

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Monday, March 12, 2018
1:15 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE L. BLACKWELL, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILWOMAN CHERELLE L. PARKER
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILMAN AL TAUBENBERGER

RESOLUTION 171018 - Resolution authorizing the
City Council Committee on Education to hold
hearings to discuss how we can better
implement educational standards in the early
childhood years from Pre-K to 3rd grades to
prepare our children for success later in
life.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you. Good afternoon. Thank you for your
4 patience. We would like to thank the
5 last committee, the Committee on Health
6 and Human Services, for recessing for us.
7 They had eight panels and they were still
8 on Panel 1. So I say thank you,
9 Councilwoman Bass. Thank you,
10 Councilwoman Sanchez, because you sure
11 didn't have to. He who holds the mic has
12 the power to run their committee as they
13 see fit, and they were very, very kind to
14 do this.

15 So the Committee on Education
16 is now called into order. We will ask
17 the Clerk to read the title of the
18 resolution.

19 Before she reads it, we note
20 that we do have a quorum. Certainly we
21 thank Councilwoman Cherelle Parker,
22 Councilwoman Helen Gym, Councilwoman
23 Maria Quinones-Sanchez, and certainly
24 yours truly. We are here, so we have a
25 quorum and we will begin.

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2 Will the Clerk read the title
3 of the resolution.

4 THE CLERK: Resolution 171018,
5 resolution authorizing the City Council
6 Committee on Education to hold hearings
7 to discuss how we can better implement
8 educational standards in the early
9 childhood years from Pre-K to 3rd grades
10 to prepare our children for success later
11 in life.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you very much.

14 We're going to begin right away
15 since so many people have limited time.
16 We will call on Panel 1, Dr. William
17 Hite. We thank him for being here, our
18 School District Superintendent; Cheryl
19 Logan, School District of Philadelphia,
20 Chief Academic Support Officer; Diane
21 Castlebuono, School District, Deputy
22 Chief of Early Learning; Allayna Ratliff,
23 Martha Washington School, Principal,
24 that's my area too; and Kimberly
25 Ellerbee, Samuel Powel School, my

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2 principal as well.

3 (Witnesses approached witness
4 table.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
6 you. That will be our first panel, and
7 we'll try to move quickly. We don't want
8 to hold people up, and hopefully we can
9 have a good discussion on this issue.

10 Dr. Hite.

11 DR. HITE: Thank you, Madam
12 Chair. And I am joined by the members
13 that you just introduced, so in order to
14 save time, I will not reintroduce them,
15 but I do want to thank our two principals
16 who are here. It is Allayna Ratliff from
17 Martha Washington. She's right here to
18 my right. And Kim Ellerbee from Samuel
19 Powel. Kim is on the left. And so I
20 want to thank them in joining Cheryl
21 Logan, Dr. Cheryl Logan, and Diane
22 Castlebuono and myself on this panel.

23 So when I arrived at the
24 District, we set goals, and these were
25 ambitious but imperative goals.

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2 And I want, before I begin or
3 continue, want to also say hello to the
4 other members of the Education Committee
5 who are also present. So thank you all
6 for being present as well.

7 We sought better academic
8 outcomes and structural stability, within
9 broader aspirations for greater equity
10 and opportunity for our students. We
11 developed a strategic plan with four
12 anchor goals critical to our long-term
13 success and to the children of the City,
14 and one of those principal initiatives
15 was to see 100 percent of eight-year-olds
16 reading on grade level.

17 Why did early literacy play
18 such a large role amongst our many needs?
19 Because we know that on-track literacy is
20 an important indicator of a child's
21 future academic and professional success,
22 and we know fourth grade reading is the
23 turning point. If a child is reading on
24 level by fourth grade, we see lower rates
25 of dropping out, risky behavior, and

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2 incarceration later in life. We see
3 greater percentages of students
4 graduating from high school, greater
5 percentages of students attending, and
6 fewer students being identified with
7 special educational needs.

8 Tackling a District-wide
9 initiative like this in an urban setting
10 with limited resources required a
11 strategic and comprehensive plan that
12 brought together educators, families,
13 administrators, community partners, and
14 private funders.

15 Four years ago we went to work.
16 Through a multi-faceted and coordinated
17 effort with the City's Read by 4th
18 Campaign -- and I know Jenny Bogoni is
19 here. I saw her earlier. Jenny, thank
20 you for being here as well -- expansion
21 of the citywide pre-K under Mayor Jim
22 Kenney, the generous donations of such
23 crucial foundations, including the
24 William Penn Foundation, the Lenfest
25 Foundation, and hundreds of other private

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2 and individual donors across the nation,
3 we have come together to make early
4 literacy the top priority here in
5 Philadelphia.

6 The result was a systemic and
7 highly individualized training and
8 support system for our K-3 teachers and
9 students, updated instructional
10 materials, modernized classrooms, and the
11 involvement of parents and families to
12 provide a truly holistic support system
13 for all of our students.

14 We began this effort with our
15 dedicated teachers. Over the past three
16 years, we have worked to ensure that
17 every K-3 teacher in our district
18 received professional development in
19 evidence-based literacy practices,
20 supported by full-time school-based
21 coaches who provide hands-on,
22 individualized feedback and job-embedded
23 coaching to teachers about classroom
24 practices.

25 Our partner, Read by 4th, is

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2 supporting these efforts by working
3 directly with local colleges and
4 universities to ensure that new teachers
5 receive the training they need in
6 evidence-based literacy practices during
7 the certification process. That way, the
8 District can hire new teachers who are
9 already trained in the science of reading
10 instruction, particularly at the early
11 grades.

12 We launched and successfully
13 completed a three-year
14 multi-million-dollar funding campaign to
15 equip every K-3 classroom with a leveled
16 library, providing over one million "just
17 right" books to support 46,000 students
18 under our Right Books campaign.

19 And last year we remodeled 70
20 classrooms in eight of our lowest
21 performing schools in terms of literacy.
22 Next year we will expand this program to
23 even more schools and even more
24 classrooms. These classrooms have
25 activity centers and seating designed to

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support small group instruction as well as improved lighting, new paint, new cabinets, and new technology and manipulatives. By improving the physical spaces our children learn in, we can help them develop early academic and cognitive skills.

We know none of this matters if students aren't in school, so we have renewed our focus on improving school attendance across the District and we've expanded breakfast service at our schools to ensure more students are in school on time and ready to learn. We also focused on parent and guardian engagement so families can help support early literacy development at home.

Our work and our investments are paying off. We are quickly seeing proof that this type of systemic approach can yield measurable results. Last year, only our second full year of the initiative, the percentage of third graders in the District reading on level

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2 increased by five points, surpassing
3 statewide gains.

4 As the Superintendent of the
5 District, I am fortunate to be able to
6 see the results firsthand in the joy that
7 reading brings to our students and the
8 enthusiasm it generates for more
9 learning. We're reinvigorating the
10 sparks of creativity and the imagination
11 that are at the heart of early literacy.

12 And this is just the beginning.
13 We look to the next few years with
14 anticipation having created a synergistic
15 system in which more of the right
16 resources are focused on reading, and
17 teachers with specialized training can
18 hone their skills and apply them more
19 effectively.

20 It is also not enough. We have
21 a long ways to go. We know certain
22 schools are improving faster than others,
23 and with urban literacy rates still under
24 40 percent, we know there is much to be
25 done. But our initial work and progress

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prove that change is possible and growth is achievable. Supporting our educators with the resources, capacity, skills, and the knowledge they need will be critical to continuing to move our students forward. It is imperative that we do this and maintain these supports. These students are the future citizens of our city and our world, and creating strong readers will help ensure their potential is limitless.

Madam Chair, I'd like to thank you for your commitment to education in Philadelphia, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and the members of your Committee to improve educational outcomes for all children throughout the City.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very much.

I note you mention here that with urban literacy rates still under 40 percent. Why do we think that is true? Do we have enough teachers? Do we have

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enough books? Do we have the materials?

I see we're fixing up our classrooms, and

I'm glad we improved 5 percent. What is

it that we need to do? And, remember,

we're hopeful that with Council okaying

whoever the Mayor chooses to be on the

Board, that we can ask them questions

more easily than before.

DR. HITE: Sure. Thank you for

the question, Madam Chair. I mean, one

of the things that we need to do is

remain focused on the work that we've

already begun. And the work is

multi-faceted in that we, number one, had

to train individuals on how to teach

reading, particularly in the early

grades, K through 3. We had to direct

resources to schools that were the most

in need of those resources, and we did

that first. We did that first with

classroom materials, with reading

coaches. We did it first with redoing

all of the literacy classrooms.

Now our focus has really become

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2 or has turned to the practices that are
3 happening in classrooms and making sure
4 that we are seeing those practices with
5 fidelity on a day-to-day basis across all
6 of our schools.

7 We are pleased to say that
8 we're moving quickly from one out of
9 every three children reading on grade
10 level to increasing that, but I think
11 it's with the continued efforts that
12 we've begun and maintaining those efforts
13 and staying focused on that work would be
14 the best way to continue to see the
15 progress that we are seeing in those
16 places.

17 I would also add that it's also
18 important that the teachers that we
19 train, particularly in the K-3
20 classrooms, that we make sure that they
21 remain in the K-3 classrooms so that
22 those individuals are not trained and
23 then they move to eighth grade or fifth
24 grade, but then they stay in those
25 classrooms as well. And then as we begin

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2 to see those children improve and then
3 move through the system, we would see
4 then the reading outcomes increase as
5 well.

6 And one thing that I didn't add
7 in my comments is, one of the things that
8 I'm most proud of is that we've had more
9 children move from the lowest category to
10 the next category. They're still not
11 proficient because they were at below
12 basic, but we've seen thousands of
13 children move from below basic to basic,
14 and we know that that move has to take
15 place before those children get to
16 proficient. And so that's a product of
17 the tremendous work that our leaders and
18 our principals are doing and our support
19 staffs are doing in schools each and
20 every day.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: So
22 these are issues and ways and programs
23 that you have now that you want to
24 continue and you think you can move it
25 along more quickly?

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2 DR. HITE: Yes. We think
3 that -- well, I don't want to give a
4 false sense or be unrealistic.
5 Teaching -- because of where we are and
6 because we've historically been, at least
7 in the School District, that we know that
8 this effort is going to improve over time
9 if in fact we maintain our focus. And so
10 it's not going to improve overnight, but
11 it will improve over time. And because
12 we're seeing the children move -- the
13 largest number of children move from the
14 lowest level to the next level, then we
15 see that the trend is moving in the
16 positive direction.

17 And so my point to you and to
18 the members of the Committee is that it's
19 really important for us to stay focused
20 on these efforts that we have started,
21 particularly in the K-3 space, and then
22 begin to think about how do we now use
23 reading for 4 through 8 or 4 through high
24 school so that children are actually
25 learning from what they are now able to

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2 read, and that's one thing that's
3 really -- that's our next big tranche of
4 work, but the work that we're going to do
5 to improve the literacy skills is really
6 happening at kindergarten through third
7 grade.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I'm
9 telling you, teaching cursive writing
10 would help. I know. Every year. Every
11 year.

12 And let me say to my Powel
13 School principal that the Parking
14 Authority has said they're going to work
15 out our issue. I met with them as
16 recently as last week.

17 So I'm hoping that our issue,
18 Dr. Hite, won't take too many years.

19 All right. Let me share the
20 mic. Councilwoman Maria Sanchez and then
21 Councilwoman Gym.

22 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank
23 you, Dr. Hite, and thank all of you for
24 your commitment, particularly to early
25 education.

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2 Since we don't have universal
3 pre-K or universal kindergarten, what are
4 we doing to ensure continuum so that the
5 child is not in a service provider age
6 three and four and then loses a year?
7 How are we doing this and how are we
8 making sure?

9 MS. CASTLEBUONO: Good
10 afternoon. My name is Diane Castlebuono.
11 I'm the Deputy for Early Learning. And
12 one of the important components of the
13 third grade reading effort that we have
14 is looking at the pre-K through third
15 grade continuum and to make sure that we
16 identify children who are struggling in
17 literacy and language development as
18 early as possible, before they fall
19 further and further behind. So we've
20 looked very closely at the standards and
21 aligning the pre-K standards with the K
22 to 3 standards.

23 We have a better screening
24 mechanism now for identifying when a
25 student is struggling, the specific

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2 components they're struggling in. We
3 track components of literacy development,
4 like letter naming fluency and phoneme
5 segmentation so that we can address those
6 long before students are taking the third
7 grade reading test. And a big part of
8 this is actually paying attention to the
9 standards in Pennsylvania. So
10 Pennsylvania has done a really good job
11 of laying out the standards from pre-K
12 through grade 3 in language and literacy.
13 And so we are working very closely with
14 the providers, pre-K providers in the
15 community, around making sure that they
16 understand those standards. But as you
17 said, we are not yet at universal pre-K
18 and --

19 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: So what
20 happens -- what are we doing early enough
21 when a child is at a center, when are we
22 engaging parents for that connectivity
23 that seems to be missing? This is the
24 biggest complaint I get and people ask
25 me. So what are we doing for that

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2 connectivity? So that if a parent was
3 aggressive enough to get their child into
4 a quality pre-K, what are we doing to
5 help them connect their child to
6 kindergarten so that we don't have those
7 gaps?

8 DR. LOGAN: Cheryl Logan, Chief
9 Academic Officer.

10 The team is doing many things.
11 So we're working with our Office of
12 Family and Community Engagement to make
13 sure, first, that parents know when
14 kindergarten registration is and that
15 parents can start registering students
16 for kindergarten. Actually several weeks
17 ago that registration began. And then
18 also working with our pre-K providers.

19 We're also looking and
20 monitoring our kindergarten enrollment,
21 because one of the things that we know
22 that if we can keep our students close to
23 home, that they are more likely to
24 attend. So if we need to add a class at
25 a particular school, that the earlier

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that we know -- and that kind of goes
back to parents knowing early and then
understanding the benefits of early
registration.

So the benefits -- once parents
realize their students -- or their
children are going to be in kindergarten
for the following year, there's an effect
that you can measure between how early
they register and how well they do in
kindergarten, because once they know,
they start doing all the things that they
know they need to prepare them to be
sitting in the seat.

But I think that that is the
most powerful thing that we are doing,
making sure that students can stay as
close to home, that we open up additional
classrooms in areas where the need is as
close to where students would be their
neighborhood school so they don't have to
transition from K to 1 to a different
school, because we do notice that some
parents choose not to if it's not going

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2 to be their neighborhood school.

