
5:20,23	121:19	99:24	151:21	84:19 94:2	193:2	156:6	comprising
83:1,3,6	122:1	197:10	173:22	129:1	196:10	248:6	24:24
click 52:9	124:10,14	221:21,23	175:25	163:15	225:24	compares	compromise
clock 230:4	124:17,19	244:18	177:16	committee	252:24	39:15	87:10
close 7:1	124:24	259:21	203:18	1:2 2:3	community	compass	170:20
19:14	125:13,20	colleges	227:11	4:10,13,19	7:5 11:14	35:11	compromis...
76:23 86:7	126:3,3	39:25	253:21	19:4 22:3	12:14	compassion	133:17
89:4	141:10	Collings	commend	23:25	24:20 25:5	196:21	computer 8:3
110:13	161:21	204:19	19:17	48:24 49:5	39:24	compelled	8:7 15:25
137:21	164:19	color 85:4	commended	49:13	91:11 97:6	209:6	16:6,13
149:9	169:6	167:6	129:25	65:21 82:8	117:10	compete	18:16
187:23	184:18	196:8	130:11	104:19	128:10,23	229:21	38:24 39:5
closed 138:25	197:14	236:2	comment	109:16	129:19	competing	52:21,24,24
closely 91:24	202:1	250:18	31:4 48:16	127:13	130:10	26:3 163:8	53:21 54:4
127:7	218:18	251:19	48:17	172:22	136:2	200:5	54:5 70:23

109:21	153:23	262:9,19	39:1,5 76:3	133:6	152:21	82:6,10	256:16,20
162:11,17	168:18	conjunction	155:19	162:4	205:14	102:8,18	256:23,25
212:11	182:16	43:9	consistently	167:2	Corbett	103:15	257:4
235:17	186:20	connect	187:23	242:4	213:23	104:13,16	260:7,12,15
244:3	205:11	205:1,6	consists 55:6	continued 2:8	214:2,3	105:3,23	260:17,19
Computer-...	211:15	connected	constantly	24:23	core 56:15	107:11	261:4
182:20	252:18	127:23	35:10	continues	66:4,5	108:10	263:20
computer-s...	255:18	206:1,10	constituents	132:6	92:21,22	109:1,3	264:18,19
67:2,16	conclude	208:18	28:3	136:21	corners	112:15	Councilme...
computeriz...	60:21	216:20	234:11	continuing	169:13	115:20	3:7,11,15
62:2	concluded	223:2	constituted	5:8 193:4	correct 54:19	118:11	3:18,23 4:3
164:16	264:22	235:4	245:3	205:14	62:25	120:9	6:5 12:2
computers	concludes	239:8	construction	224:7	117:19	121:2,23	13:24
54:7,8	78:25	connections	143:10	continuous	216:25	122:14	18:22,24
237:23	89:23	238:1	consult 219:6	60:16	265:6	127:10,16	23:24
conceivably	104:12	consciously	consultation	225:16	correction	130:24	48:14,17,21
44:15	210:5	39:8	193:13	contracting	56:23	138:1	49:4,15,17
concentrati...	264:10	consensus	consuming	89:11	correspond...	142:10	49:18 50:8
233:15	conclusion	31:1	38:6	contracts	154:22	147:21	50:11
concept	62:12	consenting	contacted	34:8	Council 1:1	152:10,16	66:12
86:24	193:7	5:9	6:22	contrary	2:10,16	157:8	68:14,18
135:15	213:7	consequence	contained	185:4	23:22 28:5	164:25	70:17,19
concern 50:5	condition	184:8	265:3	contrast	36:8 37:6	172:7,17	82:8 83:18
53:23	12:8	consequences	contend	220:24	65:21	180:23	104:14
66:19 70:8	174:17	52:6	212:2	contributed	83:16	181:7,11	108:20
72:3 114:5	conditions	191:12	contending	195:16	111:17	186:2	122:15,16
118:7	13:15 55:4	consider	84:10	contributes	113:11	193:18	122:18
177:14,14	191:15,17	22:24	content 8:8	101:9	128:6	203:2	127:11
234:24	conducive	47:11 59:8	42:7,10,15	contributors	144:18	204:3,9	206:3,9
253:7,25	196:16	168:3	43:5,15	255:13	147:15	205:5,7,19	208:12
258:10	conduct	169:3	44:1,8 56:6	control	148:4	206:8,16,17	217:14
260:21	166:1	202:21	187:25	219:21	153:1,7	206:21	230:12
concerned	conducted	216:5	188:2,6,12	265:21	173:9	207:1	231:23
13:6,8	91:5,19	219:2	196:9	controversial	181:25	208:1,9,11	263:21
22:10	92:4 93:6	228:9	212:5	29:11	205:4	208:16	Councilme...
48:25	97:3	261:11	250:18	controversy	206:6	213:21	11:17 28:8
67:12	102:22	considerate	content-bas...	228:18	208:10,23	216:15,23	29:23 37:5
74:13	139:23	94:12	188:9	conundrum	216:21,22	217:1	48:22 90:3
172:25	confidence	considerati...	context 43:7	26:17	216:25	222:24	134:17
192:16	15:20	80:6 107:3	44:5,12	86:18	219:1	223:6	165:9
concerning	33:17	107:10,25	62:15	conversation	229:4	229:23	168:15
107:16	191:13	108:3,4,7	238:24	12:17,18,20	230:16	230:1,11,17	171:13
261:1	configurati...	111:2	continents	17:15 18:7	232:17	230:18,22	181:13
concerns	85:2	142:5	54:16	18:12,19	233:22	230:23,24	217:16,17
19:10 21:8	confirmed	157:7	continue 30:7	22:1,9,14	239:2	231:3	231:12
32:23	113:10	204:8	59:20	22:17,20,20	256:14	235:1,6	234:19
37:19 41:8	conflict 91:1	213:12	87:17	26:5,15	Council's	239:4,10	247:7
41:11,16	conflicting	263:2	94:13	35:9 50:1	4:19	241:25	263:14,16
66:8,24	30:3	considered	102:16	58:10,12	Councilman	242:18	Councilwo...
67:3,11	confused	94:25	111:12	79:3 81:16	1:10,11,11	246:9,14,19	1:8,9,9,10
68:13 95:7	258:11	consistency	115:19	248:5	1:13 3:8,20	246:24	2:2 3:13,16
106:3,6	confusion	38:17	126:16	263:23	6:2,6,9	247:1	3:25 4:8,24
109:8,20	7:24	87:22	127:6	conversatio...	48:18	250:24	6:4 12:1,4
138:16	260:21	consistent	128:25	108:16	49:20 58:8	251:5	12:6 18:21

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 8

19:1 22:4	47:20	creators	60:3	42:21	23:24 82:6	133:10	110:8
23:19	courage	185:19	criticized	curtain 96:5	day 9:11 14:4	136:14	146:9
36:15 37:1	204:10	credit-bear...	219:8	cut 44:25	58:25 66:5	227:1	147:16
48:4,12	courageously	40:2	crowd 229:20	45:4 47:21	70:21	254:7	212:9
49:14	89:1	Creek 6:16	cruel 64:11	51:15,24	80:14 82:1	decision-	definition
50:10,20	course	20:11	193:5	58:22	143:16	184:24	15:15
61:9 65:3	175:12	cried 174:21	cruelly 69:23	cut-off 238:8	144:4	decision-m...	18:15
73:24 74:5	262:4	crime 6:20	cruelty 68:2	238:12	154:20	41:20	192:1
75:1 82:2	courses 40:2	criminal 16:2	Cs 188:25	cutting 51:8	173:20	95:25	degree 87:1
82:22 83:4	40:3	163:1	CTE 98:5	cycle 163:3	179:4	121:12	DEI 72:4
83:9,12	Court 265:12	criteria 8:13	culminated	167:22	180:5	decisions	105:10
89:24 92:9	cousin	55:17	244:20	219:11	196:6,12	39:21 42:5	Delaware
94:9,15	158:22	72:14	cultural	cycles 40:16	197:7	43:25 45:4	37:10
122:19	COVID	78:17	156:9		249:7	50:2 53:11	194:12
123:16	77:15	92:25 93:4	culture	D	250:16	95:23	217:20
125:7	130:14	93:21	129:18	D 1:8	256:9	107:15	delay 102:2
126:6,24	137:1	95:17,19,20	curious	Dad 175:2	258:21	112:5,13	delayed
127:3	212:1	97:9 98:6	212:13	Daily 2:18	259:17	213:18	88:10
206:7,14,19	262:19	98:11	current	damaging	264:17	217:23	111:13
206:23	COVID-19	99:16,18,25	24:10	218:5	days 158:22	219:7	Deleting
208:14	2:9 81:6	136:23	44:23 81:9	Dana 247:9	de 106:20	deck 36:3	183:14
counsel	92:19	185:15	85:14	danger 7:7	deadline 32:6	declined	deliberately
171:16	cracks 89:15	200:14	89:13	Darrell 23:22	deadly	134:11	42:6
counselor	cramped	223:20,22	128:18	dashing	150:16	decoding	delight 258:2
257:12	166:22	225:6	129:7,18	170:9	deal 89:19	64:7	deliver 85:23
counselors	crazy 229:15	226:24	131:19,20	data 55:6	121:3	deconstruc...	delivered
32:3 97:6	create 21:23	criteria-	134:7	96:7	151:6	84:21	51:19 81:5
105:22	27:10	58:19	136:20,21	109:23	207:23	decrease 72:6	delivering
125:24	34:20,23	71:19 72:7	138:21	117:2	dealing 199:1	dedicated	197:21
254:14	42:13,20	171:1	139:5	121:13	253:22	17:17	delivery
count 75:23	84:23 88:1	criteria-bas...	140:2,14,22	137:9	Dean 65:11	18:11	32:20
countless	136:2	4:22 7:18	141:21	142:4	death 164:6	90:23	Delta 2:10
84:16	151:1,15	9:13 11:9	150:10	193:12	deaths	dedication	demand 69:9
167:3	152:4	12:22 13:4	164:19	211:6	255:13	165:11	202:16
168:1	created 14:7	16:25 19:7	170:21	219:14	debate 61:6	208:13	219:16
countries	17:21	20:3,23	174:18	220:8	debated 9:9	deemed	demanding
54:16	26:11	30:18	182:17	262:10	decade 28:18	179:15	164:8
country	29:14	65:25 66:6	191:23	date 56:8	decades 62:9	deep 70:8	184:11
166:15	63:22	66:17 71:5	245:6,21	daughter	December	148:8	demands
195:2	73:14	72:19	246:7	138:13	1:5 248:10	deeper	202:20
200:8	148:15	73:12 77:1	252:21	239:17	decide 34:4	123:23	219:18
222:17	262:16	96:3,9	currently	246:22	143:16	deeply 14:23	democracy
229:20	creates 262:8	100:12	2:11	247:5,8,17	145:20	187:4	178:7
counts 53:2	creating	105:16,18	162:23	248:2	decided	211:15	demographic
232:23	130:9	105:20	164:13	259:14	194:10	222:5	85:17
couple 55:3	140:23	115:9,25	169:23	daughter's	deciding 96:6	deficiencies	95:15
58:23	200:17	120:3,6	curricula	68:4 132:5	decimated	218:24	120:25
102:19	creation	131:4	42:25	258:6	160:24	deficit 86:21	demograph...
108:21	12:21	201:9	154:18	daughters	decision	define 113:2	19:13,15
142:25	creative	209:9	curriculum	247:12	14:20	188:19	121:18
226:10,11	44:18	critical 12:20	183:22	daunting	37:23	248:18	130:24
227:19	188:3	27:22	184:10	169:17	38:15	definitely	156:19
234:12	creativity	169:20	188:24	David 1:10	39:18 46:4	48:25	233:14
coupled	80:10	critically	curriculum	13:25	52:4 79:2	103:22	demonstrate

171:3	39:22 42:6	develop	112:17	disappear	dismantling	75:22	190:25
210:22	43:4,23	43:18,19	difficult	162:5	85:6	76:11 78:3	191:2
demonstrates	153:19	139:2	17:13	disappointi...	dismayed	83:22 84:8	192:8
70:11	210:14	developed	70:15	207:16	151:7	84:17	193:4,7
Demonstra...	desirable	30:23	102:13	disappoint...	disparities	85:17 90:7	194:7,12
213:1	43:25	32:25 89:6	224:15,20	90:19	19:19	90:10,13,18	196:14
denied 88:10	desire 179:21	developers	255:23	136:14	26:11	91:6,9 92:5	201:1
102:1	264:13	42:12	difficulty	disarray	166:2	92:20	202:12,17
134:12	desired 238:8	developing	64:7	150:19	dispersed	93:23 94:6	202:20
denies 198:19	258:24	31:25	dig 164:22	disbelief	243:8	94:18 98:3	203:25
Department	despair	33:14 51:4	diligently	211:20	displaced	98:22,24	209:2
34:3 37:15	258:22	development	244:12	disciplinary	143:18	101:6	213:6
depend	desperately	29:24 40:1	DiPace	232:11	displayed 3:4	104:21	215:22
221:18	80:19,20	183:21	160:13	discipline	disqualified	105:6	219:4,4,11
dependable	despite	devices 80:15	direct 50:3	162:16	58:18	110:14	220:7,25
213:11	167:15	devised 73:19	100:15	discontent	disrupt	112:6,25	221:1
dependent	destroy	devoted	265:21	33:18	130:10	113:12,14	224:18
110:17	202:10	90:23	directed	discouraged	disrupting	115:17	229:11
111:9	destroyed	dialogue	245:3	262:21	215:16	116:16	231:18
depends 41:6	168:20	13:16	direction	discourse	disruption	123:18	235:11,19
113:1	destroying	difference	49:1 87:15	170:17	246:5	128:16	237:14
depression	250:11	58:21	101:12	discovered	disruptive	129:12	249:15
191:16	destruct	78:16 80:5	106:22	214:18	245:11	132:19,21	250:1,10
DEREK 1:13	259:5	differences	directly 13:8	242:14,21	distant 113:8	133:9	257:11
describe	destruction	52:22	67:24	Discovery	distinction	134:6	258:18
51:18	85:5	54:14	125:19	51:11	55:24	135:23	259:3,6
described	detail 67:1	80:22	134:5	discriminates	distracted	138:19	261:15,17
6:19	236:2	81:19 85:3	137:24	156:16,17	262:21	139:8	261:19
describes	details 7:14	167:15,16	234:10	discuss 9:17	distress	140:12	262:17
45:20	30:19,21	different	Director	83:19	153:21	141:2	264:15
214:10	31:18 32:4	20:14	61:20	165:12	distribute	142:24	District's
desegregated	148:14	32:17	disabilities	188:24	34:4,17	143:3,15	4:20 15:11
163:11	215:23	35:17	64:6 75:12	discussed	district 7:22	144:13,15	25:22
desegregati...	252:6	42:23,24,24	75:21 76:8	29:21	11:16,19	146:21	29:24
163:15	deterioration	47:4 54:15	76:10,13	72:10	12:23	147:1,10	33:13
deserve	89:20	57:20	77:2 78:6	discussing	13:21	148:9,13,25	37:23 41:8
66:16	determine	64:19	81:8,20	74:23	14:16	149:15,18	62:18 64:3
73:21	20:2 39:25	71:14	191:18	discussion	16:23 17:2	149:23	99:2 142:3
101:22	64:10	114:19	disability	22:7 23:3	17:8 19:18	150:13,20	148:12
deserves	91:23	120:1	78:16 79:1	95:22	20:8 22:22	151:17	150:15
81:25	110:18,25	136:11	disadvantage	121:4	24:5,8 27:6	152:8	163:17,23
171:23	111:22	137:13	10:23	123:23	28:9,14	153:10	169:16
deserving	164:17	146:16	59:24 63:1	134:12	30:10,22	154:1,23	195:20
169:23	determined	182:14	218:16	151:3	31:8,14,24	156:12,25	201:2
170:10	34:12	190:4	220:3,11,13	disenfranc...	33:17	161:8,21	district-wide
design 51:14	211:24	197:23,25	disadvanta...	121:8	35:25	171:18	191:14
55:16 72:5	252:9,14	198:15	25:10	disenfranc...	36:10 38:3	173:3,15	districts 10:1
72:13	253:14	222:6	219:19	86:23	38:16	178:20	42:23
157:3	determines	237:10	221:15,25	disgusting	39:18	181:19	74:19,22
182:23	100:17	251:21	disadvanta...	145:11	40:19 45:1	182:5,7,18	75:4 113:2
219:15	determining	differentially	10:22 64:4	disheartened	45:16	184:21	disturbed
designated	92:16	71:15	disagree	231:20	46:25 47:6	185:4,7	19:13
221:6	detrimental	differently	52:25	dislocation	50:18 57:1	187:2	disturbing
designed	143:5	52:13	118:13	246:6	69:3,8	189:12	8:17

