

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, February 21, 2024
10:20 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN NINA AHMAD
COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

ALSO PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON

BILL: 240007
RESOLUTION: 240028

1 - - -

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
3 morning, everybody. Today is
4 Wednesday, February 21st and this
5 is the Committee on Education.
6 Before we start today's hearing,
7 myself along with my colleagues and
8 most of the people in City Hall as
9 well as City government, we today
10 mourn the unfortunate passing of
11 our Chief Clerk Mr. Michael Decker.

12 So before we start today's
13 hearing, I'm not the Council
14 President so I can't do it the way
15 the Council President would do, but
16 I at least want to take a moment of
17 silence to recognize his life, his
18 legacy, his work as well as his
19 40-plus years of service to the
20 City of Philadelphia.

21 (Moment of Silence.)

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
23 you, everybody. Again, today is
24 Wednesday, February 21st. I now
25 note that the hour has come.

1 Mr. Maynard, will you
2 please call the roll to take
3 attendance. Those who are in
4 attendance -- we're not virtual.

5 Mr. Maynard.

6 THE CLERK: Chair Thomas.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
8 morning. I'm present.

9 THE CLERK: Vice-Chair
10 Phillips.

11 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
12 Present. Good morning, everyone.

13 THE CLERK: Councilmember
14 Squilla.

15 (No response.)

16 THE CLERK: Councilmember
17 Gauthier.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
19 Good morning, Mr. Chair and
20 colleagues. Present.

21 THE CLERK: Councilmember
22 Lozada.

23 (No response.)

24 THE CLERK: Councilmember
25 Ahmad.

1 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

2 Present. Thank you very much.

3 THE CLERK: Thank you,
4 Councilmember. Councilmember
5 Brooks.

6 (No response.)

7 THE CLERK: Mr. Chair, a
8 quorum is present.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
10 you. A quorum of the Committee is
11 present and this hearing is now
12 called to order. This is the
13 public hearing on the Committee of
14 Education regarding Bill No. 240007
15 and Resolution No. 240028.

16 Mr. Maynard, will you
17 please read the titles of the bill
18 and hearing resolution to be heard
19 before this Committee today.

20 THE CLERK: Bill 240007, an
21 ordinance amending The Philadelphia
22 Code to add a new Chapter 21-3400,
23 entitled "Youth, Name, Image and
24 Likeness Protection," to establish
25 provisions related to education and

1 counseling for certain Philadelphia
2 youth and their families who are
3 considering licensing publicity
4 rights, all under certain terms and
5 conditions.

6 And Resolution 240028,
7 authorizing the Committee on
8 Education to hold hearings
9 concerning the practice of leveling
10 and its impact on students and
11 teachers in the School District of
12 Philadelphia, especially following
13 the learning loss caused by the
14 COVID-19 pandemic.

15 Please be advised the
16 Committee will hear Bill 240007.
17 Then exit public hearing, go into
18 public meeting to vote on the bill
19 and then resume the public hearing
20 to hear testimony on Resolution
21 240028.

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
23 you, Mr. Maynard.

24 Before we start our hearing
25 today, would any member of the

1 Committee like to make any openings
2 remarks?

3 (No response.)

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing
5 none, Mr. Maynard, will you please
6 call the first panel we have to
7 testify this morning.

8 THE CLERK: The first panel
9 that we have consists of Professor
10 Kenneth Jacobsen from Temple
11 University School of Law.
12 Professor Jacobsen.

13 (Witness approached Witness
14 table.)

15 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
16 morning, Professor. Please state
17 your name for the record and you
18 can proceed with your testimony.

19 MR. JACOBSEN: Thank you.
20 Good morning. My name is Kenneth
21 Jacobsen and I am a practice
22 Professor of Law at Temple
23 University Beasley School of Law
24 and also the Director of the Sports
25 Law Program at Temple Law School.

1 I'm here today to support the
2 Youth, Name, Image and Likeness
3 Protection bill. Preliminarily, I
4 want to commend Councilmember
5 Thomas for his foresight and wisdom
6 in bringing this bill to the floor.

7 By way of background to
8 give you some idea who I am apart
9 from being a professor, I have
10 negotiated sponsorship and
11 endorsement deals for professional
12 athletes. I'm a nationally
13 recognized expert on name, image
14 and likeness. I've published in
15 Bloomberg and other media outlets.
16 I conduct continuing legal
17 education programs on name, image,
18 likeness and I have a deep personal
19 interest in name, image and
20 likeness as well which is why I'm
21 here today.

22 The name, image and
23 likeness is as its name suggests.
24 It is a way where an individual can
25 make money off of their persona,

1 off of their name, off of their
2 nicknames and other things.
3 Because of a change before 2021,
4 both high school and college
5 athletes were not allowed to make
6 any money off of their name, image
7 and likeness or they would lose
8 their amateur status and
9 eligibility.

10 That all changed in 2021 on
11 a college level. And on a high
12 school level, our athletic
13 association, Pennsylvania
14 Interscholastic Athletic
15 Association has promulgated rules
16 and regulations governing NIL, so
17 high school athletes are able to
18 monetize their name, image and
19 likeness.

20 The problem is that the
21 regulations on both the college
22 level and high school level are
23 confusing. They are on a college
24 level not consistent and there are
25 traps for the unwary. If a student

1 does not strictly follow those
2 rules and makes a misstep, they
3 could lose their eligibility in
4 high school. They could also lose
5 their eligibility in college
6 depending on what happened.

7 Also, where there is money,
8 there are bad actors out there who
9 could exploit athletes. I have
10 seen contracts where agents that
11 are representing athletes want 40
12 percent commissions. I've seen
13 contracts where the fine print in
14 those contracts require that
15 athlete to give up his or her name,
16 image and likeness rights in
17 perpetuity in one deal.

18 It was interesting to me,
19 just yesterday I was very fortunate
20 to meet with 75 athletic directors
21 and the Supervisor for Athletics
22 for the Philadelphia School
23 District. We had a wonderful
24 meeting. And there an athletic
25 director came to me with questions

1 that one of his students had.

2 For example, under high
3 school regulations you are not
4 allowed to wear your school
5 uniform. And a question was to me,
6 well, can you wear the colors of
7 your school even if you can't wear
8 the uniform? This was a question
9 from an athlete. Another question
10 was, well, I'm receiving a pair of
11 sneakers, is that compensation?
12 The answer to that is yes. I'm
13 receiving some other things. Is
14 that taxable? And the answer to
15 that could be yes, depending on
16 your tax bracket.

17 So the area of name, image
18 and likeness is one that has a lot
19 of ambiguity. And what we want to
20 do, and I'm going to kind of
21 summarize at the end, Temple
22 University wants to partner with
23 the Councilmember and with the City
24 on this.

25 The other aspect of this

1 bill, which is important and also
2 came up yesterday, is the National
3 Letter of Intent. The National
4 Letter of Intent is a high school
5 player decides he want to go to --
6 he or she wants to go to a college
7 and they sign a commitment letter
8 to that school. And with that
9 commitment letter is a financial
10 arrangement. The university says,
11 look, you come and play sports for
12 us and here's what we're going to
13 give you, athletic scholarships and
14 other things.

15 The problem is there's a
16 lot of conditions attached to those
17 other things, grade point averages,
18 misconduct. And the athletic
19 director yesterday, which I knew it
20 but it was very good to hear
21 directly from people dealing with
22 this said, Professor -- I said,
23 Please call me Ken -- we need help.
24 We need help because our students
25 are coming to us with these offers

1 from various universities for
2 scholarships, but they're really
3 not understanding what the
4 documents say. They're really not
5 appreciating what they're
6 committing to. They're not
7 understanding the possibility that
8 they could lose those scholarships
9 if they do or do not do certain
10 things.

11 So I have recognized and
12 Councilmember Thomas, to his
13 credit, has recognized that there
14 is room for assistance in this
15 space. And that's where we come in
16 with Temple University and Temple
17 Law School. We want to partner
18 with the City in order to provide a
19 couple of different things.

20 Number one, we have already
21 established a hotline that Temple
22 Law has established the number to
23 field calls so if a student is
24 presented with an NIL contract or
25 if the student has questions about

1 the National Letter of Intent,
2 they're able to call and someone
3 will get back to them immediately.

4 We also apropos of our
5 meeting yesterday will be doing
6 inperson educational programs in
7 the schools with either individual
8 families, the athletes, the
9 coaches, the athletic directors.
10 And as we said yesterday, we don't
11 care if it's one student or 100
12 students with an assembly. We will
13 there because I believe in this
14 kind of inperson interaction.

15 One of the things that I do
16 want to underscore about this bill
17 is it is neutral in terms of its
18 effect on taxpayers. There's no
19 taxpayer money involved in this.
20 That's where we come in. And I say
21 this because we at Temple not only
22 are very interested, you know, we
23 like to think of ourselves as the
24 City's law school. We do clinics
25 for immigration. We do clinics for

1 landlord/tenant and we view this as
2 part of our ongoing commitment for
3 public service for the City of
4 Philadelphia.

5 So I have two students who
6 are dedicated to this project. And
7 as a result of some earlier
8 hearings, I have a network of
9 volunteer lawyers who are Temple
10 Law alumni who will work with me
11 because there are certain
12 restrictions on who the advisors to
13 the athletes could be. They have
14 to be licensed barred attorneys or
15 certified agents. And I have a
16 network of lawyers who will work
17 with me in order to provide this
18 service.

19 So we are talking about
20 legal counseling, financial
21 literacy, educational programs on
22 NIL early, early intervention. I
23 call it the three pillars;
24 education, protection and
25 prevention to get to our youth

1 athletes before they make a
2 mistake, before there's a misstep.
3 And the same thing with the
4 National Letter of Intent, to
5 educate them with the coaches, with
6 the athletic directors in
7 partnership with them on what the
8 National Letter of Intent process
9 is and if they want to review those
10 documents, to review those as well.

11 I think this is a fantastic
12 bill. We are throwing our weight,
13 that is, Temple Law School behind
14 this initiative. Again, I commend
15 Councilman Thomas for understanding
16 the need, for recognizing the need
17 and for helping to establish what I
18 think is a constructive partnership
19 going forward that is really not
20 free -- it's free to the taxpayer.
21 It doesn't cost the taxpayer money.

22 And the benefits we get out
23 of it is our public service to the
24 City of Philadelphia as well as our
25 students, my students, will benefit

1 from the personal interaction that
2 they will have with the youth and
3 with the community of Philadelphia
4 and that's what we're about.

5 So with that, I urge
6 passage of this bill and I will be
7 happy to answer any questions that
8 any of you may have.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
10 you, Professor.

11 Before we jump into
12 questions, I want to take a moment
13 to note for the record that
14 Councilmember Squilla has joined us
15 and he's marked present.

16 As we explore where we are
17 with NIL, you mentioned the hotline
18 as well. What has been some of the
19 activity on the hotline thus far?
20 We know it's only been open for a
21 couple of weeks, but for members of
22 the Committee as well as folks of
23 the listening public, how has it
24 been going so far?

25 MR. JACOBSEN: It's been a

1 slow roll but intentionally so,
2 Councilmember. We didn't want to
3 get too far ahead of ourselves
4 because we understand that this
5 process is going on. But in terms
6 of the -- like yesterday, I handed
7 out the palm cards. I expect a --
8 in fact, I was told to expect a
9 heavy surge of calls after the
10 basketball playoffs are over, but
11 immediately there will be more
12 calls coming in.

13 But we really have -- we
14 have had several, not all from
15 athletes. We have had some calls
16 from someone that runs a nonprofit
17 organization that wanted to know
18 how that person could interact with
19 the athletes. It's not exactly
20 what the hotline is designed for --

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

22 Correct.

23 MR. JACOBSEN: -- but we're
24 going to answer the question.
25 We're not here to be too lawyerly

1 and say talk to someone else. We
2 just say, look, we'll answer the
3 question. But it's expected to
4 certainly accelerate. But the
5 other part of this that I
6 personally and my students are
7 really interested in is the
8 inperson engagement. I really
9 think that that's where the rubber
10 is going to meet the road a lot.

11 Yes, we'll handle emergency
12 calls to a hotline, but getting in,
13 you know, my view as I said if
14 someone has an NIL contract and
15 they're calling up because they
16 need help, we want to help them.
17 We also want to get in before so
18 that they have some kind of
19 understanding of what the NIL, NLI
20 process is before they're handed
21 that contract so that they can have
22 that baseline preparation and also
23 know who to call.

24 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: So
25 we've talked a lot about NIL but

1 not necessarily NLI, and even
2 myself who's strategically involved
3 in the sports space, I'm not too
4 familiar with issues around NLI.
5 Can you just give us a little more
6 detailed information as it relates
7 to things we should be concerned
8 about as it relates to NLI and some
9 of the risks that might exist for
10 young people who don't have the
11 proper support system around them?

12 MR. JACOBSEN: Yes. And
13 again, this was reaffirmed
14 yesterday and it was more than just
15 anecdotal because the ADs were
16 talking about specific instances.
17 So you may have a student who has
18 National Letter of Intent, signs
19 for National Letter of Intent and
20 gets a better offer from another
21 school. What does he or she do,
22 what are they allowed to do. These
23 are areas where the students really
24 don't know and the athletic
25 directors provide whatever guidance

1 they can. And the ones I met
2 yesterday were just superlative,
3 they were wonderful but they're not
4 quite sure what to do, or if they
5 get a National Letter of Intent.

6 And again, accompanying
7 that National Letter of Intent is a
8 term sheet and it could be several
9 pages along about what is expected
10 of that athlete and it's a
11 contract. And some of the
12 terminology, some of the terms --
13 because the schools want that
14 student to come there, they want to
15 recruit that student but they're
16 also going to do it on terms that
17 perhaps are more favorable to the
18 school than they are to the
19 athlete. And unless the athlete
20 knows what all of those terms are,
21 what kind of grade point average
22 you have to maintain, what would
23 constitute grounds for terminating
24 that athletic scholarship. Unless
25 the athlete can understand and

1 knows what those different terms
2 are and they vary from offer to
3 offer, then that athlete probably
4 will not be able to make a
5 fully-informed decision.

6 So on the NLI piece,
7 Councilmember, I was surprised in a
8 way at the immediate need for that
9 kind of education. I knew that it
10 was out there, but to hear it
11 directly from the athletic
12 directors who are on the ground
13 dealing with these students and
14 helping them try and navigate these
15 issues, certainly that was
16 interesting to me and reaffirms how
17 the NLI piece of this bill is
18 important as well as the NIL piece.
19 I hope that answered your question.

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: No, it
21 answered it. And I think it's
22 extremely helpful to myself and
23 those in the listening audience who
24 often view a National Letter of
25 Intent as nothing but a good thing,

1 never necessarily thinking about
2 some of the unintended consequences
3 that can come from maybe being in
4 11th grade and signing that letter
5 too early and then coming back your
6 senior year and getting
7 opportunities that might be a
8 better fit for your individual
9 situation. So I think that that
10 was very informative.