3 And the third thing that we're
4 working with is that we have almost 2,000
5 students that come from early
6 intervention, and we are working more
7 closely with our early intervention
8 providers to, one, make sure that parents
9 are aware that they can start to
10 register -- as soon as they know their
11 child is going to be attending
12 kindergarten and the child is
13 age-eligible, they can start registering
14 them. They don't need to wait to have
15 IEP meetings or anything like that. They
16 can go right ahead and register their
17 child.

18 There was a lot of -- I
19 wouldn't call it misinformation, but
20 confusion about when parents could
21 register if their children were coming
22 from early intervention. And then
23 working with the early intervention
24 providers about what the expectations are
25 for kindergarten as well as our home day

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2 care providers to align what they are
3 doing in their homes or in the more
4 formal pre-K settings so students are
5 ready to transition successfully.

6 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: So some
7 of the criticism we had around some of
8 the pre-K, how the slots evolved, right,
9 because 30 percent of the slots are going
10 to folks who could afford to pay, but
11 they have a slot that they don't pay. Do
12 you think the system is equitable in its
13 current distribution of slots? And if
14 there are gaps, are you identifying them
15 so as the City rolls out its next batch
16 of slots, that they're available in those
17 places where there are gaps to reach that
18 goal of yours, which is to try to keep
19 people home, as close to home as
20 possible?

21 MS. CASTLEBUONO: So we are
22 working very closely with the City on --
23 we do regular community needs assessment
24 that not only measure the dearth of
25 adequate pre-K slots, but also talk about

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2 family need.

3 I think the challenge sometimes
4 we have is that sometimes there's not a
5 provider in the neighborhood where we
6 actually have a need. And so one of the
7 big efforts that the City is taking the
8 lead on is also growing the quality of
9 new providers. So that is also integral
10 to that effort.

11 But at this time, yes, we are
12 working very closely to make sure that we
13 as closely match need and demand, but it
14 is almost hard to do perfectly, but yeah.

15 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: And
16 we'll ask you as we get closer to the
17 budget hearings a little bit of that,
18 right? Because my frustration was that
19 we did a lot of funding to the top three
20 and four when I felt most of my money
21 should have gone to one and two's, right,
22 so that we grow the system. And
23 unfortunately because of the litigation,
24 the training money and the commitment to
25 that training and growing of those

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2 service providers has not happened. So
3 we'll be interested in seeing how much
4 of -- as the slots roll out, how much of
5 those are going to go to building those
6 quality and those gaps. But it would be
7 good for you if the School District can
8 provide to us particular neighborhoods at
9 a citywide level where there are some
10 serious gaps so that we are aware so we
11 make sure that that happens.

12 MS. CASTLEBUONO: We can
13 certainly do that.

14 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Thank
15 you.

16 Thank you, Madam Chair.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you. Very important.

19 The Chair also notes that
20 Councilman David Oh is in attendance, and
21 we thank him.

22 Councilwoman Gym.

23 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you
24 very much, Madam Chair.

25 I just want to open this by

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2 thanking Dr. Hite for his deep commitment
3 and your team to your deep commitment to
4 early childhood education. I think the
5 City made, with the Administration,
6 really made a huge investment around
7 pre-K expansion, but I think that the
8 District has really worked to try to
9 match that with a real investment on that
10 transition piece. It's great to have Ms.
11 Castlebuono in the District to see over
12 that transition.

13 I want to thank Dr. Hite for
14 his commitment to the school breakfast
15 program and to feeding programs that are
16 supportive and as well to your investment
17 around ESL and our new students who are
18 learning English, because that, of
19 course, will have a huge impact on the
20 District's literacy rates.

21 As we talk about standards for
22 young people to measure their literacy
23 and how well they're doing, the matching
24 side is how well we're doing on the
25 opportunity to learn standards, and among

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those things that I've heard a lot of concerns about from our teachers and from school-based personnel has been about class size. As you know, kindergarten, first, and second grade is 30 students per class. There is no guarantee for any additional personnel. And I know that when I've had teacher town halls or met with parents, a lot of parents want to talk about the need for their children to have a much more personalized learning experience.

The City is looking at making potentially a massive investment in our schools. Is class size one of the things that you've taken a look at it? And I want to be thoughtful about how I say this, because I think it doesn't have to be a full-time teacher in a classroom going down, but I think what I'm hearing most from a lot of teachers and school personnel is they need someone in the classroom who could even be there for part time that will have a literacy focus

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2 for the young people to relieve the 30
3 per teacher. And that's just our
4 standard. It's not even if we get more
5 overcrowded than that, and I believe we
6 have a number of incidences.

7 So could you talk a little bit
8 about how classroom assistants or
9 literacy assistants in the classroom even
10 for part of the time could play into
11 supporting some of your literacy
12 standards and also be a measure of a
13 school's -- a measure of the District's
14 commitment towards helping students meet
15 that?

16 DR. HITE: Thank you. Thank
17 you, Councilwoman. And we are looking at
18 supporting the -- we're looking at the
19 class size issue, and we started this
20 particularly in some of our lowest
21 performing schools, and we looked at
22 reducing the size of the K through second
23 grade classrooms, I believe, in all of
24 our schools that fall into the turnaround
25 network and we were looking at that as a

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2 pilot.

3 As you indicated, there are
4 several issues associated with the class
5 size conversation. We have some schools,
6 like one is Powel, that if in fact we
7 wanted to create twice the number of
8 classes in that school -- and I'll let
9 the principals talk about how they're
10 doing it in their respective schools, but
11 I'm using Powel just as an example,
12 because we have several schools like
13 that.

14 I was at a school the other day
15 with significant numbers of children in
16 classrooms, and I said, We need to get
17 you another teacher.

18 The principal said, Well, I was
19 offered another teacher. I chose not to
20 take it. Instead I took a classroom
21 assistant, because even with another
22 teacher, I have no place to put another
23 classroom.

24 And we have to take that into
25 consideration in terms of the facilities

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2 in some of our areas that are now at
3 capacity, but we've been looking at how
4 do we then utilize the assistance of
5 individuals who are coaching teachers and
6 who are reading specialists and other
7 classroom assistants, particularly in the
8 early grades, to address some of those
9 issues. And I'll let the two principals
10 talk about how they do this specifically
11 at their schools, and it may give us an
12 indication of how we can think about it
13 from a District perspective. But we are
14 looking at that as a potential investment
15 as we move toward the new budget.

16 PRINCIPAL ELLERBEE: So good
17 morning again -- or good afternoon.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you
19 for your great work, Principal Ellerbee.
20 Thank you.

21 PRINCIPAL ELLERBEE: Thank you.
22 So Powel is one of the schools
23 that Dr. Hite referred to that is
24 actually at capacity, and so increasing
25 the number of teachers would not allow us

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2 to reduce class size in the traditional
3 sense. So there are no additional
4 classes to be able to set up to split
5 those classes up to create smaller sizes.
6 What we have done in lieu of that is
7 really look at ways to utilize staff and
8 personnel to still create a lower
9 adult-to-student ratio.

10 So, for example, in some of my
11 classes, we utilize a co-teach model
12 where I have paired a regular education
13 and a special education teacher together
14 in the classroom to essentially create a
15 ratio of one to about 13 or 14. In other
16 classes I utilize the support of our
17 classroom assistants to reduce class
18 size.

19 And then one of the things that
20 we do to ensure that they're prepared to
21 provide quality instruction to students,
22 our classroom assistants actually sit in
23 on grade group meetings with the teachers
24 that they're supporting. They sit in and
25 participate in professional development.

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They work closely with our literacy lead teachers and all trainings around literacy practices. So that enables them to really hone their skills as well and also enables them to really bring some quality to what they're doing in the classroom with students.

COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you.

PRINCIPAL RATLIFF: Good

afternoon. I represent Martha Washington. I'm the Principal there. And with my school, we were actually fortunate to have small class sizes. Right now for kindergarten and second grade, our student capacity maxes out at roughly 20 students, and at first grade there's slightly more. And similar to what Principal Ellerbee just stated, we do utilize assistants in our first grade classroom just to provide and try to cut down on the student-to-teacher ratio. We have found that to be extremely successful. And even with them being in the classroom, they also participate in

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2 some of our professional development
3 activities. So when we're talking about
4 guided reading, when we're talking about
5 phonics, they're in there with them to
6 learn and to be in the trenches right
7 there to be able to take that back to
8 their students. And we actually have
9 seen growth in that area. Similar to
10 what Dr. Hite was stating earlier, our
11 literacy scores last year went from 52
12 percent up to 62 percent, which is more
13 gain than we have seen probably in the
14 last five years just from some of the
15 work that the District has been doing
16 around literacy.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And do you
18 attribute any of that to the size of
19 your -- the attention that students feel
20 like they may receive in the classroom?

21 PRINCIPAL RATLIFF: Definitely
22 the size, but also the training that
23 they're getting as well.

24 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: And
25 Principal Ratliff, I'm sorry that I'm not

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2 clear. Are you a turnaround school?

3 PRINCIPAL RATLIFF: No, I'm not
4 a turnaround school.

5 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Then do you
6 feel, without totally putting you on the
7 spot, but do you feel like the smaller
8 class size is like rewarded by the
9 District? So to some extent, like
10 many -- in the ways that staff and
11 resources can be distributed by the
12 number of students or the population of
13 students in a building, one of the
14 questions we've been asking is whether
15 like schools that actually have a lower
16 class size in the K to 2 framework could
17 actually like not have that be a punitive
18 kind of situation. So sometimes it rubs
19 up against like the District's issues
20 around capacity. And, of course, we have
21 a funding issue, and so I'm not excusing
22 any of that, but what I guess I'm curious
23 about -- and maybe, Dr. Hite, maybe you
24 can weigh in a little bit, but some of
25 the struggle has been like if we do get

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lower class sizes in K to 2, sometimes some schools have felt like a teacher might get taken or that -- in the past it was something that you helped us address with, there might be a split grade.

And so I'm wondering, is the District starting to shift that a little bit so that if you do see a classroom of between 20 to 25, we will actually sort of just -- if it's K to 2, we're just sort of going to back off and let that be? And that's in part something where we rub up against this commitment and wanting to talk about class size, but are we able to do that in the schools where this happens?

DR. LOGAN: Well, it depends on the reason that the class size is at, because our schools all receive Title funding and some by teachers to reduce class size. So I'm not sure about Dr. Ratliff's school, but that is -- and a teacher would not be taken in that, because they purchased the teacher to

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2 reduce class size and they have the money
3 in the budget to support that.

4 And then the second piece of
5 that is in terms of when we have
6 leveling, because I think that's what --
7 I hear leveling in your question. We
8 have to make very difficult decisions at
9 leveling, because the issue at leveling
10 is that there are children in classes in
11 other schools where they are -- the class
12 size is too large and we need to have the
13 teacher. So we either have to hire
14 teachers, which requires additional
15 resources, so we typically have --
16 sometimes we have to add teachers, but
17 often it's an even trade. We have to
18 reduce as many teachers as we need to add
19 in other schools. So it's very
20 context-dependent and depends.

21 I don't feel that schools are
22 penalized for having a class size. I do
23 feel we have a very broad discussion
24 about how we look at it as a district,
25 and we do -- and there is a lot of

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deference made for special circumstances
when the leveling conversation happens.
So there are schools that end up keeping
a teacher and there are some schools that
end up losing a teacher.

Because of the way -- schools
also have a lot of autonomy around their
Title funding. They choose to either
reduce class size or do other things or
to release a teacher. We have many -- I
mean, you know that many schools have
teachers that are released and for good
reasons, and that's a choice that the
school is making, because the release of
that teacher typically means that the
students will have to be with other
teachers, which will increase the class
size. So, again, very context-dependent,
and I think that it's great that at
Martha Washington they've had those
remarkable results and I appreciate the
principal attributing it to multiple
factors.

DR. HITE: Councilwoman, I will

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just add the final point on this is, so we are less punitive in terms of the schools that are able to make this work in a different way. Whether they're using Title I or because we train all of the teachers in the K-3 space, we held harmless this year at leveling those schools that were going to lose teachers at the K-3 space if in fact they were going to lose one or fewer. So we're less punitive, but it does boil down to resources, and because we made as a part of our investment trying to address the consequences associated with leveling, we were able to do that this year and looking to do that as we move forward.

But as Dr. Ratliff and Principal Ellerbee have stated, I think it's important that we give schools maximum flexibility on how to utilize the funds that they receive, particularly the restricted funds, like Title I, and if they can use that fund to reduce the classes, we don't allow that to impact

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2 anything else in terms of what's

3 happening in their schools.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you.

5 First, I would be remiss, one, if not

6 thanking Dr. Hite for the commitment to

7 the hold harmless positions at the K to

8 3. I know that it gets a little

9 complicated as the positions switch

10 around and seniority kind of can bump

11 people, but I really appreciate that, and

12 I think that that's an enormous

13 commitment.

14 I also would be remiss if I

15 didn't congratulate you, Dr. Logan, on

16 your appointment to be the new

17 Superintendent in Omaha, Nebraska; is

18 that correct?

19 DR. LOGAN: That's correct.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: So thank you

21 for that.

22 I do want to go on record,

23 however, as saying that I am drastically

24 opposed to leveling, and I think like all

25 of us in this room understand that. For

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2 those people who do not know what
3 leveling is, I think Dr. Logan also
4 alluded to it, is sometime mid year,
5 we're not able to distribute the number
6 of teachers as needed and so we'll see
7 enormously overcrowded classrooms come at
8 the start of school or October, November,
9 and then sometime in October, November
10 because we can't hire additional
11 teachers -- it's not a great time to hire
12 additional teachers at that time
13 either -- we have to pull from other
14 schools, and it just creates enormous
15 disruption. And I know all of us in this
16 room share that belief that we shouldn't
17 start school for these young people with
18 their permanent teacher sometime in
19 October, November. We really want school
20 to start September 4th, 5th or 6th.
21 Whenever that first day of school starts,
22 that's when the school year kicks off and
23 they're with their teacher. That's a
24 commitment I want to bring to the School
25 District of Philadelphia. I would like

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2 to see an end to leveling, especially if
3 it's resource-based, and I'd love for us
4 to continue the conversation.