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 10

diverse 25:5	146:8	243:10	132:11	100:20,23	185:12	262:1	171:9
33:10	147:16	draws 28:24	earning	103:7	educator	elect 113:5	emotional
35:16	205:8	dream	126:18	114:8,14	66:2 68:9	elected 45:16	79:21
72:20	206:16,18	166:21	East 156:2,3	117:6	165:21	113:4,24	183:9
119:17	207:24	196:6,12	217:7	123:11	196:18	114:3	emotionally
130:19	208:5	250:7,9,15	Eastern	126:14,14	209:1,17	116:6	179:20
136:3	224:20	250:20	156:2	126:17,19	217:6	128:6	emotions
166:9	234:5	dreams	easy 29:2	128:22	educators	129:3	80:8
220:5	260:5	167:24	55:2 215:8	134:3	12:15	134:15	209:11
diversify	dollars	249:17	echo 50:4	137:19	14:11	172:23	empathetic
73:10	111:19	250:11,13	68:2	154:18	effect 136:10	176:17	168:7
diversity	195:23	250:21	echoed	160:21	effective	electronic	empathy
20:24	domain	Drexel	251:11	161:1,3	20:19	141:9	258:19
25:18,20	116:12	186:10	echoing	162:8	150:22	elementary	emphasis
47:15 66:3	Donna 5:24	driving 63:16	129:17	163:6,10	246:4	17:11	188:5
66:11,15	23:6 24:3	188:25	economic	164:3	effectively	35:20,23	emphasize
67:4 68:16	106:5	237:4	35:18	167:9,20	14:5 31:15	46:18	16:15
68:24 72:1	door 71:7	drop 13:2	59:24	169:16	185:13	120:14,17	employed
72:7,22	double 76:9	114:9	151:19	171:19,22	188:7	125:15	77:11
87:6 105:9	102:11	drugs 160:23	155:23	172:3	191:24	198:9	employee
122:6	152:22	dual 140:6	160:5	174:5,10	effectiveness	247:14	251:22
129:25	Downey	due 2:8 92:19	186:12	175:11,19	16:8 30:8	elements	employees
130:20,25	204:18	177:19	200:12	175:25	efficiency	106:15	149:18
147:11	downscored	durable	economically	188:8	38:18	elevate	215:9
155:16	54:12	171:12	25:10	196:14	efficient 38:8	171:22	employing
156:9,12	Dr 5:24,25	duty 176:18	economics	197:3	47:13	elicit 47:2	156:13
165:14	23:7,8	196:13,17	159:25	198:5,9	efficiently	eligibility	employment
166:5	36:22,24	dwindling	164:4	199:18	38:4	29:5	174:12
169:7	37:3,8	19:10	edge 51:8	200:17	effort 9:7	eligible 29:12	empty 98:11
172:1	61:11,13	dying 164:6	editor 43:22	201:4,18,24	11:7 39:4	72:15	enabled
174:3	68:3 73:6	dynamics	43:22	202:13	69:10	139:21	237:23
215:20	83:8,10,11	121:6	editors	205:21	103:21	232:12	encourage
219:14	83:14,21		160:11	207:24	115:13	eliminate	110:8
222:12,19	88:9 89:25	E	Edmonds	208:7,23	120:15	32:12	encouraged
244:7	109:15	E 265:1	181:18	220:9	248:6	96:14,17	126:4
divide 27:8	110:6	E&S 128:24	educated	229:8	262:1	eliminated	ends 11:1
192:3	118:15	129:4,20	255:24	231:11,17	efforts 49:3	96:12	endure 140:5
division	134:21	earlier 33:16	educating	264:1,11,21	54:16	eliminating	enforcing
33:20	160:13	97:4 101:1	144:24	Education's	101:18	95:20	133:7
divorced	165:5	103:15	education 1:2	96:11	136:8,17	183:23	engage 31:8
160:5	181:2	122:20	2:4 4:13,19	135:1	199:24	184:8,18	154:9
doctor 165:2	186:4,7,9	130:5	10:5,17,18	educational	213:5	elite 100:15	157:1
165:3,24	186:15	169:10	19:4 23:25	40:5 52:14	244:13,16	eloquent	184:23
172:8	187:3,8	201:24	25:16	90:25 96:7	244:20	26:19	engaged 86:3
193:18	196:5,12	213:9	30:11 37:7	101:23,24	249:22	eloquently	91:12
doctors	204:19	257:5	37:9,13,16	116:19	250:12,22	81:13	154:2
160:11	236:4	early 24:9,20	37:16	121:15	264:7	embark	engagement
166:8	dramatic	106:4	48:24 66:4	154:13	eight 132:24	166:20	15:21
doing 10:19	193:9	190:6	73:16	168:18	230:7	embed 42:21	34:11
42:16 54:4	dramatically	207:3	74:17 77:4	170:21	248:9	embedded	128:10
56:9 60:7,8	154:13	255:8	83:25 84:1	171:7	either 109:5	84:7	134:13
60:16	draw 241:17	earn 126:12	84:3,10	173:23	146:8	embrace	139:1
88:20	248:25	201:9	86:1 93:8	178:1	177:12	180:15	153:12
124:4	drawn	earned	94:25	183:20	253:13,18	emerging	171:15

185:11	96:18 98:9	218:25	16:17,22	84:22	estimate	102:14	120:21
engages	106:18	environme...	17:19	erect 89:18	46:20	105:24	153:16
91:18	110:22	80:24	18:12,14,17	Eric 142:14	et 225:16	112:20	169:24
engaging	111:1,2,10	229:9	19:6 21:23	147:24	ethic 7:8	186:13	222:16
73:2 100:7	ensure 27:24	envision	22:11,12	152:12	ethical 49:25	194:3	223:23
Engineering	44:3 56:24	138:21	25:20	153:1	ethics 179:6	205:25	240:1
61:18	81:14 86:1	epithets	26:16,18,20	157:9	ethnic 68:15	207:10,15	244:7
128:20	94:4	167:3	26:22,23,24	error 38:11	72:6	230:9	examples
148:7	137:11	equal 10:9	27:23	38:12,14	155:23	240:14,19	189:12
161:12	139:15	69:12 78:4	30:12,17,20	errors 44:19	249:24,25	everybody's	excel 185:14
242:12	176:25	102:25	32:13	ESL 195:3	ethnicity	192:22	188:2
English 52:17	179:17	130:13	33:21 34:2	259:18	68:22	evidence	excelled 7:1
54:11 56:4	192:2	146:18	34:9,20	especially	72:16	210:25	excellence
56:10,11	ensures 38:17	147:11	36:3,4,12	53:10	95:13	261:9	61:2
61:20	193:13	163:8	61:1 66:3	84:12 88:4	168:2	265:3	219:14,16
62:25 63:1	ensuring	189:24	69:9 72:1	119:18,20	249:23	evidence-b...	220:10
63:2 75:16	117:1	252:2,5	74:14	195:13	ETS 54:10	169:21	222:13,19
78:6	169:17	equality	81:10,15	200:12	Eubanks	evolution	233:18
122:23	170:20	10:20	83:22	259:1	32:14	16:4	excellent
123:10	211:4	86:14,15	86:13,15,16	essay 7:11	Europe 156:2	evolved	85:25
136:12	enter 45:5	175:9	86:22	8:3 16:1	European	97:18	126:13
156:14,18	52:11	186:16	88:15 94:5	38:20,22	217:7	ex 49:12	151:15
167:5	58:16	191:22	105:9,13	39:12,15	eval 182:10	exact 141:14	152:5
198:10,25	226:13	equalizer	106:2	41:3 52:9	183:24	exactly 33:3	174:5
199:12	entered	84:4	107:8	52:16 67:2	184:3	112:10	232:9,10
235:12	139:20	equally 75:10	121:5	67:17 68:1	evaluate	149:14	exception
247:16	entering	75:15	123:20	70:23	21:20	252:8	233:1
258:4	24:19	equation	128:13	201:14	37:24 42:7	exam 51:4	exceptional
259:11,12	35:25	211:15	130:1	210:11	evaluated	63:18	147:18
259:14	132:1	equitable	134:2,25	213:10	91:21	176:5	exclude 72:11
enhance	156:5	15:21	135:3	225:12,13	184:19	236:1,5	141:21
106:1	entire 13:6	26:10 29:9	136:4	226:22	188:1,7	237:12,15	excluded
136:4	81:1 88:16	84:11,20	139:15	243:24	evaluates	237:18,20	133:24
enhanced	104:3	130:13	141:17	essays 16:13	42:8	237:24	136:23
171:6	120:20	137:21	148:9	39:16	evaluation	238:3,19	execute 30:10
enjoy 141:19	199:25	141:18	157:5	40:24	37:12	239:3	executed
179:16	218:17	169:18	165:15	41:24 54:6	38:15	examine 4:20	17:22
enormous	222:16	189:23	170:9	209:25	40:10	103:5	execution
222:11	entirely 9:15	231:19	171:4	236:11,16	91:16	examines	238:21
237:5	entitled 79:1	242:24	172:2	236:19	105:8	39:11	exemplary
enriching	entrance	243:16	175:9	essence 200:2	184:5	examining	242:25
135:11	176:5	244:15	186:16	essential	210:11	94:3	exercise
enrolled	entry 220:19	251:24	191:21	201:16	evaluations	example 8:14	239:3
24:14	223:20	252:3,12,23	202:10	essentially	92:4 187:6	20:8 39:21	exhibiting
137:4	225:8	equitably	213:5,12	189:7	190:17	42:4 44:6	179:6
139:6	environment	27:8 34:17	215:21	193:4	Evans 251:2	46:11,13	exist 33:11
251:18	79:23	147:11	218:11	establish	251:3,4,7	54:14	86:10
253:8,15	137:15	equity 9:7	219:18	100:21	evening	55:18	133:19
254:13	144:3	10:9,20,21	220:25	established	118:1	58:14	existed 9:23
255:6	176:25	10:24	252:1	116:22	evenly 28:24	59:11,12	106:16
enrollment	177:25	12:17	equity's 34:2	establishing	event 238:17	76:11 87:2	existence
13:3,13	196:16	13:20 15:1	equivalent	103:18	everybody	97:17	146:20
16:24	environme...	15:2,9,14	45:23	esteemed	50:17,19	118:19	existing 55:6
19:11	150:17	15:15,17	eradicating	172:22	57:21	119:14,15	114:4

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 12

166:2	86:25	104:6	faculty 31:11	75:13 93:9	253:24	Feltonville	181:17
177:21	experiment	105:10	fail 32:21	112:10	fearful	203:9	first 5:21,23
218:9	212:24	123:6,13	failed 30:25	126:2	174:21	field 16:3	12:13 21:4
exists 86:24	experiment...	127:1	148:14	135:6,13	fears 255:19	38:13 46:2	23:5,7,21
103:12	193:15	187:19	202:12	137:17	feature 5:14	62:10	25:12
219:15	expert 37:10	255:23	203:22	140:4	5:18	183:16	28:12 36:1
262:6	82:13	259:19	255:10	141:19	features	233:17	37:22 41:2
expand	261:12	eye 203:22	failure 30:4	143:2	39:11,12	260:25	41:16
201:21	expertise		179:23	146:1	85:4	fight 10:4	51:23 59:4
expanding	67:1	F	203:20	155:24	fed 159:11,13	151:21,21	72:9 78:19
87:7 201:4	171:20	F 265:1	failures	157:1	159:14	152:5	78:21
expansion	256:1	face 26:17	191:20	160:1	feed 110:24	163:9	83:13,14
171:1	experts 9:18	51:23	fair 35:5	168:1,8	feedback	164:23	91:16
expect 18:6	11:15	144:20	112:20	197:16	21:2 31:5	207:15	109:21
144:24	67:19	175:6	145:20	198:1	40:6,11,16	fighting 35:5	115:21
178:16	153:23	215:15	146:7,9	200:11	40:23	163:21	147:7
187:12	171:16	face-to-face	148:18	257:14,20	41:23	220:13	150:6
expectation	219:6	77:22	150:14	259:24	43:10	figure 179:2	173:5
5:7	226:11	faced 34:16	152:5	families'	51:15 93:3	234:6	209:17
expectations	229:5,12	211:17	169:17	254:5	94:7,19	254:4	218:22
132:7	260:3,24	254:19	171:23	family 129:14	104:4	figuring	223:15
160:2	explain 120:2	faces 80:25	182:11	143:21	135:4	34:23	225:19,25
194:15	141:25	facilities	183:5	156:10	153:13	fill 25:2	226:3
expected	166:11	107:18	189:5,23	160:6	154:5,10	227:12	228:3
21:11	explained	facing 224:6	194:25	167:7	209:25	filled 38:10	239:13
149:19	7:11 28:7	fact 9:10,14	199:8,16	184:23	210:16	98:10	242:21
176:8	129:18	9:24 10:8	202:17	185:10	feeder 120:12	166:24	247:10
190:8	184:20	33:18 44:5	228:12	195:5,11,12	158:4,6	final 151:14	first-gener...
expecting	explaining	76:5 89:21	234:8,24	199:21	feeds 111:5	finally 14:25	195:10
191:10	149:13	96:24 99:4	239:25,25	240:3	feel 10:16	16:20	247:15
expended	explanation	120:15	240:21	241:12	104:23	22:10 40:4	257:9
54:17	34:3	122:4	241:1	far 18:7,12	109:10	46:1 64:8	first-year
expensive	explore 85:9	167:17	244:23	73:21	113:13,20	119:7	61:24
115:5	88:20	185:1	252:5	74:20 75:9	126:12	149:25	63:20
experience	252:15	187:12,25	fairly 238:25	100:25	168:13	212:12	firsthand
16:11	explored 61:3	189:15	250:20	101:12	203:19	221:2	80:2
86:19	express	190:23	fairness	113:8	214:23	248:7	168:22
88:17 96:8	113:16	221:14	10:20 61:1	140:18	215:6	financial	183:10
131:22	115:17	245:17	86:17,20	159:12,13	251:13	6:24 168:3	237:9
135:12	expressing	facto 106:20	faith 174:14	165:7	255:1,16,17	find 117:10	Fiscal 195:20
155:19	182:15	factor 86:22	228:6	224:24	261:7	150:7	201:2
171:7	expression	252:15	fake 202:8	257:20	feeling 213:3	262:23	fissures 89:15
189:2	80:17	factors 60:25	234:23	fatally 187:5	253:10	finding	Fitler 173:19
203:18	extensive	72:22	fall 31:13	235:20	feels 88:6	238:11	five 52:1 71:5
235:16	154:7	111:24	65:19	father 166:14	207:15	finds 162:18	79:9
experienced	extensively	170:1	111:23	242:7	feet 227:6	fine 242:19	113:24
23:14	166:4	225:14	fallen 84:5	fault 69:20	Felicia 251:2	fine-grain	138:10
158:24	extent 8:11	facts 133:24	familiar 66:7	favor 231:15	fellow 19:3	68:17	173:13
258:14	external 18:3	factual	familiarity	favorite	151:22	finished	175:12
experiences	extra 234:13	245:20	236:23	207:7	felt 8:4	102:18	184:10
129:15	extracurric...	factually	families	fear 14:7	174:24	241:24	fix 59:4 73:4
136:4	194:20	245:24	25:12 31:9	131:12	203:22	Finzimer	146:25
186:25	extremely 7:2	Faculties	31:10	168:19	258:10,18	181:1,6,9	flaw 153:10
experiencing	98:12	254:1	33:19 75:5	192:8	259:2	181:10,12	flawed 63:12

63:14	40:5 140:2	86:10	248:22	184:15	94:1	232:1	27:25
187:4,5	191:23	four 66:23	frustration	195:14	Germantown	236:24	30:13
188:7	229:5	113:25	260:22	202:24	11:3	glaring 19:6	47:18 84:1
189:25	formal	121:22	fulfills	216:7	getting 36:11	global 86:11	95:1
235:20	128:13	135:7	228:16	futures	52:3 150:2	253:23	116:22,23
238:20	191:1	141:10	full 61:6	193:17	234:15	globally	117:7,15
255:9	formed	164:18	127:5		Gideon 35:20	200:6	132:12
fledge 127:5	245:17	173:14	131:22	G	gift 196:23	go 10:6 11:2	135:1
flexible 43:6	former 23:21	226:19	134:12	G.W 128:19	gifted 187:20	11:8 13:18	136:18
flinching	209:1	227:16,22	211:8	gain 53:21	Gilmore	13:18 15:6	165:14
145:17	formerly	240:6	258:21	104:10	134:18	15:7 35:12	193:14
floor 147:7,8	131:5	250:15	fuller 17:9	236:22	Girls 119:7	43:21	219:22
147:8,9	forms 210:24	four-year	18:18	gains 171:4,5	119:15	57:25 83:5	262:4
Floyd 84:16	formula 16:7	39:24	fully 12:11	game 233:10	174:1	83:13,14	God 180:21
94:1 165:4	35:6	fragile 79:19	44:4 86:3	GAMP 155:6	175:24	100:25	208:4,8
172:11,14	formulating	fragmented	168:21	gap 137:22	give 48:13	101:12	goes 15:6
172:15,19	245:10	211:12	218:3	gas 166:16	93:9	114:18,21	18:12
173:4	forth 27:25	212:2	265:4	gatekeeper	139:23	114:24	240:16
focus 29:22	104:21	framework	fund 26:21	62:4 63:13	142:1	119:22	going 7:15
88:15	105:25	30:14	137:20	65:1	145:20	120:18	10:14 14:6
201:17	132:12	Franklin	197:10	Gates 37:18	153:15	127:22	17:15
233:24	137:14	154:6	fundamental	Gauthier	156:7	128:3	18:10
fold 56:19	185:17	181:18	9:21 87:25	1:10 3:24	158:1,11	141:24	22:23,25
59:22 60:9	fortunate	frankly 170:7	153:10	3:25 18:24	171:19	151:17	23:5 26:6
60:11	6:24	170:17	fundament...	19:1 68:18	186:24	152:15	50:2,2 55:8
folding 59:8	forums	fraud 202:8	235:19	70:18	204:25	157:12,21	57:11,13,24
Folk 128:2	129:11	fraudulent	238:20	gem 244:16	249:14	157:23	57:25
138:3,7,8	forward	238:25	funded 37:15	gender 39:6	258:12	158:7	58:14,18
folks 22:23	18:19	fraught 30:1	195:22	general 43:13	given 20:10	160:9	59:5 60:12
169:10	21:25 22:8	free 234:5	funding 35:6	231:9	31:13 48:1	175:3	67:13
204:25	36:5 71:4	Freedman	152:6	244:13	63:23	178:5	68:24 70:3
205:1	71:13	141:1	195:21	generalizable	72:21 73:6	204:23	71:4,10,13
follow 81:17	103:3	freely 250:21	200:25	46:20	106:22	207:12	71:14 72:2
followed	117:20	frees 43:14	202:14	generally	122:3	212:21	82:5 83:13
242:5	123:19	43:19	funds 27:7	191:23	124:21	214:25	92:10
following 2:7	182:16	Freire 173:19	166:18	generate	136:24	225:9,19,25	93:17
83:2	205:13,15	frequently	Furjan 181:2	212:11	140:23	226:3,15,21	110:19
food 197:22	207:22	98:2 142:3	186:7,9	generated	151:5	227:22	111:13,22
foot 17:25	264:14	friend 6:14	236:4	45:24	176:2	228:1,2	112:2,3,11
footing 163:9	foster 100:22	friends 11:3	further 41:25	generation	187:7	239:23	122:10
fora 66:9	found 2:21	11:4	79:3 89:20	14:21	189:8	240:3,5	125:3
forced 69:19	158:5	143:22	111:12	247:10	226:1	241:3,5,6,8	126:25
226:21	214:20	150:1	214:20	generations	236:5	260:17	144:5
246:6	237:21	155:22,24	264:7	89:11	244:22	263:11	145:3,16
forces 159:15	238:6	175:4	Furthermore	163:25	245:20	goal 68:14	168:14
forecasting	foundation	192:13	31:17	genre 46:7,23	260:3	88:15	186:23
211:21	37:17,18	199:14	189:11	genres 47:4	gives 66:19	117:4	204:16
foregoing	81:10	240:3	future 45:1	gentle 179:7	149:21	126:9	215:12
265:5,18	89:16	front 68:7	112:1	gentrify	162:19	128:15	224:24
foreign 29:7	91:20	212:11	118:22	162:4	giving 26:25	179:23	237:10
52:17	147:4,6	238:14	119:16	gentrifying	40:23	194:12	239:23,25
forget 81:21	160:22	fruit 196:21	123:21	161:22	41:23 64:8	222:21	240:11,13
forgive 145:8	167:21	frustrated	158:10	232:21	161:22	244:25	240:18
form 16:17	foundational	113:18	166:25	George 84:16	209:23	goals 17:17	251:10