11 Are there any questions --
12 a couple of questions. So Chair
13 recognizes Councilmember Gauthier
14 and then Councilmember Ahmad.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER: I
16 don't have questions. I just want
17 to commend you and commend Temple
18 for being willing to offer this
19 resource to young people in the
20 City. It's incredibly generous of
21 you and makes me proud to be a
22 Temple alumna.

23 And wanted to also commend
24 the Councilmember on brokering such
25 a valuable partnership. It's

1 really great.

2 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
3 you. Thank you, colleague.

4 MR. JACOBSEN: Thank you.
5 Thank you for those comments.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Chair
7 recognizes Councilmember Ahmad.

8 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Thank
9 you, Chair.

10 Good morning --

11 MR. JACOBSEN: Good
12 morning.

13 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: --
14 Professor. I actually have a
15 Temple Owl in your class who is
16 very interested in this and has
17 told me much about this.

18 MR. JACOBSEN: This I know.

19 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Yes.
20 First of all, I want to commend my
21 Councilmember here who brought this
22 up and then all of you to be
23 participating in it. My question
24 was about the early intervention
25 you mentioned. How do you identify

1 the athletes to do their early
2 intervention? That's one.

3 And the second part is,
4 what is your relationship with our
5 high schools here in order to sort
6 of spot or be present so they know
7 that this opportunity exists?

8 MR. JACOBSEN: Okay. For
9 the first part, we really don't
10 want to isolate any one particular
11 athlete unless they have an NIL
12 deal. Our goal is to talk to all
13 of the athletes and their families.
14 And when I say early intervention,
15 I think for NIL and NLI we're
16 talking freshman, sophomore years.

17 I don't think it's too
18 early to start talking to them and
19 having them knowledgeable about
20 what NIL and NLI are because by
21 their junior year, they're going to
22 be engaged in that process of
23 looking at colleges, looking at
24 universities, looking at financial
25 aid. So that's what I mean by

1 early intervention.

2 Obviously, if someone has
3 an NIL deal, we will look at that.
4 But we want to reach them before
5 that so that they understand what
6 the process is, they understand
7 what the risks are, they understand
8 what is prohibited. There are
9 certain prohibited activities. You
10 can't sponsor gambling. You can't
11 sponsor marijuana. You can't
12 sponsor other kinds of businesses,
13 so that's something that from early
14 on even before they're presented
15 with an NIL deal, we can certainly
16 educate them.

17 With respect to the high
18 schools if yesterday is any
19 indication, we are going to be
20 welcome with open arms because I
21 can't say enough about how
22 productive, how insightful the
23 questions were. I know
24 Councilmember Thomas has his own
25 relationships with the high

1 school -- quite candidly, when I
2 went and I met with some of the
3 people I said, look, not that I'm
4 concerned, I'm aware, who are we to
5 go in and tell the high schools
6 what to do. I'm certainly aware of
7 that. I'm not a politician but I
8 can be political. And I was
9 sensitive to that. I was sensitive
10 to that issue.

11 We certainly don't want to
12 displace anything that the ADs or
13 the coaches or the guidance
14 counselors or the superintendents
15 or anyone else is doing, but we
16 think we can bring value added
17 because this is a very confusing
18 area, even for the most educated
19 people in high schools.

20 I get up every morning and
21 read three different electronic
22 newsletters about NLI, National
23 Letters of Intent and other sports-
24 related issues. And I do it for
25 two reasons: Number one, I want to

1 know, I want the latest knowledge.
2 And number two, people like your
3 daughter who are very good, I don't
4 want them to be smarter than me.

5 So the point is that even
6 some of the athletic directors
7 understandably are not aware of all
8 of the rules and regulations, and
9 certainly on a college level, and I
10 think we'll see on a high school
11 level, these things change daily.
12 On a college level, NIL changes
13 daily because of court battles,
14 because of battles with the NCAA.
15 So that was kind of a long-winded
16 answer to your question.

17 So far our reception in
18 high schools has been tremendous.
19 We expect that to continue. I
20 followed up after our meeting and
21 we expect to be in the schools with
22 the athletic directors. And as I
23 said, if they want us to meet with
24 one athlete and her family, we'll
25 do that. If they want to do an

1 assembly, we'll do that but those
2 are details to be worked out. But
3 right now our relationship from
4 everything that I've seen is
5 outstanding.

6 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Thank
7 you.

8 MR. JACOBSEN: And we
9 appreciate the School District's
10 participation in this endeavor.

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
12 you, Councilmember. And I just
13 what to echo the sentiments of my
14 colleague, some of what
15 Councilmember Gauthier said. Thank
16 you for the great work you're
17 doing. Thank you to Temple for
18 stepping up to the plate and
19 providing a phenomenal resource
20 that essentially cost the taxpayers
21 of the City of Philadelphia
22 nothing.

23 Some of what Councilmember
24 Ahmad said, the engagement with the
25 young people is important. And for

1 those who don't know, we plan on
2 working with some of the student
3 athletes and businesses across the
4 City to put together an NIL
5 convention where we can connect
6 student athletes to prospective
7 lucrative opportunities to put them
8 in a position to use their name,
9 image, likeness in a responsible
10 capacity, but also learn a lot of
11 the information that was
12 communicated to us today as well as
13 the things that may evolve as this
14 NIL snowball continues to go down
15 the hill and get bigger and better.

16 Are there any other
17 questions from members of the
18 Committee?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: I do
21 want to take a moment to
22 acknowledge that our Majority
23 Leader Councilmember Gilmore
24 Richardson has joined us this
25 morning. Good morning. Thank you

1 for being here.

2 Are there any more
3 questions from members of this
4 Committee for this particular
5 panel? Chair recognizes
6 Councilmember Squilla.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank
8 you, Mr. Chairman.

9 I think this is great what
10 you're doing. Is there a benefit
11 to have a standard of operations
12 for our schools to follow if we
13 create through our District schools
14 or even our private schools that
15 they all follow the same process so
16 that all kids are getting the same
17 information?

18 MR. JACOBSEN: Wow. Now,
19 you're getting me in trouble in
20 talking about what the School
21 District should do.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: No,
23 no. Just a question.

24 MR. JACOBSEN: No. In
25 fairness, I think there's a benefit

1 to consistency. I think that would
2 be good. I think that certainly
3 best practices are something that
4 can be developed. It's something
5 that is in our wheelhouse that we
6 could do in order to provide kind
7 of a curriculum, if you will, on
8 name, image and likeness on NLI.
9 And I think that that could be
10 standardized. It doesn't have to
11 be.

12 Right now I envision
13 individual meetings with athletes
14 and with high schools, but could
15 there be or should there be a
16 standard of curriculum in this
17 space? I think that that would be
18 absolutely appropriate.

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
20 let me just say the reason why is
21 because some schools are going to
22 be better than other schools.
23 Naturally, some people are more
24 interested than other people,
25 whether it's an athletic director

1 where that's his main focus or
2 maybe he does it as a job with the
3 school and not every kid will get
4 the same benefits as a kid in the
5 schools that really pay attention
6 to this.

7 So maybe it's something --
8 I mean, listen, we can't control
9 everything the School District does
10 either, but it's always good to put
11 something out there that maybe they
12 could eventually follow. And if
13 there is a standard, there's still
14 going to be people who go above
15 that standard which is great, but
16 at least we know there's a standard
17 that everybody gets.

18 MR. JACOBSEN: I would
19 really be happy to engage in that
20 conversation with the School
21 District about whether this kind of
22 process that we're doing now
23 initially and we're still rolling
24 it out on an individual basis could
25 be standardized and that there

1 could be a baseline curriculum in
2 this area. And we have the people
3 to do it. I mean, you're looking
4 at one.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: That's
6 perfect.

7 MR. JACOBSEN: We have
8 other lawyers who are Temple Law
9 alumni who have read about this
10 already, who have called me up or
11 emailed me and said, I want in,
12 this sounds great, I want to
13 participate. I have former
14 students who are now -- I was
15 having a conversation earlier. I
16 have former students who went out
17 and practiced law and now are full-
18 time NIL lawyers in the NIL space
19 who are a part of my group. So I
20 would welcome that conversation
21 with the School District to talk
22 about how we can standardize and
23 have a consistent program across
24 the School District. That would be
25 I think a great opportunity.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank
2 you so much.

3 MR. JACOBSEN: Thank you
4 for the question.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
6 you, Councilmember. I appreciate
7 the line of questioning. I think
8 that Councilmember Squilla made
9 some great points. Dr. Watlington
10 and his team are here today. I'm
11 sure they're listening to the
12 dialogue that's happening right
13 now.

14 For those in the listening
15 public, I just want to note for the
16 record that -- and the Professor
17 alluded to this in his testimony,
18 that schools themselves cannot
19 directly be involved in NIL deals
20 with the young people. So when
21 we're coming up with the standard
22 and its baseline of what
23 information we should be giving
24 student athletes as it relates to
25 the content that was discussed

1 today, we also have to remember
2 that the schools themselves cannot
3 be in communication with the
4 business or a student athlete about
5 a potential NIL deal.

6 So whatever we decide to do
7 as it relates to what that baseline
8 consist of, because I think
9 Councilmember Squilla and the
10 Professor are onto something, it
11 has to be done in a way that
12 doesn't allow interaction that the
13 Pennsylvania Interscholastic
14 Athletic Association limits, if
15 that makes sense.

16 And I know most of us on
17 the legislative side understand
18 that, but for those of us in the
19 listening audience who really care
20 about this issue, I think that
21 that's an important component to
22 consider.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
24 Mr. Chairman, I think that's really
25 important because by having a

1 standard, you could also protect
2 the schools from maybe doing the
3 wrong thing.

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

5 Exactly.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
7 making sure they know what they can
8 and can't do. So maybe some --
9 when the School District testifies,
10 we'll see. But I think it's
11 important to know. A lot of times
12 some people don't know, like is
13 this a gray area. We even get
14 called sometimes on ethics, right.

15 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Yes.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: He's
17 been doing this, he asked this
18 question, he asked that. But if
19 there is something we can't do, we
20 have to refer you to these people,
21 we have to do this and that.
22 Sometimes that helps us from doing
23 the wrong thing when we're trying
24 to help the other people.

25 MR. JACOBSEN: If I may

1 follow up on that, that's an
2 absolutely great point. And
3 Councilmember Thomas is exactly
4 right. There's an irony to where I
5 am sitting here today. I can
6 provide and review contracts for
7 high school students, but I can't
8 review contracts for Temple
9 University athletes because I am
10 employed by Temple University and
11 that would be involving me in a
12 deal, and that's the way the state
13 statute is written.

14 Now, what I can do and what
15 I do do and I think that the
16 distinction, and there should be a
17 distinction, and I meet with the
18 Temple basketball team and other
19 teams for educational purposes. I
20 am allowed to give them NIL
21 education, but I can't be involved
22 in their direct deal.

23 So will that change when I
24 say that, you know, I think things
25 are going to -- not I think, things

1 are going to change on a collegiate
2 level as well. Right now it's a
3 moving target. But where I sit, I
4 can't be involved in the deal. I
5 can't do what we're offering to do
6 for high school athletes for my own
7 university. That will change I am
8 absolutely confident.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank
10 you.

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
12 you, Councilman.

13 Are there any other
14 questions from members of this
15 Committee?

16 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: I have
17 one quick question.

18 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Sure.
19 Go ahead.

20 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: I'm
21 new to --

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
23 Councilmember Ahmad. No, no,
24 you're fine.

25 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Yes.

1 A question about financial
2 literacy. This is a great effort
3 to do wealth-building, right, and
4 to do wealth-building correctly.
5 So I just wanted to know what
6 component of financial literacy
7 sort of tutoring would happen for
8 the families involved in this
9 process, including the athletes
10 themselves? And have you thought
11 that through or maybe you're in the
12 process of who can be in that space
13 so they know what to do with their
14 resources, how to invest properly
15 and do things of that nature and
16 make sure that their taxes and
17 everything are up on all of that as
18 well?

19 MR. JACOBSEN: Okay. It's
20 is a great question, that is a
21 work-in-progress. It's something
22 we're working through right now.
23 Certainly we've given a lot of
24 thought to it. For example, the
25 example I gave before about income

1 goods. A 14-year-old kid may not
2 realize that if they get a pair of
3 sneakers, that's income. That's
4 something that might depending on
5 their tax bracket be a taxable
6 event.

7 They may not realize that
8 there could be tax consequences for
9 that. Things of that nature, to
10 just understand the basics of
11 contract law that without getting
12 too lawyerly. And this is the
13 program I did for our own Temple
14 basketball team, that you can have
15 an agreement that's not in writing.
16 If you say, yeah, let's do this,
17 you formed an oral contract.

18 So basic things, but
19 things -- I'm a real practical
20 person because I didn't percolate
21 up through academia. I was a
22 practicing lawyer for many years
23 and I take a very practical
24 approach to how I do things.
25 Things that are basic to an

1 understanding of how a contract is
2 formed, what tax consequences may
3 be that you can have compensation
4 without having money, things like
5 that we have thought through
6 although we're still developing
7 what that financial literacy piece
8 would look like in our program, and
9 we're working at it very actively
10 right now.

11 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Thank
12 you.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
14 you, colleague.

15 Are there any other
16 questions from members of this
17 Committee for this particular
18 panel?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing
21 none, I want to say thank you to
22 our amazing colleague and partner
23 for this specific initiative.
24 Professor, your knowledge, your
25 expertise and your service to the

1 City is greatly appreciated, so
2 thank you.

3 MR. JACOBSEN: Thank you so
4 much. Thank you, Members. I
5 appreciate the opportunity to be
6 here today.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
8 you.

9 Colleagues, before we go to
10 our next resolution, we are now
11 going to conclude the hearing.

12 So are there any other
13 questions or comments from members
14 of the Committee?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing
17 none, there being no further
18 questions or comments from members
19 of the Committee and no other
20 witnesses to testify, I'll ask that
21 if there's anyone that's present
22 whose name we failed to call that
23 wishes to offer testimony on the
24 bill being considered today?

25 (No response.)

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing
2 none, this now briefly concludes
3 the public hearing of the
4 Committee. We will now go into the
5 public meeting to consider the
6 action to be taken on the bill
7 before this Committee today. After
8 we take action, we'll resume the
9 public hearing to hear testimony on
10 Resolution No. 240028.

11 Mr. Maynard, will you
12 please call the roll to take
13 attendance.

14 THE CLERK: Yes, Mr. Chair.
15 Chairman Thomas.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:
17 Present.

18 THE CLERK: Vice-Chair
19 Phillips.

20 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
21 Present.

22 THE CLERK: Councilmember
23 Squilla.

24 (No response.)

25 THE CLERK: Councilmember

1 Gauthier.

2 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

3 Present.

4 THE CLERK: Councilmember

5 Lozada.

6 (No response.)

7 THE CLERK: Councilmember

8 Ahmad.

9 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

10 Present.

11 THE CLERK: And,

12 Councilmember Brooks.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

14 Present.

15 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank

16 you --

17 THE CLERK: Just a moment.

18 Madam Majority Leader, did you want

19 to vote on this motion on the bill?