5 I had one other very quick
6 question, Dr. Hite, which is a lot about
7 truancy in our lower grades in
8 particular. We used to have a commitment
9 around home-school liaisons. These were
10 individuals who would -- it's different
11 from a secretary, but basically if a
12 student does not show up for the day, the
13 home-school liaison would come in, pick
14 up the phone, call the parents, figure
15 out what's going on, report back into the
16 school, and then start working with the
17 family.

18 Right now because of our new
19 DHS reporting requirements, we have a
20 number of families, including families
21 who are referred to placement, in which
22 the broad category is truancy. There are
23 other issues that are potentially going
24 along with that. We just haven't figured
25 it out. But I wanted to ask if you could

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2 talk a little bit more about whether
3 there's been some reflections in either
4 ideas for new positions, resources,
5 things that you want us as a Council to
6 be thinking about if there's an
7 opportunity for investment to
8 specifically address some of the things
9 so that we can get our young people on
10 track, make sure that they're attending
11 school in kindergarten, first, and second
12 grade.

13 It's wonderful to go and hear
14 attendance heroes and all those kinds of
15 things, but that starts early, and it's
16 hard to replicate when -- and we need to
17 intervene when families are in distress
18 as well.

19 DR. HITE: Yeah. I mean --
20 thank you. And the response to that is
21 also multi-faceted, and you know
22 yourself, breakfast being one of those
23 things that we've used now to ensure that
24 children are in school and that they're
25 ready to learn. But what we've done both

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2 as a division and as practice in around
3 schools, as I indicated earlier, we can
4 do all -- we can make all of these
5 investments and if we can't get children
6 to school, then those investments are
7 moot. And so part of what we are
8 really -- what we've really been focusing
9 on is making sure we have the systems,
10 the processes, and structures in order to
11 give us as much information as we can
12 possibly receive about children attending
13 school and those who are not attending
14 school. And we have in the Office of
15 Family and Community Engagement, we do
16 have outreach coordinators that still go
17 out and deal with or try to support
18 families. Schools make contact as well
19 with the families. And the whole point
20 is around ensuring that the individual
21 feels welcome, number one, and that we
22 appreciate, number two, when they're
23 there and when their children are there
24 and, number three, understanding the
25 importance of getting their children to

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school every day. And in the past, we've said -- well, I said "we." I'm generalizing. But we as an institution have said get to school or else bad things will happen, and I think what we're trying to do is flip that around to we're glad you're here, now that you've been here the first three weeks, how do we ensure that you stay here the fourth week, and then just try to build that behavior, if you will, to get students to school every day.

But we're tracking now differently in terms of who is at school and we use 95 percent of the time. So it's actually a number of days each month that children are in school. And then we are also able to identify the families that need the most support in terms of getting children to school and the resources that they then communicate to us that they need in order to be more successful in getting the children to school on time.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Just a point
3 of clarification. How many -- are the
4 outreach coordinators distributed
5 regionally and how many of them actually
6 serve, do we have?

7 DR. HITE: I believe they're by
8 networks and so I don't --

9 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Is it one
10 per network?

11 DR. HITE: Well, it depends on
12 how large the problem is. It could be
13 several in some of the networks and then
14 fewer in others. And so I'll have to get
15 that information to you.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Okay.

17 DR. HITE: But I believe it's
18 by the networks, and they are -- the
19 coordinators, the outreach coordinators,
20 are from the Student Services Division,
21 but they're assigned to the networks.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: That would
23 be helpful. And, again, I don't expect
24 us to solve it. I think it's just
25 another point to put on the discussion

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2 list. In general I've often found that
3 like when we have school-based problems
4 or school-based situations with young
5 people, we do sometimes need a point
6 person at that school to directly address
7 it. It's hard when everything lands --
8 we all know the principal is ultimately
9 responsible, but sometimes if there are
10 specific areas that we're trying to
11 address -- and I need to do a little bit
12 more research on the truancy issue for
13 younger grades, but on those things,
14 sometimes we found that you do need a
15 specific person at a school to directly
16 address with those students and that
17 student population, and that's generally
18 when we've seen a significant amount of
19 movement going. It doesn't mean that the
20 District is not committing by the
21 regional or outreach coordinators
22 distributed by network, but it's hard to,
23 as you know, not have that direct contact
24 and point of responsibility directly at
25 that school.

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2 DR. HITE: And, Councilwoman,
3 if I may add -- you just reminded me of
4 something else. We've also begun work
5 with the City under the Managing
6 Director's Office with the
7 out-of-school-time, and how we place and
8 where we place those out-of-school-time
9 supports now are also defined by
10 attendance, defined by curfew violations,
11 defined by data that we both have that we
12 can then -- where we're able to both
13 direct all of the resources among the
14 City-based services and the School
15 District to those areas. And so we
16 started that work as well, but that's
17 also to address the issue that you just
18 described.

19 COUNCILWOMAN GYM: Thank you
20 very much.

21 Thank you, Madam Chair.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you very much.

24 We are now going to ask the
25 next panel -- it's only speaking for two

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2 minutes. They'll speak two minutes,
3 three at the most. Would you listen,
4 because this issue, if it doesn't come up
5 today, the issue of charter schools will
6 during budget. Could you give us another
7 few minutes to listen to Panel 2, Niya
8 Blackwell, Ad Prima Charter School, CEO;
9 David Hardy, Boys Latin Charter School,
10 CEO; and Mike Imburgia, Excellent School,
11 Director of Research, Data and Analytics.

12 (Witnesses approached witness
13 table.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We
15 thank you all for coming. And I
16 appreciate your time, Dr. Hite and panel.

17 This is one of the people
18 coming up that we wrote a letter for. We
19 didn't for everybody, and we had people
20 who run community relations at Penn, at
21 University Sciences we wrote a letter
22 for, and another charter school, but
23 David Hardy is a person we've really been
24 fighting hard for, Mr. Mayor downstairs.
25 So we hope that you are listening and

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2 maybe you will see and understand why.

3 Thank you. Good afternoon.

4 Thank you for coming. I don't know who
5 is going first. Niya?

6 MS. BLACKWELL: Thank you.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: So you
8 all know her name is Niya Blackwell, so
9 that makes her special to me, and she was
10 the apple of her grandfather's eye. The
11 issue was who did he love most, his wife
12 or his oldest granddaughter, so --

13 MS. BLACKWELL: Well, I'm sure
14 it was you.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And
16 she was the lawyer for Street, ultimately
17 the lawyer for the police -- I mean
18 Street as Mayor, then the Police
19 Commissioner, and then she did the law
20 cases for the police who got off. And
21 then I think it was because of her
22 grandfather when he passed away, she
23 thought she had enough of politics. So
24 we have to live without her, but we're
25 grateful they're all here. Thank you.

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2 MS. BLACKWELL: Thank you, and
3 good afternoon, Chairperson, and to the
4 other members of the Education Committee.
5 Again, I'm Niya Blackwell, and I thank
6 you for extending the opportunity to
7 address you on this most important matter
8 today. I am the Chief Executive Officer
9 of the Ad Prima Charter School. We are a
10 K through 8 educational program with
11 campuses in the Overbrook and Frankford
12 sections of Philadelphia. But I come
13 here today to speak for a much broader
14 constituency than the Ad Prima community.
15 With me are two gentlemen from the
16 Excellent Schools PA, an advocacy group
17 who focus primarily on school data. They
18 are Michael Imburgia, who serves as the
19 Director of Research, Data, and
20 Analytics, and Mr. David Hardy, who
21 serves as Senior Advisor. Our comments
22 this afternoon will address the clearly
23 distinguishable groups of students who
24 comprise the lion's share of those
25 underperforming academically.

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2 So as the resolution so
3 accurately states, providing a proper
4 education for every child is a complex
5 issue without a simple solution. I think
6 we can all agree with that sentiment. We
7 will also agree on the factors that we've
8 long heard as being barriers to academic
9 achievement, like class size, technology,
10 school climate, parent involvement, and
11 funding. These were the issues years ago
12 and they persist.

13 But as we discuss standards
14 today, it cannot be overstated that it
15 isn't just standards. We have those in
16 place, but it's providing access to
17 quality programs and the lack of that
18 opportunity that prevents us from making
19 the strides in education that we are so
20 eager to achieve.

21 So to your question in the
22 resolution, why are the outcomes from
23 school to school so drastically different
24 and how are some schools able to
25 implement educational standards with

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success while others are not? Well, we can look back at the barriers I previously stated as an indicator. Quality programs have many of the tools they need to create an environment where young children can learn from the very moment they walk into the school. Other schools don't have a fraction of what they need. Yet, we are all held to the same standard and are not given any consideration when the standard isn't met. And what do I mean? We all take the same assessment exam.

It should also be noted that the test itself must be considered if we are to use it to evaluate whether or not our children are learning. If the students' reading and math levels seem low based on test scores, it is important to consider that the tests themselves may have unreasonable expectations of what students should be able to achieve at various ages. For example, one might want to investigate who creates the tests

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and the instructions actually. What are their qualifications? How many years have they taught students at the ages for which they are developing the tests?

In a recent discussion with a teacher at my school concerning the success or challenges students face while taking the assessments, she shared an experience from last year, and her name is Suzanne deSeife. She's at Ad Prima Charter School.

"When I was proctoring the PSSAs for third grade, I noticed that the rules for teachers have changed in at least one important way since some years ago. Teachers are no longer allowed to assist students in understanding what the instructions themselves are asking. Students are expected to be able to read and comprehend those instructions. And I also noticed that the reading level for many of the terms used in the PSSA instructions for third grade students was above what should be expected of third

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2 graders. I was dismayed when a third
3 grader asked me to explain to her what
4 the instructions were asking her to do
5 and in response I had to tell her that I
6 was not allowed to help her read the
7 instructions."

8 So this is an example of how
9 some students may start out at a deficit.
10 Their confidence may be shaken at the
11 very beginning of the exam, which in most
12 cases hinders their result.

13 It should also be noted that I
14 was speaking of an Ad Prima student, and
15 the third grade students at Ad Prima
16 significantly outperformed the average
17 reading assessment score last year
18 citywide. So we believe that we are one
19 of those schools with a quality program.
20 However, we too recognize the need for a
21 serious examination of all of the
22 variables involved in this debate.

23 I thank you.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you very much. Thank you.

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2 MR. IMBURGIA: Good afternoon,
3 Councilmembers. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to discuss the state of
5 education in Philadelphia. My name is
6 Michael Imburgia and I am Director of
7 Research, Data and Analytics at Excellent
8 Schools PA, a statewide education
9 advocacy organization.

10 We at Excellent Schools PA
11 believe that a child's race, family
12 income or zip code should never dictate
13 their access to a high-quality education.
14 It was through that lens that we analyzed
15 available PSSA and School Progress Report
16 data to provide a summary for you today.

17 As you know, the School
18 District of Philadelphia divides its
19 schools into learning networks which are
20 largely based on geography, but excludes
21 schools within the autonomy, innovation,
22 and turnaround networks. In addition to
23 breaking down data at the network level,
24 we will also provide an overview of brick
25 and mortar charter schools which are part

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2 of Philadelphia's public school landscape
3 but operate independently of the
4 District. Currently nearly 70,000
5 students attend a Philadelphia charter
6 school.

7 First, we broke the data down
8 by learning network where there are vast
9 disparities among the schools based on
10 their location throughout the City. For
11 example, on average, only 18 percent of
12 third graders in the schools within
13 Network 4, which is mainly North
14 Philadelphia, were proficient or advanced
15 on the English language arts PSSA.
16 Network 4 is also home to a majority of
17 the schools within the turnaround network
18 where student outcomes are behind the
19 District with 21 percent of third graders
20 proficient or advanced.

21 Network 7, which is made of
22 Olney, Mount Airy, and parts of
23 Germantown, is also well below the
24 District average with 26 percent of the
25 network's third graders able to

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2 demonstrate grade level skills on the
3 English language arts PSSA.

4 It is important to note that
5 both Network 4 and 7 schools have high
6 populations of minority students. In
7 fact, 93 percent of Network 4 and 84
8 percent of Network 7 students are either
9 African American or Hispanic. In
10 comparison, Network 8, the Greater
11 Northeast schools, have a minority
12 population of 41 percent, and 54 percent
13 of their third graders are scoring
14 proficient or advanced on the English
15 language arts PSSA. With charter school
16 wait lists often in the hundreds and
17 sometimes thousands, parents in
18 low-performing networks have very few
19 options to find schools that will meet
20 the needs of their children.

21 We also wanted to look at the
22 large comparison of SDP schools and the
23 charter sector. The most recent English
24 language arts PSSA data showed that on
25 average charter schools in Philadelphia

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2 outperformed SDP schools by 15 percentage
3 points. In 2017, 50 percent of third
4 graders who attended charter schools
5 scored proficient or advanced on the
6 English language arts PSSA compared to 35
7 percent of School District of
8 Philadelphia third graders.

9 Within SDP, there are two
10 schools in the autonomy network that
11 reported PSSA scores for third grade
12 English language arts. In those schools,
13 nearly 52 percent of third graders scored
14 proficient or advanced. Higher
15 achievement rates at Philadelphia charter
16 schools can be attributed to many
17 factors. One of those is flexibility and
18 the emphasis on individualized learning
19 plans. Many schools in the charter
20 sector and autonomy network have the
21 flexibility to assess students throughout
22 the school year, particularly in the
23 beginning of the year, to evaluate and
24 make timely decisions regarding
25 curriculum and supports that may be

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2 needed to ensure student success.

3 Another key metric in examining
4 the quality of an elementary school is
5 the percentage of students who are
6 reading on grade level in kindergarten
7 through second grade. Grade level
8 reading in grades K to 2 is measured
9 using different assessments for SDP and
10 charter schools. Currently this data is
11 available on the School District School
12 Progress Report and a vital piece of
13 information for parents as they prepare
14 to send their student to school for the
15 first time.

16 There is not as wide a
17 disparity in achievement scores among
18 school governance on this metric. In
19 charter schools, 56 percent of students
20 in kindergarten through second grade are
21 reading on level compared to 47 percent
22 in the District. The charter sector
23 seems better equipped to maintain
24 achievement through grade 3, losing about
25 5 percentage points, where the District

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drops 12 percentage points from K to 2 proficiency to grade 3 PSSA proficiency.

Again, Network 4 is well below the District average with only 35 percent of students in kindergarten through second grade able to demonstrate grade level reading skills. Some areas showing improvement are Networks 1 and 2 made up of South and West Philadelphia. Both networks are at or below the District average on third grade English language arts PSSA, but have nearly 50 percent of their K to 2 students reading on grade level.