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 14

253:11	governing	257:19,23	247:20	177:13	Guardrail	239:24	148:15
254:16,19	87:20	gradebook	248:20	180:14	135:9,10,12	hands 89:21	178:24
255:16,16	government	190:25	grading 8:9	188:20	135:13	234:12	180:10
255:17,18	261:18	graded 8:3	182:25	192:8	guardrails	hang 127:17	228:10
good 2:3 3:8	governs	244:2	236:14	206:18	17:18	haphazard	257:22
3:9,13,16	185:16	grader 24:10	graduate	207:25	30:14 95:1	67:8	harmed
3:20,25 4:9	GPA 7:1 8:11	61:17,18	23:11 86:2	210:17	95:3	happen 108:9	202:23
10:5,16,18	8:12,14	64:20,22	173:25	222:20	116:23	125:3	Harrisburg
11:2 19:3	56:19	65:14,15	graduated	223:24	117:8	170:11	36:20
23:15,19	59:14,19	128:18,19	138:11	225:20,21	135:2,8	237:8	harsh 226:23
36:24 37:4	60:2	148:7	173:15	242:20	guess 49:12	happened	harshly
47:23	103:14,17	165:22	242:11	264:16	113:1	58:21 73:4	219:8
50:22	103:18	194:8,9	grammar	greater 40:14	205:1	237:19	hasty 213:18
55:14	187:18	195:3	188:11	67:1 88:1	207:12	happening	hate 196:4
60:13	191:4	214:4	199:12	95:11	guest 181:13	22:21 42:3	249:22,22
61:14 74:3	219:24	223:10	grandchild	164:2	guidance	71:7 175:4	249:23
83:15 84:2	GPA s 56:14	235:11	90:14	greatest	32:3	234:18	259:6
90:2,3	57:19 59:5	257:10,10	grandchild...	167:9	254:11	235:24	haves 52:8
105:25	60:21	graders	90:13	greatly 111:9	guide 114:11	236:10	Head 207:6
114:8,14	187:11,23	51:25	250:8	Green 1:13	guided 174:5	happens	health 2:9
116:19	190:16,23	56:19	grandma	48:14,18	gun 157:20	81:15	34:3 166:2
121:3	191:11	139:6	180:14	49:15	158:20,24	235:12	191:13
123:17	grade 25:6	140:3,7	grandmom	Greenfield	158:25	happy 238:9	192:15,16
126:19	27:17	141:21	173:21	234:16	gunfire	258:4	219:1
128:4	49:24	148:18,22	grandmother	grew 166:13	158:21	264:20	healthy
138:7	55:12	150:11	166:18	grieve 179:12	163:5	hard 34:19	264:20
142:17,18	56:12 68:4	154:15	173:16	grit 115:13	guy 41:4	34:22	hear 4:25
148:11,12	71:18	170:22	180:13	groom	guys 127:17	36:10	14:15 36:9
153:1	103:17	213:17	grandparent	245:18	158:13	87:18	36:25
161:17	131:19	214:13	142:20	ground	Gym 1:9 3:15	132:5	58:11 74:4
162:14,17	138:14	223:16	178:10	235:25	3:16 12:4,6	149:22	79:16
172:20	140:8,21	224:5	grandson	grounded	18:22	154:20	95:10
178:21,24	144:7,11	225:11	73:22	64:24	66:12	194:17,21	102:12,13
180:10	157:22	226:16,25	grandsons	group 35:16	70:19	194:24	104:4,7,10
181:12	158:5	228:16	209:10	74:13		195:16	116:9
185:22	183:2	245:14	grant 6:25	84:24	H	199:19	118:5
194:2	191:1	grades 55:7	granted 18:1	85:15	hail 166:9	200:13	134:16
203:14	193:3	55:11,11,13	263:13	144:20	hailed 243:19	208:13	152:20
208:24	195:4	55:14 56:3	grappling	147:14	half 56:18	212:19	168:16
217:3,4	200:20	56:24 91:9	57:16	228:16	100:4	225:13	172:16
226:20	201:25	98:7	grateful 62:5	239:20,20	140:21	232:2,23	181:10
229:1	203:11	131:23	gratitude	grouped	142:7	248:9,24	204:11
230:19,25	210:10	158:8	166:24	20:21	224:4	249:4	206:20,21
239:21	213:11	161:16	grave 186:20	groups 94:22	halt 262:3	254:23	223:6
240:8,9,9	214:6,12	187:16	191:12	192:11	halted 88:7	255:1	231:5
240:20	218:13	190:18	great 7:9,23	222:1	hand 49:17	256:3	242:17,19
241:9,16,20	223:25	191:3	10:7 35:2	233:24	227:2	259:15,19	246:17,20
246:20	224:7,8	199:24	50:14 73:6	249:24,25	handbook	harder 70:6	256:24
247:7	226:14	210:13	84:4 86:6	grow 107:18	214:10	247:23	258:2,5
248:20	227:16,21	212:20	90:19	107:18	handle 60:20	hardships	261:11
259:20	236:18	216:11	130:5	growing	178:6	170:3	heard 29:3
262:3	245:15	219:17	132:10	93:24	240:1	193:1	67:15
gooder 240:5	246:8	226:20	173:21	guarantees	247:25	harm 45:6	81:25
gotten 71:19	251:17	232:9	174:10	89:1 96:21	handles	73:5 134:8	93:15

100:5,9,13	heaving	257:1,4	190:18	215:17	homeschoo...	horrible	hunger 159:4
100:19	89:10	hidden 67:6	191:11	251:18	192:24	139:17	husband
104:20	heels 69:17	69:15	192:11	253:8	homework	host 157:17	138:9
106:3,6	heirs 89:17	150:16	193:16	hire 111:21	64:19	173:10	hybrid 77:18
112:18,19	held 93:8	high 4:22	194:15	201:23	homogenous	hosting 2:4	
139:15	94:24	6:20 7:19	200:2	259:18	68:20	22:3 65:22	I
153:14,22	128:22	7:20 14:3,4	211:4	hiring 111:6	honest	hour 2:22	idea 15:1
155:13,14	Helen 1:9	19:8 21:5	214:8,12	111:20	176:20	hours 131:17	51:22
169:10	12:4	21:12	217:22	201:5	honestly	198:7	105:25
182:22	Helene 181:2	24:24,25	218:19	Hispanic	151:5	199:2	108:23
187:3	186:4,9	30:15	220:18	19:11	218:8	house 89:8,12	139:14,17
192:6,7	Hello 186:7	31:23	222:17	243:9	honesty	147:3	148:11
195:25	203:8	41:20 42:4	224:1	historically	176:24	232:19	192:12
206:25	231:2	44:21 51:1	232:7	26:12	honor 137:2	household	225:21
208:25	235:5,6	51:15	233:5	84:13	149:17	249:6	227:10
223:12	246:17	53:11	235:14	169:1	150:7	households	229:15
225:15	251:3	55:14 57:7	239:17	history 84:6	166:7	25:11	240:20
236:3	256:22	57:23	245:20	84:8	215:8	71:14	ideas 61:4
238:4	help 40:7,11	62:14,19	247:13,18	160:13	254:24	houses	63:9 73:7
260:23	40:16	64:1,21	248:3,8	201:13	honorable	129:15	80:10
261:25	43:18	65:25	251:21	hit 108:2	23:6 179:8	162:1	93:14 97:7
hearing 2:4,7	80:16	67:17,22	257:15	114:17,20	hope 17:14	Howe 181:22	225:15
2:17 4:11	139:2	73:11,12,13	259:20	114:21	22:19 62:7	HSA 129:2,7	identification
4:12 5:4,5	147:17	74:10,23	high-perfor...	149:24	65:6 79:2,9	129:21	185:18
11:23	152:7	75:6 76:2,7	70:4	Hite 109:15	81:15	133:16	identified
12:15,16	158:12	77:11 78:4	high-rise	110:6	88:14	244:12	71:8 79:8
18:7 28:6	166:1	78:24 79:6	227:18	134:21	112:14	huge 65:20	91:25 92:1
36:5 37:7	177:5,25	86:2 87:5	higher 44:16	hold 18:9	141:17	215:22	103:7
65:22	179:8	96:19,23	76:4	94:10	147:15	human 15:5	110:12
81:17	184:9	97:1	120:19	100:17	166:25	15:12	identify
83:19	198:11	106:19	highest 162:7	117:11	168:5	16:16	166:1
100:7	210:15	107:20	187:16	holding	179:5	18:16 38:8	183:17
104:3,8,9	216:2	108:15	223:21	11:23 28:5	180:11,18	39:3 42:1	identities
115:18	258:6	119:8,15	highlight	holds 118:4	197:8	47:14	87:9
118:2	259:18	124:2	130:25	holes 237:5	206:10	52:24,25,25	IEP 77:3
127:16	helped 174:8	125:17	highlighted	holiday	259:4	54:6 78:11	79:11
134:11	helpful	128:19	85:1 87:11	141:20	hoped 250:4	78:12	ignoring 43:5
170:19	112:14	129:20	124:24	holistic 170:8	hopefully	130:22	ill-tied
185:25	helping 7:9	131:13	175:17	171:24	127:17	150:15	245:11
205:13,20	246:23	132:6	highlights	home 63:22	245:23	162:19	ills 160:1
206:4	247:6	139:7	191:21	114:11	hopeless	humanity	illustrious
256:20	257:13	140:8,10	highly 39:1	128:24	235:21	197:9	252:22
260:12,20	helpless	148:21,22	192:2	132:8	255:11	humans 54:6	image 3:3
263:12	255:11	149:7	203:13	144:9	hopelessness	54:8 63:25	57:5,6
264:1,5	helps 40:13	152:5	Hill 61:21	244:10	159:12	68:21	imagine
hearings 2:13	176:3	154:22	142:13	248:15	hopes 61:4	179:10	70:15 80:6
2:16,20	228:10	161:16	147:23	homeless	170:10	humiliated	80:8 131:7
4:18	Hey 231:3	164:15	148:3,6	100:22	hoping 98:3	238:13	236:9
106:21	hi 206:14	168:10	Hill- 140:25	160:25	123:20	humiliation	238:5
111:18	214:2	169:18	Hill-Freed...	homelessness	126:15	153:21	immediate
217:15	217:3	172:3	133:3	161:5	257:16	humor 63:8	24:12 59:4
heart 16:9	223:5,8	173:19	137:4	homeowners	Horenstein	hundreds	88:22
162:18	235:9	174:1	214:4,5,7	89:7	204:20	150:11	91:10
251:15,23	247:7	175:24	214:14	homes 95:14	217:2,3,5	203:25	168:12

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 16

immediately	172:1	258:7	117:1	139:13	56:20 98:8	32:15	53:15
39:3 64:9	195:24	261:14	143:11	263:13	115:11	inequitable	inordinate
68:7	implement	263:10,22	improving	includes 75:6	193:2	21:14	116:14
137:23	22:25	importantly	10:11	140:3	253:6	26:13	inperson
168:9	171:23	116:17	91:12,24	185:10	255:5,13	102:24	150:2
225:3	202:5	130:15	117:5	190:16	increases	inequities	input 14:15
238:4	225:1	137:20	139:12	including	38:18 56:5	86:10	14:19,20
246:4	implement...	173:1,11	186:16	26:5 51:8	115:23	inequity	30:23 93:3
immigrant	19:21,25	175:15	201:17	74:19	increasing	15:19	93:10,10
166:12,12	20:25	impose	in-house	75:20	71:25	inevitably	97:11
195:8,10	29:25	226:23	63:22	105:6	98:12	153:20	101:17
197:12	133:23	imposed	inaccuracy	106:4	107:22	155:9	104:11
198:6	245:12	191:8	67:3	129:11	108:23	infested	184:5,7
199:9	implemented	impossible	inadvertent...	135:5	incredible	166:23	202:7
247:11,16	7:23 9:19	21:15 38:7	156:20	153:17	116:10	inform 39:9	263:2
257:9	28:16 32:1	159:7	inappropri...	156:1	incredibly	94:22	Inquirer 2:19
immigrated	58:3 105:2	impoverish...	42:5 67:17	187:15	166:9	124:10	inquiries
259:13	130:19	166:13	inaudible	221:18	169:5	information	87:12
impact 50:3	153:20	impression	94:5 141:1	231:21,23	independent	14:5 30:3	insecure 8:4
71:14 81:7	164:21	167:10	147:14	260:24	41:15	46:8 56:1,5	insight 43:19
84:6 85:20	175:14	Impression...	185:21	inclusion	261:17	56:17,21,25	44:18
111:13,18	193:15	160:14	188:13	66:3 88:2	independen...	57:3,10	65:18
111:18,20	228:13	improve 23:1	190:3	106:2	91:19	58:22 59:3	104:11
116:12	263:1	40:17,24	196:22	165:15	India 166:14	59:9 60:9	insightful
137:23	implementi...	41:24	197:8	171:15	indicate 2:25	60:13,18,22	48:5
139:5	163:16	60:22	240:24	172:2	indicated	69:6 70:22	112:21
168:13	implications	73:15	241:17	inclusive	93:2	70:25 74:9	insignificant
184:17	72:4	100:8	243:13	33:23	indicates	74:12	185:21
195:9	implore	101:19	247:9	80:24	46:15	75:19	inspire 197:5
211:21	168:14	138:23	249:17	129:13	indicating	76:18 96:6	197:6
257:18	importance	156:11	inboxing	135:18	52:11	124:23	inspired
impacted	95:20	163:17	177:13	inclusiveness	indication	125:19,23	195:15
14:23	170:5	169:22	incentive	244:23	125:18	149:21	instance
87:23	important	183:1	131:24	inclusivity	139:4	186:25	41:18
93:24	12:18 13:1	196:14	inception	192:2	indicator	199:4	instances
124:15	24:7 36:19	200:16	24:21	income	95:2	205:10	76:22
143:10	61:1 88:11	201:3,24	85:13	252:14	individual	227:1	79:24
157:2,6	98:12	202:12	include 9:24	income-	80:7,9	258:13	187:14
158:20	104:6	210:16	41:12,13	252:15	95:17 96:2	261:9	189:6
168:9	105:10	215:21	42:17 43:1	inconsistent	111:3	262:11	instantaneo...
173:2	108:17	improved	44:2 68:21	188:17	165:10	informed	131:10
175:6	118:1	163:19	69:10 87:8	incorporate	225:7	106:11	instill 196:18
184:11	123:6,13,18	improvement	99:17	60:25	individuali...	177:7	instilled
189:10	127:1	92:18	137:8	188:23	77:4	inherently	167:19
impactful	139:19,22	175:8	140:16	incorporates	individually	169:7	institute
185:20	176:22	180:2	169:25	40:6	192:25	inherited	37:16 38:7
impacting	183:25	improveme...	185:3	increase	individuals	89:7	130:14
166:3	184:12	91:14	209:10	122:4,7	93:13	initial 87:11	institution
impacts	192:14,23	92:14	221:12	130:20	94:21	135:3	171:2
88:23	204:11	94:22	included 2:17	168:25	124:18	initiatives	institutiona...
212:1	205:10,12	97:15,16	20:9 29:4	172:1	industry	51:2	85:6
impartial	207:9	100:25	29:12,13,15	192:4	46:13	injustice	institutions
79:1	210:6	102:3	105:14,14	227:21	52:14	221:10	26:14
imperative	232:3	103:10,23	105:17,22	increased	Inequality	innocent	instruction

40:17	124:22	inviting	item 47:22	83:21	35:4	249:9,13	125:10
41:22	internalize	23:25 37:5	Ivan 230:20	89:25	151:21	257:18	128:2
77:23	102:3	involved	230:20	118:15	163:7	kindergarten	139:19,22
150:2	international	105:12		186:15	179:25	255:8	140:18
instructional	241:13	116:13,25	J	judge 8:7	186:22	kindling 61:5	160:2
43:7 81:4	Internet	144:21	J 208:22	judged	215:12	kinds 42:14	163:12
instructions	238:1	177:7,18	J-u-p-i-a-g	162:10,16	226:20	King 88:9	172:10
2:14	interpret	180:21	239:14	162:20	230:6	93:16	180:8
109:12	112:17	198:21	JAMIE 1:10	196:8	232:10	101:5,14	183:10
instrument	interpretati...	257:17	Janira	209:19	255:4	196:5	186:21
68:12	53:8	involvement	204:18	250:17	keeping	231:1,2,7,8	189:6
insufficient	interrupt	99:24	Jannie	judgment	207:25	250:14	193:8,10
46:3	102:9	185:3	206:15	15:13	Kelly 204:19	King's	196:3
integrated	230:2	ironic 156:11	January	16:16	KENDRA	196:12	198:23
78:21 79:5	interrupting	irredeemably	71:20	18:16	1:9	Kingsessing	206:5
integrity	152:17	235:21	Jaya 23:8	130:22	key 73:2	6:16	210:22
170:6	interruption	irregularities	65:5,10	judgments	177:1	kitchens	214:19
200:1	58:7 74:25	218:2	job 51:6	211:3	kicked 58:15	197:21	216:8,12
Intelligencer	94:8 97:24	irresponsible	207:25	Julia 181:22	kid 163:21	Kleinman	225:22
2:19	102:7	14:6	241:10	June 21:3	kids 14:22	5:25 23:8	235:17
intended	intervention	Isabel 89:5	jobs 151:13	84:14	20:11	48:6,9	237:8,12
41:19,21	15:5,9	ISAIAH 1:11	199:3	138:19,24	57:13	50:12,14,22	238:1
42:22 43:8	intrical	isolate 192:4	240:13	junior 166:8	120:16	50:24	239:19
47:19	243:25	isolated	Joe's 11:3	Jupiag 239:7	126:18,20	58:13	240:23,25
136:18	introduce	163:18	join 136:17	239:7,14,15	148:16,24	61:10 73:6	252:11,20
169:9	113:23	179:10,14	214:16	justice 16:2	149:4,5,10	knew 68:7	253:1
184:8	262:20	issue 10:10	248:12	32:19 88:9	149:21,24	131:16	261:24
intends 15:12	introduced	13:5,7 15:1	joined 48:15	88:10	150:18	149:8	262:7
intensifying	114:2	15:10 22:8	144:19	163:1	151:17	194:14	knowing
249:24	129:22	22:11	202:25	164:5	157:24	knock 142:6	112:1,2
intent 136:8	168:10	23:13	214:5	186:12	159:15	know 6:13	133:4,24
intentional	introduces	44:20 49:6	joists 89:19	justification	168:7	8:21 14:15	161:2
33:23	44:12	49:23 50:6	Jones 92:10	155:12	225:18,24	15:7,24	189:8,9
130:21	Introducing	118:8	147:25		226:3	16:5 17:16	215:15
intentions	183:2	119:19	152:15	K	228:2	22:5 42:13	knowledge
47:23	invest 35:3	121:24	157:10,15	K 91:9 98:18	234:21	44:24 57:4	9:16 31:3
148:12	invested	135:21	157:16	105:17,21	Kim 103:6	57:6 62:22	80:2,3
178:21	17:12	180:2,3	160:7	125:16	183:11	63:6,12	159:5
intently	131:14	207:23	174:8	131:21,23	Kimberly 6:1	64:6,13	189:2
174:15	investigate	215:25	207:13	146:17	23:9 74:1	77:21	196:19
interest	118:7	222:9	Josh 217:19	K-12 37:12	74:11	78:13	237:9
128:21	investigation	231:13	Joshua 5:24	88:16	kind 21:17	81:16	known 38:13
197:25	214:20	issues 9:24	23:7 36:22	Kahn 64:14	22:14	82:15	51:3 74:13
interested	Investing	13:23	37:8 187:3	64:18	109:22	100:16	77:6 88:25
231:13	36:4	16:22	journey	Kalia 83:21	120:15	104:20	102:20,23
interesting	investment	43:15	166:20	Karen 90:5	123:22	108:18	130:12
57:15	170:24	47:21 61:7	Joyce 25:17	Karyn 83:5,7	126:8	109:6,19	131:5
interests	investments	62:8 153:9	joyous 238:9	83:10 90:1	155:4	110:7,10	133:14
35:13 95:7	15:4 26:14	171:10	Jr 88:9	94:10	170:14	112:10	215:2
135:25	invitation	192:19	250:14	Kearney	190:5	113:6	222:18
136:9	136:17	198:23	jubilant	231:9	199:22	116:3,11	
155:8	invite 109:14	199:1	238:9	Keely 5:25	236:25	117:18	L
198:18	109:15	208:3	Jubilee 83:8	23:8 61:11	237:1	118:15	lab 212:25
internal	invited 5:2	219:1	83:10,11,14	keep 7:5,6	238:23	122:10,16	labeled