20 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

21 RICHARDSON: I can since I'm here.

22 THE CLERK: It's up to you.

23 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

24 RICHARDSON: I can.

25 THE CLERK: We don't need

1 you for quorum.

2 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

3 RICHARDSON: Right.

4 THE CLERK: It's your
5 discretion.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

7 RICHARDSON: It's fine. I don't
8 have to if you don't need me.

9 THE CLERK: Okay. That's
10 why I was asking.

11 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: A
12 quorum is present.

13 The Chair recognizes
14 Councilmember Phillips for a motion
15 on Bill No. 240007.

16 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Thank
17 you, Mr. Chairman.

18 I move that Bill No. 240007
19 be reported from this Committee
20 with a favorable recommendation and
21 further move that the rules of
22 Council be suspended to permit the
23 first reading of this bill at the
24 next session of Council.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:

1 Second.

2 (Duly seconded.)

3 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
4 you, colleague. It's been moved
5 and properly seconded by the bill
6 just read by Councilmember Phillips
7 be reported from the Committee with
8 a favorable recommendation and
9 further move that the rules of
10 Council be suspended to permit the
11 first reading of the bill at the
12 next session of Council.

13 All those in favor will
14 signify by saying aye.

15 (Aye.)

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Those
17 opposed?

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: The
20 ayes have it and the motion
21 carries.

22 Thank you, colleagues. And
23 when Councilmember Squilla comes
24 back, we will get his vote on the
25 record as well. That concludes the

1 meeting and now we'll return to the
2 public hearing.

3 This concludes the business
4 before the Committee of Education
5 and we'll now to return to the
6 public hearing to hear testimony on
7 Resolution No. 240028.

8 Mr. Maynard, in order for
9 us to go back to the public
10 hearing, we will again -- no, we
11 don't need you to call roll. We
12 will invite the first panel to
13 testify in a minute. So that first
14 panel will be Dr. Watlington and
15 his team.

16 But before we invite the
17 first panel to testify, I wanted to
18 take a moment to see if any members
19 of the Committee as well as our
20 Majority Leader wanted to give any
21 opening remarks before we start our
22 hearing resolution on Resolution
23 No. 240028.

24 Chair recognizes
25 Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

1 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

2 RICHARDSON: Thank you so much,
3 Mr. Chair, Chairman Thomas, for the
4 opportunity to hold the hearing on
5 Resolution No. 240028 regarding
6 leveling with the School District.

7 Mr. Chairman, I'm not
8 certain because I was not here if
9 we held a brief moment of silence
10 for our departed Chief Clerk
11 Michael Decker, but I just wanted
12 to honor his life and his legacy in
13 all of the work that he did for so
14 many of us for so long here in City
15 Council.

16 Regarding leveling, I've
17 been deeply disturbed around the
18 leveling policy with the School
19 District of Philadelphia and have
20 learned the policy more intimately
21 this year as a result of my
22 youngest child, my son, who attends
23 a public elementary school here in
24 the City of Philadelphia, in fact,
25 the same one that I had the

1 privilege of attending as a child.

2 And I felt that he was
3 doing a really, really good job
4 learning and really advancing and
5 excelling early on at the onset of
6 the school year, and then his class
7 size doubled overnight and they
8 also had lost a teaching assistant
9 for a while. And so, it really
10 brought to the surface for me this
11 policy around leveling.

12 I had not really heard a
13 lot about leveling over the last
14 several years, but this year in
15 particular I heard from a ton of
16 parents about leveling and because
17 I was experiencing the issue in a
18 very intimate way, I knew that we
19 had to continue to uplift this
20 issue, talk about leveling,
21 particularly in advance of our
22 budget hearings, recognizing that
23 this will be a very tough year for
24 all of us, not just for the City of
25 Philadelphia but also for the

1 School District.

2 I think it's a policy that
3 we have to look at and figure out
4 how we resolve, because so many
5 other urban school districts around
6 the country no longer have leveling
7 as a part of their process within
8 their school district. And so, I
9 am looking forward to this hearing
10 today.

11 I want to thank all of the
12 parents of young people who have
13 joined us today. We have a 5th
14 grader who sent us testimony around
15 leveling that I will read later on
16 in the hearing. To all of our
17 union partners who are here, our
18 community partners, we know that
19 there's an AFT conference currently
20 happening but the PFT also sent
21 written testimony to our partners
22 at the School District. Thank you
23 for being amenable, for being here
24 and for working with us to move
25 this policy forward and to make the

1 necessary changes so that we are
2 not dealing with this next school
3 year. So I'm looking forward to
4 this hearing.

5 Thank you very much,
6 Mr. Chairman.

7 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
8 you, Councilmember Gilmore
9 Richardson. Thank you for your
10 leadership on this issue.

11 Chair recognizes
12 Councilmember Brooks.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank
14 you so much, Councilmember.

15 You know, like our Majority
16 Leader, this leveling issue has
17 been an ongoing issue to me. And
18 first, I said I wasn't going to
19 speak on it going into it, but
20 after my amazing visit to T.M.
21 Peirce today and seeing the
22 advocacy work and the legacy of my
23 advocacy and activism put into
24 action just being in the building,
25 it brought me to tears today. It

1 was the weirdest thing.

2 I would be remiss if I
3 didn't speak on the long fight
4 around this leveling issue. Most
5 of you know I have five children.
6 Most of them are grown now. My
7 baby is now getting ready to be 16.
8 And leveling has been a long issue
9 in our neighborhood school and
10 we've seen classroom sizes grow
11 immediately come October when
12 children are doing so very well,
13 and I'm really excited to have this
14 hearing now on the other side.

15 Before I remember
16 advocating with parents and
17 advocates around the City around
18 this leveling issue, so I want to
19 commend the parents that have
20 stepped forward around this issue
21 once again and have brought this to
22 the hearing level because this is
23 tragic. In some of our schools
24 where children are already
25 struggling, post-COVID is much

1 worse than it was before, and just
2 imagine your children having an
3 amazing educational experience for
4 a few months and then come October,
5 classroom size go from 16 to 32,
6 that's huge.

7 Not only is it traumatic
8 for the young people, but it's
9 traumatic for our educators and
10 it's hard to maintain a class of 32
11 students, especially from K to 3,
12 and 4th grade as well, 4th grade is
13 hard. And I'm speaking from a
14 sister of teachers. I'm the only
15 one who is not a classroom teacher.
16 From a super volunteer in every
17 school my children attended, except
18 my older -- this one here in high
19 school, she doesn't have the same
20 mother as the other ones do. But
21 we really have to do better.

22 And while our children is
23 in an educational crisis, if there
24 is a way for us to maintain quality
25 education for our kids long-term,

1 we would really be moving our
2 District in the right direction, so
3 I think this is an important
4 hearing. Thank you so much,
5 Majority Leader, for bringing this
6 back full circle for me. And I
7 look forward to see what we can do
8 to work around this leveling.
9 Because like I said, our children
10 deserve so much better.

11 And like I said, after
12 having a tour of T.M. Peirce today
13 to see what the better could be
14 just with facilities, just imagine
15 the better what it could be around
16 educational attainment and just the
17 quality of one-on-one care that our
18 children that are already
19 traumatized in some schools
20 deserve. So thank you for having
21 this hearing.

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
23 you both for your remarks and your
24 passion around this issue. Clearly
25 we have some parents up here on

1 Council who's concerned about the
2 well-being of not just our children
3 but all children around the City of
4 Philadelphia. So thank you all. I
5 appreciate you, colleagues.

6 And, Majority Leader
7 Gilmore Richardson, thank you for
8 your remarks around Mike Decker.
9 We did have a moment of silence
10 before the hearing started, but
11 there's no such thing as giving too
12 many compliments for somebody who
13 does such great work for the City
14 of Philadelphia. So thank you for
15 your kind words.

16 Mr. Maynard, will you do us
17 a favor and please call the first
18 panel to testify before this issue
19 this morning.

20 THE CLERK: Of course,
21 Mr. Chair. The first panel will
22 consist of Robin Cooper from CASA;
23 Archbishop Mary Floyd Palmer; and
24 Emily of Houston Home and School
25 Association, whose last name I will

1 skip butchering; Christina Jackson,
2 parent at Houston Elementary
3 School; Luis Ramirez from Clara
4 Barton Elementary and Seleny
5 Fernandez from Clara Barton
6 Elementary.

7 As we have multiple people,
8 let's have Dr. Cooper and the
9 Archbishop take the seats first.
10 Thank you, ladies. And then we'll
11 call up people in batches of two
12 after that just to avoid crowding
13 the podium.

14 (Witnesses approached
15 Witness table.)

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
17 you, Mr. Maynard.

18 Welcome to you both. We
19 appreciate your presence here
20 before City Council. Clearly it's
21 neither one of your first time
22 coming before this body and working
23 with us on a number of different
24 issues to improve the quality of
25 life for the citizens of

1 Philadelphia.

2 With that being said, if
3 you want to go rock, paper,
4 scissors, whoever wants to go
5 first, feel free to communicate
6 your name for the record and begin
7 with your testimony.

8 DR. COOPER: Dr. Robin P.
9 Cooper. Setting the level is a
10 common practice in business and
11 industry as a positive practice of
12 raising the bar so achievement can
13 become a continuous process of
14 improvement. Yet the educational
15 practice in the School District of
16 Philadelphia of leveling is a
17 continuous practice that takes four
18 classes of reasonable size of 24 or
19 25 students and then levels down to
20 three classes of 33 students.

21 The PFT contract has a
22 class size maximum of 33 students
23 in Grades 4 through 12. Up to
24 Grade 3, the class size maximum is
25 30. In that case, leveling takes

1 five classes of 24 students and
2 then creates four classes of 30.
3 The maximum is currently used as a
4 minimum by the School District.

5 Leveling takes a teacher
6 from one school community and sends
7 the person to a totally different
8 school community some time between
9 mid to late October just when
10 positive academic and social
11 relationships are starting to
12 bloom. It is a self-manifestation
13 issue that starts with our schools
14 that need more resources, facing
15 low enrollment projections in
16 spring budget timelines. Thus,
17 they lose established teachers.

18 Then when actual student
19 enrollment becomes a reality in
20 September, schools lose more
21 teachers to cover vacancies that
22 were actually filled in the spring.
23 The District says leveling is done
24 in the interest of educational
25 efficiency but how efficient is it

1 to cut teaching positions in the
2 spring just to reallocate in the
3 fall.

4 A recent study by the Penn
5 State Center for Evaluation and
6 Educational Policy Analysis in the
7 Philadelphia Inquirer, Where Are
8 Philly Teachers Going by Kristen
9 Graham on February 11, 2024
10 reported that Philadelphia employs
11 20 percent of teachers each year in
12 Pennsylvania, yet accounts for 30
13 percent of the attrition which
14 equates to approximately 1200
15 teachers per year.

16 The study went on to say
17 that it cost \$27,000 to recruit,
18 hire and train a new teacher. How
19 is cutting then leveling education
20 efficient. We lose the 27,000 for
21 the teacher we cut. Then pay an
22 additional 27,000 to train the new
23 teacher, if they are even available
24 in mid-summer to late fall. How
25 many of those teachers were cut out

1 of the budgets in the spring just
2 to be called back in the mid-summer
3 or fall?

4 While most, if not all, of
5 the displaced teachers find work
6 without much trouble in the
7 suburbs, the suburbs do most of
8 their hiring in the spring just
9 when Philadelphia's dropping
10 positions due to undercounting of
11 enrollment. Philadelphia in
12 essence becomes the training ground
13 for the suburban districts that
14 already have quality teachers.

15 Philadelphia is a major
16 league city. Why should we train,
17 prepare and provide experienced
18 teachers to the suburbs. It should
19 be that the suburbs are providing
20 teachers to us. What would work
21 better? Perhaps we hold all
22 schools with allegedly falling
23 enrollments steady in the spring
24 and add positions to those schools
25 experiencing increased enrollment.

1 Then in the early September when
2 enrollments actualize, if apple
3 school has excess teacher, then the
4 teacher can move to the cherry
5 school, which has more students
6 than teachers. In other words,
7 let's hold on to who we have rather
8 than cut and then level.

9 Class size maximums of 30
10 for early elementary and 33 for
11 Grades 4 through 12 are not
12 designed to be class size minimums.
13 K-12 research shows that early
14 elementary classes K-4 work best
15 with 24 to 26 students, and
16 secondary classes at 26 to 28
17 students. Philadelphia's talented
18 teachers should remain with us.

19 (Applause.)

20 THE CLERK: Archbishop
21 Palmer, you may begin -- please
22 state your name for the record and
23 begin your testimony.

24 ARCHBISHOP FLOYD PALMER:
25 Thank you, sir. Good morning,

1 Mr. Chair, Madam Vice-Chair, Madam
2 Leader and fellow colleague Council
3 Committee members. I'm Archbishop
4 Mary Floyd Palmer, the Presiding
5 Prelate and President of the
6 Philadelphia Council of Clergy as
7 well as the founding Pastor of the
8 Samaritan Temple located in West
9 Philadelphia.

10 I'm a lifelong City
11 resident whose primary education
12 occurred beginning in the Christian
13 School until 8th grade and then
14 attended and graduated from the
15 prestigious Philadelphia High
16 School for Girls, Class No.
17 2241980.

18 More importantly, I am a
19 mother of five adult children who
20 all graduated from the School
21 District and the grandmother of
22 nine grandchildren, in which one
23 has graduated and five are
24 currently students. My educational
25 experience at the Philadelphia High

1 School was stellar, although
2 challenging and tough. In my four
3 years, I became acclimated to the
4 teachers that were taught before
5 me.

6 In each grade succession, I
7 got to know them better and
8 prepared for the next one. This
9 continuum of care and teaching
10 enabled me to graduate at a high
11 level of my school and to begin my
12 world in the secondary arena where
13 those basic principles of
14 consistency stick-to-itiveness and
15 tenacity were the order of the day.

16 Leveling, now called
17 enrollment-driven resource review,
18 is a longstanding and controversial
19 action that has been used in
20 Philadelphia for many years, and it
21 is not usually practiced in other
22 school districts. This controversy
23 relates to the fact that although
24 it's necessary to ensure that
25 resources are used properly and

1 efficiently, it is widely known
2 that this action has an opposite
3 effect on vulnerable children who
4 are already met with challenges
5 such as poverty, hunger,
6 single-parent or no-parent homes,
7 truancy, low self-esteem and
8 instability of maintaining good
9 health like eye appointments,
10 dental and the weight concerns.

11 The COVID-19 impact on the
12 Philadelphia children had an
13 insurmountable amount of trauma to
14 them. Death was prominent and
15 preeminent in their immediate
16 families with loss of life, family
17 members and friends; increased
18 violence in 2020 with 499
19 homicides; 2021 with 562; 2022 with
20 514; and just last year 410
21 homicides, many of which our
22 children witnessed in their
23 neighborhoods primarily during the
24 pandemic even if they stepped
25 outside to get some fresh area.