While student achievement needs to be increased across the City, it is important to identify the strides that have been taken to make early learning and literacy a priority. The Read by 4 movement has clearly influenced the improvements that we have seen in early literacy gains and we encourage continued support of that initiative.

If the City Council and Mayor

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2 is truly committed to ensuring
3 Philadelphia's youngest students are
4 receiving a great education, we encourage
5 the support and protection of the City's
6 high-quality charter schools. As the
7 data I just presented clearly show, on
8 average brick and mortar charter schools
9 in Philadelphia are providing a
10 high-quality education to students in
11 their early school career. We ask that
12 as governance of the School District
13 shifts back to the hands of our locally
14 elected officials, you provide families
15 and students with greater access to
16 high-quality school options.

17 Thank you.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you.

20 MR. HARDY: Good afternoon. My
21 name is David Hardy and for the record, I
22 work for Excellent Schools PA. I retired
23 from Boys Latin.

24 We have come here today in full
25 support of Council's efforts to determine

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how we might better implement the educational standards for those students who are just beginning their educational experiences. Council has rightly recognized that the performance of our city's students is lower than the average of the state. We also hope you will recognize that the academic failure in our schools is often concentrated geographically and racially. When disaggregated, the performance of our students paints a disturbing picture of a system that does not offer educational opportunity equally. Adherence to standards is an essential element of a viable educational experience, but our duty must go beyond just acknowledging those standards. We must ensure that the academic preparation to reach those standards is available to all children, no matter where they live or what they look like.

The issue of equity is evident throughout the K-12 spectrum of public

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2 education in Philadelphia. It is the
3 result of many factors. Children come
4 with a wide range of levels of
5 preparedness. It is important to meet
6 each child at that point. But the
7 meeting point should not determine where
8 we ultimately expect the student -- what
9 we ultimately expect of the student.
10 Here is where the value standards is
11 sometimes misinterpreted. When standards
12 are used as a destination and not a
13 milestone, they can limit what we believe
14 the student is capable of achieving.
15 This is where students who may come from
16 difficult circumstances can be dispatched
17 from meaningful educational
18 opportunities. In our city, that will
19 likely mean low income, black or brown
20 children. We talk about these children
21 in terms of their problems and are less
22 likely to consider their potential. It
23 is an educational pigeonhole.
24 We have developed a system of
25 public schools that is broad, diverse,

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and robust. It is time for us to demand that they produce the results our city needs. When the schools do not produce for the communities they serve, we cannot sit by idly. If we evaluate on a systemic level, we will not appreciate the depth of the situation. We need school level evaluations with a longitudinal component. We need to know how children are doing in a school today and how they did when they moved to the next level. These performance measurements must be available to parents making school decisions for their children. If we do not take these steps to ensure that there is equity in our public schools -- excuse me. If we do not take the steps to ensure that there is equity in our public schools, and that means equal opportunity for a positive outcome, we will have relegated large numbers of children to dreadful futures.

Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

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2 you very much.

3 Let me ask, what do you think
4 we as elected officials or some other
5 advocates or principals should do to try
6 to get -- I heard Condoleezza Rice say on
7 the air last week that there was a time
8 you could be born in poor circumstance
9 from public housing and you get to apply
10 to a decent school, get in, and you could
11 achieve and you could be a successful
12 person, achieve any height, but now she
13 said people ask what is your zip code,
14 and that judges, that determines what
15 your educational level is like. Do you
16 think that's true?

17 MR. HARDY: Yes, I do. And,
18 look, you and I know from our experience
19 that you can come from circumstances that
20 aren't great, but you can make something.
21 If you get the opportunity -- and that
22 opportunity for me -- and I feel the same
23 way about you. I think I know your
24 story -- is that that happened in school.
25 Some teacher, somebody, a principal,

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2 somebody at the school took an interest
3 in you because -- I mean, I know for
4 myself, there were no college graduates
5 in my family for me to go to for help, so
6 it had to come from school.

7 I think what happens now is
8 that we really tend to focus on the
9 problems that these kids come to school
10 with, and believe me, there are kids who
11 come to school with some enormous
12 problems, but we can't solve all their
13 problems. We want to. We'd like to. It
14 would be great if we could, but we can't.
15 But we can educate them and teach them,
16 give them the skills to solve a lot of
17 their own problems. The biggest problem
18 is being able to support yourself, being
19 able to have a house and raise a family
20 and those types of things, and to do
21 that, you need to be educated. You need
22 skills, marketable skills, that are going
23 to allow you to pursue a future.

24 Dr. Hite talked about trying to
25 encourage kids to come to school. I

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2 think the best way to encourage kids to
3 come to school is to give them a good
4 education. Kids aren't stupid. They
5 know what a good education is. They'll
6 come for that. But what they won't come
7 for is to sit in a room where they're not
8 going to get anything, where people don't
9 care about them.

10 So I think that, yes, we
11 have -- what Council can do, Council can
12 make sure that we are all -- and I don't
13 just mean District schools. I mean
14 charter schools too. Hold us
15 accountable. Hold us accountable and
16 make sure that when you have a school in
17 the City, that you know who is coming out
18 of that school, where they're going, what
19 kind of success levels they have, so that
20 the schools that are working can
21 proliferate and the schools that aren't
22 should not proliferate.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And
24 let me ask you another question. There
25 have been in the last several years so

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many charter schools and some traditional public schools too closing down, and then we have so many parents and community people who come to us, and we try to write letters or go to the School District or contact the Superintendent and say why can't these people get a chance? Where will these children go? What happens to these neighborhood schools? What happens to -- some of them have brand new buildings, new charter schools in brand new buildings that are closed. Then what? You have a big blight in the neighborhood, the children don't have a school, and you end up with a big beautiful building closed. And I don't know why for that -- I mean, I know that the District says they didn't succeed in one way or another, but it just seems that something is wrong with the whole picture.

MR. HARDY: There is, and part of it -- look, when the school closes, there's probably a reason why that school

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2 should close. I mean, I know -- I'm
3 familiar with the schools that have
4 closed. I think a lot of them did things
5 to get themselves closed, and that's just
6 an honest assessment of the situation.

7 I think that what really has to
8 happen on a school closure is paying
9 attention to where those kids go next,
10 because by the mere fact that they're in
11 a school that closed, they've been in a
12 place where they haven't gotten a good
13 educational opportunity. So sending them
14 to another place where they don't have an
15 educational opportunity is disastrous.
16 And that goes -- that's true for the
17 District schools that closed too. To
18 close a District school and send them to
19 another school that's failing, you really
20 didn't do anything.

21 School closures, I think that's
22 just part of life. You know, some
23 schools just get too old, they fall
24 apart. Some schools aren't working, you
25 have to close them. Those things happen,

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2 but what has to happen is our commitment
3 to making sure that those kids who came
4 out of a bad situation get to a better
5 situation, and before we start talking
6 about closing, we should make sure we
7 have that roadmap set up for those kids.

8 She's lobbying. And she's
9 right, though. We need to support the
10 schools that don't have spaces, that are
11 at capacity, that could use the space and
12 educate more children effectively. We
13 should be looking at places like that,
14 and she's got a place like that. So I
15 might as well say that on the record.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you. Thank you.

18 Any other questions?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much. I appreciate all of you
22 and I appreciate our being able to call
23 you like we do all the time when we have
24 questions and concerns. Thank you.

25 MR. HARDY: Thanks for the

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2 opportunity to speak.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you.

5 Panel 3, Donna Cooper, Public
6 Citizens for Children and Youth,
7 Executive Director; Karel Kilimnik,
8 Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools,
9 Co-Founder; Catherine Blunt, one of my
10 favorite principals as well, former
11 school principal; Ann Rosewater, National
12 Grade Level Read by Third, Senior
13 Consultant.

14 Thank you all.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And
18 while they're coming, let me tell you
19 that we have in our packets testimony
20 that's written because the individuals
21 aren't here, but it will be submitted as
22 though they were in attendance. That is
23 testimony from Jerry Jordan, Philadelphia
24 Federation of Teachers, President;
25 Representative Dr. James R. Roebuck from

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2 the Pennsylvania House of Representatives
3 and also a former teacher; Barbara
4 Dowdall, Alliance for Philadelphia Public
5 Schools, member; and Alison McDowell,
6 consultant.

7 Thank you.

8 MS. COOPER: Thank you,
9 Councilwoman. And, first of all, thank
10 you so much for having this hearing,
11 because this is a really, really
12 important topic, so I appreciate it. I'm
13 Donna Cooper, the Executive Director of
14 Public Citizens for Children and Youth,
15 and I wrote really long testimony, so
16 there's no way I'm going to read it all,
17 because you would kill me.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you.

20 MS. COOPER: But I guess there
21 are some things that I would like to just
22 bring to your attention.

23 The first is that I think that
24 this issue around early literacy, as
25 you've already sort of pointed out today,

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2 is complicated, that it isn't just about
3 children learning vocabulary, it isn't
4 just about children learning phonics.

5 It's about children learning
6 critical-thinking skills, comprehension,
7 creativity, analytical skills.

8 And so one of the things that I
9 heard a couple years ago when we started
10 to sort of do this work was teaching
11 reading is rocket science, and one of the
12 challenges I think for a lot of us who
13 became easy readers -- I was an easy
14 reader, and I think probably you guys
15 were probably easy readers too. You
16 learned to read relatively easy. And
17 really the challenge for teachers is how
18 do they educate the children who aren't
19 natural readers, where there are
20 challenges to all that skill-building
21 that makes education and literacy
22 possible.

23 So, first of all, you all have
24 taken the very first step to changing our
25 early literacy challenge by investing in

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2 pre-K, right? Make no mistake, the place
3 to effect this is in the first five years
4 of a kid's life, and by expanding access
5 to high-quality pre-K, you've already
6 augmented and made the job of the School
7 District in the future easier. So I want
8 to make sure everybody in Philadelphia
9 recognizes that.

10 But as you know, learning
11 doesn't stop at pre-K. Learning to read
12 continues through grade 3. We have a
13 model in America. You learn to read
14 until you're in fourth grade and then you
15 read to learn for the balance of your
16 education. That's sort of the model that
17 we use.

18 If you have my testimony in
19 front of you, however, I'd like you to
20 turn to the page that's not numbered,
21 unfortunately -- my apologies -- that has
22 a chart like this. So if anybody is
23 looking, there is a chart and it is on --
24 I had page numbers -- the fourth page. I
25 apologize for the lack of page numbers.

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2 But this chart shows -- I'll wait if you
3 have a sec in that many big pile of
4 testimony.

5 And maybe, Sidney, if you want
6 to take it up to the Councilmembers.
7 That might make it easier.

8 We have more copies. So if we
9 just turn to the fourth page on this one,
10 it will be easier.

11 So this chart kind of speaks to
12 what Larry Jones was just talking about
13 in fact. Since 1992, this country has
14 made essentially no progress on
15 increasing the share of children who are
16 reading at grade level. Worse yet, when
17 you look at that chart, as Larry points
18 out, that aggregates every kid. African
19 American and Latino kids are doing 20 to
20 30 percent worse than white kids reading
21 at grade level. But across the board,
22 we've not made much progress. This is a
23 pretty depressing chart.

24 Now, if you go to the next
25 page, flip over, you see a more

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complicated bar chart, but one of the good things about the bar chart is that the bottom green part of the bar is shrinking, and what that says is from '92 until now, we're seeing fewer kids farthest behind. That's below basic. So we're in fact making progress for African American, Latino, and white kids and Asian kids in decreasing the kids that are really, really far behind. That's good. But the big challenge is, we're getting them to come up a little, but they're really not getting beyond proficiency.

So we are making a little bit of progress here as a country, and I say that because I want everybody to understand this is not a Philadelphia-only problem. But what we did find when we launched, when my great colleague Sharmain Matlock-Turner and I launched the Grade Level Reading by 4th Campaign in Philadelphia, we found that these disparities at the national level

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and these trends at the national level are exactly the same in Philly, for public and private -- public school students, traditional and charter. We don't know how it is for the Archdiocese kids because they don't take the PSSAs, but we obviously have a lot of work to do in front of us.

So what the campaign set up to do -- and I appreciate that you all know about the Grade Level Reading Campaign. Councilwoman Blackwell has been at many of our campaign events -- was to basically say that by 2021, we would have as many kids on grade level as the best school district in state, and we pegged that to Lower Merion. They have 88 percent of their kids reading at grade level by third grade. So we ought to be there too.

Now, we get it. They have twice as much money as we do and they have twice as many kids reading on grade level as we do. That math should not be

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2 lost on anyone, right?

3 But in spite of that, we began
4 to work with the District and providers
5 and early childhood programs and parents
6 and community organizations from across
7 the City to create the Read by 4th
8 Campaign. And Jenny is here, as you know
9 Jenny well. In case any questions about
10 some of the things that you asked, I
11 wanted to make sure you knew Jenny was
12 here.

13 But I want to say that there
14 are two issues that were raised earlier
15 in this testimony that confound our work.
16 One is the shortage of pre-K slots. Even
17 with the City funds, we're still only at
18 40 percent of our kids entering school
19 ready. Fortunately they're in the
20 highest poverty zip codes, so they're
21 going to make the biggest impact. That's
22 good.

23 We have -- on average we have
24 kids missing eight and a half days in
25 kindergarten. So absenteeism,

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Councilwoman Gym's question about truancy. If you miss nine days based on the national research, which is 5 percent, you're going to begin to lose your capacity to stay on grade level. And we already at kindergarten are showing eight and a half days absenteeism.

Now, the Grade Level Reading -- the Read by 4th Campaign and the District have a lot going on to boost attendance, and Dr. Hite told you some of it, but I will say anything Councilmembers can do through contests and reenforcement to let parents know that every day matters, more than 5 percent, you're holding your kids back. We hear parents say things like, I thought we got ten days, because that's when truancy starts, right? So we really have to combat that and boost the attendance rate if we're going to keep these kids going.

We have to make sure kids read over the summer. On average, if kids

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2 aren't reading over the summer, they're
3 going to lose two months of reading
4 gains. There's some startling statistics
5 about the summer reading loss and, again,
6 the Campaign is getting books through the
7 rec centers in the summer and the PAL
8 centers and the Boys and Girls Clubs and
9 increasing the degree to which kids are
10 reading over the summer.