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 18

labor 199:3	255:12	144:14	237:6	162:19	205:24	217:8	179:1
Laboratory 213:1	lasting 88:22	157:24	258:18	164:5	207:3	lives 73:15	203:21
lack 30:2	lastly 117:17	179:21	Legal 2:19	167:13	220:16	163:5	207:9,21
47:20	late 186:22	learned 7:16	legally 79:12	174:7,9	listed 191:3	184:14	209:18
64:23	194:22	8:6 160:12	LeGare 77:7	175:22	listen 22:22	192:20	254:22
70:12	225:22	160:16	78:1	177:2,19	104:7	living 68:25	256:10
86:22	Latin 156:1	248:13	legislation	211:18	127:18	121:20	looked 8:23
109:23	160:13	learner 211:9	207:2	250:6	148:25	249:8	121:16
133:16	Latino 25:8	learner's	Legislative	254:20,21	168:15	loam 89:10	looking 42:2
166:5	118:21,24	211:12	24:4,6	life-changing	174:18	local 221:19	47:15 69:3
170:3,4	119:1,3,6,9	learners 63:2	legislator	168:6	213:15	locate 236:14	92:15
191:21	166:3	78:6	26:9	lifelong	261:15	location 1:4	103:8,21
215:20	laudable	122:23	legislators	157:16	listened	227:18	107:17,17
259:4	37:25 38:2	123:10	26:17	173:11	94:20 95:6	237:17	117:2
lacked 30:19	38:19	156:18	27:20	lifestyle	174:15	locked 80:11	119:18
lacking 216:3	lauded	learning	234:3	115:5	listening 49:2	80:11	120:25
261:21	222:14	24:16 40:8	lens 105:13	light 61:6	49:11	logical 60:19	144:7
lacks 155:16	law 65:11,12	64:6 69:19	123:20	159:22	52:18	long 124:5	205:13
258:19	241:2	69:22	lessen 134:8	lightly 26:15	58:10	159:1	236:20
Lady 208:10	lawmakers	77:18	lessons 155:5	liked 11:18	100:7	198:6	264:14
LaGare	26:6 27:21	78:16	209:24	likened 96:4	145:13	199:2	looks 53:7
77:25	laws 34:12	79:23 80:4	let's 54:23	limitation	148:4	235:15	126:17
78:20,23	137:15	80:23	56:2,13	43:1	186:8	long- 211:25	lopping
103:11	lawyers	81:19	218:22	limited 26:24	206:24	long-term	59:16
laid 228:1	160:11	85:22	222:3	27:3,4	207:3	73:10	lose 199:15
Lakeisha	lay 147:6	136:11	letter 259:9	42:18 43:1	263:17	88:22	199:19
251:4,5	lead 262:14	137:13,14	262:2	44:2 75:5	literature	longed 159:9	222:4
land 89:8	leader 132:18	144:9	letters 8:1	76:1 258:3	235:13	longer 59:7	losers 27:11
landscaping	133:11,15	146:16	243:2	limiting	litigation	97:19 98:6	27:13
154:11	157:17	159:6	level 30:15	47:14	163:15	143:13	32:18
language	174:14	183:8	60:10	107:21	little 31:18	195:17	losses 192:25
29:8 52:17	176:12	186:11	74:24	Lin 242:5	54:1,2,3	232:3	lost 58:22
54:11 63:2	178:13	196:17	115:12	246:11,13	62:7 104:1	234:9	145:8
63:3 75:17	leaders 27:21	211:5,22	141:7	246:17,21	127:18	longitudinal	163:5
78:6 95:13	52:13	212:3	183:16	246:25	160:20	171:21	238:2
122:23	105:15	leave 89:4	202:1	247:3,4,8	185:22	longstanding	lot 7:6 22:7
123:10	176:15	90:15	235:14	Lin's 258:5	204:25	16:22	40:21
136:13	179:5	115:1,4	levels 200:17	Lincoln	218:10	Longstreth	54:21
156:14,17	leadership	263:24	200:20	152:3	224:11	6:18	55:12
156:18	17:4,6 18:4	leaves 115:8	202:13	Linder	263:1	longtime	56:25
199:5,10	49:23 50:9	led 51:2	233:16	160:15	live 6:12,15	165:18	120:16
201:22	133:1	253:6	Li 229:25	line 184:20	10:6 86:7	look 18:18	144:6,12
247:17	171:9	left 8:10	230:3	205:24	121:10	20:20	198:25
languages	176:19	19:21	257:2,8	Ling 242:5	146:24	21:25 22:8	205:9,11
98:1	185:9	30:21 55:4	liberate	246:11,11	196:7	26:18,20	220:8
large 20:1	leading 32:5	88:5 98:11	196:24	246:24	220:6	36:5 51:7	251:11
76:1	105:20	133:25	licensed	247:4,8	243:3	52:13	252:17
168:23	222:16	134:14	257:12	258:5	248:16,24	54:18	253:24
172:24	235:25	145:16	licensing 51:4	Lisa 57:8	249:6	57:21	255:1
220:4	leads 130:17	154:16	lie 233:11	list 93:15	250:16	103:13	258:3
largely 92:19	lean 160:25	160:25	lieu 97:9	101:2	252:18	114:22	262:19
larger 75:9	learn 40:12	164:1	life 6:17	103:22	lived 6:16	118:18	lots 63:23
largest 38:14	53:20	221:16	136:4	111:25	166:22	135:7	151:3
	62:17	228:5	158:20	164:19	175:21	147:16	224:21

229:16	253:4,12	162:21	244:14	Maria 1:8	245:19	55:20,21	116:15
lotteries	259:1	210:7	major 51:21	23:20	matter 27:11	77:19 80:4	153:17
139:21	Lottery-ba...	machine-sc...	130:10	263:9	72:22	96:19	154:7
155:8	169:11	62:11	222:15	Mark 1:11	73:15	168:3	Melinda
156:8	Lou 196:4	Madam 3:21	224:19	104:14	128:10	188:13	37:18
191:25	love 68:23	4:1 12:7	majority	208:3	131:15	189:16,20	member
lottery 8:16	196:4,20	18:20 19:2	85:16	235:10	146:22,22	232:6	48:23
28:17	loved 160:19	48:19 49:3	119:23	Marquita	146:23,24	249:8	49:12 82:7
29:12	loves 217:11	50:7 94:14	214:21	208:17,22	164:3,3,4,5	265:20	231:10
32:11 33:2	217:11	Maggie	215:18	213:22	168:1	meant 41:25	members
33:8 34:5,8	low 57:9	229:25	221:15	Martin 88:9	174:7	measure 16:7	2:24 5:11
45:5 52:12	64:18	230:3,13,16	222:5	196:5	192:20	16:8,9,10	5:15 12:14
55:22,24	187:20	257:2,5,8	making 29:5	250:14	199:24	69:22 79:4	19:4 23:24
58:15,17	228:25	magnet 7:20	47:7 64:10	Mary 165:4	243:18	183:19	49:5,9
59:17	248:25	11:10	66:1 92:7	172:10,15	265:5	211:8	83:15 90:4
72:15	low-income	76:24	99:1 108:4	173:4	mattered	219:23	93:11
98:20,23	197:16,19	115:8	112:4	massive	155:3	220:2,10,10	94:25 95:6
99:6	lowering	118:18	123:18	21:17	matters	measured	95:8,16
114:17,20	200:21	119:12,13	154:2	262:20	222:5	228:11	96:12 97:6
114:22	223:20,22	119:22,24	182:10	massively	maximally	measurement	113:25
115:15	232:3	130:18	184:25	188:17	43:6 47:12	42:12	116:7,8
139:10,14	lowest 121:21	131:1	249:21	Masterman	maximize	45:19 53:5	117:9
139:16,22	187:17	136:22	256:11	13:11	96:15	63:5	136:3
140:2,6	luck 248:25	137:22	Malachy	23:12	Mayor 113:9	measures	152:25
141:4,9,15	250:22	141:11	35:25	27:15 35:2	113:25	59:24	172:22
141:24	lucky 189:17	159:8,21	man 157:21	66:8,10	mayors	170:8	217:18
142:7	245:25	161:9,17,24	158:19	76:17	160:12	218:16	264:8
143:23	Luther 88:9	162:24	manage	120:1,14,18	McCarthy	medical	membership
146:3	196:5	163:20,24	190:25	137:4	5:25 23:8	165:20	244:13
148:11	250:14	164:10,13	259:3	138:14	61:11,13	166:6	men 166:3
150:12,21	Lynch 83:5,7	164:18	managed	148:19	68:3	168:24	mental
155:4	83:10 90:1	165:23	57:19	153:3	McMichael	meet 72:14	153:21
170:13	90:2,5	168:4	managing	155:15,21	35:22	95:21	192:15
191:24	92:12	182:1,5	105:20	156:10,12	McRovian	104:24	mention
195:1	94:13,17	185:16	Mandarin	160:3	216:17	121:9	209:14
199:15	97:25	195:4	246:22	161:2	mean 42:16	132:12	mentioned
200:8,24	102:17	197:24	247:5	194:9,13	46:14	136:8,17,22	23:23
202:3	105:3	200:19	mandated	200:4	77:19	157:5	33:15
214:16,19	106:8	201:8	79:12	202:11	107:12,14	200:13	53:14
215:15	108:1,22	217:12	Mandela	213:1	108:11	202:20	101:1
218:6	110:7	221:19,24	197:2	223:10,23	119:16	241:3,4	103:14
220:14	115:20	222:2,4,13	manifests	227:13,15	193:5	meeting 2:11	122:21
221:7	120:5,24	231:18	87:21	227:17	217:11	5:3,8 22:6	218:4
225:5	121:3	233:12	manipulated	match 198:17	252:1	24:16	mercilessly
226:6	123:5	234:10	192:3	matches	meaning	82:17	167:4
228:4,11	124:16	magnitude	Mansion	35:13	232:2	93:13	Meredith
232:5,13	125:22	56:21	152:2	materials	249:1	96:10	234:16
239:23,24	126:24	maintain	manual 199:3	77:8	meaningful	117:22,24	merely 154:2
239:25	127:9	171:5	Marc 235:3,7	math 56:12	66:21	154:8	merit 198:12
240:1,2,17	145:16	192:10	239:5	64:14,16	73:20	185:24	200:1
240:21		200:2	March 79:24	219:25	113:21	230:5	218:7,15
241:20	M	245:5	marginalized	228:24	153:12	meetings	225:12
249:1	machine	maintaining	84:13 87:9	matriculati...	171:3,4	93:7,11	243:21
252:16	38:23	192:15	134:9	87:4	means 55:19	94:24 95:5	merit- 200:14

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 20

merits 29:20	29:6 31:21	258:23	modeling	5:21 19:3	108:12,13	217:5	42:17
107:3	55:13 87:5	ministers	54:5	23:16,19	123:19	223:3,8	67:18
200:21	96:18,22,25	207:7	models 42:14	36:25 37:4	151:11	230:14	68:17 73:4
202:2	99:10,23	minorities	81:4	50:22	much-needed	231:4,7	73:7,9
mess 241:19	103:17	119:21	modest 28:18	61:14 74:3	152:6	235:7,9	80:20
message	106:17	minority	Modesto	83:15 90:3	multi-dime...	239:11,13	87:16
132:14	107:19	119:25	205:2	90:3 93:16	60:25	239:14	88:21
199:22	108:14	minute 48:13	206:4	128:4	multi-facto...	242:3,6	96:17
met 71:21	115:3	153:12	modificatio...	138:7	170:14	246:15	103:5
101:3	120:13,17	minutes	137:11	142:17,18	multiple	247:2,3,8	120:22
105:8	125:16	20:16 52:8	Mom 175:2	153:1,22	210:24	251:3	126:11
232:7	129:19	93:19	248:16	155:15	murder	257:2,8	138:15
method 38:16	131:12	117:22	moment	164:24	93:25	name's 194:3	139:25
91:7	132:9	155:1	113:15	182:22	murdered	named 96:23	140:18
methods	133:2,14	205:5	151:22	194:2	158:22	215:19	148:8
60:19	134:8	230:9	193:5	206:24	murders	names 83:1	152:7,7
metric 59:6	136:21	258:17	212:6	217:4	84:15	205:17	154:5
metrics 171:3	139:6	Miriam	247:22	morning's	mute 58:11	narrative	158:3
MI 40:18,25	143:13	142:13	Mommom	22:8	75:2 92:11	46:8	170:23,25
41:17,19,20	148:20	147:23,24	212:16	mother 101:5	94:11	155:20	171:1,2
42:4,12,15	150:8	147:25	Mona 57:8	160:8	muted 58:9	Natalie 75:2	177:22
42:16,22	154:16	148:5	money 55:3	165:22	102:12,15	193:22	184:19
44:10	156:2	152:11	114:25	166:19	152:19,23	203:4,9	185:13
45:10,22	160:3	misalignment	202:15	180:13	181:6,8	258:2	188:25
46:18	161:12,15	87:19	241:14	195:12	myriad	nation 196:7	190:4,15
47:18	161:18	miscommu...	monitoring	203:21	171:10	201:20	193:6
67:21	164:14	30:2	117:15	247:11	208:3	250:16	200:23
209:20,21	189:3,4	mishaps 30:3	monster	249:12		national 84:6	205:5,11
210:3,14	214:7,11,15	mismanage...	158:14	251:17,21	N	93:24	207:19
211:6,8	215:14,25	141:6	monsters	256:6	N 265:1	166:5	215:21
213:8,9	218:14,20	mispronou...	158:16	mouth	name 3:1	nationally	219:10,12
216:8	220:18,20	65:6	159:16	234:25	24:2 37:7	45:12	221:24,24
217:22	245:17	misrepres...	month 71:11	move 17:12	39:6 48:6	native 199:10	229:13
218:4	257:14	231:22	117:21	28:4 32:16	50:24 65:7	nativism	239:22
258:11	258:13	missed 58:24	monthly	32:17	90:4 103:6	156:22	251:16
259:1	midst 86:11	142:7	117:9	54:23	127:25	natural 38:20	256:7,8
Michael	246:2	mission 84:5	months 19:8	55:22,23	138:5,8	75:5	258:24
181:3	254:24	85:23	34:10	64:25	142:15,18	navigate	263:25
193:21,23	Miller 204:19	86:17	86:11	82:25	148:1,5	70:14	needed 56:23
194:3	million 227:6	missions	100:5	101:20	152:13	nearly 97:15	86:20
203:3	mimicked	155:11	112:4	103:3	153:1	102:17,22	130:12
223:1,2,9	236:15	mistakes 18:2	192:17	192:11	157:13,15	211:16	141:15
229:24	mind 149:23	62:18	moral 35:11	194:10	167:6	necessary	144:11
microphone	197:11	139:24	morale 259:4	205:14	172:12	79:13	176:4
58:9 92:13	230:7	Mitchell	Morales	225:3	181:4,9,16	104:23	245:1,2
152:19	minded	204:20	193:22	227:17,19	186:5,8	148:10	needless
microphones	226:23	217:1,2,5	203:4,8,9	240:19	193:24	169:15	238:18
152:22	minds 179:7	222:25	204:5	moved 97:21	202:9	176:14	needs 12:17
Microsoft 1:4	179:19	mitigate	morality	movement	203:6,9	need 12:19	13:13,14,15
2:12 5:15	196:19,24	228:10	249:19	73:15	206:11	13:19	13:16 17:7
mid 228:25	minimize	model 20:18	morals 179:6	movements	208:18,21	18:18	53:11
middle 4:22	73:5	54:8,19	morning 2:3	83:25	213:11,25	20:20	72:25
6:19 24:15	minimum	64:3 229:8	3:9,9,14,17	moves 101:22	214:3	21:19,20	80:25
24:19,22,23	228:13	229:9	3:21 4:1,9	moving	216:18	26:25 34:7	122:22

123:12,15	9:15 13:18	264:20	109:13	nurturing	146:15	120:24	151:2
146:5,18	14:2 20:25	newly 4:20	126:5	249:19	162:8	126:6	180:4
157:5	25:1 28:16	130:19	128:13		168:6	138:7	237:6
183:13	29:25 31:2	Newman	152:18	O	181:25	152:25	opened 70:22
185:8,9	33:14 40:4	204:20	noted 66:12	O 265:1	offered 107:9	172:19	opening 6:3,7
190:10,14	49:1 53:12	News 2:19	98:13	o'clock 230:5	office 105:9	177:20	12:4,10
190:23	57:18 58:2	newspaper	151:8	object 182:17	227:7	181:9,12	18:24 28:8
221:22	62:18	160:10	237:21	objecting	officer	203:8	29:23
228:21	65:24	night 194:22	265:3	233:5	128:23	230:18,24	48:16
229:2	66:19,24	259:17	notes 75:20	objection	official 75:23	239:10,13	131:18
251:25	72:10	nine 98:1	265:4	232:25	officials	241:23	206:25
254:5,6	76:21	113:10	noticed 70:7	233:2	128:6	242:20	207:4
negative 81:6	77:11,14	114:2	124:5	objections	134:15	246:21	operationally
99:13,14	79:5 90:14	116:7	233:4	233:8	172:24	247:3	55:19
negatively	90:16	Nodded 37:2	notices 2:18	objective	176:17	257:7	opinion 46:8
259:24	91:13	50:21 74:6	notification	262:11	officio 49:12	old 13:19	116:4
Negro 197:10	98:21,24	Nogales 65:6	131:2	objectivity	Ogontz 243:3	227:23	opinions
Neha 157:12	99:2,7	noise 92:8	notified 21:9	38:17	oh 1:10 3:7,8	248:10	93:14
neighbor	105:1	102:10	novel 51:7	obligation	6:2,5,6,9	oldest 138:10	opportunities
71:8	110:3	nominated	November	28:1 78:3	12:2 13:25	247:8,17	10:13 18:1
neighborho...	129:14	129:3	32:6	observed	23:24	once 56:13	18:3,4 27:1
6:21 10:11	134:6	non-English	237:13	188:16	48:21 49:4	97:20	75:25
35:4 76:7	136:23	156:16	258:14	obstacles	50:8 58:8	123:4	92:17
114:23	138:17	non-numer...	nuance	67:6 69:14	68:14 82:6	143:3	96:15
125:14	140:23	60:19	190:13	obtain 70:25	82:9,10	204:6	119:19
126:21	141:3,21	nonbullying	220:2	116:18	83:18	205:15	121:11
151:18	150:25	215:5	nuances 88:8	249:21	102:8,18	250:14	154:14
159:2	156:23	noncriteria	number 13:2	obtained	104:13	one-and-do...	167:21
170:24	164:11	98:18	17:1,3 27:4	94:6,19	108:20	79:14	168:19
201:25	167:13	nonprofit	42:18 43:2	obviously 8:7	109:3	one-bedroom	170:21
216:2	177:18	51:3	44:2 47:17	70:3 71:13	112:15	166:22	175:19
232:20	184:9	nonsense	56:4 62:9	248:23	118:11	one-day	210:21
neighborho...	185:2,14	44:14	63:11 77:8	occupants	120:9	58:20	opportunity
20:5,15	194:6	nonstandard	107:18,22	89:14	121:2,23	ones 69:14	9:17 10:9
154:17	197:25	63:1	108:24	occur 132:23	130:24	162:24	11:2,14
197:15	198:19	nontranspa...	115:24	occurred	134:17	163:2,4	22:18,18
neighbors	199:4	245:9	122:4,8	131:6,17	145:7	ongoing 18:6	31:4 35:8
160:19	200:10	norm 45:24	137:6,16,19	153:25	152:16	66:8 86:12	36:8,12
196:22	202:5	normal 150:3	148:24	occurring	158:6,9	117:15	49:11
neither 10:25	209:8	normed	177:10	141:7	172:20	171:13	65:23
Nelson 197:2	215:13,23	45:12	189:6	occurs 97:19	207:1	192:24	66:22
neuroatypi...	216:1	norms 85:7	227:9	97:20	208:1,9	online 28:10	73:14,18,20
191:17	218:5	Norris 243:5	229:18	October 21:4	217:15	29:13 30:5	75:8 77:21
neurodiverse	226:24	North 35:20	252:6	24:9 35:9	230:1	30:24	78:4 82:1
64:4	227:25	158:19	numbers	131:6	231:24	31:18 32:7	83:17
never 42:9	228:10	160:8	56:2 76:5,8	134:4	257:1	32:11	85:12,20
62:13	231:21,25	251:15,23	76:21 85:2	221:4	260:15,19	69:19,22	89:22 93:9
131:23	234:7	Northeast	164:2	off-topic	263:21	92:6 97:22	93:12
132:14	245:10	197:18	numerical	44:13	264:18	open 9:12	95:10
149:23	252:2	Notary	56:12	offended	okay 37:3	21:2 82:6	103:25
161:2	253:12	265:12	numerous	162:10	43:7 71:25	104:18	104:4,10
162:16	258:25	note 2:22	187:21,24	offer 2:15	83:6 92:12	129:14	106:10
199:6	259:25	5:13 49:21	nurture	37:5 61:3	107:11	136:16	124:19,25
new 7:17,21	262:8	93:5	255:21	80:5	108:10	146:20	126:22