1 Although we can celebrate
2 the decrease of homicides by 20
3 percent, mental health and
4 instability of their minds has
5 increased by greater than 40
6 percent and suicides known for our
7 children have increased at an
8 insurmountable amount. Their
9 spirits are low, hopeless, sad,
10 depressed, anxious and frustrated
11 and are very concerned about life
12 safety matters that most children
13 should not have to be concerned
14 about just to exist in our society.

15 Our District has shared
16 that each leveled position that is
17 examined by a team of experts who
18 make this decision of what they
19 feel is best, if I may ask have
20 they visited the classrooms of the
21 teachers who are on the hit list,
22 have they spoken to the children
23 who will be affected, have they
24 talked to the parents who have to
25 deal with the emotional impact and

1 outbursts of losing a teacher
2 they're children have knitted to?
3 Have they spoken with the
4 teachers who not only are replaced
5 and transferred, but the impact of
6 being in a new environment and
7 beginning again which can be
8 frustrating for them, have they
9 spoken with the teacher who follows
10 in the place of this action and
11 heard the challenges they must face
12 to not only adjust but to maintain
13 a warm and caring environment?
14 As a faith-based leader, I
15 have spoken with a number of
16 grandparents, parents, caregivers
17 and those who provide kinship care
18 who have stressed the heavy impact
19 when leveling occurs at their
20 schools. Increased trauma
21 reactions, need for affirmation,
22 consideration, care, compassion and
23 present support along with regular
24 counseling to stabilize not only
25 their emotions and mental health

1 are what I have had to provide for
2 many young people in which I
3 encounter.

4 As one who has been an
5 educator for a brief moment, I
6 understand the overwhelming
7 responsibility of individual
8 children who may want to do as they
9 feel that rules and regulations can
10 be set. However, our job sometimes
11 can be impacted because we are
12 overwhelmed and we are not able to
13 perform at optimum level.

14 There is no argument that
15 we need to have increased retention
16 of our teachers, as Dr. Cooper
17 said, who then leave to go to
18 another district on the outskirts
19 of our city for nicer, cleaner,
20 brighter classrooms and an
21 increased salary and package that
22 make them say so long.

23 This does not mean that
24 they have a less love for teaching,
25 just that the environment has been

1 set in which they can then do what
2 they love to do. Given all of
3 this, what can we do to adjust the
4 action without the impact extending
5 and exacerbating the trauma already
6 felt and lived by our most precious
7 commodity, our children, those who
8 are not given a voice or a choice
9 by those of us who pledge to serve
10 and look out for their best
11 interest.

12 It's unrealistic to believe
13 that even in this debate that we
14 will all get what we want. Not so,
15 and certainly it wasn't an option
16 in my parents' home about whether
17 to go to school or not. But
18 despite rules, regulations and
19 policies, I do believe that the
20 educators of the School District
21 and those in leadership along with
22 this august body have to find a
23 better way to resolve this issue
24 and make sure that at the end of
25 the day the excellent experiences

1 that all of us might have had years
2 in past will continue not only for
3 the children now, but for the
4 children to come.

5 I'm certainly hoping that
6 we'll be able to come to some
7 resolution, that we'll be able to
8 always keep us in the forefront of
9 who we say and love. I love my
10 children, grandchildren and
11 great-grandchildren as I'm sure you
12 all do too. And this would be my
13 final question: Would you want
14 your child to go through this?
15 Thank you.

16 (Applause.)

17 THE CLERK: The Committee
18 will next hear from Emily Pugilese
19 and Christina Jackson.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

21 RICHARDSON: Can we have questions
22 for this panel --

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Oh,
24 okay. I'm sorry. Hold on. I
25 apologize. So what we'll do is

1 we'll do questions now for this
2 panel and then we'll call the next
3 group.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Right, because they
6 are actually part of this same
7 panel.

8 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Okay.

9 Because I was going to let the
10 whole panel go and do them all at
11 the same time, but you want to
12 do -- we can do these two if you
13 want.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

15 RICHARDSON: Right.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Chair
17 recognizes Councilmember Gilmore
18 Richardson for questions for these
19 particular witnesses and then we'll
20 move on to the next.

21 Councilmember Gilmore
22 Richardson.

23 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

24 RICHARDSON: Thank you so much for
25 the leeway, Mr. Chair.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

2 Absolutely.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

4 RICHARDSON: I wanted to just
5 (inaudible) and thank you both for
6 being here and for providing your
7 testimony. From the school
8 administrators' perspective, how
9 does leveling impact your staffing
10 after the onset of the school year,
11 and particularly from a budgetary
12 perspective?

13 DR. COOPER: So the belief
14 from administrators is that the
15 projections are never over but
16 always under. So during the spring
17 they spend so much time recruiting,
18 trying to get the best fit for the
19 school, but then following the
20 first hired -- or the last hired,
21 first fired. So when leveling
22 comes around, they lose all of
23 that.

24 So they put so much time,
25 effort and energy in these site

1 selection committees. And then in
2 the fall because they were
3 underenrolled, those folks are the
4 ones that have to leave. And so,
5 then in a few months down the line
6 they're over. Now, they have to
7 start that process all over again,
8 which is unfair. We're already
9 facing a national teacher shortage
10 and then to lose what you worked so
11 hard for. Folks are saying, just
12 send me what you have. And that's
13 not good enough.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
15 RICHARDSON: And to your point, do
16 you think that the new special
17 admit policy has had additional
18 impacts on the leveling and/or
19 budgeting issues as well as keeping
20 the staff members in the school
21 because actually yesterday
22 (inaudible) the special admit
23 process has unintended consequences
24 relative to some schools not being
25 able to receive additional students

1 even if they are underenrolled.
2 And so, once the leveling takes
3 place in addition to this new
4 policy, some schools may be grossly
5 underfunded from a budgeting
6 perspective because their
7 enrollment cannot go up due to no
8 fault of their own.

9 DR. COOPER: Absolutely. I
10 think you said it best.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

12 RICHARDSON: Okay.

13 DR. COOPER: I think
14 especially for the special admit
15 schools first -- and I know we're
16 as a District currently working on
17 it, but for those folks to have
18 seats and have additional seats,
19 one of the things that as I'm
20 understanding it is, that if you
21 are on a waitlist, you have to go
22 through or the principal has to go
23 through the entire waitlist as
24 opposed to actually waiting for the
25 waitlist to go all the way through

1 before a person that was on that
2 first acceptance piece to be able
3 to accept. So if they didn't
4 accept and they want to accept,
5 they're only given like a span of a
6 week.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

8 RICHARDSON: Right.

9 DR. COOPER: And we know
10 that for our parents sometimes they
11 don't get the email. We know we
12 have a lot of computer technology
13 issues. So a week is not a lot of
14 time. So if my parents have the --
15 if they are in poverty, basically I
16 missed the opportunity to attend my
17 first choice because I only have
18 that week.

19 And so, once that week goes
20 by, I have to wait for everybody,
21 every round of that waitlist. And
22 by that time if there's a parent,
23 the parent is going to take other
24 options. And typically, those
25 other options are out of the

1 District.

2 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

3 RICHARDSON: Right. Thank you.

4 Thank you very much for your
5 testimony and for all the work
6 you're doing with all the
7 administrators across the District.

8 DR. COOPER: Thank you.

9 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

10 RICHARDSON: And thank you so much,
11 Archbishop Mary Floyd Palmer for
12 your testimony.

13 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

14 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
15 you.

16 Are there any other
17 questions from members of this
18 Committee for this particular set
19 of panelists?

20 (No response.)

21 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing
22 none, thank you both for your
23 testimony. Thank you for your
24 service to the City of
25 Philadelphia.

1 DR. COOPER: Thank you.

2 ARCHBISHOP FLOYD PALMER:

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

5 Mr. Clerk, will you please call the
6 next witnesses to testify before
7 the Committee.

8 THE CLERK: Of course,
9 Mr. Chair.

10 The next witnesses we'll
11 hear from is Emily Pugilese and
12 Christina Jackson. Emily and
13 Christina, if you're available.
14 (Witnesses approached
15 Witness table.)

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
17 morning. Please state your name
18 for the record and you may proceed
19 with your testimony.

20 MS. PUGILESE: Good
21 morning. Emily Pugilese.

22 DR. JACKSON: Christina
23 Jackson.

24 MS. PUGILESE: Hi. My name
25 is Emily Pugilese. I am the parent

1 of a 5th grader and 2nd grader at
2 Houston Elementary School which is
3 our catchment neighborhood school
4 in Mount Airy. First, I'd like to
5 say thank you to Councilmember
6 Katherine Gilmore Richardson and
7 all of Council for holding this
8 hearing. We usually hear a lot of
9 press and attention around leveling
10 in late September, early October
11 when it occurs. And then we tend
12 to hear basically nothing about it
13 until it happens again to the next
14 set of kids, teachers and school
15 communities the following year.

16 I really appreciate the
17 opportunity to address the issue in
18 more detail and I hope we can make
19 progress towards ending this
20 traumatic process. I'm here today
21 because my 5th grader's class at
22 Houston was leveled earlier this
23 school year. They went from having
24 two classes of 16 kids to one class
25 of 32. And I don't know if any of

1 you have spent time with 5th
2 graders recently, but that is a lot
3 of 5th graders.

4 There are so many ancillary
5 impacts that follow a classroom
6 that is leveled. My son tends to
7 be more anxious and overwhelmed by
8 school, which impacts his behavior
9 at home. His classroom now
10 includes way more distractions and
11 disruptions from similarly
12 overwhelmed classmates.

13 As a direct result of
14 leveling, at least two students in
15 his class, including my son's best
16 friend, have made the tough
17 decision to move to special admit
18 schools for 6th grade. This
19 reality has led many families to
20 reconsider sending their kids to
21 their neighborhood school.

22 We could discuss these
23 impacts for hours, really I could.
24 But the lack of transparency around
25 the leveling process overall and

1 the larger district-wide
2 implications of leveling need to be
3 addressed as well. When I was
4 researching leveling before
5 testifying at a School Board
6 meeting in the fall, I came up with
7 a lot more questions than answers.

8 There were 59 schools
9 leveled this school year, but
10 according to articles in the
11 Inquirer and Chalkbeat, there were
12 another 49 schools who had grades
13 under the class size required to
14 justify two teachers that got to
15 keep two classrooms.

16 When I searched for the
17 policy that identified how the
18 District determines which
19 classrooms get leveled and which
20 get to keep their teachers, I could
21 find no policy. In fact, the
22 Chalkbeat article insinuated that
23 special admit schools get
24 preferential treatment and often
25 get to keep their teachers, a

1 revelation that was backed up by
2 multiple accounts I heard of
3 special admit schools and
4 highly-resourced schools -- sorry,
5 not only avoiding leveling, but in
6 some cases being given extra
7 teachers even if they didn't have
8 the actual classrooms to put them
9 in.

10 The District has been
11 heavily focused in recent years
12 around equity, as they should be.
13 But how is this process with no
14 written policy and no transparency
15 equitable. We know that leveling
16 impacts teacher retention,
17 something the District is working
18 hard on improving. We also know
19 there is a teacher shortage of
20 hundreds of teachers in the
21 District this year.

22 According to an article
23 published in the Inquirer on
24 Monday, Philadelphia teachers are
25 leaving the profession at alarming

1 rates, higher than teachers in the
2 rest of the state, with 18 percent
3 leaving the District in their first
4 year. This threatens to make our
5 already historic teacher shortage
6 even worse.

7 If I go back to our
8 personal experience at Houston for
9 a moment, I want to talk about the
10 amazing teacher we lost, Ms. Lya.
11 Ms. Lya moved back to the U.S.
12 after teaching internationally for
13 years, specifically to take the job
14 at Houston. She bonded closely
15 with the kids and staff as was
16 extremely sad to leave and we were
17 devastated to lose her. We learned
18 last week that Ms. Lya recently
19 took a job running an educational
20 program at an art museum. She's
21 part of that 18 percent of teachers
22 who leave in the first year. And
23 I'd bet that she wouldn't have left
24 if she hadn't been leveled.

25 This is a huge loss for the

1 District and our school community
2 as we were hopeful that she would
3 return to our school next year when
4 the larger current 4th grade moves
5 up to 5th. We realized that the
6 District's systemic budget
7 constraints along with the teacher
8 shortage makes this a challenging
9 issue to solve. We acknowledge
10 that as much as we would love for
11 leveling to be eliminated or
12 drastically changed immediately,
13 that's probably not realistic.

14 There are things, however,
15 that could be to greatly improve
16 the process as we work toward a
17 different policy all together:
18 Number one, be transparent; create
19 a policy that prioritizes equity
20 and transparency. Two, provide
21 support; provide resources and
22 funds to school and classrooms that
23 were leveled to help support the
24 teacher and the students through
25 the transition. Sidenote, Houston

1 received absolutely no support from
2 the School District when our
3 classroom was leveled. It was
4 parents and other school -- members
5 of our school community coming in
6 to help move furniture around and
7 make the classroom work for 32
8 kids.

9 Number three, look at
10 longer term numbers; what is the
11 class size of the grade below the
12 one being leveled. Will the school
13 have to rehire a teacher for that
14 grade next year if the teacher is
15 taken away. That's the case at
16 Houston. There is over 50 students
17 in the current 4th grade class that
18 they're going to have to hire
19 another teacher when that class
20 moves up next year.

21 Reconsider the rehiring
22 policy. With the teacher shortage,
23 the District policy that teachers
24 who give less than 60 days notice
25 before leaving the District and can

1 never be rehired again seems
2 self-destructive. Number five,
3 research how other districts
4 operate. As others have said,
5 there are a lot of large urban
6 districts similar to Philadelphia
7 who do not level. New York City
8 recently stopped the process all
9 together, what is their policies,
10 how can we learn from them.

11 At the end of the School
12 Board meeting in the fall when I
13 testified, Superintendent
14 Watlington made a statement about
15 leveling and said that only 1
16 percent of teachers are impacted by
17 leveling. But if we're looking at
18 Philadelphia's school communities
19 overall, it's almost 25 percent of
20 schools impacted and thousands of
21 students.

22 Year after year this
23 happens to students in communities
24 in Philadelphia. Families protest
25 and news articles are written about

1 how traumatic and disruptive it is.
2 Yet no changes are made. I hope
3 this hearing is the first step
4 towards ending this outdated and
5 harmful process. Thank you for
6 your time.

7 DR. JACKSON: Okay. Good
8 morning, everyone. My name is
9 Dr. Christina Jackson and I'm a
10 parent of twin 5th graders Guari
11 and Kaiya that were both at Houston
12 Elementary. I'm also an Urban
13 Sociologist and Professor at
14 Stockton University in New Jersey
15 and in the fall I'll be starting at
16 Rutgers Camden in Sociology and
17 heading up Africana Studies.

18 First, I want to thank
19 Councilmember Katherine Gilmore
20 Richardson and the rest of the
21 Education Committee here for your
22 steadfastness and choice to keep
23 the topic of our kids' education a
24 priority. I'm here to provide my
25 experience and perspective about

1 how leveling is among the many
2 destabilizing ways that our
3 scholars are constantly succumbed
4 to.