11 But the big thing obviously
12 that brings us here today is the School
13 District and what are they doing to teach
14 reading, and as you know, the School
15 District has now retrained every teacher
16 in the School District and every
17 elementary school principal, and that is
18 in part possible because Dr. Hite led
19 that effort and the William Penn
20 Foundation funded that effort. And we
21 have now got 2,100 teachers who now know
22 how to teach reading. That's great. And
23 they have books in their classroom and
24 they've got coaches, and that's great.

25 But the real reason I was so

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appreciative that you asked me to come here today is, one of the most startling things I learned by going and watching those summer boot camps for teachers, those teachers said to me, I never knew this before. Nobody ever taught me how to teach reading. Nobody ever taught me how to teach reading.

So I encourage us all to begin to have a conversation with our partners in the higher ed sector, because this bar chart on the fourth page -- the line graph, I'm sorry, is not going to change unless we radically reform how we train teachers and how we hire teachers.

And so the District and the charters are doing the best they can with people who were never trained to teach the basics of literacy to the people who don't learn to read naturally. The 50 percent of kids who need extra help didn't happen. There was one class maybe and it might have been on cognitive development, but it really wasn't on the

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2 rocket science of teaching reading. And
3 I think when we begin to grapple with
4 that, when we begin to bring our higher
5 eds to the table and challenge them to
6 prepare the teachers for our kids, we're
7 going to see this stuff change much more
8 quickly, and I would welcome any
9 opportunity to work with Council on that
10 major overhaul.

11 MS. ROSEWATER: Hello. My name
12 is Ann Rosewater.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you. Thank you.

15 MS. ROSEWATER: Are there
16 questions for Donna or you want to hear
17 all of us?

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Any
19 questions?

20 (No response.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: No.
22 You're fine.

23 MS. ROSEWATER: Thank you very
24 much. My name is Ann Rosewater and I am
25 a Senior Consultant with the Campaign for

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Grade Level Reading, the National Campaign for Grade Level Reading, and have spent my career working to promote healthy child development and learning, including as Director of a special congressional committee on children, youth and families and as a Regional Director of the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

The National Campaign for Grade Level Reading is a collaborative of foundations, non-profit partners, business leaders, government agencies, and states and communities across the country working to ensure that more children in low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career, and active citizenship.

Our campaign focuses, as you heard, on an important predictor of school success and high school graduation, grade level reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

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2 Our network expands across 360
3 communities now in 43 states, Washington,
4 DC, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands
5 and includes more than 3,900 local
6 organizations, 450 state and local
7 funders, and 185 United Ways. We want to
8 thank members of the City Council,
9 including and especially Chairperson
10 Blackwell, thank you, and Councilwoman
11 Reynolds Brown, who unfortunately isn't
12 here today, for the opportunity to talk
13 briefly this morning about the work in
14 Philadelphia.

15 Just last year, the Campaign
16 recognized Philadelphia as one of 48
17 campaign pacesetter communities for
18 exemplary progress in building
19 cross-sector collaboration,
20 community-wide mobilization, and public
21 and private funders absolutely committed
22 to increasing the number of kids reading
23 on grade level by the end of third grade.

24 We are quite inspired by the
25 work of the Read by 4th Campaign led so

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ably by the Philadelphia Free Library,
the Campaign's Executive Director, Jenny
Bogoni, who as Donna said is here and has
worked so closely with Superintendent
Hite, Diane Castlebuono, Donna Cooper,
and many others to unite the School
District, the charter and parochial
school sectors, the William Penn
Foundation, Wells Fargo, Lincoln
Financial, and the United Ways of Greater
Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey and
many others behind this effort.

Philadelphia is in fact a
leader in the campaign because you're
getting results. It is also one of the
leaders in the campaign when it comes to
robust partnerships inside and outside of
the schools, with principals and teachers
as well as summer and out-of-school-time
programs, parents and preschool
educators.

When we look at school district
data around the country, we see
Philadelphia, one of the largest

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districts in the Campaign overall, on the right track and heading in the right direction. Last year, as you heard, 35 percent of third graders scored proficient on the PSSA, up from 30 percent in 2016. That more than 15 percentage increase is greater than what we saw in Dallas and Phoenix last year and on par with Denver and Raleigh-Durham increases in recent years.

These gains are being driven by a variety of factors, speaking to the complex issue of teaching and learning literacy, not the least of which is the unprecedented public-private investment in professional development, which has mobilized an army of literacy coaches, the use of state-of-the-art curricula and assessment tools to reach and lift up the young readers in kindergarten through third grade who are struggling the most, and also due to the informal -- the more informal efforts to recruit and deploy reading captains in neighborhoods

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2 throughout the City, leveraging small
3 business and the faith community.

4 We are clear-eyed about the
5 problem.

6 There is a reading crisis
7 across the United States. According to
8 the most recent national assessment of
9 educational progress, fully 80 percent of
10 low-income fourth graders in the country
11 were not reading at grade level.

12 But Philadelphia is lighting up
13 the pathway out of that crisis, and it's
14 a light we hope everyone sees.

15 Thank you very much.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you.

18 Catherine Blunt.

19 MS. BLUNT: Hello. My name is
20 Catherine Blunt. I was here last year
21 and I testified before the Education
22 Committee regarding the School District
23 accountability for preparing and
24 matriculating African American male
25 students, and it was interesting to note

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then, as I suggested, that I felt City Council needed to convene a roundtable of involved stakeholders along with the above-mentioned -- because I'm not going by this, so you can't read this to follow me, like Donna -- above-mentioned persons like Dr. Clayton, Dr. Lytle, and Dr. Farmbry, as well as retired School District teachers and administrators to come together with Dr. Hite or high level School District of Philadelphia representatives about improving student education and challenge schools and communities looking to develop specific recommendations for student success and a safe, nurturing school classroom environment, and I concluded at that time we need to finally take responsibility for growing our own by educating our own students, sending them to colleges, connecting them to careers and education in other fields needed in our city for the future success of our city and to positively impact our marginalized

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2 minority communities as well as our
3 communities in poverty.

4 Children achieving, a phrase
5 coined by Dr. Hornbeck, is a matter of
6 curriculum; instructional delivery in the
7 classroom; professional development of
8 staff; parental engagement in the
9 education of their children; and clean,
10 safe, nurturing educational environments.

11 As a member of the 2015-2016
12 Philadelphia University Pre-K
13 Commission -- Universal Pre-K Commission,
14 I was party to discussions about the
15 number of three- and four-year-olds
16 engaged in state-approved Keystone Stars
17 quality pre-K programs; heard small
18 female and minority-run family day care
19 providers complain about the Stars
20 program being more interested in
21 checklists than their students learning
22 and growing; heard parents say they
23 wanted day care facilities that were
24 affordable, convenient, safe, and
25 culturally inviting; heard day care

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teachers as well as providers complain that kindergarten was not ready for their children. All right? Kindergarten was not ready to receive children who learned to play and play to learn. So when they went to kindergarten, particularly the males, the males were identified as ADD or ADHD because they couldn't sit in those neat little rows all day long, which isn't a natural way for them to transition to learning as a whole.

So there were at that time identified -- I'll generalize -- about 42,000 three- or four-year-olds residing in Philadelphia, thirty-two of which were in families living below the poverty line, 15,000 were already in quality pre-K programs, with 10,000 of 17,000 low- and moderate-income youngsters becoming the targeted population for publicly funded universal pre-K seats and approved City day care programs. The other 7,000 children may have been in quality child care programs with the

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possibility that many were with
grandparents or other family members or
even with neighbors because it was less
costly and more convenient for those
parents.

The Universal Pre-K Program was
considered a way to provide quality day
care, early childhood education, and
intervention for children at risk because
of social economics, including
homelessness, English language learning,
and/or special education needs. It was
hoped that children's needs would be
identified and addressed early, thereby
enabling them to be more successful and
least likely to drop out of school,
particularly in the ninth grade, and/or
become the school-to-prison pipeline.

So to monitor and manage
Philadelphia's endeavor to provide
quality pre-K for our at-risk three- and
four-year-old population, the City must
keep track of their numbers, determine
where they are during the day, and push

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out to those outside of quality pre-K programs and connect them and their parents with quality activities doable with grand-mom and other relatives and even the neighbor.

Even though children are exposed to pre-K reading and reading activities in pre-K -- excuse me. Even though children are exposed to pre-reading and reading activities in pre-K and kindergarten programs, reading is especially emphasized in one through third grades. Children should learn to read and read to learn, as Donna said. This means that teachers, especially those educating children in early years, must know how to teach reading and math and science.

So I am going to now quote from Hilderbrand Pelzer, who is the son of educators who were educated in Philadelphia, and he is an elementary education teacher -- excuse me; Philadelphia education principal.

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2 "Several years ago when I was
3 the principal of a Philadelphia public
4 school inside the City's prison system, I
5 witnessed the sad truth that I've seen
6 play out repeatedly throughout my tenure
7 as an educator. I found that on average
8 incarcerated school-age youth, median age
9 16, were reading below the sixth grade
10 level. Not having learned to read was
11 the single greatest weakness among these
12 youth, who struggled with pronunciation
13 and understanding vocabulary and
14 demonstrated difficulty with reading
15 fluency and comprehension. These are the
16 same deficiencies that I see in my
17 current school every day" and in their
18 respective -- excuse me. "These are the
19 same deficiencies that I see in my
20 current school every day and the
21 deficiencies that so many hard-working
22 teachers and principals are grappling
23 with in their respective schools across
24 the country. The truth is, the literacy
25 development of children in urban

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2 communities is dismal in general and at
3 best static. After a myriad of local and
4 national efforts decade after decade to
5 get children reading on grade level,
6 reading achievement has remained
7 essentially flat.

8 Now, I want to say this: Some
9 years back, Jonathan Kozol wrote
10 something called Why Children Can't Read,
11 but he also wrote something called The
12 Children of the Revolution. So The
13 Children of the Revolution is about how
14 Fidel Castro in Cuba, whether you like it
15 or not, got rid of the literacy program
16 by teaching children to teach reading.
17 So it was each one teach one. And the
18 children, you know, solved the literacy
19 problem. And so Jonathan Kozol concluded
20 that the reason why we have a literacy
21 problem in the United States is because
22 we don't want to educate people to be
23 literate.

24 Now, Betsy DeVos, Secretary of
25 Education, was on 60 Minutes yesterday

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2 and she was answering questions about her
3 push for school choice, which is designed
4 to take funds from traditional public
5 education and especially poor, at-risk
6 students living in marginalized
7 communities. Ms. DeVos painted a bleak
8 scenario where traditional public
9 education will be replaced by voucher
10 education that has been proven not to be
11 any successful or more successful than
12 what is already occurring in traditional
13 schools, and these are least effective
14 for needy students. She represents a
15 future of education by those who envision
16 education innovation technology platforms
17 supplanting a reliance on curriculums
18 promoting humanistic values and
19 standards. They also envision replacing
20 teachers with computers and online
21 programs. Educators know children,
22 especially at-risk children, learn best
23 in human environments and through human
24 interactions.

25 So I'm concluding.

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2 As educators and policymakers,
3 we must push back against Betsy DeVos and
4 the corporate-academia innovation
5 technology rush to turn our children into
6 commodities for profit and requiring
7 their parents to relinquish their
8 protection under the Family Education
9 Rights and Privacy Act in order for their
10 children to qualify for School District
11 and/or after-school remediation programs
12 that allow corporations to collect and
13 use data on our children to improve their
14 product.

15 To Mr. Pelzer's assessment and
16 recommendation, I would emphasize,
17 education is a human endeavor in which we
18 socialize our young to commit our moral,
19 if we're religious, or our biological, if
20 you're more scientific, imperative to
21 preserve our humanity and thereby
22 preserve the planet which nourishes us.
23 In addition to earlier recommendations
24 and, of course, necessary funding to
25 provide quality education for all of our

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2 students, I add we must move forward to
3 ensure all students are reading on grade
4 level by grade four. We must also move
5 forward to preserve our classrooms and
6 our schools in which students learn to
7 read and do math and science.

8 Additionally, we must move forward to
9 maintain the human interaction of
10 education, our teachers and our
11 administrators who provide safe,
12 nurturing learning environments in which
13 students participate in learning to
14 become human as well as literate.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Very
16 important. Thank you.

17 Good afternoon.

18 MS. HAVER: I just want to
19 thank you for allowing me to give Karel
20 Kilimnik's testimony. It's very brief.
21 It's one page. She just had car issues.
22 So I'm speaking on behalf of Karel. I am
23 Lisa Haver.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: On
25 behalf of who again?

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2 MS. HAVER: Karel Kilimnik.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

4 MS. HAVER: I'm Lisa Haver.

5 I'm the other co-founder of the Alliance
6 for Philadelphia Public Schools. So I'm
7 going to read her statement, and I want
8 to thank everybody else for what they
9 said and, as I always do at this
10 Committee, I thank Chair Blackwell and
11 Councilman Oh for being here for the
12 public speakers. We really appreciate
13 it.

14 Good afternoon to everyone.

15 I'm Karel Kilimnik, a retired early
16 childhood teacher.

17 I'm speaking on behalf of
18 Karel, for the record.

19 When I retired, I was teaching
20 kindergarten and horrified at what I was
21 expected to do. Instead of a
22 play-oriented, hands-on discovery
23 approach, my students were brutally
24 forced into relentless assessments,
25 enforced sitting for too long as I was

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2 supposed to follow highly scripted
3 curricula. My blocks and easels were
4 banished, as was project time where
5 children could choose what they wanted to
6 do and play with others as they explored
7 a rich environment. Please note that the
8 Common Core ECE Standards were not
9 developed by any educators.

10 Young children learn by
11 playing. I have included links to
12 articles and research documenting this
13 fact. I hope that you can take time to
14 read them as you develop early childhood
15 standards for our students.

16 Defending the Early Years is a
17 national organization focused on
18 developmentally appropriate early
19 childhood practice. Their articles
20 document why standards and standardized
21 testing are inappropriate for young
22 children. Fred Rogers stated that play
23 is the work of children. In the short-
24 and long-term play benefits, cognitive,
25 social, emotional, and physical

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development. Children learn as they discuss problems, negotiate, analyze, make mistakes, experiment, collaborate, and cooperate with each other. Play provides an opportunity for teachers to observe critical-thinking skills of their students. Play leads to creativity, capacity for problem-solving, and love of learning. How does the child approach and solve problems? Children use many mathematical and scientific concepts as they negotiate their way. Building blocks provide multiple opportunities to foster beginning mathematical skills as children experiment with construction.