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 22

128:9	84:20	81:22	pandemic	145:14	153:13,17	145:21	35:2 118:1
134:13	85:23 94:2	185:15	69:18	148:6	154:2	147:1	155:25
136:25	128:14	overarching	86:12	153:2	160:4	168:12	174:9
137:18	organize	153:9	92:20	173:13	161:11,14	177:5	pass 34:12
147:19	134:1	overcame	144:8	176:12	167:2	179:22	259:18
150:25	organizer	209:11	150:1	178:9	168:16	183:4	pass-fail 53:4
159:8,24	128:12	overcrowded	177:17,20	190:7	173:1	187:24	passed
160:9	organizing	227:14	179:9	194:7,8	174:16	188:8	195:18
165:12	217:15	overhaul	192:24	196:18	176:7,16,23	216:6	263:15
172:2,5	orientation	21:20	226:18	215:6,14	178:18	243:25	passion 90:21
174:4,12	129:14	130:9	227:9	221:22	192:7	partiality	91:1
175:10,23	originating	overhauled	253:23	223:9	194:5	86:23	118:16
176:10	54:15	120:23	254:25	231:8	195:11	participants	169:3
180:17	ostracized	overhearing	panel 5:21,23	235:10	196:1	5:6	180:12
181:14,24	167:4	248:4	6:7 23:5	254:13	197:13	participate	261:2
195:12	outcome	overlook	82:8,25	255:19	198:6,21	12:12 88:3	264:13
222:3,11	10:25	169:12	83:2,3,7	256:3	202:18	95:10	passionate
251:8	138:22	overlooked	109:21	257:9	214:18,21	199:7	101:7
256:14	169:9	20:6	122:17	259:10	216:4	202:25	passionately
262:18	177:3	overseas	127:14,20	parents 6:12	221:17	participated	109:10
oppose	261:24	235:15	127:22	6:22 9:21	222:6	98:20	180:16
223:10	outcomes	oversee	175:8	10:4,16	228:18	194:19	path 24:19
opposing	40:18	176:21	180:7	11:14	231:10	234:1	55:9 56:14
194:5	112:11	overseeing	201:14	12:14 14:6	233:8	263:18	100:15
opposite	outcry 34:5	168:22	panelists 4:2	14:10 21:8	234:20	participating	168:6
169:8	86:13	oversight	29:21 36:7	27:14,21	237:4	24:15	pathway
optics 66:21	222:8	132:25	128:7	32:2 49:9	246:6	138:18	222:2
73:19	225:23	133:16	165:7	65:23	248:13	185:25	patients
option	outgoing	overstatem...	172:23	70:24	252:7	participation	165:25
139:11	207:17	238:16	panic 258:15	74:13,14,15	253:1,7,19	217:19	patronizing
158:16	outlined	overtook	paper 97:21	77:20	254:2,11	222:23	154:24
159:20	77:15	160:24	209:21	90:15 97:5	255:15	particular	patterns
options 54:25	134:25	overwhelm...	210:4	100:6,10,13	257:24	13:7,9,11	88:14
55:9 61:2	153:5	233:15	213:8	101:2	258:3,8	64:25	pause 21:1
74:23 75:9	outlining	owed 89:3	parent 14:17	105:14	259:16	68:25	31:14 73:7
75:10,14	77:9	owners	23:11 24:7	114:11,13	260:4,23	155:7	110:4
98:9	outpouring	160:12	26:5 36:17	118:3	parents'	170:12	140:23
110:19	260:21	Oxford	50:25	125:5,10,14	250:12	176:5	156:7,23
112:5	outrage	160:17	61:16	125:19	252:17	226:1	185:7
168:4	131:11		65:14 66:2	126:11	255:2	253:21	212:6
order 4:12	outreach	P	70:7,10,13	128:12,14	Park 20:13	particularly	213:15
5:17 13:20	124:13,16	p.m 131:6,7	70:16	129:4,16	Parkway	12:25	260:1
59:18 60:4	outside 18:5	264:22	71:24	130:6	99:9,23	17:10	paused
86:7 91:22	79:22 89:9	page 124:23	78:25 90:9	131:9,12	119:5,14	62:14	257:21
114:17	91:10	paid 195:23	93:17	132:4	120:21	76:24	262:15
125:5	112:5	234:5	128:9,18	133:4,25	154:6	79:19 81:7	pay 240:7,10
189:5	115:5,7	Palmer 165:4	129:6,10	134:2,14	part 30:13	191:10,14	241:13
205:25	outspoken	172:11,14	130:2	135:5,13	37:21 41:9	partnered	249:18
220:17	207:14	172:15,19	131:2,14	137:3	41:20	129:8	paying 49:2
224:24	outstanding	173:5	132:16	139:2,23	91:15 99:8	partnering	125:11,21
257:21	244:6	Palumbo	133:15,20	149:19	100:6	135:12	127:6
259:20	247:21	76:17	139:19	150:14,18	112:24	partners	178:19
orders 56:21	overall 76:9	118:23	140:19	150:23	126:22	152:8	234:4
organization	76:11,14,15	119:15	144:17	151:4,23,24	144:16	parts 9:2	PCAC

144:17	263:2	184:16	Pew 91:20	174:1	225:11	228:14	79:13
peers 131:25	people's	223:24	92:2,16	175:21,24	picking 146:6	planet 211:19	112:24
183:21	208:5	242:25	98:15	178:21	pickle 224:17	planned	116:5,20
238:14	perceived	performing	102:21	181:19	picture	140:9,13	142:5,8
peers' 128:21	156:21	27:5 76:4	phase 97:14	182:2	211:12	planning	145:5
PEG 210:6	percent	78:5	102:2	184:21	pie 27:8,9,12	73:1	187:5
210:12	24:25 25:3	187:17	Philadelphia	185:1,12	34:22,23	115:13	188:15
penalized	25:7,7,8,8	200:3	1:1 6:13,15	208:22	piece 89:8	plans 78:8	190:22
68:25	28:21,23	period 158:4	8:24,25 9:1	209:2	191:20	130:22	191:6,19,25
210:14	39:4 53:3	204:24	9:2,25 11:6	217:13	212:8	planting	203:20
Pennsylvania	58:2,6,16	205:23	11:16	219:4	pieces 34:21	196:20	215:6,11
10:2 24:5	58:17	permitted	12:24	221:13,14	46:9	platform	220:19
113:3	69:15	190:19	13:22 17:3	221:17	pike 124:12	171:22	223:18,19
173:7	75:24	perpetrated	17:23 19:5	222:10,15	pile 153:22	plausible	241:21
217:8	76:13,14,16	perpetrated	19:16 24:8	222:18	pillars 89:18	53:13	pointed
229:19	76:17,18	perpetuated	35:6,21,23	227:8	pilot 182:10	play 188:25	103:1,19
people 9:14	81:22	26:12	40:20	228:21,23	184:2	223:14	points 51:24
11:1,19,20	90:22	person 58:1	50:18	229:7	pipeline	240:2	61:25
16:4,5	118:20,20	58:14,18,24	61:22	239:19	31:23	played 17:20	137:9
17:24	118:21,21	59:16	65:15	240:8,8,12	pits 33:19	187:1	209:14
26:25 60:4	118:22,24	93:14 96:2	68:19	242:9,10	pivotal	playing	234:13
106:11	118:25	107:2	71:15 72:1	243:4	174:6	183:16	polarizing
107:19,24	119:1,2,3,4	139:16	73:17	251:15,20	175:12	233:17	31:2
109:25	119:4,6,6,7	151:18	74:11,18,21	251:23	place 19:18	please 2:23	policies 26:21
110:2	119:9,10	203:4	75:9,22	252:13	21:22 60:6	2:25 3:2,5	27:22
112:18	120:21	211:18	77:6,17	255:7	106:13	4:15 5:20	29:20
113:5,10,12	140:12	212:14	78:2 81:1	257:11	107:13	23:16 48:6	33:21 60:5
113:16	207:10	240:22	81:24	Philadelphi...	122:24	58:11 74:1	84:21 95:4
114:18,21	212:12	255:24	83:23 84:9	29:3 66:15	123:2	75:2 81:20	105:24
115:1,1	224:1,3,6	person's	85:25 90:7	73:11	130:20,25	94:11,11	policy 15:3
118:6	225:4,9,18	16:11 60:1	90:18,23	98:22,25	144:3	102:14	29:18 30:8
126:4	226:2,5,7	personal 52:5	91:6	229:14	145:10	128:13	30:12,14,18
127:19	226:12	65:18	101:21	233:12,13	160:17	137:1	34:9 49:1
153:6	228:3,4	165:18	110:15	Philadelphi...	185:10	141:20,25	60:10 79:5
177:10	243:7,8	personally	112:6,25	157:16	225:21	142:1,8	81:9 87:20
179:9	percentage	23:14	115:8	Philadelphi...	249:16	145:8	96:11,20
186:19	156:5	129:22	116:17,18	172:4	placement	148:17	105:1
190:2	percentile 7:4	195:7	119:24	Philip 231:9	39:21	150:24	106:7
192:14	45:21,22,23	personnel	126:9	Philly 51:3	43:24,24	157:12	107:13
207:11	percentiles	30:22	132:19,21	158:19	places 133:17	172:12,18	116:12
221:15	45:9	31:24	133:9	160:9	159:23	213:17	132:15,23
227:10	perception	perspective	136:19	163:12	162:20	223:3	133:7,19
231:23	96:18	74:9 107:3	138:9	197:17	221:9	228:9	135:22
232:19	149:11	181:16	142:24	PHLCounc...	plan 19:18,21	242:19	149:17,20
233:3,18,22	perfect 11:8	250:3	143:3	2:21	73:10 77:4	250:19	154:12
234:22	224:15	251:13	144:22	phone 6:11	77:5 79:10	plenty 262:10	176:24
239:23	perfectly	perspectives	146:21	131:7	140:21	plight 246:1	185:15,20
240:11,11	199:10	165:18	147:5,10	188:24	151:4	plummeting	185:23
240:12,22	perform	perverse	156:19	physician	163:16	13:12	195:9
251:11	199:17	221:1	165:19	165:20	195:20	16:23 17:1	200:10
253:5	203:17	petition	166:4	physicians	224:22,25	17:3	202:6
260:23	performance	153:6	167:25	51:5	225:4	Plus 220:1	203:13
261:6,16	44:21 46:6	petitioning	172:25	pick 57:11	227:3	point 41:2	209:8
262:21	72:18	231:17	173:6,9,16	198:17	228:1,2,9	55:1 60:17	214:9

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 24

215:5,24	possibility	130:20	167:16	press 87:12	principals	privately	proceed
216:2	44:12	135:14	Prep 11:3	pressing	97:5 99:16	177:11	23:16
219:3	53:24	practicing	prepare	19:22	104:24	privilege	36:23 48:7
225:20	possible 2:13	165:20	35:14	103:4	105:4,12,15	15:8 70:17	61:11 74:2
228:11	53:17	praised 25:17	62:17	pressure	105:17,19	84:23,25	127:25
231:16,21	147:17	99:24	162:14	248:1	105:21	100:11	138:6
231:25	216:14	precedent	prepared	prestigious	125:25	132:5	142:16
232:25	possibly 33:9	39:19	26:1 176:7	168:23	141:8	151:19	148:2
233:16	59:7	precious	221:23	172:23	149:10,13	155:17	152:14
policymakers	potential	179:18	preparing	pretend	149:18,22	233:16	157:14
27:20	16:9 67:14	180:6	182:13	154:23	215:9	250:23	165:2
politely	170:6	precise 220:6	221:21	pretended	225:10	privileged	172:13,18
145:17	183:18	predict 177:3	prerequisites	244:24	226:8,9	15:23 26:3	181:5
politicians	211:9	predictable	242:24	pretest 54:17	228:5,7	70:13	186:6
176:17	250:5	112:22	presence	pretty 119:17	254:15	232:25	193:25
poll 28:22	potentially	predicted	179:17	prevent	principle	233:8	203:6
polling 15:6	56:16	153:24	present 1:7	123:22	199:25	234:11	206:11
pool 87:8	193:16	predictions	1:12 3:1,8	179:19	218:7	probably	208:19
poor 6:20	253:16	47:8	3:10,14,17	previous	prior 2:20	117:25	213:25
199:16	poverty	predictive	3:22 4:2,9	69:12	5:10 72:13	203:25	216:19
219:3	160:19	45:1	4:10 49:22	131:21	99:5 132:1	224:2	223:4
221:20	161:4	predictor	69:21 74:8	previously	154:9	problem 9:9	230:15
234:21	163:3	55:14	136:13	39:16	155:13	19:7 62:22	231:5
248:24	167:23	184:15,17	166:25	98:10	156:6	114:6	235:8
249:7,8	Powell	predictors	206:4	144:6	181:21	143:9,10	239:11
poorly 73:18	143:15	38:1	230:17,21	146:3	priorities	152:3	242:19
153:19	power 16:10	predomina...	230:23	175:18	100:21	204:4	246:15
population	84:23	111:8	262:1	pride 130:6	prioritizati...	218:8	247:2
45:13	85:21	preferable	presentation	primarily	19:23	219:13	257:6
54:18	188:19	44:1	85:18	15:10	20:18	234:14	proceedings
75:21	196:25	preference	245:21	120:1	125:1,2	238:18	265:3
76:10,14,15	202:5	20:10	presented	125:13	171:14	262:16	proceeds
81:1,22	261:18	98:19,21	131:24	primary	prioritize	problematic	107:20
119:23	powerful	103:11,12	146:13	75:17	34:6	47:25	process 4:21
136:5	82:12	122:3	261:10	100:14	188:12	51:14	7:17,21
168:25	197:3	137:17	presenting	principal	prioritizes	217:24	9:15 10:15
243:10	practice 15:3	149:7	112:7	24:16	73:19	problems	10:25
244:4	40:15,15	214:8	presently	99:23	prioritizing	57:16 67:8	13:23 14:2
portrayed	43:3 53:16	218:10	173:17	129:9,17	66:21	69:21	14:3 15:12
232:1	53:20	220:17	preserve	131:11	priority 17:7	150:17	15:13
pose 109:17	85:14	221:7	60:17	132:14,25	124:21	152:9	19:20 21:1
posed 87:13	132:13,22	234:15	preserving	133:11,13	141:3,5,16	153:4,25	21:6,10,19
position	133:14,18	preferences	59:3	149:4,20	161:23	182:21	23:1,15
100:16	137:2	29:16 33:4	President	181:15,17	162:1	216:1	24:12
110:4	189:13	preferred	23:22	181:20,21	184:23	218:11	28:12,23
112:13	210:15	87:3	25:16	182:3	privacy 5:7	224:16	29:18,22
133:17	236:11	164:19	129:2,8,21	183:7	private 112:9	225:2	30:1 31:2
209:21	practiced	221:2	129:23	184:20	114:24	262:9,15	31:16,25
212:17	135:17	preferring	130:3	214:6	115:7	procedure	32:1,24
224:18	189:19	209:4	133:16	225:17	151:10	96:20	33:11,15
245:22	practices	preinserted	173:8	226:11	152:20	procedures	37:22 38:9
positions	34:10	16:7	244:5,10	243:12,12	168:3	94:4 95:5	41:10
52:1	84:22 94:4	prejudice	presiding	244:14	173:20	118:4	57:18
128:22	95:3,11	146:6	173:8	245:16	175:25	136:2	65:25