5 A little bit about me. I,
6 myself, am a product of a
7 Philadelphia neighborhood and
8 special admit schools. I went to
9 neighboring C.W. Henry School from
10 K to 8th grade and Creative
11 Performing Arts High School from 9
12 to 12, so I am indeed a proud
13 graduate of the School District of
14 Philadelphia's public education
15 system.

16 Last time -- oh, and I also
17 went to Temple. Go Owls. Last
18 time I was actually here in this
19 room in 2019, my daughter and I
20 testified at the State of the
21 Schools hearing and some of my
22 advocacy along with my fellow
23 allies helped to lead our historic
24 victory that ruled Pennsylvania
25 school funding system

1 unconstitutional, so I am
2 well-versed in the experience of
3 living through and advocating for
4 funding instability in our
5 education system.

6 As a sociologist, I am also
7 interested in how low-income
8 families of color in our city fare
9 within institutions like our
10 education system. While I do not
11 formally study Philadelphia, I am
12 used to feeling jolts and constant
13 changes at our schools, even down
14 to the classroom.

15 Leveling is an illustrative
16 example of these kinds of jolts.
17 I'm sure that I don't have to take
18 time to explain, as you already
19 know that students in our
20 predominantly Black and of color
21 School District come from families
22 with about an average of 47,000 a
23 year. Given the environments many
24 of our children come from, they are
25 faced with cumulative disadvantages

1 at the neighborhood level, racial
2 and economic.

3 My mom, a veteran teacher
4 of the School District, once told
5 me "School's a stabilizing force
6 for my kids." She was speaking as
7 someone who is currently at Heston
8 School after her school Leidy was
9 also closed down. She not only
10 teaches them academic and social
11 skills but basic hygiene, helping
12 them to brush their teeth, making
13 themselves look presentable. There
14 are a lot of reasons why that it is
15 and it's definitely not my mom's
16 responsibility, but it goes to show
17 you that our students need our
18 schools to be stabilizing places.

19 I get that we as a School
20 District can't solve City problems.
21 But what we can do is make smaller
22 strategic choices that don't
23 disrupt the foundation of their
24 classrooms.

25 In September my children

1 Guari and Kaiya were in two
2 separate classrooms at the start of
3 the year. As you've heard, a few
4 weeks in after my daughter
5 developed a relationship with her
6 teacher Ms. Lya, she was given five
7 days' notice that she would be
8 leaving and the two classrooms
9 would be combined into one.

10 As you can imagine, this
11 was devastating for our kids and
12 even my son who had Ms. Lya too
13 since she was a social studies and
14 English teacher giving the benefits
15 of the co-teaching model. We
16 appreciate everything the remaining
17 teacher, our principal and staff
18 have done to help stabilize the
19 classroom, but it still has been a
20 tougher learning environment for my
21 twins.

22 So much so that my
23 daughter, who was already a very
24 sensitive learner, stopped wanting
25 to go to school. It got so bad

1 that we were dragging her to school
2 metaphorically. For her, the
3 learning environment was too noisy
4 and there were too many behavioral
5 incidences that increased. My son
6 was initially sad about the loss in
7 September and October, but he still
8 wanted to go to school.

9 Half of the year has now
10 gone by and now he doesn't like
11 going to school and is often asking
12 me to take personal days because
13 the classroom is loud and he wants
14 to get called on more often.
15 Unfortunately, we did have to
16 choose to take my daughter out and
17 she is currently in PA Cyber
18 Charter, which is a sad last
19 resort.

20 We have to remember an
21 important aspect of the leveling is
22 the trauma that is left on the
23 classroom. Witnessing the loss of
24 a teacher only inflicts further
25 trauma on these young lives.

1 Further, it causes a deterrent as
2 others have said for teachers and
3 students who loved and were
4 committed to our school. Yes, our
5 HSA and principal and teacher met
6 to develop solutions, but why must
7 we continue to do this.

8 The classroom has suffered
9 because of leveling. It has added
10 to the already cumulative
11 disadvantages that our students
12 face. Months ago when us parents
13 testified at the School Board
14 public hearing, Superintendent
15 Watlington reiterated that leveling
16 only affects a small percentage of
17 schools as Emily also said.

18 But my response to that is,
19 okay, but if something so small but
20 yet deeply affect the educational
21 environment at our schools over
22 decades, then why is it okay for
23 our kids to still endure it? I
24 think it's a very simple question.
25 Can we have new measures for

1 determining what schools are
2 leveled? It could be that schools
3 can avoid leveling for one year if
4 they already have been leveled in
5 the previous three years. That's
6 possible.

7 We realize that the
8 District's budget constraints along
9 with the teacher shortage, but I
10 also heard this every single year
11 I've been in school. Why is it
12 okay to continually have this as a
13 reason? It's not enough for me.
14 Even when our school funding was
15 already deemed unconstitutional,
16 these questions still loomed on my
17 mind. Thank you so much for your
18 time. I hope that this hearing is
19 a continued step to bringing about
20 the ending of this archaic process.
21 Thank you for your attention to our
22 testimonies.

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
24 you for your testimony.

25 Chair recognizes

1 Councilmember Phillips and then I
2 will recognize Councilmember
3 Gilmore Richardson.

4 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

5 Listen, I just want to say thank
6 you for your time today. It's
7 really important to have heard your
8 voice. Because if you're not in
9 this situation, it's very difficult
10 to understand this gravity. So
11 this is very pivotal to hear.

12 I'm hoping that our School
13 District -- and I know they're
14 listeners and I'm praying that we
15 come up with a better solution for
16 this, because what I'm hearing is
17 that often time parents make
18 decisions on where to send their
19 child to school based on the
20 teachers and the staff that are at
21 that school. And then suddenly
22 that changes over time.

23 What that says to us is
24 unfortunately the following, that
25 these teachers are whetted more so

1 to a system for the District as
2 opposed to a fit culture for a
3 school, and we have to get to a
4 point where we fit teachers and
5 staff based off of a school's
6 climate and culture and need as
7 opposed to just saying, oh, we need
8 a resource.

9 So other alternatives have
10 to be met. That means that we have
11 to go into some recruitment and I
12 have to put my sneakers on or
13 whatever to recruit some teachers.
14 You know, I'm all for it. So just
15 want to say thank you.

16 MS. PUGILESE: Thank you.

17 DR. JACKSON: Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: Thank
19 you, Chairman.

20 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Chair
21 recognizes Councilmember Gilmore
22 Richardson. Then Councilmember
23 Brooks.

24 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

25 RICHARDSON: Thank you so much,

1 Mr. Chairman.

2 And I just wanted to say
3 thank you from one parent to
4 another for your testimony, for
5 sharing your story in talking about
6 how traumatic it is for our young
7 people to be a part of leveling in
8 the classroom environment and how
9 it really changes their overall
10 experience.

11 I know you offered some
12 potential solutions around leveling
13 to say if a school is leveled for
14 three years prior, maybe give them
15 a break one year. But I wanted to
16 know if there were any additional
17 recommendations you had while we
18 have the ears of the School
19 District?

20 MS. PUGILESE: I mean, I
21 recommended at least providing more
22 support to the schools that are
23 leveled and continued support. I
24 will say -- Christina, I think
25 you'd back me up on this -- I kind

1 of thought we'd go through a
2 transition and it would get easier
3 in the classroom, and that doesn't
4 feel like it's happened.

5 I think my kid is learning
6 a ton, but it almost feels like the
7 last couple of months have been
8 harder. So I just think continued
9 support in the classroom and more
10 resources. If it's not another
11 teacher, it would be -- like 32
12 kids is a lot, it's a lot of kids.

13 Did you have any other --

14 DR. JACKSON: Yeah. Thank
15 you for that question. Because I'm
16 a researcher, I have a researcher
17 answer. I guess my issue is
18 thinking about the measures that
19 we're using to say which schools
20 get leveled is very quantitative.
21 It's a few numbers off, right, a
22 few students off.

23 So I think we need to do
24 research around leveling, more
25 qualitative research around

1 leveling, coding that and then that
2 will give us a lot of -- because
3 it's gone on for so long, it can go
4 on for decades, right. So I'd like
5 us to think personally about the
6 actual research measures that we
7 use or best practice that we use to
8 decide what schools are getting
9 measured and how they're getting
10 measured and when.

11 Because right now -- I can
12 be interpreting wrong. But right
13 now it seems like it's very
14 quantitative. Like it's based on,
15 oh, you have this particular
16 number, now we got to take the
17 kids, now we have to take the
18 teacher and then they go to another
19 school. In our case, they now
20 teach at a museum. So I would say
21 that it's how we measure what
22 schools get leveled personally.

23 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

24 RICHARDSON: Thank you.

25 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
2 you, colleague.

3 Chair recognizes
4 Councilmember Brooks.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank
6 you, Mr. Chair. I want to say --
7 all right, there I am. Thank you,
8 Mr. Chair.

9 First, I want to say thank
10 you so much. I really appreciate
11 for me just like seeing parents
12 just picking up the baton where I
13 kind of dropped the ball because we
14 still never -- my oldest daughter
15 is 32, right, so this has been an
16 ongoing thing. So thank you for
17 stepping up and pushing us further
18 to a solution around leveling.

19 And you mentioned a few
20 things that I just have a few
21 questions around what you said. So
22 when the class was combined, did
23 they get a classroom assistant --

24 MS. PUGILESE: No.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: No

1 teacher's assistant. Okay. That's
2 what I thought. And when you said
3 resources, can you be a little bit
4 more specific so we can have it on
5 record?

6 MS. PUGILESE: I think it
7 can be as simple as making the
8 classrooms more comfortable. I
9 think our kids felt really down.
10 They felt -- they were really sad
11 to lose their teacher. They did a
12 lot of advocacy that we included
13 the kids in the banning. And I
14 know my kid was like, oh, there's
15 no way they're going to take our
16 teacher away. It was a lesson in
17 advocacy and what it means to
18 continue, always a good thing.

19 But they really felt the
20 impacts, and I think the class
21 overall was down. So even just
22 making the classrooms nicer. You
23 guys have been in Philly schools.
24 Our K through 3rd grade floor is
25 beautiful because it got painted

1 and they got all new furniture and
2 then you walk upstairs and it's not
3 the same.

4 So even if just like
5 something, small things in a
6 classroom to make them feel, maybe
7 some fidget toys, some areas they
8 can move to, to get away when
9 they're feeling overwhelmed in a
10 large classroom, little resources
11 like that. But I also think
12 additional bodies. Maybe
13 additional supports, and I know our
14 school is doing this. But talking
15 about social, emotional issues,
16 talking about 5th graders start to,
17 you know, there's some conflicts
18 starting in that grade, talking
19 about conflict resolution, being
20 kind. All those things are
21 happening in the classroom, but I
22 think additional supports will
23 really be helpful when you're in a
24 smaller room with that many kids.

25 DR. JACKSON: Yeah. I

1 would just add additional teacher
2 support. Our school, you know, I
3 was really happy that the
4 principal, we met and we were able
5 to open up the classroom to make it
6 a little bit bigger. And like
7 Emily said, we were able to help
8 with the classroom in terms of
9 making it a better environment.
10 But because there's just too many
11 kids in the classroom, there are a
12 lot of behavioral issues.

13 And so, I think that in
14 terms of resources it should also
15 be actual physical support, like
16 teachers' bodies that can help in
17 the classroom.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank
19 you. I figured that's what you
20 meant, but I just wanted to make
21 sure we had it on record. I
22 remember the time that when my
23 kids' class was leveled. I just so
24 happen to be at home and I was
25 classroom assistant, right. People

1 don't have the ability to do that,
2 and I'm sorry you had to transition
3 your children into cyber education
4 for a better learning environment.
5 That's unacceptable. And some
6 parents don't have that option and
7 our kids continue to struggle.

8 So I just wanted to make
9 sure we were clear that we meant a
10 person, also brighter colors, bean
11 bags, stuff that make young people
12 feel comfortable in the space that
13 is already overcrowded. And I'm
14 glad you mentioned social emotional
15 learning tools. I was a
16 restorative practitioner so I spent
17 a lot of time training District
18 teachers around restorative
19 practices and how that can change a
20 school environment even when you're
21 going through trauma. So thank you
22 so much for that.

23 MS. PUGILESE: Yeah, of
24 course.

25 DR. JACKSON: Thank you.

1 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
2 you, colleague. Appreciate your
3 questions.

4 Chair recognizes
5 Councilmember Ahmad.

6 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: Thank
7 you, Chair.

8 I wanted to commend both of
9 you for being such active advocates
10 for your children. Sadly not every
11 parent is able to do that. In
12 fact, that village doesn't exist
13 for many of our children across
14 Philadelphia. And also, thank you
15 for being so clear, both of you.

16 I know you're a researcher
17 so you have brought really specific
18 ideas. And you mentioned this and
19 I would love to see more of this,
20 behavioral health support that
21 could come when these decisions
22 were being made, both for the
23 teachers, for the administration in
24 the school as well as the children
25 and parents. So we should probably

1 talk to the School District about
2 how those resources can be made
3 available, whether we can talk to
4 our Department of Behavioral Health
5 and Intellectual Disabilities to be
6 a support for the School District.

7 Again, I don't know the
8 mechanics of it, but that would be
9 really critical to do this. And
10 you talked about the data being
11 quantitative. And I was looking
12 and thinking what is the
13 cost-benefit analysis that has been
14 done which will then say -- my bias
15 is to think it'll show that it does
16 not give us a benefit in the long-
17 term.

18 In our learning algorithm
19 for the children, what does that
20 look like because that can then
21 come into a budgetary conversation
22 to say the outcome is not
23 beneficial. And so, in order to
24 not have to have that outcome means
25 more resources in the classroom,

1 not to have to level the classroom
2 because monetarily it does not make
3 sense, right.

4 So we need a financial
5 modeling of this. We would love
6 our economists to kind of speak to
7 this so that when we draw out our
8 trajectory, it is not helping our
9 student body, our school and our
10 city. So I thank you again for
11 bringing these to our attention and
12 hopefully we'll be able to build on
13 all of this.

14 DR. JACKSON: Thank you.

15 MS. PUGILESE: Thank you.

16 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
17 you all, like my colleague said,
18 for your testimony today and thank
19 you for taking the time to be a
20 part of such an important
21 conversation. I think more
22 important than anything thank you
23 for your advocacy and your passion
24 as it relates to our students. It
25 is very much appreciated.

1 Are there any other
2 questions for members of this
3 Committee for this particular
4 panel?

5 (No response.)

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing
7 none, thank you again for your
8 testimony.

9 Mr. Clerk, will you please
10 call our next witnesses as it
11 relates to this panel.

12 DR. JACKSON: Thank you.

13 MS. PUGILESE: Thank you.

14 THE CLERK: The next
15 witnesses the Committee will hear
16 from are Luis Ramirez and Seleny
17 Fernandez.

18 Luis and Seleny, if you can
19 come forward.

20 (Witnesses approached
21 Witness table.)