It is up to teachers and administrators to provide them with a rich environment filled with many opportunities to explore. A literacy-rich environment filled with books, magazines, posters, signs, and recipes creates a desire to learn how to interpret and read.

In my class we always had an

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assortment of insects, hosted an annual
embryology project, went on field trips
to the local post office, to the Art
Museum, discussed and wrote how
everything we did worked. Young children
need hands-on experiences. This is how
they learn. Look at kindergarten in
Finland where play guides everything.

You have an article in front of
you from The Atlantic about kindergarten
in Finland which Karel sent in
previously.

Outside play, inside areas such
as housekeeping, ice cream store,
hospital all provide opportunities for
children to learn and develop skills that
they will use as they progress through
life.

I just want to reiterate what
Ms. Blunt said. Human students need
human teachers. There's a very dangerous
trend now, and we as observers of the SRC
just saw just at the last meeting \$10
million more for online learning. That's

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2 in addition to the 10 million that was
3 allotted about a year ago. And as we
4 pointed out at that time, there is no
5 research that shows that this is
6 beneficial for children. Human children
7 need human teachers. And as one of the
8 previous speakers pointed out, Mr. Hardy,
9 our kids come with issues. They're not
10 just in school to learn reading, writing,
11 arithmetic, and cursive -- with you on
12 that one -- but they're really there to
13 learn how to interact with people.
14 Computers will not do that for children.
15 Human teachers, deans, principals, that's
16 what it's going to take.

17 So we want to be on record of
18 saying this blended learning, online
19 learning is not beneficial for any
20 children, but I think especially for our
21 children here in Philadelphia.

22 Thank you again for allowing me
23 to read Ms. Kilimnik's statement.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you. Thank you.

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2 MS. McDOWELL: I think Barbara
3 Dowdall, I don't think she made it today,
4 so I'm Alison. I don't know if it's my
5 turn.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All
7 right. Can't hear you, so say your --

8 MS. McDOWELL: Alison McDowell.
9 Sorry. I think Barbara was before me,
10 but she's not here.

11 May I just pass these copies to
12 you?

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

14 MS. McDOWELL: Thank you very
15 much. At the end I'm going to speak a
16 little bit about financialization of
17 education through technology, and those
18 are some supporting materials that I
19 think are really important.

20 There are two individuals who
21 made the first round of the School Board
22 who are connected with Econsult
23 Solutions, and they've just hired on an
24 advisor from Results for America, who is
25 very much involved in pay-for-success

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2 finance for pre-K and early literacy. So
3 I think those are really important
4 documents.

5 Just to clarify, I think you
6 had me down as a consultant. I'm
7 actually a parent. I mean, I guess I can
8 consult on parenting, but that's -- I
9 have no professional private capacity as
10 a consultant.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you.

13 MS. McDOWELL: In 1976, my
14 third grade class constructed a geodesic
15 dome reading nook under the guidance of
16 our teacher, Mrs. Nevius. And inside
17 with books and carpet squares and
18 flashlights, a bunch of eight-year-olds
19 found magic. Wilder Elementary had a
20 librarian who could place the perfect
21 book in the hands of each and every
22 child. We anxiously waited for Mrs.
23 Nevius to take out her bookmark to read
24 the next chapter of The Cay or Island of
25 the Blue Dolphins aloud to us. These are

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formative experiences for me.

I am now the parent of a Philadelphia student and I have witnessed a relentless campaign to steal this magic from our schools, and today I welcome the opportunity you have given to consider what humane education looks like and how we can best support it.

We need to reduce class sizes; hire certified reading specialists; and make sure every school has a library, a functioning library with a certified librarian. Public libraries are great, but they should not replace school libraries.

Shower children with books that are culturally relevant to them and help build a teaching force for our city that reflects our student body. Choose teacher-led professional development over disruptive consultants who are often selling technological solutions. Give children time during their school day to think, to discuss, to reflect, to

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2 challenge, and to question.

3 Many students today, including
4 pre-K even and kindergartners, are
5 instead of this being logged onto
6 software programs designed to harvest
7 personal data. And rather than
8 age-appropriate play-based learning, they
9 are being put in front of screens. And
10 we know that increased screen time leads
11 to social isolation and creates angry,
12 depressed children.

13 Instead of developing healthy
14 relationships through quality time with
15 teachers and peers, they're having their
16 education shaped by algorithms and
17 computer code. We know there are racial
18 issues with a lot of these algorithms.

19 Our children may not have
20 libraries, but they do have unique ID
21 numbers that track their every move
22 online in school. And children have no
23 idea that their data is fed into
24 predictive analytic systems and that
25 their unpaid digital labor creates value

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2 for ed-tech investors. As Eric Schmidt
3 of Google's Alphabet once said, data is
4 the new oil and we're about to frack our
5 children.

6 There is no guarantee that our
7 children's data will be protected from
8 hacks or leaks. No one can be sure it
9 won't be used to profile them in ways
10 that will actually limit their future
11 opportunities rather than open doors.

12 The most powerful companies in
13 the world right now are cloud-based
14 computing companies and
15 telecommunications companies that have an
16 interest in pushing education online.
17 And venture capital and philanthropies
18 are helping facilitate this
19 transportation through social impact
20 investments. And in the name of
21 evidence-based policy, there is now a
22 bipartisan push to embrace so-called
23 innovative finance schemes that use
24 private money to fund social programs,
25 including pre-K and early literacy. This

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2 pay-for-success model requires a lot of
3 data to prove that their programs
4 so-called "work." And not coincidentally,
5 this is exactly what education software
6 systems promise to deliver, is that data,
7 children's personal data.

8 So remember the housing market
9 crash of 2008 when bundled mortgages were
10 turned into vehicles for financial
11 speculation? There are powerful global
12 interests who want to do it again, using
13 debt associated with pre-K literacy
14 program investments. This next "big
15 short" could very well be our nation's
16 education system. This is not just in
17 Philadelphia; this is national, this time
18 gambling not on homes but on children's
19 lives. So no software system is going
20 to -- Philadelphia's youth must learn to
21 be independent, creative, and courageous
22 thinkers.

23 I'm here today in my Year of Du
24 Bois T-shirt. I'm a member of the
25 Saturday Free School, so I am here in the

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2 spirit of Du Bois and social justice.

3 We need courageous thinkers.

4 We need people who will speak the truth.

5 No software system is going to teach our

6 children that. And when allocating

7 resources for education, I implore you as

8 a parent to invest in people first and

9 books second. That's where the magic is.

10 Approach big data with caution, because

11 it can be weaponized against children and

12 the common good.

13 And so these documents here --

14 this is -- the second page shows the plan

15 to securitize debt through asset-backed

16 securities on social impact pre-K

17 investments, and ReadyNation is behind

18 this. They are having a global

19 conference on pre-K education in New York

20 in November. You have to request to

21 register. And I've noted on this

22 document, it says a children's advocate

23 or other policy expert may attend only

24 with a pre-approved team of at least four

25 business people. The people who are

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attending, speakers, include the people from the World Bank, chemical companies, figure skaters, KPMG, many, many global entities. You can look it up on the website. But really no educators, and it's pretty clear that they're not interested in having those people in the room as they plot this out. So there's a lot of money involved in children's data.

Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very much. Thank you.

I'd like to call forward a panel of all my friends, Lawrence Jones, Richard Allen Charter; Sharif El Mekki, thank you, Mastery Charter School or the old Shoemaker, Principal; Jean Marie Kouassi, Commission on African and Caribbean Immigrant Affairs, he's Co-Chair; Mohamed Camara, Commission on African and Caribbean Affairs, also Co-Chair; and then there's Tamika Anglin, constituent.

And gentlemen from the

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Commission, I know that you heard them speak earlier about the ELL as if African children are getting their share.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very much. Good evening to you all and thank you so very much. Thank you.

(Thank you.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you. And thank you for your patience. What wants to start? Lawrence Jones?

MR. JONES: Certainly.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: This is one of the people I call too when I have issues, everybody, on charter schools and education in general from my Richard Allen Prep School.

MR. JONES: Chairwoman Blackwell, Councilman Oh, members of the Committee, members of the public and fellow panelists, thank you very much for having me here. This conversation about early education pre-K to third grade is

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an important one. I want to first start off by saying that I have been in education for 24 years and they have all been in middle school, which would initially say to you that I don't know that much about early education. However, we get the product, and those 24 years have actually taught me a lot and I've seen a lot, and there are some things that I am very happy about and there are a number of things that I am concerned about and some things that, quite frankly, scare me to death.

In 2002, No Child Left Behind came about. It was a time in public education where we had a focus on education unlike any before. The amount of resources, the amount of money, the amount of attention that has been placed on testing, assessments, test preparation, that has been spent on various programs and consultants has been staggering. And we have seen progress and we have seen some steps, but the

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steps have not been large enough, and there are some areas where we've actually seen regressions.

So when we take a look at it and we talk about what it means to be prepared by third grade, we have heard from every panel the importance.

As a middle school educator, I'm used to getting students in either grade 5 or 6. I'm used to having to deal with what was done prior to them getting to our school.

For example, when we look at literacy, there have been times when we have had students who have done very well, but we've also seen by my written testimony last year 75 percent of our incoming fifth grade students were reading below grade level, 75 percent. Of that number, 48 percent were more than two years behind, most of them closer to three or more. So off the bat, you have students who are coming in at a deficit, and those students are most in need of

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2 supports and services. And it makes you
3 beg the question, of course, why did they
4 arrive that way.

5 So I have some thoughts on
6 that, but my concern is more so based in
7 the dangers of how do we address those
8 students. Now, the easiest way to do it
9 is to say that as years go on, if early
10 education improves, we're not going to
11 have to deal with those students anymore,
12 and I hope that is the case. But for
13 right now, the child who is in fifth
14 grade reading on a second grade level is
15 soon going to be the child who is in
16 ninth grade reading on a third grade
17 level or a fourth grade level, and that's
18 a child that is not going to successfully
19 navigate high school.

20 So we look at that, and schools
21 are left with a problem. One of the
22 problems that schools are left with is to
23 ask the question, do I put the limited
24 resources into those students that really
25 need it the most, understanding that if I

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2 put all of my resources into a fifth
3 grade student who is reading on a second
4 grade level, if he or she does the
5 Herculean task of gaining 2.5 years in
6 six months, they're going to be at a 4.5
7 grade level. They're most likely not
8 going to be proficient on their
9 assessments. So for a school, those
10 resources are not going to necessarily
11 show.

12 Now, they will get some
13 consideration through growth and other
14 standards, which thankfully some of the
15 rewrites of the laws have addressed, but
16 many schools have been made to force --
17 forced to make those tough decisions, and
18 it's not always based about what's best
19 for the students who are in need.

20 Another issue that has brought
21 me concerns -- and I think I have more of
22 an answer for this one -- is how are the
23 students getting to us, and I've already
24 said that literacy and mathematics and
25 reading is a problem, but there's also

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2 something called the behavioral literacy.
3 If someone were to say at the start of No
4 Child Left Behind that we would have
5 students, large numbers, who were reading
6 this far behind grade level, we'd be
7 shocked. But if someone were to also say
8 that there were states passing laws where
9 teachers were being able to be armed so
10 they could protect themselves and others
11 ostensibly against their students, we
12 would either laugh or we'd start to cry,
13 but that's where we are right now. And
14 one of the issues I believe is that we
15 are not dealing with the whole child.

16 So when we talk about
17 behavioral literacy, if we were to punish
18 students who don't know how to read, you
19 would think that was cruel and
20 nonsensical, but every day we punish
21 students who don't know how to behave.
22 And oftentimes that's not an indictment
23 on their home life. It's not always a
24 home life indictment. If I want you to
25 know how to transition into my classroom,

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2 I need to teach that. And our kids are
3 learning different things every day. If
4 I want you to have conflict without
5 resorting to your hands or a weapon, that
6 has to be taught, and we're not
7 necessarily purposefully teaching that.

8 So one of the things that we
9 look at is, at our school we started a
10 program and it's several programs, and we
11 knew initially that there were going to
12 be spikes, and we saw a huge influx in
13 certain behaviors that we did not like,
14 but we expected that. So we've been
15 doing restorative practices, we've been
16 doing youth court, one of the first
17 schools to do that, peer mediation and
18 conflict resolution, and we also do
19 mindfulness techniques and we have been
20 working with some teachers actually doing
21 transcendental meditation. It's
22 voluntary for certain teachers. And we
23 have put all of these things together.
24 We switched our resources, we pulled away
25 some of our NTAs or security and replaced

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2 them with restorative coaches, because
3 you have to teach this.

4 Now, after the first year, we
5 saw a spike. After the second year, we
6 saw a minimal decrease. This year, from
7 September until now, we have a 77 percent
8 decrease in acts of violence and
9 fighting. We have over a 50 percent
10 decrease in suspensions. And these are
11 real numbers. This is not just you put
12 the kid out for two days and don't call
13 it a suspension. You call it a -- I
14 don't know the term they call it now. A
15 stay home timeout. So these are actual
16 real numbers.

17 So I propose that we look at
18 why not having mandatory peer mediation,
19 conflict resolution training in certain
20 grades. We mandate that we test in those
21 grades. Do we mandate that we teach kids
22 how to get along with one another?

23 Why not mandate that these
24 programs are in every school? Why not
25 look at sensible ways to raise funding?

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2 And one thing I don't hear very
3 often is, looking at the state
4 corrections, there are more than 20 state
5 prisons who are either at 100 percent or
6 up to 105 percent of their capacity. I
7 would love to see the day that we have a
8 plan on reducing those state prisons by
9 about 15 to 20 percent or more and taking
10 those funds and putting them into
11 education, and then we could argue about
12 things like do we make smaller class
13 sizes or teach things like this.

14 And in my final statement, as I
15 know I've gone on, is, we are also seeing
16 that when we teach these things, we also
17 have to make sure that there are social
18 linkages as well. We do have students
19 who come to us with issues, but schools
20 every day address those students as human
21 beings, and some of their issues are
22 actually gifts. A student that has to
23 learn and work through a mental health
24 challenge or a behavioral challenge
25 oftentimes becomes a student that's that

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2 much more empathetic.

3 So I thank you for this
4 opportunity. I thank you for listening.
5 I hope that we can all take a moment and
6 give a little bit more weight to how we
7 use the soft skills to enhance things
8 like literacy, mathematics, and overall
9 academic performance.