66:20,24	127:4,5	245:9	182:10,25	prompt 44:18	proud 7:7	233:7	pulled 159:1
67:8,9 69:9	128:15	246:3,3	183:3	46:3,7,10	128:17	PTSD 191:16	pulling
70:12	129:13	251:25	184:3	46:23	148:6	public 2:4,6,9	229:12
71:10,22,25	134:4,7,8	252:3,8	195:4	189:8	153:2	2:14,15,16	punctuation
72:4,10	135:2,8,19	253:17,20	197:24	209:25	173:24	2:17 4:12	237:1,22
73:5,8,19	136:15,21	254:9,16	214:11	promptly	174:2	4:18 5:4,6	punished
74:10 77:6	136:24	255:17,22	programs	168:17	178:9,9,17	6:17 12:8	219:20
77:7,9,11	137:8	256:13	10:12	prompts	180:13	14:15	purpose 5:19
77:12,13,14	138:17,21	257:18,20	24:17	42:18,20,21	194:8	28:19	135:24
77:25 78:9	138:23	258:25	182:23,24	43:2 44:2	242:7	30:23 31:4	purposeful
78:11,22,24	139:3,12	259:25	201:22	44:14	proved	32:20 34:5	15:3 70:20
79:6 83:20	140:23	262:3,4,8	251:14	45:15	153:24	34:11 36:9	purposes
85:12,13	141:4,22	262:13	progress	46:22	proverbial	36:17	49:25
87:23 88:4	142:9	263:3,4	117:16	188:11,17	166:21	65:16 66:4	182:25
88:13,24	145:9,10,19	processes	210:25	188:18,21	provide	66:16	pursue 118:8
91:4,13,17	146:19	31:20	211:5,23	189:1,11,18	10:16,18	73:16	250:20
91:18,18,19	148:15	84:22 94:3	progression	236:7,12	11:15 31:4	75:23	purview 69:7
91:22	150:21	106:14	75:6	pronounced	35:7 74:12	81:23 84:2	push 86:19
92:15,23	153:5	118:3	project	221:25	78:3 95:11	85:25 90:4	pushed
93:22	156:24	136:1	154:11	properties	104:9	93:7,12	188:14
94:20,23	157:4	produce	prominent	240:6	159:24	94:24 95:9	214:23
95:8,24	163:24	196:21	86:21	property	174:19	96:10	253:11,16
97:2,8,12	164:11	produces	promise	89:14	196:15	106:21	put 9:15
97:14,17,17	165:13	45:11	149:9	proposal	210:21	112:8	21:21
97:21,22,23	168:11	producing	161:9	49:8 201:3	222:2	150:21	51:23
97:25	169:6,18,25	188:2	176:11	214:22	255:20	154:5,8,8	109:6
98:13,23,25	175:13	production	189:14	215:2	provided	154:10	111:25
99:1,3,9,19	176:1,6	188:6	224:9,9	proposals	18:5 53:19	155:1	114:3
100:9,22	178:2,3,17	professional	promised	245:10,12	79:12,15,17	167:7,8,11	126:8
101:8	178:24	61:16	164:16	245:13	80:18	167:18	143:4,20
102:5,20,24	180:3	162:9	promises	propose	100:2	169:1	157:25
103:5,10,12	182:2,6,9,9	166:15	70:25	224:14,25	134:22	172:3	177:23
104:1	182:14,19	168:24	71:12	proposed	195:21	173:17	185:10
105:1	183:4	193:12	96:21	4:21 16:1	253:19	178:15	195:1
106:10,15	184:1,6,9	240:22	161:10,18	31:5 134:5	provides	185:3,23	224:18
106:20	184:25	257:12	161:19	182:18	11:13	202:7	225:25
107:14	185:2,8,17	professor	223:17	185:7	40:25	204:23	236:16
110:1,3,4	186:20	37:9 51:12	228:17	213:16	43:10	205:6,15,20	248:5
110:11,11	187:4	53:5,25	promising	245:4	211:11	205:22	puts 25:23
110:17,21	191:22	61:19	57:13	protect	providing	217:12	203:15
110:22,23	193:10	65:11	promote	116:23	10:12	222:13	putting 10:2
110:24	194:6	186:10	40:14	158:17	22:17	231:11	19:18
111:6,11,12	198:1,19	217:6,19	126:1	255:20	65:22	241:15	158:15
111:17	199:4,7,25	proficiency	129:6,16	protected	210:2	255:7	212:17
112:20,21	202:19,21	156:15	133:20	208:7	254:10	265:12	
112:22	202:23	212:12	135:24	protecting	provoked	publicly 77:8	Q
113:8	212:4,9	228:24,25	157:4	179:7	167:17	177:11	Q&A 12:12
115:19	218:6,23,25	program 8:4	245:5	protective	proxy 67:4	238:13	qualification
117:1,8	219:3	8:7 24:22	promoted	79:4	169:7	publish 166:4	200:22
120:4	221:4	28:20	133:18	protest	PSSA 37:24	published	qualificatio...
121:8	233:21	40:20,21	promoting	248:12,14	45:25	2:18 37:13	121:9,15,21
123:9,24	237:6	61:21	129:12	protesting	92:24	45:18	qualified
124:8	238:22,23	92:15	133:7	233:18	93:21	51:11	87:8
125:21	242:15	145:2,21,22	165:14	234:20	97:10 98:7	209:20	199:20

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 26

201:6,23	36:11 82:7	139:13	Ramji- 65:5	reaction	153:8	162:7	223:3
232:6,6,12	82:14,18,24	140:16	Ramji-Nog...	231:20	154:20,24	244:21	230:14
232:18	85:10	210:5	23:9 65:8	read 4:15	156:14	258:23	231:5
234:22	87:18	259:3	65:10	16:13 83:1	190:12	recess 205:18	232:11
qualify 58:16	104:19	quoted 67:23	ramroded	205:16	192:22	recognition	235:7
59:17	108:19,21		153:10	259:8	204:6	124:20	242:4
198:12	109:4,17	R	ran 138:23	reader 44:10	235:22	recognize	245:6
200:9,19	122:12,17	R 265:1	random	readily 92:5	239:18	49:16 57:8	recorded 5:5
201:9	122:20	race 39:6	150:19	92:6 176:7	240:20	57:9 82:5	5:9
226:4	127:12	68:22	randomness	reading	241:6,19,21	109:9	records
quality 34:24	138:20	72:16	15:16,16,18	24:18	252:11,16	123:25	201:13
42:8 43:5	142:4	122:6	15:18,19	52:18	252:24	170:4	recruiting
43:13	192:20	168:1	range 51:11	143:23	253:24	recognized	166:7
87:10	204:23	198:2	56:7 61:6	219:25	254:23,23	5:16 25:15	redesign
117:5	216:13	199:17	68:21	228:24	254:25	124:10	85:13
126:17	245:24	200:11	rank 59:18	reads 43:10	255:1	recognizes	154:6
137:19	252:18	241:1	60:4	ready 86:2	259:15	6:6 12:3	reduce 166:2
162:7	253:18	race-based	201:19	138:5	reapply	18:23 38:3	reduces
171:6	256:2,21	28:20	220:17	164:23	140:19	48:14	38:18
172:3	260:13	races 222:6	ranked 10:1	169:14	149:8	recognizing	reducing
200:3	264:8	racial 22:11	71:2,3	171:17	reason 99:20	5:11 22:11	47:13
202:2	quick 104:18	68:15 72:6	139:9	205:17	119:13	recommend	reeling 9:14
240:18	quickly 49:8	86:12	ranking	207:14	120:20	185:6	refer 190:6
241:6,18	55:9	120:25	220:14	real 34:20	255:15	recommen...	reference
quandary	182:20	121:6	223:21	52:5 126:9	reasonable	8:1 243:1	45:25
122:9	225:1	151:19	rankings	149:1	5:7 38:19	243:23	48:25 49:7
quarterly	261:23	155:23	220:14	171:11	39:18	recommen...	85:2 145:1
191:3	263:6	164:4	rapid 40:15	201:14,15	47:16	7:9 92:1	183:11
question 9:22	quiet 162:20	167:3	rapidly	realistically	262:24	reconsider	referenced
13:17 14:1	209:3	186:12	161:22	77:19	reasoning	260:2	130:5
14:14	Quinones-	221:10	rate 69:16	reality	134:23	reconsidered	referred 40:9
25:24	263:9	racially	120:19	159:17	reasons	48:1 78:19	213:8
29:10,19	Quinones-S...	163:18	rated 52:23	160:7	51:13	record 5:13	refining
30:7 34:6	1:8 2:2 4:8	racism 93:25	139:11	163:20	156:9	24:2 48:7	109:24
34:18	4:24 6:4	156:21	rater 38:9,12	realization	182:20,23	49:22	reflect 15:8
56:10	12:1 18:21	racist 26:13	39:2,8 42:1	167:20	210:2	83:21	33:24
87:25	22:4 23:20	95:3	rates 53:1	realize 27:16	223:12	109:13	80:25
102:4	36:15 37:1	135:14	rating 235:18	171:25	reassured	127:25	85:16
104:18	48:4,12	233:1	240:24	207:18	167:14	136:16	136:5
118:17	49:14	radio 157:17	ratings 54:6	212:7	receive 6:24	142:16	reflected
130:17	50:10,20	173:10	rats 212:25	257:18	8:20 44:16	148:1	170:7
149:2	61:9 65:3	177:12	re-elected	realized	117:7	152:14	reflecting
174:23	73:24 74:5	raised 13:8	34:14	167:24	137:19	157:13	19:15
197:13	75:1 82:2	49:17 66:9	re-envision	250:21	188:9	172:13	187:11
200:16	82:22 83:4	68:13	88:16	reallocation	189:17	181:4	reflective
questionable	83:9,12	109:21	re-evaluate	34:21	236:13	186:5,9	20:24
63:5	89:24 92:9	121:25	213:15	really 22:24	238:5	193:25	121:17,19
questioned	94:9,15	138:9	reach 6:14	26:18 33:5	received 6:11	203:6	135:9
95:16	quizzes 64:16	171:11	9:7 101:16	43:17 49:6	93:10	204:17	reform 73:1
132:15	quorum 4:10	raises 56:10	190:24	49:21 61:3	97:11	206:2,11	83:25
questions	quote 25:18	112:23	222:21	61:7 64:19	113:20	208:19	163:13
5:11 19:22	89:5	raising	reached	73:3,9	161:1	213:25	reformed
28:7 32:5	101:10	251:19	177:10	139:18	202:15	216:19	177:19
33:12	134:23	Rally 196:5	196:2	151:20	receiving	221:20	reforms 84:4

refuse 90:15	88:19	255:10	represented	62:23 63:6	respective	64:17	56:14
regard 38:21	released 21:4	reneging	20:12	64:24	45:2	rethink	57:17 59:5
79:7 91:12	84:17	161:10	66:17 76:3	65:12 81:3	respond	229:13	67:8,11
107:7	relevant	renovate	183:8	105:7	175:1	retired	70:2 85:24
111:17	171:16	227:23	197:15	133:25	245:23	181:17	89:17
112:8	reliable 38:8	Rep 106:5	representing	140:8	responding	return	98:21
116:21	47:12	207:5	29:16	166:1	3:3 44:17	113:11	101:11
124:17	211:7	repeat 99:14	74:15	170:25	109:11	227:24	127:4
regarding	reliably 38:4	153:8	165:17	193:11	response 4:5	returned	146:10
4:13 131:3	relied 210:3	repeated	244:4	211:21	24:13	39:3	151:20
168:18	relies 18:16	133:13	represents	261:3	45:14 81:5	190:14	158:8
182:1	remain 104:2	repeats	59:13,14	researched	102:4	237:14	163:12
184:25	remained	219:10	185:5	45:3	118:10	248:15	171:8
regardless	32:5 76:22	repetitive	reproduction	reserved	127:15	revenues	177:8,8
72:16	remaining	62:7	265:20	reservd	251:10	195:22	178:12
95:12	28:22	209:15	reputation	reshuffling	256:19	review 16:13	188:7,21
198:2	141:24	replace 54:24	25:4	36:3	260:11,20	75:19 79:2	189:16,24
199:16	243:8	replaced	request 117:3	reside 110:16	responses	105:13	191:18
200:11	remains	190:4	150:6,12	170:11	63:19	135:3	204:4
regards	137:7	replacement	151:14	resident 91:8	139:13	137:10	217:24
202:6	remarks 12:5	51:22	230:6	132:19	140:15	201:14	239:16
register	12:11	replacing	requests	165:19	146:2,2	reviewed	240:15
191:1	18:25 26:1	141:8	99:21	residents	249:14	76:20	241:7
237:15	28:8 29:23	156:21	148:17	95:12	responsibili...	137:13	254:6
registered	75:18	replicate	260:3	118:2	26:4	164:20	258:20
70:8	207:14	34:25	require 34:10	resolution	responsibili...	177:19	259:25
regulating	remember	reporter	55:18	1:16 2:5	36:2	revise 62:18	260:1,5
80:7	138:18	265:12,22	170:15,16	4:14,16,17	responsible	revised 220:1	261:4,8
regulation	210:7	represent 9:3	171:12	5:22 22:2	212:14	revising	rigorous
79:21	reminded	45:13	required 26:2	23:2 48:23	responsive	40:25	53:12
reimagine	167:12	66:14	96:25	57:7,9	86:22	41:24	154:17
228:20	remote 1:4	75:13 76:8	243:24	104:8	113:14	revisit 178:25	rise 66:19
229:13	2:13	76:13,16	requirement	134:20	rest 216:7	revoke 239:2	159:24,25
reimagining	remotely	81:21	69:24	205:21	229:21	reward 62:24	160:1,2
228:22	2:12	129:4,10	71:16,22	262:2	240:10	63:8	risk 20:5
reinforce	removal	130:6	79:8	263:22	restaurant	220:11	130:10
62:8	18:15	representat...	153:19	resourced	197:20	rewarded	156:20
165:13	93:20	20:2	requirements	20:7	restricted	219:18	risked 167:12
reiterate 23:6	remove 15:12	121:22	29:8	resources	76:1	rewarding	risks 169:8
191:7	32:16 44:9	representat...	requires 15:4	15:4 17:11	result 94:2	63:7	robocall
reject 132:3	137:16	23:10,18	15:9 40:1	26:24 27:3	122:5	Ribbon 25:15	150:5
relate 195:8	removed	24:4 36:16	219:23	34:18 35:7	134:14	129:24	rock 89:10
relates 50:5	131:20	54:18	220:2	74:20	140:24	215:19	rodents
relationship	141:5	66:10 70:9	228:14	123:13	168:20	244:21	166:24
180:20	187:6	106:17	requiring	137:21	260:20	Richardson	role 46:12
relative 46:6	237:17	113:6,7	233:17	141:14	results 21:3	134:18	47:7
46:9	removes	130:4	research	170:2,16	28:18	richer 81:2	132:16,16
190:10	183:24	134:19	37:14	185:12	91:21	rid 158:3	168:22
relatively	removing	172:21	40:21,22	216:4	92:24	ride 65:19	174:18
95:21	16:16 29:4	189:22	44:24	respect	140:12	72:2	roll 2:24 3:6
relatives	29:7 47:13	233:13	45:19	118:13	183:3,14	rigged 233:9	22:12
90:11	140:24	representat...	46:17	202:18	213:19	right 27:18	254:16,17
relax 141:19	render 197:8	94:21	47:20 51:2	respectfully	retake 53:1	36:13,13	254:24
relearning	rendering	173:3	51:10	107:4	63:16,17,18	51:25	rolled 31:15

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 28

218:1	99:21,25	4:22 6:18	83:20,22	129:20,22	178:16,20	245:22	47:9,15
252:10	100:2	6:19,25	84:8 85:11	131:3,12,21	180:15	247:13,14	52:2 55:12
room 150:10	120:7	7:19,20,22	85:17 86:1	132:8,9,17	181:18,19	248:3,19	55:17
151:3	182:21	10:1,7,7	86:2,6 87:5	132:21	181:22	249:2,15,16	56:25
root 152:3	190:5	11:2,9,10	87:14,20	133:1,2,8,9	182:7,18	249:18	58:20
roughly	220:1	11:15,18	88:3,24	133:15	184:21	250:1,10	65:25
187:11	samples 47:3	12:23	90:6,10,10	134:6,9,22	185:4,6,16	253:10	66:14,18
227:5	52:23	13:10,21	90:12,14,17	135:2,11,19	187:2,14,15	254:7,14,14	70:1,2 71:2
Roxborough	Sanchez 4:7	14:3,4,9	90:18 91:4	135:20,20	187:18	255:7	71:6 72:8
151:25	172:21	15:11,22	91:5,6,9,13	136:25	188:20,22	257:11,14	72:20
run 176:18	263:10	16:14,23	91:22 92:4	138:17,18	190:11	257:15,17	73:11,12,13
251:14	264:2	17:2,5,8,16	92:20	138:23	192:12	258:1,18,21	76:2,4,7,12
running	Santoro	17:19,25	93:21 94:6	139:7,17	194:7,11	258:24	77:1 78:5
186:21	142:14	18:13	94:18,19,23	140:10,11	196:13	259:2,6,20	79:9 81:23
230:4	147:24	19:17 21:1	95:8,14,17	140:14,14	197:23	261:15,16	87:7,21,23
rushed	152:25	21:5,22	95:23 96:1	140:17,20	198:17,22	261:19	90:13
133:22	153:2	22:6,21,22	96:2,18,19	141:2,7	201:1,2,4	262:17	95:18 96:3
219:7	Sargent	24:8,11,13	96:22,23	142:23	201:15,21	264:15	96:9,16,25
rushing	127:23	24:15,19,20	97:1,2,3,7	143:3,12,13	202:4,16,19	school's	99:5
262:17	128:4,5,11	24:22,23,24	98:3,4,5,6	143:15,17	207:18	100:8	100:11,13
Russian	sat 15:7	24:25 25:4	98:19,22,23	143:20	209:2	240:17	100:15,16
217:6	101:3	25:14,15,17	98:24,25	144:13,15	211:22	school-based	100:17
Ryan 242:2,6	244:17	25:22 27:6	99:2,3,9,16	144:22	213:2,5	111:7	101:6
242:7,20	Saul 158:11	28:9,14	99:19	145:1,12,19	214:8,11,13	125:25	104:25
	saved 258:17	29:6,24	103:18	146:11,14	215:4,18,19	school-level	105:16
S	saving	30:6,9,22	104:21	146:19,21	215:25	198:9	106:24
S 1:13	166:17	31:8,14,23	105:6,21	146:25	217:12	schooler	107:23
Sabriya 83:8	saying 25:18	33:9,13,17	106:19	147:5,10	218:14,15	189:3	108:11
83:21	65:13	35:12,25	107:20,21	148:20,21	218:24	schoolers	110:13,23
sacrifice	106:9	36:10,17	108:13,14	148:23	219:3,24	87:5	111:1,2,4,8
198:4	113:19	37:21	108:14,15	149:8,14,25	220:7,16,17	106:18	111:14
sacrificed	116:24	40:19 41:8	109:12	153:4,16	220:23	150:8	112:8,9
195:13	146:4	41:9 42:23	110:14,20	154:22	221:24	189:4	114:9,16,19
sad 248:21	149:15,23	43:17,20,21	112:3,6,25	156:24	224:1,4	214:7,15	115:7,7,9,9
Sadie 234:17	239:24	44:22	113:2,4,5,7	157:22,23	226:1,4,7	schooling	116:1
safe 7:6	says 67:21	45:15	113:11,13	158:7,10	226:21	88:20	117:5,11
196:15	151:17	50:18 51:1	113:17,24	159:23	227:13,25	schools 4:23	118:19
255:4	175:2	55:13,14,17	114:23,25	160:4,10	227:25	7:18,21	119:12,13
safeguarding	216:10	56:8,18	115:6,14,17	161:8,15,16	228:21	9:13 10:12	119:22,24
32:22	scale 52:10	57:1,18,23	116:8,16	161:20	229:7,14,18	10:15	120:6
safety 179:17	scenario	58:25	118:22	163:13,23	231:10,18	12:22,23	121:1,5,22
219:1	47:25	60:22	119:16	163:24	232:20,22	13:5 15:14	123:1,4,14
sake 34:2	schedule	62:19	120:3,12,13	164:10	235:11,14	16:25	125:15
198:5	135:20	64:13,21	120:14,17	165:12,21	238:2	17:10,11	126:2,21
209:13	scheduling	65:12 66:7	120:17	165:23	239:17	18:5 19:8,9	130:18
salute 25:19	83:19	66:16 69:2	121:13	167:4,8	240:4,4,5,7	19:14 20:3	131:1,5,9
sample 37:20	scheme 202:9	69:3,4,7	123:8	168:10,24	240:16	20:12,23	135:10
39:10 41:9	scholars	70:5,21	124:2	169:16,18	241:10,11	21:12,24	136:22,22
45:17 47:5	62:10	71:20 72:2	125:17,25	171:18,24	241:14,15	27:5,15	137:20,23
51:14,16,19	scholarship	74:10,24	126:11	172:3	241:16,18	28:19	139:6,7
52:20	6:25 18:3	75:7,22	128:19,23	173:2,15,18	243:6,14	30:18	140:8,10,22
54:24	scholastic	76:15	128:24	174:1,3	244:5,6,11	31:21,23	140:24,25
56:11 99:6	201:11	77:12,16	129:12,13	175:24	244:25	33:5 35:4	141:11,22
99:8,11,18	school 4:20	78:24 79:6	129:16,19	176:6	245:8,17,20	42:24 45:2	143:13