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Good
23 morning. You can start by stating
24 your name for the record and after
25 you've stated your name for the

1 record, you may proceed with your
2 testimony. Thank you for being
3 here today. We very much
4 appreciate it.

5 MS. FERNANDEZ: Good
6 morning. Thank you. Well,
7 actually afternoon almost. My name
8 is Seleny Fernandez and I'm a
9 parent of a 1st grade daughter.
10 And when I hear that they invite us
11 to come here, I was a little
12 concerned about what I was about to
13 say. And I was like, okay, I
14 didn't know that I had to speak in
15 front of you.

16 But my concern is because
17 my daughter, she is 7 years old,
18 after I noticed that she was
19 telling me that it was more
20 students coming in the classroom.
21 She was saying, Mommy, now is a lot
22 of -- more kids here and it's a lot
23 of noise. And I'm like, okay, what
24 is going on.

25 So my husband, he was

1 speaking with her. And she say, I
2 have trouble concentrating. And I
3 say, Why? And she say, Oh, it's
4 too many kids there and only one
5 teacher. I say, For you being a
6 7-year-old, you are concerned about
7 that. Oh, that's pretty smart.

8 So this is a big deal for
9 us because our community -- I'm
10 from Dominican Republic and our
11 community is big, the Spanish
12 community in our neighborhood. A
13 lot of those kids, they have big
14 problem learning. And then if you
15 taking away their teachers, what is
16 going to happen? More problems.
17 What I learned was in one of the
18 meetings that we had in the school
19 that half of the students, only
20 like 50 percent are learning more
21 than the other 50 percent. And
22 this concerns me because how you
23 being okay with the 50 percent is
24 good to learning and the other 50
25 percent is not.

1 I know a lot of parents
2 there maybe they feel shy to go in
3 public and talk or say something,
4 but I'm speaking for all of them
5 that are not showing here because
6 some of them had to work, some of
7 them are single parents and I see
8 them every day, all the kids going,
9 happy to learn. And only one
10 teacher -- for my daughter I think
11 they're like 27.

12 Just this week she told me
13 there was another new student
14 coming in her classroom. And I'm
15 like, wow, 27 or 28 kids. That is
16 a lot of kids with only one
17 teacher. And she's happy because
18 she have more friends, but it
19 concerns me because I had to speak
20 with the doctors about her learning
21 abilities. She is a little behind.

22 And I'm like, okay, we have
23 to raise our voice up and see what
24 the City can do and the School
25 District to help us about our

1 future kids. They're the future.

2 So this is my concern. I'm sorry.

3 Thank you.

4 MR. RAMIREZ: Good morning.

5 My name is Luis Ramirez. I'm

6 Seleny's husband and the father of

7 the 7-year-old girl at Clara

8 Barton. I feel honored that you

9 guys invited me here. I am also an

10 immigrant. I came from a third

11 world country. So being in this

12 room is a bit overwhelming. It

13 does feel like first world country

14 here. When I went to the School

15 District building, it feels even

16 more like first world country,

17 right. But when you go to my

18 school, it feels like I'm back in

19 the third world country. Okay.

20 And the standards that my

21 wife was making reference to, the

22 numbers are impacted by leveling.

23 So last year the target, the goal,

24 was that only 51 percent of the

25 kids would learn at grade level, 51

1 percent. 49 percent, imagine those
2 numbers in politics, right.
3 Imagine that. That's not
4 acceptable. That's not first world
5 standards, right.

6 When we talk about leveling
7 specifically, we grew up in third
8 world countries. There were laws
9 that prevented classroom sizes from
10 being bigger than 20. And when we
11 came to this country and we said,
12 wow, first world, the richest
13 country on earth. We're going to
14 get very good class sizes. Now,
15 we're talking about 28.

16 So you are leaders in one
17 of the biggest cities in the
18 richest country on earth. You have
19 a budget that is bigger than the
20 entire budget of many countries
21 around the world. The School
22 District has I think around \$4.5
23 billion. That is a lot of money.
24 That is just a lot of money. So
25 this is not a money problem. This

1 cannot be a money problem.

2 I'm an engineer by trade,
3 and the numbers just don't add up
4 here. Okay. This is not a money
5 problem. When I look at the budget
6 that the School District has, when
7 I look at the number of students we
8 have enrolled in the District, we
9 pay more for each kid in the
10 District than many private schools
11 that have a much better
12 performance. Okay. So this cannot
13 be a money problem.

14 Now, I think this leveling
15 specifically is a transparency
16 problem. One of the parent's
17 testimony connected on that. You
18 know, I have no idea how leveling
19 is applied across the City. Does
20 Penn Alexander get leveling. What
21 is the class size at Penn Alexander
22 and how does that compare to the
23 average of the schools in the City?
24 How does it compare to mine? When
25 decisions are made about leveling,

1 what is the criteria? How do we
2 determine what schools will get
3 leveled?

4 So transparency is huge,
5 right, which indicates a management
6 problem, right. So there is a
7 management problem at the School
8 District. When I see the
9 Superintendent joining here with an
10 entourage of people, he cannot
11 answer a question about leveling by
12 himself, that's concerning, right.
13 He's got to come with financial,
14 human resource, all sorts of people
15 to this meeting. That is
16 concerning. He tells me there is a
17 management problem here.

18 I'm sorry. As a concerned
19 parent, I get emotional because my
20 daughter is in this mess. I want
21 to end with just a correlation. To
22 me leveling is the same thing as
23 looting. The School District is
24 coming to my school and looting us
25 of the most valuable resources.

1 Except when looting happens in
2 Philadelphia, it happens at the
3 rich stores, right. My sense is
4 when leveling happens or looting
5 happens at the School District, it
6 happens at the lowest income
7 neighborhoods. Unless the School
8 District can prove me otherwise,
9 show me the data, right. Be
10 transparent and I don't think they
11 are. I don't think they can be. I
12 don't think they want to be.

13 There are a lot of concerns
14 as parents about leveling. The
15 impact was very well-described by
16 previous parents. You know, as
17 City Council I urge you to make
18 this a priority. Okay. Education
19 has to be a priority for the City.
20 I am very optimistic that our new
21 Mayor will make it a priority. I
22 hope she comes with the changes
23 that are required to prevent
24 leveling in a first world country
25 and one of the biggest cities in

1 this country. It's just not
2 acceptable. It's not acceptable.
3 I appreciate the time. Thank you
4 very much.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
7 you both for your passion and your
8 testimony.

9 Are there any questions
10 from members of the Committee for
11 this particular set of witnesses?

12 Chair recognizes
13 Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

15 RICHARDSON: Thank you,
16 Mr. Chairman.

17 I just wanted to say thank
18 you so much for your testimony and
19 for coming down to share your
20 feedback regarding what's happening
21 at Clara Barton. I had the
22 opportunity to visit Clara Barton
23 twice in the last year and I'll be
24 returning soon.

25 I just want to say thank

1 you for your feedback and know that
2 we are taking this issue seriously.
3 We want to see policy changes as a
4 result of this hearing and our
5 ongoing work with the District. So
6 thank you very much.

7 MR. RAMIREZ: Thank you.

8 MS. FERNANDEZ: Thank you.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
10 you, colleague. And I echo the
11 sentiments of Councilmember Gilmore
12 Richardson.

13 Chair recognizes
14 Councilmember Brooks.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yes,
16 I also want to echo the sentiments
17 of Majority Leader. But I also
18 want to say thank you for coming.
19 This is the people's house. I
20 think that you should feel welcome
21 and know that this is where we come
22 to do the City's business.

23 Just six years ago, six, I
24 was over there. I was not here.
25 Had no idea that I would be here.

1 This advocacy work that you do,
2 that you're doing for your
3 daughter, it translates into work
4 that needs to be done across the
5 City. So I want you to know the
6 intimidation has to go. We need
7 you to come and say what the things
8 are that you need.

9 The School District needs
10 your voice to be able to make the
11 changes for your community because
12 you know in our community --
13 because my neighborhood is not that
14 far from yours -- everyone is not
15 going to have the courage to be
16 able to speak out. So I want to
17 thank you both for taking the time
18 out to do this, not just for your
19 children but for children around
20 the City, and you belong here.

21 So let this be the last
22 time you feel any level of
23 intimidation. That's what I wanted
24 to say. Six years ago I was there.
25 Was not an elected official. This

1 was the work that I did. So thank
2 you. I really appreciate you.

3 MS. FERNANDEZ: Thank you.

4 MR. RAMIREZ: Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Great
6 remarks. Great remarks, colleague.
7 Thank you.

8 Chair recognizes
9 Councilmember Ahmad.

10 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: I also
11 want to congratulate you on being
12 here. Like you, I'm an immigrant.
13 And like you, I also come from a
14 third world country, so I deeply
15 resonate with you, with your
16 comments about what expectations we
17 had when we've come here, right,
18 that I thought the roads were paved
19 with gold, right.

20 So it's a very rude
21 awakening when you look at the
22 inequity that exists in this
23 society where there is so much. We
24 are the richest country in the
25 world and yet we're not able to

1 educate our children with the
2 highest level of support and that
3 we have so much trauma in our city.
4 So you have been heard.

5 We have to figure this out
6 with all my colleagues here. I'm
7 new to Council. And so, it is very
8 important for me to listen to all
9 of you and to listen to my esteemed
10 colleagues who have a lot more
11 experience in many of these areas.
12 But the passion of saying that our
13 city can do better, must do better,
14 will do better. So thank you for
15 being here.

16 MR. RAMIREZ: Thanks.

17 MS. FERNANDEZ: Thank you.

18 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
19 you for your comment, colleague.

20 And hopefully you feel more
21 comfortable advocating and coming
22 down to City Council letting us
23 know what's going on in your
24 community, your families and what
25 we need to do to be able to improve

1 quality of life for constituents
2 across the City of Philadelphia.
3 So thank you.

4 Are there any other
5 questions from members of this
6 Committee for this particular
7 panel?

8 (No response.)

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Hearing
10 none, I want to say again thank you
11 for your testimony.

12 Mr. Clerk, I believe we
13 have testimony that's supposed to
14 be read into the record next?

15 THE CLERK: That's correct,
16 Mr. Chairman.

17 We'll go to Councilmember
18 Gilmore Richardson who will read
19 testimony from a 5th grader who
20 could not be here today because
21 he's in class.

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Makes
23 sense. The Chair recognizes
24 Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

1 RICHARDSON: Yes. Well, thank you
2 so much, Mr. Chairman.

3 I wanted to ensure that we
4 were able to put the testimony of
5 Naomi Bloom on the record. She
6 asked that I read this testimony
7 into the record, so I will do just
8 that.

9 Hello. I am Naomi Bloom, a
10 5th grader at Henry H. Houston
11 Elementary School. I would like to
12 address the issue of leveling.
13 Leveling happens when two or more
14 classes do not have the minimum
15 amount of students to have the
16 current amount of classes.

17 When this happens, the
18 District combines the classes and
19 usually one teacher to a different
20 school, leaving the other teacher
21 with a huge class. I have been
22 directly affected by leveling. At
23 the beginning of 5th grade, we had
24 two classes. One class of 15
25 students and one of 16. Our two

1 teachers were Ms. Douglass and
2 Ms. Lya.

3 Ms. Lya was new to our
4 school this year and everyone was
5 excited to meet her. What we were
6 most excited about though was to
7 have a small class. In 4th grade,
8 we had a class of 32, and it was
9 pretty crazy. Anyway, we were all
10 really sad when she told us that
11 she couldn't stay because the
12 minimum amount of students needed
13 to have two classes was 34 students
14 and we had 31 in our grade.

15 Now I have a class of 30
16 kids and a lot of times it's really
17 loud and there is a lot of fights.
18 It was annoying, but the thing that
19 aggravated me the most was that not
20 all schools have to deal with it.
21 I have a friend who goes to a
22 private school, and she told me
23 that her maximum class size is 17
24 or 18 students while ours is 33. I
25 understand that there are other

1 kids in the District who have much
2 bigger classes than us, but we hope
3 you take into consideration that
4 the way it works out for us right
5 now isn't great for us kids. Thank
6 you.

7 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 Thank you, colleagues.

9 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank
10 you, colleague. We appreciate you.

11 With that being said,
12 Mr. Clerk, will you please call the
13 next panel to testify.

14 THE CLERK: Of course,
15 Mr. Chairman. The next panel is
16 Dr. Tony Watlington, the
17 Superintendent of the Philadelphia
18 School District, who has several
19 colleagues with him to answer other
20 questions as-needed.

21 (Witnesses approached
22 Witness table.)

23 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Can we
24 support them with -- yep, thank
25 you.

1 And, Mr. Superintendent,
2 good morning. You have a
3 PowerPoint presentation to go with
4 your --

5 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

6 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: There
7 you go. You guys are on it. Thank
8 you.

9 Good morning,
10 Dr. Watlington and team. I know
11 you've been through this before, so
12 of course please start by stating
13 your name for the record. We will
14 begin with the testimony. If I do
15 step away for a second,
16 Councilmember Gilmore Richardson,
17 our Majority Leader, will chair the
18 hearing if I do have to step away.

19 But, Dr. Watlington, please
20 state your name for the record and
21 you may begin with your testimony.

22 DR. WATLINGTON: Tony
23 Watlington, Superintendent, joined
24 by Chief Financial Officer Mike
25 Herbstman and Deputy Superintendent

1 for Talent, Strategy and Culture,
2 Jeremy Grant-Skinner. I also want
3 to note that we have some other
4 team members here with us that I'd
5 like to recognize. Deputy
6 Superintendent for Academic,
7 Dr. Jermaine Dawson is with us.
8 Chief -- yes, round of applause.
9 All right. Chief of Staff, Sarah
10 Galbally who you know. I hear
11 another round of applause. And one
12 more time for our Chief of
13 Communications and Customer
14 Service, Alex Coppadge.
15 Chair Thomas, Majority
16 Leader Richardson, Councilmember
17 Phillips, thank you for the
18 opportunity to speak with you this
19 morning. I first want to begin by
20 saying thank you to our parents
21 from both Houston and Barton who
22 spoke this morning as well as the
23 Archbishop and Dr. Cooper.
24 Majority Leader Richardson,
25 I appreciate you sharing your

1 thoughts from your own experience
2 earlier this year with Gompers
3 Elementary. I want you to know
4 that we do think that this is a
5 very significant and serious issue.
6 We're pleased to be here to let you
7 know about how we've charged the
8 team with doing a comprehensive
9 review of our leveling process.

10 We're going to take just a
11 few minutes to give you an update.
12 And so, we'll jump right into it.
13 We're going to do three things
14 before we take your questions and
15 feedback. Number one, we want to
16 answer the question what is
17 leveling, the enrollment-driven
18 resource review, what is it.
19 Number two, how are other districts
20 approaching this. Last time we
21 spoke before this Council you asked
22 some questions relative to some of
23 the large urban school districts,
24 and we're going to give you those
25 answers today. And then third,

1 most importantly, what are we doing
2 about it. And then we'll go right
3 into any questions or feedback that
4 you have.