10 Thank you.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you. Thank you. I wish we could talk
13 more about all of those things. Thank
14 you.

15 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Just like
16 my friend and colleague here, this is my
17 25th year working in Philadelphia
18 schools, and my experience has spanned
19 from fifth grade all the way through
20 twelfth, and some of what I've learned
21 about pre-K to third was from my time at
22 the U.S. Department of Education as a
23 Principal Ambassador Fellow. So I want
24 to just again thank you, Dr. Blackwell,
25 Councilman Oh, for having me, and

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2 particularly as a person who directly
3 benefited from early childhood education
4 that was led by members of the Black
5 Panther Party and their kind of Head
6 Start programming in West Philadelphia.
7 I'm appreciative to be able to testify
8 about this extremely important issue.

9 We know that early education is
10 a crucial component to improving the
11 quality of life for both students as well
12 as the citizens as a whole, and I
13 congratulate City Council for working
14 with Mayor Kenney and the School District
15 to give far more students access to
16 universal pre-K, as we know that
17 economists rate -- say that the lifelong
18 economic rate of return is 7 to 10
19 percent per year per every single dollar
20 invested in early education programming.
21 And we know that there's still much more
22 work to do.

23 So Dr. Hite, Dr. Logan, and
24 their team has already spoken about
25 several of the things that -- so I will

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2 scratch that, but just to reiterate, I
3 give literacy, early intervention, and
4 screening.

5 I was very pleased to hear them
6 talking about teacher colleges and the
7 wholly unprepared teacher that enters
8 schools, not just high schools but pre-K
9 to third grade, and absolutely it is
10 extremely complicated for half the
11 student population and they just keep
12 falling further behind as the years go
13 across.

14 So a couple things, and I think
15 if implemented -- and this is from the
16 research that I've seen with -- if it's
17 done consistently and pervasively -- and
18 this is again a loose framework, but
19 these are some of the key components if
20 applied.

21 One successful, supportive, and
22 seamless transitions during each year and
23 between each year all the way through
24 third and even fourth grade. We can do
25 this by insisting on effective and

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aligned curriculum, instruction, and
assessments both within and across early
childhood in early grades.

Leaders should create
expectations, incentives or requirements
for joint professional development. So
decreasing the silos, so pre-K gets this
training, first grade gets this training,
kindergarten gets this training, but that
some of this training is collaborative
and across. So this joint professional
development opportunities for both
providers, teachers, principals, and
administrators across these
community-based early education programs
and care settings as well as the
elementary schools -- and that should
include data collection and reporting
systems from early childhood -- should be
integrated as well. So that's one, the
transitions during and between years.

Another one is day-to-day
activities that demonstrate the
importance of social-emotional learning.

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So this was spoken about a lot. And how to nurture and develop this through play and other activities. We should ensure that every adult that is working with our children, particularly the younger ones, values and has the training, the professional development, reflecting that imaginative play is a crucial part of an equitable program.

Our children must have consistent access to both structured and unstructured opportunities to visualize, sketch to stretch, make -- with materials and dramatizing; implementation of a systematic approach to support our teachers of mobile children; and to support children who are new to a school is also particularly important.

Thirdly, strategies that ensure positive relationships exist between children and teachers, including mandatory and ongoing cultural context professional development. While, yes, we must also strive for low teacher-child

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ratios, we must also value the role of culture and community context. And by prioritizing and facilitating conversations that include discussions of race, class, culture, and anti-racist teaching, we can make significant impact on student learning outcomes.

We ask that you formally work with The Fellowship: Black Male Educators for Social Justice to support the recruitment of an increasingly diverse teaching force; implementation of a research-based best practice that develops strong family and community engagement such as including children's extended family members, engaging in summertime home visits, leading school-based play groups, encouraging parent-led workshops, and holding regular cultural celebrations.

Fifth, a high-quality, diverse teaching force that hires teachers who are actually qualified to teach pre-K to third grade, helping to ensure a deep

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2 understanding of not only where students
3 are in pre-K but where they have to be by
4 third grade.

5 We should support teachers and
6 classroom assistants pursuing their
7 degrees in child development and/or early
8 childhood education.

9 I would like to call your
10 attention finally to a program that The
11 Fellowship: Black Male Educators for
12 Social Justice needs your help in
13 bringing to Philadelphia that can play a
14 huge role in supporting our younger
15 students. This program is called Leading
16 Men Fellowship. It is currently in
17 Washington, DC and is expanding to Kansas
18 City, Oakland, Detroit, and elsewhere.
19 This program trains high school graduates
20 to serve in pre-K schools as literacy
21 coaches. They attend professional
22 development over the summer and
23 throughout the year. They work as
24 classroom assistants while they attend
25 school to secure Bachelor Degrees.

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2 The Leading Men Fellowship
3 program was created to address two
4 different problems. First, it increases
5 the number of male educators of color in
6 early education, which is almost nil
7 currently. And, secondly, it helps to
8 reduce the gap in language development
9 for preschoolers from various
10 backgrounds.

11 Thank you again for your time.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you very much.

14 Let me thank Sandra Dungee
15 Glenn for coming and staying all day.
16 Thank you.

17 Thank you both very much.

18 COUNCILMAN JONES: Madam Chair,
19 if I could?

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes,
21 sir. Councilman Jones.

22 COUNCILMAN JONES: I just want
23 to thank these guys, whether it's El
24 Mekki at Shoemaker Campus. Some of the
25 best interns I've ever had over the last

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2 ten years I've gotten from his school.

3 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: Whether it

5 was when --

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I knew

7 him first.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: Listen, you

9 knew him best and first. I'm just

10 thankful he's there. He produces a good

11 product, meaning young people that when

12 they come down City Hall, they represent

13 their school well and they have a sense

14 of self-esteem, that they are not

15 second-class students anywhere. And so

16 that kind of imagery comes from the top,

17 and I know it does, and so I'm

18 appreciative.

19 I was watching you all on

20 television. I said I'm going to come

21 down. I was going to come up and hug

22 him, but I won't do that. I'll maintain

23 proper decorum, but I just wanted on the

24 record to thank you guys.

25 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Thank you,

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2 Councilman, for all your support over the
3 years. And obviously Jannie Blackwell,
4 our esteemed Councilwoman, knew me when I
5 first became a teacher. So very
6 appreciative.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: He
8 looks just the same. He looks like he
9 could get mixed up with one of the
10 seniors, you know.

11 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Well, I'm
12 thankful for all of your leadership. And
13 Councilman Oh actually went to the school
14 that I first started teaching, Turner
15 Middle School.

16 COUNCILMAN JONES: Really?
17 What do you mean "went to"?

18 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: He
19 attended.

20 COUNCILMAN JONES: Wait a
21 minute. Something is wrong with the
22 timeline here. Now, you attended his
23 school?

24 COUNCILMAN OH: Well, not
25 recently.

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2 COUNCILMAN JONES: All right.

3 Thank you, Madam Chair.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you.

6 Thank you, Mr. El Mekki, and
7 thank you, Lawrence Jones.

8 (Thank you.)

9 MR. KOUASSI: Councilwoman,
10 Councilman David Oh, Councilman Curtis, I
11 would like to thank you again for the
12 invitation, and my name is Jean Marie
13 Kouassi and I am co-leader in litigation
14 at the Mayor's Commission of African and
15 Commission Affair, but I'm also the
16 founder of Palms Solution, which stand
17 for the African global initiative
18 dedicated to facilitating social,
19 academic, and cultural immersion of
20 immigrant students into the Philadelphia
21 School District setting.

22 For the last ten years, I've
23 been very involved in the education of
24 our children, and the reason being that
25 many of them comes from Francophone

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countries, and as you know in this case is, English is not their first language. And so when it comes down to the education, we have many more barriers than ones coming from Anglophone countries.

On the international level, I was also privileged in May 2016 to be invited in Germany to help develop strategies and social policies to expand the concept of cultural diplomacy and immigrant acceptance in the German school institutions. That's when they started to accept most of the Syrian refugee.

The reason why I feel like it was -- I felt like it was important to mention this is because, for one, I wanted to let you know how much -- how passionate I am about the problem of integration of our kids into the system, but also coming from different background as I mentioned, I think there's something that I could contribute here by the suggestion that I will make at the end.

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2 Since children begin to notice
3 differences and construct classification
4 and evaluate categories very early, early
5 childhood educators need to affirm and
6 foster children's knowledge and pride in
7 their cultural identities.

8 Unfortunately, these facts are often seen
9 as liability instead of assets, leading
10 to incorrect assumption and closed
11 attitude towards these differences.

12 In fall of 2017, I participated
13 in meetings to revive the School District
14 of Philadelphia language policy. The
15 previous language policy was from 1991.
16 The new policy, which is now Policy No.
17 138, requires the School District of
18 Philadelphia to provide a culturally and
19 linguistically appropriate planned
20 instruction program for English learner,
21 which build on students' home language --
22 which is built, sorry, on students' home
23 language and culture. The policy
24 addresses not only identification and
25 placement of students, but also

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2 programming, accountability, equity, and
3 community engagement.

4 However, the true test of any
5 policy is not only its revision, but also
6 its implementation. And so far since
7 it's been even passed by the SRC, we
8 haven't seen any implementation of this
9 new revised policy.

10 Along with the problem of
11 implementation, we are also forced to be
12 faced with some of the issues that come
13 with Title I and Title III distribution,
14 the lack of tangible data for our
15 children coming from their different
16 African and Caribbean countries. There's
17 no data whatsoever. Therefore, I'm kind
18 of surprised and kind of concerned about
19 how the School District gets to even
20 equally address the issues of the
21 different students since we have no data.

22 Now, the question is, how do we
23 solve then these issues? And this is
24 where I would like to make the following
25 suggestion.

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2 First, I do understand that
3 dealing with foreign countries is not
4 always easy to come up with solutions,
5 and since we have so many of the African
6 members here in Philadelphia, we're close
7 to 16,000 in Philadelphia and vicinities,
8 and we have within this 16,000 people
9 such as myself that were blessed to do
10 their studies here and also have learned
11 so much about the system within
12 Philadelphia and knowing how our system
13 also works in our own countries, I think
14 that we can be assets to help with
15 finding best solutions to the problems
16 that we are faced here with the education
17 of our children.

18 So the first one that I think
19 we should be looking into is to create a
20 multi-faceted African and Caribbean
21 partnership consortium. If we really
22 want to target our kids, we have to be
23 able to sit together and for us, in a
24 certain way, get a chance to also educate
25 the people that are concerned about our

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2 children and vice versa, for them to
3 educate us on how to implement the
4 different policy that they have. I think
5 for me that makes sense.

6 The second thing is the
7 consortium that we'll create will work in
8 concert with Philadelphia public schools
9 where the presence of immigrant is
10 noticeable to facilitate the inclusion of
11 the immigrant students, but infusing
12 multicultural content into the entire
13 curriculum's school programs and also
14 strengthen the academic outcome of these
15 institutions.

16 Moreover, the consortium will
17 also provide the platform for community
18 partners in the greater Philadelphia
19 region to collaboratively facilitate the
20 flow of information addressing the needs
21 of all immigrants as relate to immigrant
22 data, governing, academic outcome,
23 language, cultural immersion, and other
24 related services.

25 Furthermore, the consortium

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2 will also collaborate and coordinate with
3 relevant department at the School
4 District to ensure that policy and
5 programs meet the needs of immigrant in
6 the early childhood development.

7 The consortium can also and
8 should also be involved in education of
9 the teachers about the concept of
10 diversity, building a classroom-based
11 multicultural framework that will address
12 practical application of multicultural
13 education in the classroom.

14 Members of the Council, the new
15 educational approach that I am proposing
16 find its essence and distinctiveness on
17 one hand in its ability to anchor itself
18 in the cultural sphere of the surrounding
19 neighborhood; on the other end, in its
20 capacity to meaningfully address the
21 needs of its students. I'm talking here
22 about relevance and pragmatism.

23 Our K to 3 relevant educational
24 system needs to find in its sociological
25 environment and the organizational

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principle and method the human capacity,
the subject content, the teaching, the
learning strategies and means, the wisdom
and knowledge and ethic required for its
smooth implementation in the education of
our children.

The pragmatism part of it deals
mostly with what as immigrant we can
bring into the education of our children.
We don't -- we have so many of our peers
that want to be involved, but
unfortunately there's no room for us to
work together with the School District.
And I think that if we have a system
that's officially known to represent the
African and Caribbean group, that system
or that group could work efficiently and
effectively with the School District so
that the accountability but also the
interconnectedness between these two
groups will help with the outcome of --
the academic outcome of all the public
schools, especially the ones that have
most of the African immigrants.

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2 And so what I am proposing
3 today really is about us understanding
4 that the problem of the public school
5 cannot be solved unless we are part of
6 the equation, because whether we want to
7 admit it or not, diversity today is
8 synonym of Philadelphia, and the
9 multicultural system in which we have, we
10 all cannot go back. It will move
11 forward. And so the earlier we are
12 prepared to work together and
13 understanding that there's a need to
14 create a platform upon which the building
15 and the strength of our kids will come, I
16 don't believe that regardless of all the
17 other things that we are trying to do,
18 regardless of all the other assets that
19 we are trying to bring in, I don't
20 believe that the School District will be
21 able to optimize its implementation when
22 it comes down to strengthening its
23 schools.

24 And so as I'm concluding, my
25 sincere and heartfelt hope is that my

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2 recommendation will be inspiring and
3 supportive of the effort of those of you
4 who have ability to make a difference.
5 We may think that we are just a small
6 group trying to push our agenda, but the
7 truth of the matter is, as Margaret Mead
8 said, never doubt that a small group of
9 thoughtful, committed citizens can change
10 the world. Indeed, it's the only thing
11 that ever has.

12 Thank you.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you, Jean Marie. Thank you.

15 Brother Camara.

16 MR. CAMARA: Good afternoon,
17 everybody.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
19 afternoon.

20 MR. CAMARA: Good afternoon
21 again. I would like to thank the Council
22 for giving us the opportunity to be part
23 of this discussion. My name is Mohamed
24 Camara. I'm one of the Co-Chairs of the
25 Mayor's Commission on African and

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2 Caribbean Immigrant Affairs' Committee on
3 Education. The reason why we're here
4 today, as Jean Marie mentioned, is
5 because in the Commission we have
6 received several complaints of African
7 and Caribbean families about issues of
8 equities, access to opportunities, and
9 language barriers mostly throughout the
10 interactions with their local schools.