144:7,21	237:11,11	44:25 45:4	141:24	197:1	85:11	71:12	serves 15:22
146:15,17	240:10	45:10,12,21	148:23	205:23	87:14,20	send 151:25	service 52:15
148:19	242:9	45:22,23	171:1	222:8	88:3,24	152:1,2	60:14
150:10	243:20	46:24	201:8	239:15	91:4,7,13	234:21	73:18
151:9,10,16	244:8	47:21	214:13	251:15	91:22	241:12	188:23
151:18	245:4	51:16,24	227:4,15	seeds 196:20	93:22	sending	services
152:5	252:22	55:7 56:7	second 48:11	seek 93:3	94:20,23	105:18	32:21
154:16	253:3,15	60:16	50:16	154:10	95:8,24	155:5	34:18 90:6
155:6	254:1	79:17 98:8	54:11	174:12	97:2,4,8	199:23	194:21
158:4	schools'	183:15,23	78:23	seeking 91:8	98:23,25	senior 51:10	session
159:2,4,9	155:10	184:16,18	94:10	seeks 184:9	99:3,9,19	161:14	263:11
159:21	182:1	190:3,19	136:12	seemingly	100:9	sense 8:13	set 27:12,25
161:9,12,18	schoolteach...	210:13	143:17	53:15	109:22	16:2,3 17:9	27:25
161:24	241:5,9	219:18,25	147:7	86:14	123:9	57:2 86:16	32:17 85:8
162:12,13	schoolteach...	225:16	150:12	seen 13:2	131:4	119:17	104:21
162:24	167:8,11,19	228:23	223:19	39:17	134:22	sensible 59:2	105:25
163:11,18	Science 61:19	238:5,7	225:9,18	57:13	135:2,19	60:4	132:7,12
163:20	128:20	scoring 37:11	227:3	113:9	136:24	sensitivity	137:14
164:1,14,15	148:8	38:4,5,8,10	230:2	119:23	138:17,23	170:17	154:7
164:18	161:13	38:16,20,22	243:16	123:25	145:2,19	sent 104:23	163:24
165:15	242:12	38:23	248:2	135:17	146:11,19	125:19,23	225:7
168:4,5	Sciences	39:20	secondhand	187:7,9,9	153:4	153:7	255:8
170:25	37:17	40:11 41:4	80:3	187:13	156:24	189:12	setting
171:2,14	203:10	42:6 43:12	secretly	sees 152:8	157:4	199:5	157:25
175:13	scientific	47:11 51:9	219:5	segregation	165:13	sentence	setup 162:3
182:5	166:6	51:20	section 29:17	101:9	168:11	39:13 63:9	seven 132:24
184:11,12	score 39:10	52:16 54:5	77:5 78:7	select 11:4	169:5,25	sentences	173:17,19
187:10	39:14,23	62:2	79:10	15:14	171:24	62:25	seven-week
190:11	42:9,15	189:21	147:2	57:22	176:6	102:19	9:11
194:14,18	43:4 44:1	209:23	243:4	100:14	182:2,8,19	sentiment	seven-year
198:13,24	44:11,16	scrambling	sections	131:5	183:4	132:4	132:13
200:4,10,19	46:14 52:9	70:24	20:20	201:10	185:2,8,16	256:5	severest
200:20	53:3,8,10	scratch 229:3	175:20	selected	218:6,15,24	sentiments	246:5
201:7,10,18	54:19,20,25	scratching	sectors	44:25	221:3	50:4	shame 191:7
202:10	59:20 60:2	211:24	175:20	47:21	222:5	129:17	shamed
209:9	60:24 64:1	screen 3:4	secure	120:3	228:6,8	251:12	238:13
215:14,21	64:9,10	50:15,18	196:16	161:21	232:21	255:2	share 20:6,15
216:3	68:6 72:5	52:10 96:5	security	252:19,25	257:17	separate 79:7	24:10
218:13,19	97:10	scribe 80:16	179:18	selecting	258:25	244:1	25:25
218:21	137:10	scrutinized	see 9:8 13:12	32:25	259:25	September	37:19
220:18,19	190:16	174:25	24:14	selection	selections	129:24	41:10
220:21	191:9,11	seat 199:19	50:17,19	12:21 14:4	14:3	serious 13:22	65:23
221:19,20	203:14	201:9	52:12	18:13	146:15	18:11	74:18 90:8
222:2,4,13	237:2	seating	62:16	19:20 21:2	selective	44:20	93:13 97:6
222:20	238:12	107:22	66:20 70:6	21:6,19	96:16	69:21	103:25
223:21	258:20,23	seats 25:3	70:11 71:4	24:11	100:12	138:16	105:4
225:7,8	scored 39:16	27:4 34:24	72:25	37:21	self-determ...	serve 24:3	106:16
227:20,23	44:4 52:21	85:8 98:10	77:10 84:3	41:10	11:7	61:5 75:13	110:9
227:24	63:25	106:23	86:5 87:18	44:22	self-discrim...	173:7	115:21,22
229:2	187:20,21	107:23	114:6	55:13,17	115:12	254:5	116:2,7
232:5,16	scores 15:7	108:4,24	123:17,21	57:18	self-interest	served 31:22	124:18
233:12	37:24	114:15	148:9	60:23	233:19	47:1 51:9	125:2
234:8,10	38:25 39:2	115:10,24	175:5	70:22	sell 162:2	181:20	157:18
235:25	39:4 44:8	115:25	193:3	83:20	semester	217:9	172:5

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 30

256:5	short-term	160:8	159:25	58:9	74:17	special 12:21	165:7
257:22	211:25	256:9	177:24	somewhat	126:8	76:25	186:14,19
258:8	shot 58:24	sister 195:14	186:12	49:7	214:14	100:23	spokesperson
shared 51:13	show 40:22	248:6	society 81:11	son 6:23 8:14	227:7	103:7	194:4
95:4 97:4	54:10	sisters 248:11	179:22	24:10,14	spaces	122:21,22	sponsor 18:9
101:10	154:19	sit 212:10	195:16	35:10,12	108:12	123:1,3,11	22:2 23:3
107:5	173:10	situation	socioecono...	49:24 50:3	220:20	124:2	166:18
110:18	177:12	44:23	28:25	161:13	spared 246:1	131:5	263:25
124:23	211:6	72:19	68:15,22	214:3	speak 3:4	140:17,20	sponsored
125:24	232:9	112:17	72:7,17	242:11,14	16:11 24:1	146:14	48:22
129:15	showing	160:5	122:7	242:21	65:2 83:17	183:13	263:15
149:12	46:17 81:3	174:18	198:2	243:14	89:22 91:3	198:15	sponsoring
160:20	shut 179:21	209:12	218:16	247:14	93:17	243:20	134:19
165:14	shutter	situations	221:10	248:10,20	103:25	245:3	spots 108:15
172:1	211:19	33:8	222:7	248:21	106:10	253:9,15	200:7
174:16	shy 131:18	114:10	software	253:8	116:3	specialize	232:1
205:10	Sibling	178:7	53:16	254:18	117:21	186:11	spring 30:13
252:7	103:11	six 173:18	54:13	255:3	124:25	specializes	71:12
253:3	sides 233:3	234:6	236:15,15	256:10	131:10	197:24	233:25
257:24	sight 222:4	skill 189:22	236:17,20	son's 7:24	178:12	specialty	square 227:6
Sharen 181:1	sign 125:5	skills 44:19	236:24	244:9	179:13	257:13	Squilla 1:11
181:3,8,10	signed 153:6	46:17	237:23	256:2,12	180:17	specific 33:8	3:19,20
181:16	significant	155:7	soil 89:9	soon 17:24	181:15	124:14	104:14,16
186:3	14:14,20	210:15	solely 85:19	212:13	198:10,24	specifically	105:23
sharing	28:11 81:6	258:4	243:21	216:13	209:7	8:8 19:19	107:11
50:15	170:23	skin 85:3	244:2	227:10	246:21	30:9 74:17	108:10
165:8	182:11	167:6	Solomon	sorry 50:19	247:16	78:2	109:1
shattered	183:15,18	196:8	92:10	58:8 83:6	261:6	106:20	122:14
158:21	220:13	249:22	147:25	92:13	263:3,4	129:8	127:10,16
shed 174:21	252:6	250:18	152:15	102:8	speakers 62:6	specious	134:18
sheets 236:21	signify 5:16	SLA 27:14	157:10,12	118:25	66:25	169:8	138:1
shell-shocked	signing 125:9	133:2	157:15	145:2,15	69:12	speech 80:15	142:10
31:11	similarly	137:3	160:7	152:17	72:13 73:2	spell 237:22	147:21
Sherice	75:14	142:20,22	165:1	178:2,3,3	77:14	spelled 214:9	152:10
127:23	245:2	143:7,14	207:13	199:11	81:13	Spencer	157:8
128:3,3,5	simple 150:9	148:19	solution	204:1	93:16	37:17	164:25
128:11	191:5	202:12	38:21	234:2	94:12	181:18	172:7,17,22
138:2	219:23	slice 27:11	141:18	238:10,10	101:2	spend 116:10	180:23
shift 34:9	242:16,23	slides 77:9	158:2	241:22	103:16,19	116:14	181:7,11
88:13	simply 10:6	slippage	177:8	251:6	104:5	228:20	186:2
shining 35:19	10:14 27:9	59:10	224:14,14	sort 60:24	181:14	spending	193:18
159:22	32:16	slogan 197:9	solutions	71:11	speaking	82:19	203:2
shocked	68:12 85:1	slots 253:2,3	21:3 26:10	192:21	65:13	spent 26:16	204:3,9
116:9	220:9	small 25:4	150:9	source 38:14	85:19	61:23	205:7,19
shocking	233:9	34:22	171:12	60:13	178:12,14	90:21	206:8,17,21
16:12 68:8	simultaneo...	85:15	213:16	South 9:1	180:12	spoke 68:3	208:11,16
79:25	236:6	87:14	219:12	35:23	214:17	106:17	213:21
151:12	238:14	131:16	solve 219:13	156:3	247:4,9	153:18	216:15,23
Shonda	single 29:6	148:23	224:16	197:17	250:3	207:5,7	217:1,16
213:23,24	46:3,15	smaller 20:20	225:1	Southwest	251:13	216:10	222:24
214:3	47:4,22	220:5	somebody	6:12,15	259:13	spoken 66:25	223:6
216:16	75:6,7	smooth	110:6	8:25	speaks 78:1	67:7 68:11	229:23
short 60:23	79:14	245:13	240:3	221:13	85:4	69:16	230:11,18
63:18 84:5	80:14	social 35:18	Someone's	space 46:12	162:19	95:13 98:2	230:24

231:3	132:7	173:6	49:25	Street 243:5	20:22 29:7	students 10:4	105:19
235:1,6	200:3	181:4	64:20	streets 7:5	35:21,24	10:5 14:10	106:25
239:4,10	243:17	186:5	123:19	161:6	36:18 38:4	15:22	110:12,14
241:25	standardized	193:24	140:9,13,21	strengthen	38:25	16:24 19:9	110:15,16
242:18	7:3,25 55:7	203:5	155:3	180:19	39:25 42:2	19:12,24	111:4
246:9,14,19	60:11,12	206:10	164:14	strengths	44:17 47:8	20:7,13,21	112:1,2
246:24	95:19	207:5	240:12	40:12	50:25	21:9,11,16	114:7,8,13
247:1	183:14,23	208:18	stayed 208:2	78:14	57:22 62:2	21:18	117:2,6
250:24	standards	213:24	staying 82:16	210:1	64:12 69:4	24:18,23	118:3
251:5	171:6	216:18	Stein 235:3,5	stress 95:6	71:4 73:16	25:1,6,9	121:7,9,19
256:16,20	183:22	223:3	235:9,10	192:5	77:21	28:21,24	121:25
256:23,25	194:15	229:19	stellar 174:13	203:15	78:12,12,13	29:13	122:5,8
257:4	200:22	230:3,14	245:6	248:1	79:10 80:4	31:11 32:2	123:9,11,15
260:7,12,17	232:4,7	231:4	stem 24:17	stressed	90:6 96:14	35:8,16	124:22
263:20	standing 96:4	235:7	153:9	89:14	96:21	36:2 40:12	128:16
264:19	248:2	239:11	stenographic	95:19	117:4	40:18,23	131:20
SRC 113:12	star 35:20	242:3	265:4	96:13,17	130:1	41:1,23	132:10
St 11:3 35:25	190:17	246:14	step 17:25	98:15	131:20,24	43:2 44:3	133:12
staff 111:7,20	start 23:4	247:1	78:19,21,23	stressed-out	137:24	44:13	134:10
111:21	65:13,20	stated 81:14	87:14	228:15	142:6,20	45:13 46:5	136:11,12
125:25	66:1 86:8	84:1 109:7	101:11	stressful	168:10	46:19 52:7	136:18
132:11	145:3	141:7	191:5	64:13	169:4	57:12	137:8,12
150:14	150:13	144:6	Stephanie	182:6	171:24	61:24 63:2	139:2
201:6,15	165:6	146:4	93:16	183:5	183:1,6	63:19,21	140:4,13
254:1	167:13	147:13	101:5,14	stretched	184:14	64:4,5,9	141:15,18
stake 27:17	229:3	217:22	231:1,4,8	254:2	186:25	66:13,16	141:23
stakeholder	254:17	245:16	steps 31:7	strike 170:12	190:13	68:5,10,24	143:1
133:23	started 6:8	statement 6:3	67:14	strive 89:2	191:13	69:11,18,20	153:3,13
171:15	50:13 53:6	6:7 84:18	72:24	striving	195:3	70:2 71:1,3	154:14
stakeholders	143:17	84:19	88:12	21:24	199:16	71:18	155:5,9
73:3 85:15	158:25	156:13	123:19	250:6	201:12	72:12,14	156:6
104:25	159:2,4	158:23	Steve 50:24	strong	202:22	73:21	157:6
135:5	195:6	statements	Steven 5:24	116:19	210:10,11	74:10	161:15,24
184:24	starting	26:19	23:7 48:6	130:1	210:25	75:11,12,16	162:23
stakes 41:20	91:16	244:22	204:19	147:7	212:25	75:21,25	166:8
42:5 44:21	144:14,16	states 128:11	stop 59:5	149:6	214:10	76:7,9,12	168:16
44:22 48:2	150:1,3	135:24	71:6	strongly	219:24	77:2,16,17	169:1,24
51:15	154:9	167:14	122:10	185:6	241:13	78:5,7	170:10
53:11	159:7	250:5,9	146:10	223:18	243:10	79:16,19,19	173:2
62:14	starts 144:4	262:12	158:2	structure	244:3	79:20,22	182:4,12
63:25	state 10:2	static 102:10	164:21	39:13	250:20	80:19,21	183:8,9,10
64:18	23:18 27:7	stating 210:5	196:4	63:10	251:17	81:7,18,20	183:13,17
67:18,22	35:5 48:6	station	225:13	160:6	254:13,18	81:23	183:20
193:16	106:5	166:16	stopped	188:11	254:24	84:12 87:8	185:1
211:4	121:24	174:7	202:21	struggle	259:2	88:2,17,18	187:19,22
217:23	127:24	Statistics	stops 147:2	79:20,21	student's	89:2 91:2	188:2,14
222:17	130:4	233:11	story 190:9	199:11,12	39:6,10	95:21	189:7,11,13
233:6	136:15	status 68:23	straightfor...	struggled 7:4	43:11 46:5	96:15,24	189:17
251:20	138:5	72:17	242:16,23	232:16	46:16,20	97:5 98:3,9	190:12,18
stand 168:8	142:15	117:11	strange 167:6	struggling	96:7 170:2	98:17	191:2,8,10
169:14	148:1	222:7	strategic	80:7	170:3	100:14	191:15
175:5	152:13	244:15	33:22 73:1	255:24	212:3	101:19,21	192:9
standard	157:13	245:21	Strawberry	student 13:3	student-dri...	101:25	193:3
62:25	172:12	stay 24:13	152:1	13:12	130:21	105:14,18	195:8