5 Next slide, please.

6 Advance two slides actually and
7 we'll get right into what is the
8 enrollment review or leveling.

9 Long story short, schools are
10 allotted funding based on a certain
11 number of ratios of students.
12 We're allotted for one teacher per
13 30 students in grades Kindergarten
14 through 3rd grade.

15 We're allotted for one
16 teacher per 33 students in Grades 4
17 through 12. And we're allotted one
18 teacher for 24 students in our
19 career and technical education
20 classrooms. Now, at the beginning
21 of the year students don't always
22 come in these nice bundles, by
23 school or by classroom.

24 Also, I want to note that
25 our contract with the Philadelphia

1 Federation of Teachers, the PFT,
2 says and I quote, "The leveling of
3 classes must begin no later than 10
4 days" -- "no later than 10 student
5 days after the first student day of
6 the school year and shall be
7 completed by the Monday following
8 the 21st student day." So there's
9 a precedent for how we do this
10 process.

11 Also, it was noted earlier
12 that we had some 50-something
13 teachers who were leveled out of
14 9,000 teachers that were
15 assigned -- who were actually
16 assigned to a different school. I
17 give you the number just so you
18 have the data. I don't say this is
19 good, bad, perfect. I say this is
20 just the data. So we're not
21 editorializing that data at this
22 point. I just want you to have the
23 numbers.

24 On the next slide, Chair
25 Thomas, the Committee asked us

1 before, what do other large urbans
2 do in some of these districts, you
3 specifically referenced or someone
4 referenced in our last visit. So
5 we pulled together the data at the
6 current time from the nation's four
7 largest school districts.

8 As you know although
9 Philadelphia is the six largest
10 city in the country, we have the
11 8th largest educational system in
12 the country. So we pulled the
13 largest district in the country, in
14 the world for that matter, the New
15 York City schools as well as the
16 second largest district is Los
17 Angeles Unified, the third largest
18 district, there's been a toss-up in
19 the past couple of years because of
20 declining enrollment.
21 Historically, that's been the
22 Chicago Public Schools. I believe
23 Miami is just ahead of Chicago now.
24 So we'll make Miami three and
25 Chicago four.

1 We've been talking with our
2 colleagues in other districts
3 taking the time to study this
4 process. Long story short, do
5 these districts level as a mixed
6 bag? Yes, for Los Angeles Unified
7 School District. In Miami-Dade,
8 they do not do the leveling that we
9 do, but they do have an involuntary
10 transfer process that begins some
11 time after the summer -- some time
12 during the summer, excuse me, which
13 is different than what we do here
14 around the 20th day of school or
15 so. And the New York City schools,
16 no, but they do have a process that
17 typically concludes some time in
18 August where our process is well
19 after school begins.

20 And then the Chicago Public
21 Schools, just got off the phone
22 recently with the Superintendent
23 there, and they continually monitor
24 class sizes throughout the year to
25 adjust for oversized classes such

1 that they don't have to follow a
2 leveling process the way we do.

3 Next slide, please. So
4 what are we doing about it.
5 Shortly before -- around the time
6 of the last visit to Council, Chair
7 Thomas, I charged the School
8 District team, my team, with
9 conducting a comprehensive review
10 of the leveling process, to make
11 sure that one would understand
12 exactly what has happened
13 historically. Just the facts, be
14 careful about editorializing it.

15 We've been driven by the
16 impacts on students, teachers and
17 families, the impacts on the budget
18 and impacts on our allocation of
19 resources. Hence, we have our CFO
20 Mike Herbstman here and the Deputy
21 Chief -- Deputy Superintendent of
22 Talent, Strategy and Culture who
23 oversees the Human Resources
24 Department of the organization here
25 with me today.

1 We're committed to getting
2 this process, this review,
3 comprehensive review completed
4 inclusive of talking with people
5 who've experienced the leveling
6 process, talking with our
7 colleagues in those other large
8 districts and others. We agreed to
9 get that process completed between
10 October of 2023 and March of 2024.
11 Now, we're close to that timeline,
12 but we're not quite finished just
13 yet, to be frank.

14 What will happen when we
15 complete our process, this
16 comprehensive review? Next month I
17 want to take my findings, the
18 team's findings, my recommendations
19 to the Board of Education. As you
20 know, the Board is responsible for
21 vision, policy, goals, hiring and
22 evaluate the Superintendent. And
23 certainly, this has policy and it
24 has budgetary implications. So I'd
25 like to take those findings and

1 recommendations back to the Board
2 of Education in March.

3 And pending the Board of
4 Education's feedback and direction,
5 certainly would like to have an
6 invitation to come back, Chair
7 Thomas, to update this Committee
8 and let you know what we intend to
9 do.

10 If we go over the final
11 slide, I'm just going to conclude
12 by saying that again we appreciate
13 the feedback. We know that this is
14 a strong impact. We understand it.
15 We're committed to figuring out how
16 to make this a process that is the
17 best it absolutely can be.

18 I don't want to get ahead
19 of the final study findings and
20 recommendations, but we look
21 forward to coming back and updating
22 you on our next steps. And with
23 that, we would be happy to take any
24 questions or feedback.

25 COUNCILMAN THOMAS: Thank

1 you. I'm going to pass it to
2 Councilmember Gilmore Richardson to
3 chair the remaining of the hearing.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you
6 so much, Mr. Chairman. And thank
7 you all for your leeway for this
8 hearing. It has been a difficult
9 24 hours to say the least.

10 But I wanted to thank the
11 District and thank you,
12 Superintendent Watlington, and your
13 team for all of your support in
14 working with us with all the
15 questions that we have around some
16 of these policies.

17 I really want to thank
18 Dr. Dawson who I think has been an
19 excellent addition to the team and
20 has really heard our feedback and
21 seeks to resolve a number of the
22 issues that we have brought forth.
23 So I want to publicly say thank you
24 to Dr. Dawson who I think has just
25 been a stellar addition and

1 necessary addition to your team.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: I agree.

3 Thank you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Thank you. I wanted
6 to start off and I will be honest,
7 I have a ton of questions and I
8 need to get them all on the record
9 for this hearing because this is
10 probably the last opportunity that
11 we will have prior to us
12 undertaking our robust budget
13 process.

14 So is there a written
15 policy on enrollment-driven
16 resource review, i.e., leveling?
17 Is there a written policy?

18 MR. GRANT-SKINNER: There
19 is not a Board policy in the
20 District that outlines the process
21 for enrollment-driven resource
22 review. And the process we do
23 follow is looking at actual
24 enrollment compared to those ratios
25 that were shared, which are the

1 same ratios used in the spring to
2 allocate positions based on
3 enrollment projections.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Okay. But to confirm,
6 there is no written policy within
7 the District that exists relative
8 to enrollment-driven resource
9 review, i.e., leveling?

10 DR. WATLINGTON: That is
11 correct. There are other issues in
12 the District where we have to
13 figure out how to best allocate
14 resources that don't either have or
15 sometimes warrant a District
16 policy, and we just figure out how
17 to do the work to do the greatest
18 good for the greatest number of
19 children.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

21 RICHARDSON: Okay. And so, to that
22 point there is no written policy on
23 leveling. For the record for this
24 hearing, can you notate -- and I
25 know in your testimony you stated

1 that there are 50 teachers that
2 were moved as a result of leveling
3 out of 9,000 -- can you notate how
4 many schools were impacted?

5 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

6 Would you like that information?

7 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

8 RICHARDSON: Yes.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: I'm going
10 to ask Deputy Superintendent to
11 speak to that.

12 MR. HERBSTMAN: I can speak
13 to that. So there are 58 schools
14 in all that ended up with lower
15 teacher allocations. That
16 originally totaled teacher position
17 reductions of 87. Of those, there
18 are reasons that the people did not
19 actually move, including that we
20 had -- some of those were at
21 schools for our early access site
22 selection. So 50 of those 87
23 teachers moved. I don't have the
24 breakdown of exactly how many of
25 those 50, but of the 87 that was at

1 58 schools. We can follow up with
2 that information.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

4 RICHARDSON: That would be
5 excellent. If you could provide
6 that information to Chairman Thomas
7 so that he could disseminate that
8 to the Committee and to the members
9 of Council.

10 And so, 50 out of 87
11 teachers, 58 actual schools. And
12 you'll get us the list of each one
13 so we can compare and contrast the
14 list, right?

15 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

17 RICHARDSON: And one question I do
18 have based on several school visits
19 that I had this week is around the
20 special admission policy and the
21 change in the special admission
22 policy and the ability for school
23 administrators to be able to pull
24 young people off the list to go to
25 their schools based on the fact

1 that they may not have reached
2 their enrollment cap for their
3 particular school.

4 We're hearing that
5 enrollment is down at a number of
6 schools. So you have this new
7 special admission policy mixed with
8 this leveling policy that is not
9 written. How are you justifying
10 that? How are you working through
11 that? How are we helping schools
12 to try to meet their enrollment
13 caps when we know that a lot of
14 schools have much larger facilities
15 and they have very low enrollment?

16 DR. WATLINGTON: To that
17 point -- is this on still. To your
18 point, Leader Gilmore Richardson,
19 the data showed this year that, A,
20 we have an actual increase in the
21 number of students who are apply --
22 number of applicants, student
23 applicants, to our criteria-based
24 schools; B, we have an increase in
25 the number of acceptances in our

1 criteria-based schools.

2 It is in part because we
3 conducted an external review of our
4 lottery process. We spent some
5 time last summer with Dr. Dawson
6 and other members of the team
7 meeting with our criteria-based
8 school principals. So I think the
9 numbers there are going to show a
10 promising trend this year. They're
11 not all in yet. We're still in
12 that process.

13 I think it's also important
14 to note for the record that we
15 actually held harmless a lot of the
16 would-be cuts to our criteria-based
17 schools last year because we
18 understood that we, A, need to look
19 to the lottery external audit
20 feedback and figure out how to
21 better do it and, B, we need to
22 make decisions in concert with
23 talking to principals rather than
24 just saying run a computer system
25 and have at it. So I think we're

1 going to end up in a better place
2 and we'd like to be able to share
3 that data with you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Okay. I only ask that
6 if you could check in with all of
7 the principals not only for the
8 criteria-based schools but for the
9 CTE schools, because I think there
10 is an issue which is an unintended
11 consequence to change in the
12 process that is holding them
13 harmless and not giving them the
14 ability to bring in additional
15 young people into their schools if
16 they do have the room and the
17 staffing.

18 DR. WATLINGTON: Duly
19 noted. Happy to do so.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

21 RICHARDSON: Okay. I just heard
22 that yesterday so this was in my
23 travels. So I wanted to ensure
24 that we got that on the record.
25 Thank you.

1 I now have a question
2 regarding the class size caps. And
3 so, do we have class size caps
4 based on schools? So if it's
5 criteria-based or special
6 admission, do we have class size
7 caps? And if so, what are the cap
8 numbers?

9 DR. WATLINGTON: I'm going
10 to have Deputy Superintendent
11 Grant-Skinner, who oversees our
12 labor and negotiations with PFT and
13 others to speak to that.

14 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
15 RICHARDSON: Okay.

16 MR. GRANT-SKINNER: The
17 class size caps that you saw across
18 the District, there are a couple of
19 very special cases in the
20 Collective Bargaining Agreement
21 with the teachers that go beyond
22 the 30, 33 and 24, but they're very
23 specialized and it's not different
24 by school. So the 30, 33 and 24
25 applies across the District.

1 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

2 RICHARDSON: Okay. And to your
3 point, you said there are
4 specialized caps based on the
5 Collective Bargaining Agreement.
6 Can you detail what they are for
7 the record?

8 MR. GRANT-SKINNER: It's
9 for some specialized types of
10 positions. They're very small
11 numbers. I don't know in this
12 moment exactly what they are, but
13 it's specialized types of positions
14 that are very rare.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

16 RICHARDSON: Okay. So it's more so
17 related to position and not
18 specific school type, would you
19 agree?

20 MR. GRANT-SKINNER: That's
21 correct.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

23 RICHARDSON: Okay. And so, for the
24 record would you be able to provide
25 that information from the

1 Collective Bargaining Agreement --

2 MR. GRANT-SKINNER: Yes.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

4 RICHARDSON: -- for the Committee.

5 Okay. That'll be great.

6 And my next question is we
7 have heard that some schools have
8 class size caps that are smaller
9 than other District schools and the
10 average that you've notated here
11 today. So are you -- can
12 individual schools negotiate lower
13 class size caps?

14 MR. GRANT-SKINNER: That is
15 not a part of the District policy.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

17 RICHARDSON: Okay. So the question
18 is though, can schools negotiate
19 lower school --

20 DR. WATLINGTON: No.

21 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

22 RICHARDSON: Go ahead.

23 DR. WATLINGTON: I'm sorry.

24 Go ahead.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

1 RICHARDSON: Well, can schools
2 negotiate lower class size caps?

3 DR. WATLINGTON: We
4 referenced that for career and
5 technical education classrooms as a
6 cap of 24.

7 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

8 RICHARDSON: Right.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: Outside of
10 that, we are a school system and
11 not a system of schools. And so,
12 we have uniform rules with some
13 unique intricacies that the Deputy
14 Superintendent will make sure to
15 get to Council.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

17 RICHARDSON: Right, I agree. And
18 I'm asking this in this way for a
19 reason. Can you confirm for the
20 record Penn Alexander's class size
21 caps, what they are?

22 DR. WATLINGTON: Deputy
23 Superintendent, can you speak to
24 Penn Alexander in particular?

25 MR. GRANT-SKINNER: I'm not

1 aware of anything unique to Penn
2 Alexander. And some of our team
3 members have just gone through the
4 process to look at enrollment
5 projections by school, by grade and
6 we did not treat Penn Alexander
7 differently than other schools.

8 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

9 RICHARDSON: Okay. And if we can
10 just have that --

11 DR. WATLINGTON: We do know
12 that Penn Alexander receives some
13 additional supports relative to the
14 University of Pennsylvania. We
15 might want to dig deep into what
16 that looks like differently than
17 other schools. And so, if that's
18 kind of part of the spirit of that
19 question, we'll be happy to detail
20 what those extra supports are.

21 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

22 RICHARDSON: Okay. And can you
23 just confirm whether or not they
24 have different class sizes than
25 other schools in the School

1 District?

2 DR. WATLINGTON: Certainly.

3 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

4 RICHARDSON: Okay. Now, for
5 charter schools, are you involved
6 in the leveling process for charter
7 schools at all? And are charter
8 schools leveled?

9 DR. WATLINGTON: As you're
10 aware, Majority Leader Gilmore
11 Richardson, the charter schools --
12 in the School District of
13 Philadelphia, the charter schools
14 some time during the mid part of
15 Bill Hites' tenure became a direct
16 report of the Board of Education.
17 And certainly, the Chief of
18 Charters who works in the Board
19 Office serves on the
20 Superintendent's cabinet for
21 collaboration, but we do not have
22 detail or involved in how the
23 charters staff their schools. Is
24 that correct, Deputy
25 Superintendent?