11 Now, as we investigated those
12 concerned, we came across a serious lack
13 of data for those two populations. It
14 appears that there are a lot of data
15 available for Hispanics, Caucasians,
16 African American, and Asian students, but
17 there's nothing disaggregated about
18 African and Caribbean children. And most
19 of the time they don't identify them as
20 independent entity. They are presumed to
21 be African American directly, which in
22 essence is not a problem, but it deprives
23 them of a lot of resources.

24 As we know, many of the
25 children come from war zones, come from

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2 places where they haven't been in school
3 for the longest time. So the issues are
4 not really the same, because they have
5 different academic needs.

6 As we looked at that, as I
7 mentioned before, we couldn't find any
8 specific data on this population. So it
9 is very difficult to talk about
10 implementing standards when you have no
11 basis to basically see if there's
12 external (unintelligible) standards can
13 apply to the population that you really
14 want to help.

15 I sincerely think that we are
16 facing a conundrum here. Without the
17 data that is needed for that specific
18 population, it is impossible to move
19 forward. So I myself and Jean Marie, we
20 looked at the registration form of the
21 schools that are concerned. We found out
22 that there's not even a box to check
23 rather than white -- I'm sorry;
24 Caucasian, Hispanic, black or Hispanic
25 non-black. So we would like to see,

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2 first of all, an aggressive collection of
3 data that can basically include all the
4 populations of Philadelphia so we can
5 work towards developing a framework in
6 which all the children can be serviced in
7 the appropriate way.

8 How can you work with diversity
9 within the School District of
10 Philadelphia if you can't find any data
11 on its children or you can't find any
12 data on how many educators were basically
13 hired to these communities. There's
14 none. Because when these people come to
15 us, they ask us -- they tell us that
16 every time I go to School District of
17 Philadelphia, I cannot find anyone that
18 is African or Caribbean. And I work for
19 the School District of Philadelphia. I
20 seldom come across anyone in the School
21 District of Philadelphia that is an
22 educator that is of Caribbean or an
23 African person. Very seldom you do. And
24 a little shaped team, I don't -- I
25 haven't seen a single one.

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2 So there are a serious need of
3 diversity here, because we know that
4 children learn best in environment in
5 which they can see themselves, when they
6 see themselves represented. So we'd like
7 to see some collection of the appropriate
8 data so we can conduct longitudinal
9 studies about this population and how the
10 School District of Philadelphia is
11 assisting them.

12 And also -- I mean, I see
13 Dr. Hite talking about evidence-based
14 practices, which requires
15 (unintelligible) of civil research, but
16 there's no data on this population. So
17 how can we even pretend to work on
18 evidence-based practices if we have not
19 substantial research that shows that
20 whatever practices we're trying to
21 implement actually work for this
22 population?

23 So I will refer to the
24 recommendations that my colleague Jean
25 Marie has mentioned. We need to

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2 substantially collect data. We need to
3 find ways to work together to promote
4 diversity.

5 That's pretty much it. Thank
6 you very much. I hope I didn't confuse
7 you more.

8 COUNCILMAN JONES: No.

9 Thank you, Madam Chair.

10 A couple of clarifying
11 questions. I think I understood the
12 nature of your issue and also your
13 request for data, but let me just
14 clarify. Do we know how many members of
15 the School District or student population
16 are of African or Caribbean origin,
17 immigrants?

18 MR. CAMARA: No. That's pretty
19 much what it is, because there's no box
20 to check. So there's no data. We know
21 that they're there. We know they're
22 counted as African American, which is not
23 a problem, but it is a problem when we
24 try to get them services.

25 COUNCILMAN JONES: So when

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2 someone who has migrated to Philadelphia
3 and goes into the school system, there is
4 no form for any ethnic group that might
5 be a foreigner when they check in?

6 Do you happen to know,
7 Councilman?

8 COUNCILMAN OH: You know what,
9 I don't know that answer, and I do think
10 there is a way around this problem, but
11 it might actually stem from
12 anti-discrimination statutes around
13 identifying ethnicities, citizenship, and
14 other things. But I do think this very
15 important point, that we have students
16 who have come from very traumatic
17 backgrounds with language challenges,
18 that there should be a way around that,
19 because some of our students may check
20 white, but they're actually coming from
21 overseas with war-torn situations and
22 from Europe where there's been genocide
23 issues and other things.

24 So I think that is really a
25 very important point I never actually

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2 thought about, but I think that's where
3 it may come from.

4 COUNCILMAN JONES: So, Madam
5 Chair, with your permission, I am a
6 Commissioner on the Human Relations
7 Commission at the state level and I am
8 familiar with the Education Department's
9 requirement for second language
10 accessibility, and what I'd like to do is
11 connect you with that individual from the
12 state level that monitors that throughout
13 the Commonwealth and be able to have
14 these questions addressed by the School
15 District.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We
17 appreciate that. We've had these
18 discussions, and when they see little
19 brown children, they just assume the
20 African American is checked. So they
21 don't realize that they are not
22 necessarily African American children but
23 African children, and there seems to be
24 consideration for Hispanic and Asian
25 kids, but not African. Just today one of

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2 our Ph.D. folks came up to me today, who
3 is part of the Commission -- and Stan
4 Straughter, I'm glad he's here. She came
5 to us last year, and we thought we worked
6 it out, and it's one of the main groups
7 that we have in the City that's supposed
8 to deal with multiculturalism. So they
9 have a Latino there, they have an Asian,
10 and they came to her as an African and
11 said, We want you to help us find another
12 Asian. They still did not want to
13 consider African people now. Many of you
14 know, we talk about it more and more,
15 we're trying to create Africa Town in
16 Southwest. We have more Africans there
17 than any place else in our city and
18 suburbs.

19 But everybody deserves their
20 respect. But to go to an African person,
21 speak several languages, not from here,
22 they know her, she's part of a program,
23 part of their program, and say, Find us
24 an Asian person, you know. I mean, they
25 could have asked Councilman Oh, they

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2 could have asked a lot of people, but
3 they wanted her to do it because she's on
4 the Commission, but they wouldn't
5 consider an African.

6 So we have to -- as leaders, we
7 have to, and Councilpeople, we have to do
8 something about this, and I will deal
9 with this, because this is a City agency.

10 COUNCILMAN JONES: I will
11 forward that information to you, Madam
12 Chair.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you. Thank you.

15 MR. KOUASSI: Thank you so
16 much.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
18 Councilman Oh.

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

21 First of all, thank you for
22 that. It was very enlightening and I
23 think very important.

24 I did want to clarify that I
25 went to Turner Middle School, of which I

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2 believe Principal Sharif El Mekki was an
3 administrator; if not, principal
4 administrator.

5 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Teacher
6 and assistant principal.

7 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. I was
8 long gone. He is not that old.

9 On the other hand, I did want
10 to ask, if I'm not mistaken, you went to
11 school in Iran?

12 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Yes; for
13 middle school.

14 COUNCILMAN OH: That is
15 fascinating, because you were in like
16 West Philly, Southwest Philly and then
17 you went to high school. How did that
18 happen?

19 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Yeah. So
20 after -- you know, as you might know,
21 both of my parents were in the Black
22 Panther Party, so of all of the issues
23 that occurred, part of what they wanted
24 to -- their children experienced was
25 outside of being an expatriate and what

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2 does it mean to be outside of the country
3 and what could the black experience be
4 elsewhere. And so they had friends in
5 Iran, and so they invited us to stay with
6 them, and it just ended up being a very
7 long living situation. But I came back
8 to go to Overbrook High School and
9 graduated from there, School on the Hill
10 and -- yeah.

11 COUNCILMAN OH: Fascinating.
12 Certainly a very enriching experience.

13 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Very
14 colorful upbringing, definitely.

15 COUNCILMAN OH: Yeah.
16 Fantastic. Thank you so much.

17 PRINCIPAL EL MEKKI: Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you,
19 Chairwoman.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you.

22 Is there anyone else here who
23 would like to testify?

24 All right.

25 (Thank you.)

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you. Thank you all. Thank you. Very
4 important. Thank you all.

5 (Witness approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Feel
8 free to identify yourself and make your
9 testimony.

10 Is there anyone else?

11 (No response.)

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you.

14 MS. ANGLIN: Hi. I'm Tamika
15 Anglin.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.
17 I'm sorry. They did give me your name.
18 I apologize.

19 MS. ANGLIN: It isn't one
20 thing. It's everything. According to
21 your resolution, it says standardized
22 tests are an effective way to show how
23 the children are doing and what areas
24 need to be focused on. However, there is
25 research to say that standardized test

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scores more closely align to income level than it does academics.

Philadelphia is a city of 26 percent poverty. In the resolution it says 33 percent pass the test in reading and 19 percent pass in math.

Thirty-three and 19 add up to 52. Smack dab in the middle is Philadelphia's poverty percentage of 26 percent.

Lower Merion has a poverty of 5.5 percent, and Donna Cooper cited a statistic that said 88 percent of Lower Merion's reading level is on grade level.

There are far more problems in schools than is attributed to simply academics.

Parents who are unemployed, underemployed, who have to leave the house before children are able to get ready and go to school. So you have parents leaving at 6:30 in the morning and children who don't have to leave for school until 8 o'clock. You leave single-digit children at home with middle-aged teenagers to get themselves

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2 ready and out the door for school on
3 time.

4 The District cited that they
5 have a campaign to increase attendance.
6 The one thing that they do not have is a
7 campaign to address the things that
8 hinder children from coming to school.
9 Telling somebody how important school is
10 is not going to get them to come when the
11 issues that hinder school attendance
12 don't have anything to do with just
13 coming to school.

14 Parents understand the
15 importance of getting to school. The
16 problem is the things that impact their
17 ability to get their children to school
18 daily on time have more to do with
19 circumstances outside of schools -
20 employment, unemployment,
21 underemployment, things as simple as was
22 the laundry done over the weekend so that
23 children have clean clothes to come to
24 school. Are there -- is transportation
25 an issue? Is my mother feeling well

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enough today to get me out of the school
or do I need to stay home and take care
of her? There are too many issues, and
because there are so many issues, we want
to default to the simplest -- what we
think is the simplest solution, which is
increase test scores.

The School District spends more
than nine days on standardized tests, and
that's actually taking the test. That
does not include the lead-up of test prep
in those days. There are 60 remaining
classroom days, nine or more of which
will be dedicated to standardized
testing, and every single day up until
that point, there will be test prep.
That's not education.

Councilwoman, you asked what is
the difference between the achievement of
your peers and what can Council do. One
of the things that I know was different
when you were in school is, there was no
focus on standardized testing. There was
no budget for standardizing testing at

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2 the level that children are being prepped
3 to take these tests that they're not
4 succeeding at anyway. Why? Because
5 you're focusing on taking the test as
6 opposed to providing the education. The
7 education -- if the education comes and
8 is resourced, then the test scores will
9 follow if, as one of the other testifiers
10 said, if the tests are focused in on the
11 things that children are actually
12 learning as opposed to what is the
13 motivation of the people creating the
14 test, because it doesn't benefit them to
15 create a test that lots of students pass.

16 What can Council do? One of
17 the things that I hope will happen as the
18 City takes over governance of the School
19 District by way of the School Board is
20 that you actually hold the District
21 accountable for the things that they say
22 they're doing, and not just by data but
23 by real concrete, "show me what you got"
24 evidence, going to the schools, find out
25 what's doing. And three to

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eight-year-olds are not standard, so you cannot create a standard curriculum for a child who is three years old.

What they do need is outside play, fresh air, similar things to the things that you all had when you were in school. They don't need to be sitting in a desk all day. They don't need to be on a computer screen all day. They need a whole lot of things that the District is not providing, libraries being one of them.

Cursive has become a conversation, and it's not about the act of cursive, but it is about the things that are engaged in your brain when cursive happens, and too many of those types of things have been removed from the classroom to pave the way for more and more standardized testing.

When you standardize the curriculum, it always comes with a standardized test, and we don't have any more money to invest on testing. We need

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2 to invest in the things that we know work
3 for children, the same things that worked
4 to get you to where you are today.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
6 you. Thank you very much and thank you
7 for your testimony.

8 We have an announcement.
9 Councilman Taubenberger.

10 COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Thank
11 you, Madam Chair. And I just want to
12 recognize a guest from Ireland, from
13 County Mayo, led by their Mayor, Mayor
14 Richard Finn. We welcome you to our
15 Chambers.

16 And my colleagues that are
17 here, we have also three former mayors,
18 including the first female Mayor ever of
19 County Mayo, and her name is Anne Keppe
20 and also former Mayor Jerry Cole and
21 former Mayor Michael Holmes, and most
22 important is the Deputy Chief of Finance,
23 the Chief of Finance, Mr. Peter Dugan.

24 So I want to just welcome them
25 to Philadelphia and my colleagues that

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2 are here.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Let me
5 say welcome. Welcome. I remember when
6 my late husband, late Congressman Lucien
7 Blackwell, when he served in this body,
8 he went several times. I've been twice.
9 In fact, Frannie Rafferty was a member of
10 Council, and he embarrassed him so much,
11 he made him go. And one of the trips we
12 took -- do you remember -- you all I
13 guess have been around long enough. Do
14 you remember when they bragged about the
15 tour of the Pope? Remember the Pope
16 went? So we did that. That's one of our
17 trips. We took that tour.

18 But it's a lovely country. I
19 did learn one thing from Ireland and,
20 that is, that they call it the Irish
21 mist. That's just rain. I found out it
22 rains a lot in Ireland.

23 COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Madam
24 Chair, thank you very, very much for this
25 opportunity.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

3 you.

4 Welcome to all of you. Thank

5 you. Thank you for coming.

6 Thank you, Councilman.

7 COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Thank

8 you.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Is

10 there anyone else who would like to make

11 a statement?

12 (No response.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Seeing

14 none, thank you also, Evelyn

15 Sample-Oates, for being here all this

16 time.

17 We thank everyone who

18 testified. Thank you to the Committee,

19 especially to David Oh. And we will

20 recess this hearing subject to the call

21 of the Chair, and we thank everyone who

22 participated.

23 Thank you, Niya. I see that

24 you're still here. You all remember that

25 statement I made. I'm not so sure I won

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2 when it came to the final analysis.

3 Thank you.

4 (Committee on Education

5 concluded at 3:45 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
proceedings, evidence and objections are
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stenographic notes taken by me upon the
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