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 32

199:9,13	98:15	255:9	129:7	223:18	43:12,23	67:10	158:4
200:6,9,18	102:22	successful	132:10,17	231:7	44:8,11	88:19	190:7
201:10	154:17	122:25	134:1,6	256:11,11	58:3 66:6	107:8	192:19
202:1,17	157:20	123:3	140:1	260:17	72:2 85:5	130:5	tamps 228:17
203:14,16	176:3	132:1	168:8	surely 69:6	88:14	143:19	TANEHA
203:24	194:17,21	sudden 88:6	169:14	154:11	117:18	150:24	265:11
204:12	194:23	109:25	174:19	surface	125:4	161:2	Tanya 128:2
209:19,24	198:7	110:2	176:3	211:25	139:10	176:4	138:3,4,5,8
210:15,21	199:19	245:11	182:15	surprise	141:4,9	182:7	142:11
211:3,16	229:6	suddenly	183:8,9,10	110:3	143:5,23	204:4	task 169:17
212:9	239:20	234:7	192:11	234:4	144:22	213:14	taught 69:25
213:3	240:5	suffer 179:11	193:6	surprised	146:4,11	224:20	178:10
215:5	248:23	191:15	201:6	150:24	151:1	226:22	235:12
219:17,19	249:4,5	213:18	205:4	surrounding	159:11,13	227:14	tax 195:23
220:12,12	styles 136:11	248:1	206:6	47:22	159:14,23	234:24	240:7,23,23
220:16	137:13	258:22	216:21,25	survey 21:2	165:23	237:17	240:24,25
221:21	subject 167:2	suffered	230:16,22	30:24,25	173:23	239:21	taxes 240:14
224:8,23	174:24	193:1	244:13	93:5,6 97:4	178:16	240:23	taxpayer
226:7,13	176:13	sufficient	256:8,9	104:22	180:15	256:4	132:20
228:19	218:2	31:10 34:1	supported	138:19,22	195:1	258:19	133:21
232:2,6,8	229:6	111:20,21	77:3 129:5	138:25	200:8,15,24	taken 7:25	202:15
232:11,15	subjects	sufficiently	supporting	139:5,9	202:8	8:2 31:8	taxpayers
236:9,10,13	56:15	219:6	207:22	140:12	210:20	49:7	178:19
237:3,15,21	submit 52:9	suggest 39:20	244:17	145:25	215:13	143:12	195:23,25
237:25	76:19	201:20	supportive	233:25	218:12,15	155:20	202:16
238:4,6,11	80:23	211:11	135:10	surveys	221:17	263:5	Taylor 84:15
241:8	submitted	suggestions	supports	14:17	223:11	265:5	teacher 42:1
243:7,9	75:17,19	260:2	79:13	129:12	228:21	takers 54:12	43:9,14
244:18	204:17	sum 47:5	80:18	survived	229:8,8,14	takes 54:1,21	44:10
245:19	subsequent	summative	122:24	161:4,5,6	229:18	183:15	209:1
246:7	92:3	213:11	126:10	226:18	236:22	211:14	211:14
247:13	substantial	Sunshine	174:24	suspect 53:10	252:16	talent 196:23	212:7
248:14	38:9 42:25	5:17	supposed	suspicion	253:12	talented	243:22
252:20,23	substantially	super 188:19	78:9,10	14:8	255:7,9	130:23	teacher-ass...
253:11,14	24:22	superinten...	179:5,24	sustain 132:6	259:2	169:12	213:10
254:2,11	substitute	13:9 98:14	254:10	133:1	264:15	talk 27:14	teachers 17:2
255:6	32:19	117:12,14	255:2	swallowed	systematica...	53:6 66:23	31:10 32:2
256:8	substituting	151:1	supposedly	159:5	54:13	110:5,8	40:14 41:1
257:15,15	213:9	164:12	155:16	162:25	systems	146:3	42:19
257:19,23	substitution	207:17	support	swapping	26:13	149:1	43:16
257:25	14:19	Superinten...	218:14	108:13	32:15 56:9	190:9	111:6
258:8,10,19	subtlety 63:8	105:5	sure 20:11	swiftly	57:2 65:16	218:22	129:9
258:21	suburbs	supermark...	34:13	137:25	84:23	231:14	143:1
259:5,23	151:11	197:22	36:11	synonymous	173:18	235:23	150:14
260:6,24	succeed	supervision	50:17	15:17		talked 107:19	189:13
students'	57:23,25	265:22	68:20	86:16	T	110:1	201:6,15,23
254:6	86:3	support 40:7	102:10,14	system 9:22	T 265:1,1	145:12	226:10
259:4	184:13	41:21	122:24	10:19	table 55:10	talking 24:17	237:4
studied 62:11	success 35:1	43:24 49:3	124:7	11:11,20	75:20	26:16	243:2
155:18	38:1 45:2	90:6 99:20	139:20,24	13:18,19	tailored	51:24	258:12
studies 54:10	47:8 130:1	101:22	152:23	14:9 15:22	220:22	67:10	teachers'
217:7	131:25	108:23,24	205:25	21:13,21	take 15:1,10	77:25	189:20
study 53:12	188:20	126:25	208:6	30:4 40:19	26:15 55:8	121:18	teaching 8:9
92:2,3	194:24	128:15	216:9	41:18 42:6	56:14 60:8	125:13	40:7 61:23

85:22	197:11	73:25 74:2	36:14,16,17	194:1	197:11	239:22	thousands
132:11	213:19	82:4,13,13	36:18,24	202:24	260:1	240:7,7,8	20:3
166:8	test 39:22,23	127:21	37:3,4 48:2	203:1,2,11	261:8	240:17,21	154:14
210:18	43:24	138:2,6	48:5,9,18	204:7,9,13	things 13:19	241:20	204:1
211:14	45:25	142:11,16	48:20	205:8,19	15:6 16:1	243:15	threat 2:9
249:20	52:16,18	147:22	49:10,13,15	206:9,12,18	17:21	250:4	threaten
team 185:9	53:1,7 55:7	148:2	49:22 50:7	207:1,20	28:17 30:6	251:11,25	245:13
Teams 1:4	63:14,17	152:11	50:7,11,14	208:3,5,9	59:10,21	252:16	threats 53:8
2:12 5:15	68:5	157:9	50:23	208:11,12	63:7	253:6,17,20	53:12,18
tearing	156:15	165:1	58:12 61:8	208:14,16	110:10	255:25	three 46:22
201:18	162:10	172:8	61:10,13,14	208:24	114:12	260:25	47:3 97:19
tears 174:21	164:17	180:24	65:1,4,8,20	213:19,21	115:21	261:14,20	99:7,11,15
175:5	183:15,23	186:3,6	73:22,25	213:22	118:5,6,9	261:22	99:22
teased 167:4	184:16	187:8	74:7 75:3	216:14,15	123:2	262:16	100:2
TECH	189:15,16	193:19,23	81:25 82:3	217:14	144:12,23	thinking 44:5	117:22
173:19	191:9	194:1	82:3,10,18	222:22,24	150:3	59:21	131:17
205:4	199:8	203:3,7	82:20,23	222:25	174:9	125:8	148:17
206:6	203:19	204:16,21	83:11,15,16	229:22,23	188:19,22	151:11	153:3
216:21,25	219:17,25	206:12	83:18	230:10,11	192:6	224:21	164:16
230:16,22	233:2,10	213:22	89:21,25	231:6,11	219:5	third 147:8	212:18
techniques	258:11,16	214:1	90:2 92:11	234:25	249:21	Thomas 1:11	230:8
146:16	258:20	216:16,20	94:12,17	235:1	261:4,13	4:4 49:17	242:8
technologies	259:19	222:25	102:16	239:3,4	262:22	49:18,20	247:12,18
51:8	test- 54:11	229:24	103:24	241:25	think 13:17	50:11	three-hour
technology	tested 63:4	231:6	104:12,17	242:1	13:23	206:3	52:18
32:10,15,18	testified	235:2,8	108:22,25	246:8,9	14:13	217:16	three-year
33:1,1 40:5	205:9	239:5,12	109:3	250:23,24	16:18 47:5	thoroughly	133:5
40:8 98:4	236:4	242:1	112:15	251:8	47:6,10	137:10	threw 29:17
teens 77:20	testifiers	246:10,16	118:10,11	256:13,16	53:25 55:1	164:20	throw 67:13
tell 23:12	106:4	250:25	122:13,14	256:17	59:23 60:3	thought	73:17
176:23	testify 5:3,21	256:17	126:7,22	257:1,3,7	60:6 63:15	70:12	213:13
235:23	22:24	257:6	127:7,9,10	260:6,7,18	71:18	90:16	throwing
255:3	50:24	258:5	127:20	263:9,19,20	72:25	92:12	177:15
261:19	61:15	259:9	128:5,8	263:21	103:3	105:24	223:15
telling 7:13	127:19	260:8	130:23	264:11,12	104:6,7	145:8,18	thrown
155:2	128:1,17	264:13	134:17	264:17,18	106:7	209:17	150:18
233:21	163:1,4	testing 52:15	137:25	thankfully	107:2,15	215:23	Thursday
tells 215:11	164:24	79:14	138:1	176:9	108:1,16	249:8	145:14
Temple 65:12	172:12	193:13	142:9,10	thanking	112:18,23	thoughtful	ticket 52:4
65:17	204:11,15	226:24	145:9	165:6	113:22	157:2	tiers 28:25
tended	207:11	233:6	147:20,21	thanks 65:9	115:2,15	170:16	time 5:13
188:12	256:18	tests 7:3,25	147:22	264:6	126:7	188:4	8:23 9:4
tension 86:12	260:10	60:12,12	148:3,4	theme 90:8	148:10,11	228:12	11:24 18:9
249:25	264:4,9	183:19	152:9,10,23	theory	148:14	thoughtfully	28:10,12
term 59:7	testifying	187:1,10	157:6,8	135:16	151:9	67:16	36:1,14
60:23	162:22	text 80:15	164:23,25	238:20	187:4,24	179:2	48:3 63:23
130:16	203:4,23,24	texts 131:8	165:5,8	thickness	190:22	thoughtless...	73:23
212:1	216:22	thank 4:9 6:9	172:4,7	59:13	215:22	72:12	82:19,20
terms 14:2	testimony	11:22,24	180:17,21	thing 16:5,21	223:14	thoughts	88:19,25
17:25 18:2	2:15 4:25	12:2,6,13	180:23	63:24	225:19,20	65:24	90:22 93:2
109:23	23:17 36:6	18:8,20,22	181:14	86:25	227:8	172:6	106:9
125:8	36:23 37:6	19:1 22:5	185:23,25	124:5	228:7	209:11,16	116:11,14
186:17	48:8 61:12	23:2,15,19	186:2,3,7	147:2	237:3	thousand	124:5,24
terrible	67:23	23:21 36:7	193:17,19	162:18	238:15,24	51:25	126:23

Dec 15, 2021 Committee on Education
December 15, 2021

Page 34

127:8	17:15 19:5	170:19	top-rated	124:8	117:23	176:1	undergo
137:25	22:1,24	185:25	202:10	139:18,25	132:17,18	186:17	69:19
143:5	24:1 26:1	TOEFL	topic 37:14	176:14	133:20,22	209:10	undergoing
146:10	32:9 48:3	52:16	46:9 101:7	177:1	180:19	211:16	130:9
149:20	61:15 62:1	54:11	109:7	180:4,18	trusted	212:2	underline
151:4	62:6 65:10	token 171:4	117:23	185:22	128:22	223:13	222:11
154:7	74:23	told 6:23 7:16	topics 51:12	transparent	129:10	224:25	undermine
157:7	83:17 90:8	11:18	total 30:4	136:1,6	133:10,12	231:8	155:10
160:18	91:3 101:3	101:8	touch 78:11	151:2	176:14	247:12	undermines
170:15	102:15	149:5,22	223:13	176:20	truth 165:8	248:4,11	199:25
171:19	103:25	157:19	touches	184:2	try 28:15	253:22	218:7
177:8,14	104:8,12	161:14	162:17	202:18	49:25	two- 133:5	underperfo...
178:25,25	105:8	176:1	tough 28:6	trapped	60:17	two-thirds	27:6 69:2
179:1,3,16	110:18	194:16,23	tour 24:16	163:3	247:23	25:9	underpove...
204:4,7,25	119:19	212:19,21	tours 129:14	trauma	trying 12:9	two-way	248:16
209:13	128:17	214:6	244:18	177:16	60:9 106:1	134:13	underprivil...
213:13	130:5,8	246:1	track 245:6	179:11,11	108:8	type 44:15	232:16
224:12,20	134:20	247:19,22	tracts 29:1	179:12,19	113:16	145:6,7,9	234:13
228:20	137:25	248:22	trade 90:20	191:7	115:16	261:13	underrepre...
235:15	142:21	258:15	traditional	traumatic	123:19	types 114:19	20:4
243:6,12	148:2,5,13	tolerance	125:14,16	238:17	125:15,16	typical 79:23	141:10
244:9	153:14	86:14	170:7	travel 154:25	143:19	typically	169:2,24
247:19	155:14	toll 142:25	traditionally	Treasurer	147:3	230:8	underresou...
253:21	162:22	tomorrow	31:22 88:5	129:3	208:6		159:3
254:3	165:12,17	263:12	121:7	treat 45:22	228:20	U	underserved
256:4	169:10	tool 43:3 67:5	trained 39:1	tremendous	254:4	U.S 37:15	9:3 69:11
263:8	170:23	69:5	210:8	80:9	255:3	51:5	70:1 72:11
264:6	171:11	162:12	training	118:13	tuition 11:5	259:13	119:20
time- 38:5	172:6	163:7	38:10	166:7	tune 117:10	ultimate	understand
timed 233:2	181:15,25	183:25	166:16	198:4	turn 158:14	179:23	17:13,19
244:1	186:14,19	209:18,22	trajectory	Trey 242:11	224:21	ultimately	26:2 87:16
timeline	186:23	210:4,17,18	126:16	245:25	229:7	40:16	88:11
19:24	190:2	211:7	transcript	trickled 32:4	252:4	unacceptable	104:22
times 53:2	195:17,19	tools 37:12	265:6,19	tried 6:14	turned	14:24	116:5,11
56:16 76:8	203:1	229:16	transfer	tries 219:5,9	224:23	unacceptably	121:23
78:17	208:25	top 17:7	232:21	trigger 159:1	Turner 6:18	189:25	138:15
97:19	209:6	19:14	transferring	tripled 156:6	turning	unanimously	144:12
101:4	213:4,16	20:12 27:4	210:12	trivialize	39:17	263:16	145:5
135:17	216:22	28:24	transform	56:22	48:10	unaware	148:8,24
212:15	219:2,8,16	111:25	177:5	true 46:21	turns 9:6	45:18	156:4
243:13	222:9	147:3	transforma...	123:20	tutor 259:18	78:20	187:8
timing 20:25	224:5	185:11	177:6	135:15	tweak 88:8	unbiased	198:25
77:13	229:17	199:13,17	transit 155:2	211:8	twice 215:18	228:8	199:6
111:15,16	231:12,14	200:3,9,10	transition	truest 86:16	248:5	uncertainties	212:16
112:9	231:23	201:20	129:19	truly 20:19	two 13:10	211:17	235:17
263:10	235:23	208:2	133:15	32:12	52:22	uncertainty	236:19
tinker 236:18	238:4	224:3	245:14	85:14	53:17	14:7 140:6	261:2,3,16
tips 236:25	247:4	229:19	translate	136:25	56:21	192:5	understand...
tireless	256:5,15	248:19	246:23	143:5	61:25	unclear 7:13	19:12
165:10	258:1	249:2	247:6	169:4	63:11	9:4 45:11	238:9
title 4:16 24:7	261:25	top-down	259:12	252:4,11	101:5	unconsciou...	understand...
today 5:1	264:11	150:16	transparency	260:5	138:10,11	39:9	154:19
8:22 9:20	today's 2:4,6	top-perfor...	30:2 95:12	trust 15:20	146:9	underfunded	186:17
9:21 12:16	37:6 81:17	198:13	123:21	33:18	164:12	27:7 159:3	190:13

254:9	unmatched	188:24	various 28:25	39:13	16:15,21	258:7	177:19
understands	25:21	190:15	66:9 98:1	236:25	18:8 20:10	261:16	179:12
154:4	unmute	197:4	125:12	vocational	23:2 25:19	wanted 12:10	183:15
256:7	127:24	200:8,23	135:5	75:7	28:4 35:11	21:13	189:22,23
understood	unnecessar...	217:22	vary 46:6	voice 12:9	35:15,19,24	37:19	190:11
8:11,19	33:19	220:14	220:22	16:11	36:7 37:22	49:21 68:6	207:12,16
undertake	unnecessary	227:24,25	venture	36:19	41:2 43:17	131:14	207:23
169:22	203:15	229:16	177:9	43:18	48:20	175:23	213:4
underwent	unpack 81:12	232:20	213:2	81:18,19,24	49:16	207:20,21	217:25
135:3	unpacking	237:1,1	verify 237:16	161:7	50:16 53:2	256:4,10	222:14
undeserving	54:1	241:1	version	177:4	56:22 57:2	wants 64:20	231:21
232:1	unprecede...	useful 63:5	151:24	178:4	59:22	145:24	238:19
undiagnosed	212:15	useless	versus 47:4	204:12	61:25 64:8	Ward 181:22	251:12
64:5	213:13	238:18	116:6	256:12	66:23 89:4	warehouses	254:3
unduly 183:5	253:23	248:23,24	128:14	voiced 19:10	103:24	197:22	255:16
unequivoca...	unstable	uses 41:5	133:7	voices 195:24	112:10,20	warned	ways 40:23
156:15,17	89:10	44:7	vested 128:20	233:5	114:7,13	153:18	41:23
uneven 89:18	unsure 7:15	usually 209:4	vet 136:25	234:7	123:17,24	Washington	47:11
unfair 63:13	254:15	utilize 135:25	VICE-CH...	258:7,9	124:7	208:17,21	57:20 59:1
63:14	unsuspecti...	183:3	1:9	voluntary	126:8	208:22	72:10
69:23 70:5	246:2	utilizing	Vice-presid...	116:6	136:15	wasn't 31:3	84:10
109:17	upcoming	92:24	51:10	volunteer	142:15	125:8	88:20
198:1,3	21:22		victims	129:1	152:4,13,20	163:13	129:5
200:10	141:20	V	159:17	volunteers	157:18,24	253:3,13	192:23
203:13	upending	vacant 227:6	video 48:10	116:13	158:14	waste 197:11	198:16
210:9	84:25	vaccines 34:4	149:12	voted 163:14	165:2,6,8	watched	210:23
218:1	upheld 102:5	vain 193:16	view 2:15	214:21	166:11	174:20	we'll 127:22
221:1	102:20	valid 41:5	viewers 5:6	215:1	172:4	watching	138:3
unfortunate	uprooting	184:15,17	views 182:1	263:15	178:22	12:16	142:13
114:10	84:21	211:6	village	vs 163:10	180:19	127:7	147:24,25
unfortunat...	upscored	validated	166:13	vulnerable	186:4,18,22	water 213:14	152:14
47:24	54:12	45:4,24	violates	21:18	188:15	Waters	157:11
62:20	upside 57:7	51:16	62:20	32:21	190:1,5	160:14	263:23,24
136:7	224:22,23	170:25	violence 7:7	vying 52:1	191:6,19,25	watershed	we're 2:12
153:23	urban 229:9	validates	157:20		194:18	113:15	19:5 22:10
unique	urge 17:18	44:25	158:20,24	W	197:1,7	way 15:6,7	51:23
155:10	156:23,25	valuable	158:25	wagons 219:9	202:24	16:16	56:13,14
196:23	use 5:14	82:20	255:5	wait 102:1	205:8	20:13,22	57:11,16
198:14	32:10,19	108:25	Virginia	220:15	206:2	25:21 39:9	67:13
United	37:10	value 170:4	32:14	waited 32:3	207:1	41:13	91:24
167:13	38:24	199:18	virtual 82:16	waiters	212:21	47:19 58:2	106:1
197:10	41:17	values 33:24	211:22	197:21	217:14	59:2 60:15	107:17
231:10	44:10	156:10	virtually 38:7	wake 84:14	222:17	67:25	108:8
250:5,9	45:16	249:20	128:7	walk 261:5,7	223:13,17	70:21 85:8	119:18
uniting 197:8	51:15 55:5	Vapiwala	visibility	Walette	224:10	87:21	123:23
universities	55:12 56:2	157:12	85:19	138:4	231:11	88:16	155:2
200:7	56:4,13	165:5	vision 18:18	142:12,13	234:21	113:20	186:21
university	59:7 62:1	variant 2:10	86:5	142:14,18	235:22	115:19	192:18
37:9 65:17	63:24	variations	visit 151:9	142:19	240:12,13	116:4	205:20
217:7,9,20	64:25	46:14	155:21	147:22	240:19	126:13,19	206:17
235:13	80:15	variety 81:4	visualized	152:18	241:6,7,9	147:8	214:24
241:8	88:15 99:5	155:22	248:12	walls 89:15	241:21	149:1,14	223:15,19
unlearning	102:6	182:22	vital 222:2	want 12:13	249:4	150:4,7,15	223:22
88:19	109:22	210:23	vocabulary	14:25	255:20	155:1	224:17