1 MR. HERBSTMAN: If I can
2 add to that, our work with the
3 charter schools is really around
4 their payments, so they do get
5 adjusted throughout the year to
6 their actual enrollment. So we
7 don't get involved in the hiring
8 side there. But if they have fewer
9 students than expected, then their
10 overall funding will decrease from
11 the School District as a result of
12 it.

13 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
14 RICHARDSON: Okay. And so, their
15 funding will decrease based on
16 their internal leveling process,
17 that there is no direct correlation
18 from the District relative to how
19 charter schools level and/or look
20 at their sort of enrollment cap
21 class size projections, things of
22 that nature?

23 MR. HERBSTMAN: Correct,
24 it's just the actual funding that
25 is applied per pupil amount that

1 each charter school receives is
2 then multiplied by their daily
3 average membership which is their
4 enrollment. So as their enrollment
5 goes down, they receive less
6 funding but we're not involved in
7 the actual how they use that
8 funding.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: On a
10 monthly basis, Leader Richardson, I
11 will look at the numbers to look at
12 what our class sizes look like
13 across the District, the District-
14 operated schools. I do not do so
15 with the charter schools.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
17 RICHARDSON: Understood. And to
18 your point, relative to the charter
19 schools and their funding, is that
20 the same when it's a special -- let
21 me rephrase that. Not a special
22 admission, but is that the same if
23 it's a student with an IEP? You're
24 still able to get the money back?

25 MR. HERBSTMAN: So we pay

1 two different rates to charter
2 schools. One is based on all
3 students and then there's a second
4 rate for students with IEPs. They
5 receive that amount per student
6 plus an additional amount on top of
7 it.

8 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

9 RICHARDSON: Okay. So I have a
10 further question about that. We
11 can pause that for budget time, but
12 I was always told or I thought that
13 we're not able to be reimbursed for
14 those particular students, whether
15 they stay or go to a charter
16 school?

17 MR. HERBSTMAN: Sorry.
18 Could you repeat that?

19 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

20 RICHARDSON: Meaning, if you have a
21 student who goes to a charter
22 school that has an IEP and then
23 they go back to the District
24 school, do we get the full
25 reimbursement?

1 MR. HERBSTMAN: So again,
2 at the end of the year once
3 everything is trued up, we're
4 paying for their actual enrollment
5 so we would adjust for both
6 students with and without
7 disabilities that have left the
8 school to get to the final payment
9 amounts.

10 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

11 RICHARDSON: Okay. I can hold on
12 that one because that's not germane
13 specifically to this resolution,
14 but I know we were sort of going in
15 that direction.

16 One question I have based
17 on the testimony from the parents
18 around the support for the schools
19 and for the teachers once a
20 classroom is impacted by
21 enrollment-driven resource review,
22 which is leveling. So what type of
23 resources do you provide? And then
24 also for the schools that have been
25 impacted by leveling this year, can

1 you notate which grades? So
2 whether it was kindergarten, 1st
3 grade, 2nd grade, whatever grades
4 it is, if you can just break it
5 down by grade? And then notate the
6 type of resources that the School
7 District provided to the school and
8 to the classroom.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: Certainly.
10 For teachers who have been leveled,
11 our aspiration is not to say, hey,
12 Majority Leader Gilmore Richardson,
13 we're moving you from School A to
14 B, show up on Tuesday, call us when
15 you get there. We want to have
16 good supports in customer service.

17 I'll ask Deputy
18 Superintendent Dawson if he can
19 talk specifically about what that
20 looks like in the schools in terms
21 of support to teachers, in terms of
22 helping to make sure the materials
23 are moved, welcoming them.

24 Dr. Dawson, could you maybe
25 come to the podium and just say a

1 quick word about that please?

2 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

3 RICHARDSON: And I want to preface
4 this by saying, Superintendent
5 Watlington, that the reason why I'm
6 asking that question, and I can use
7 this as a personal example, my son
8 has an IEP for speech therapy and
9 he has not had speech therapy all
10 school year, not one day.

11 So I've gone out and it's
12 taken me months to find a place for
13 him to have speech therapy, and I
14 gladly pay for it and take him in
15 the evenings after I've been here
16 all day and out and about all day,
17 and I'm sure other parents are
18 experiencing this.

19 So first, his classroom has
20 been leveled. He hasn't had speech
21 all year. How does the District
22 explain that? And then it's -- and
23 I get it, right. But how do we
24 explain that, that a child goes all
25 year without a needed, necessary

1 support? The classroom has already
2 been leveled, so the class size
3 doubled.

4 So while the class size was
5 smaller, he was doing better
6 because he was getting more
7 individual attention. It was less
8 behavior issues going on between
9 the children and the classroom
10 because it's so many kids and
11 they're small. But how do you
12 account for that?

13 DR. WATLINGTON: It is
14 absolutely my expectation as
15 Superintendent that when services
16 are written into an approved
17 Individualized Education Plan, that
18 children receive them. I will look
19 into that issue personally.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
21 RICHARDSON: Well, no, no. I'm not
22 saying that for that reason because
23 the District is already helping
24 with that, and particularly
25 Dr. Dawson. But I'm saying it to

1 the point of saying that there are
2 so many students out there who may
3 have an IEP, who may need services,
4 who have also been impacted by
5 leveling, so now it's like a double
6 conundrum that they're dealing
7 with, that they're not receiving
8 adequate service.

9 And I'm not blaming this on
10 the District, right. We understand
11 that there are staffing shortages
12 across industries that are not just
13 in education. They're in health
14 care. They're all over the place.
15 Our workforce has been deeply
16 impacted as a result of COVID-19.

17 I'm not saying this in a
18 way to place blame --

19 DR. WATLINGTON: Sure.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

21 RICHARDSON: -- but I'm saying this
22 in a way of while we're trying to
23 figure all of this out, we have one
24 chance to get it right with our
25 kids.

1 DR. WATLINGTON: Right.

2 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

3 RICHARDSON: And this is a whole
4 year that my son will miss speech
5 therapy outside of the speech
6 therapy that I've been able to find
7 at an outside location that I take
8 him to, that I pay for every single
9 day that the District has not
10 provided.

11 And so, how do account for
12 that when you're also leveling
13 those same classrooms? And maybe
14 if the class size was smaller and
15 knowing that you can't provide the
16 service, then they would get more
17 individualized attention versus
18 being now in a large classroom
19 still not receiving the additional
20 services they are supposed to have.

21 And I know I'm not the only
22 parent that's going through that.
23 It's thousands of parents who are
24 experiencing that because of the
25 staffing shortages that we know to

1 be true. So how do you account for
2 that?

3 DR. WATLINGTON: I agree
4 with you that our kids have one
5 shot at this. I also agree with
6 your point that when there are some
7 existing disparities or issues,
8 that leveling absolutely can and
9 does exacerbate those issues.
10 Point and duly noted, and we'll
11 take that under our review.

12 With your permission, I'd
13 like to ask Dr. Dawson to speak to
14 what specific supports do we
15 provide to teachers or have we
16 provided in the past year that were
17 leveled.

18 DR. DAWSON: Thank you so
19 much, Dr. Watlington. And hello,
20 Councilwoman Gilmore Richardson.
21 Our support for teachers where
22 their classrooms have experienced
23 leveling is through supports
24 directly from the principal and the
25 District Office to push in through

1 what our professional learning
2 specialists at the District Office
3 level and also through an acronym
4 SBTL or what we call school-based
5 teacher leaders, who are coaches
6 and instructional coaches in the
7 school who provide direct support
8 to teachers.

9 In many cases, these
10 school-based teacher leaders also
11 do small group instruction for
12 students alongside the teacher or
13 they do what we call side-by-side
14 coaching to support the teachers in
15 the classroom with the students in
16 realtime. Nothing can replace a
17 highly-qualified teacher our
18 Superintendent says all the time as
19 one of the levers that really,
20 really move the needle.

21 But while we are going
22 through the leveling process, these
23 are some of the things that we put
24 in place to ensure that teachers do
25 not feel alone and that they can

1 feel that there is some supports as
2 they transition kids into the
3 classroom. So where they may have
4 had 27 kids and now they've gone to
5 30 or 31 kids, that SBTL or that
6 school-based teacher leader is in
7 that classroom for a period of time
8 with that teacher, almost as two
9 teachers in the room to support
10 with the students getting
11 acclimated to make sure that the
12 teacher has the resources that he
13 or she needs to support the
14 teachers.

15 And has it been in every
16 case, absolutely probably not. But
17 for the most part, we can say that
18 teachers are provided that
19 additional support. And where it
20 has not been the case, we
21 definitely would like to know that
22 so that we can also push in and
23 provide some additional supports
24 for those teachers as well.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

1 RICHARDSON: Okay. That will be
2 great. And a couple of things I
3 wanted to notate here based on your
4 slide around what the District is
5 doing to address this issue. You
6 stated that the report is not quite
7 ready, but you anticipate that it
8 should be ready in or around March
9 or April or so?

10 DR. WATLINGTON: That is
11 correct.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

13 RICHARDSON: Can we receive a copy
14 of that report?

15 DR. WATLINGTON: We fully
16 intend to come back to Council and
17 present it to you, yes.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

19 RICHARDSON: Okay. Excellent. And
20 then we'll also receive an update
21 to Council and District
22 stakeholders after the report has
23 been given to the Board, right?

24 DR. WATLINGTON:
25 Absolutely. Following the Board's

1 review and feedback and
2 direction -- again, I don't want to
3 get ahead of the Board because
4 there may be some budgetary
5 impacts. We certainly look forward
6 to coming back to Council and being
7 very transparent and speaking with
8 the full community because we know
9 this is a big issue for a lot of
10 people, parents in particular and
11 staff.

12 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
13 RICHARDSON: Right. And while
14 you're conducting this
15 comprehensive review of the
16 leveling process for the purpose of
17 this report, you stated you talked
18 to teachers and administrators and
19 other folks in the school
20 community. Have you spoken with
21 students?

22 DR. WATLINGTON: I have a
23 Superintendent Student Advisory
24 Council and they give me feedback
25 on a number of issues, including

1 those that personally experience
2 leveling or have friends or
3 schoolmates who've experienced it.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Okay. Excellent --

6 DR. WATLINGTON: We meet
7 every month by the way.

8 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

9 RICHARDSON: Okay. Great. And
10 then one thing I wanted to notate
11 based on Dr. Cooper's testimony was
12 around the recruitment for
13 teachers.

14 DR. WATLINGTON: Mm-hmm.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

16 RICHARDSON: And how typically last
17 folks or the last teacher to be
18 hired is the first one to be let
19 go. How are you working to address
20 the recruitment challenge based on
21 recruiting teachers to come and
22 then those who may be impacted by
23 leveling?

24 DR. WATLINGTON: I want to
25 say a couple of words about that.

1 There are districts that make
2 decisions based on when there's a
3 reduction in faculty because of
4 enrollment. There are districts
5 that follow a process based on
6 seniority --

7 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

8 RICHARDSON: Right.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: -- which
10 means you're last in, first out.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

12 RICHARDSON: Right.

13 DR. WATLINGTON: There are
14 districts that do something very
15 different. They say we are going
16 to make this about performance. If
17 you are our highest performer
18 regardless of where you stack in
19 terms of seniority, we want to keep
20 you at this school.

21 There's not one gold
22 standard way of doing it. I can
23 tell you that on the front end
24 we're working hard to increase our
25 recruitment of teachers because the

1 real root cause issue here is two
2 things driving this. On the one
3 hand, we have some students who are
4 transient and move, and we're not
5 exactly sure -- our projections are
6 pretty good, but they're not always
7 100 percent accurate.

8 On the other side of that
9 nickel, Majority Leader Gilmore
10 Richardson, we have a 71 percent
11 decline in the number of teaching
12 licenses that were administered,
13 that were awarded here in the
14 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania over
15 the past decade. So that means
16 we've got to, A, recruit more
17 widely outside of the Commonwealth
18 of Pennsylvania. That means we've
19 got to go to New Jersey and
20 Delaware.

21 If we want to get more
22 African American teachers, we've
23 got to go to the south, because
24 notwithstanding Lincoln and Cheyney
25 being the first HBCUs, most of them

1 are in the south. We also have to
2 go to those predominantly white
3 institutions across the country and
4 expand our footprint. It takes
5 resources. And we have to expand
6 our footprint at MSIs, the minority
7 serving institutions.

8 We also are looking at
9 investing in Grow Your Own
10 opportunities in partnership with
11 the PFT, I think College Unbound,
12 Cheyney University, La Salle and
13 Drexel, if I'm correct, to take
14 people who already work in the
15 School District and get them
16 through their college degree debt-
17 free in exchange for them to come
18 back and work here in the School
19 District.

20 And then I just want to
21 quickly mention as a part of our
22 strategic plan Accelerate Philly,
23 we intend to open a very unique
24 teacher preparation middle college
25 high school, where we intend to

1 work with local university partners
2 to get them through college debt-
3 free similar to the
4 paraprofessional initiative that
5 we're already doing in exchange for
6 coming back to work here. We want
7 to grow our own teachers here in
8 Philadelphia and we need to expand
9 our recruitment footprint outside
10 of Pennsylvania.

11 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

12 RICHARDSON: Excellent.

13 DR. WATLINGTON: And in
14 Pennsylvania quite frankly.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

16 RICHARDSON: Excellent. I love the
17 recruitment efforts that you all
18 are undertaking.

19 I want to pause to
20 recognize the presence of
21 Councilmember Mark Squilla and
22 thank you very much for your
23 attendance this afternoon. Do you
24 have any questions, Councilmember
25 Squilla? You're good?

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: No.

2 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

3 RICHARDSON: Okay. All right. And
4 then finally, I wanted to ask from
5 an equity perspective when you look
6 at leveling of schools, are you
7 taking into consideration sort of
8 where the schools are located, if
9 they're in underresourced
10 neighborhoods?

11 And then also, if there's
12 no written policy relative to
13 leveling, then I don't believe that
14 there's an actual written policy
15 around what you do once a school or
16 a classroom is leveled. So I would
17 just ask as a part of the
18 comprehensive review that you all
19 are undertaking if you could just
20 put the policy whatever it may be
21 in writing, and then what the next
22 steps based on what you all will
23 decide this enrollment-driven
24 resource review is. Okay?

25 DR. WATLINGTON: Certainly.

1 I'll take the first part and I'll
2 ask Deputy Superintendent Grant-
3 Skinner --

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: It's leveling.

6 DR. WATLINGTON: Leveling.
7 And good to see you, Councilmember
8 Squilla, as always.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Hello.

10 DR. WATLINGTON: Relative
11 to equity when I talk to my
12 colleagues across urban districts
13 across the country, it's no
14 different than New York, Chicago,
15 Miami, Houston, Atlanta and the
16 like. One of the equity issues of
17 our time is that in the urban areas
18 there are some neighborhoods and
19 communities, geographic areas, that
20 are experiencing significant
21 population increases, and there are
22 some parts of our cities across the
23 country that are experiencing
24 population decline.

25 A tough question always

1 comes about in terms of with our
2 communities that are losing
3 enrollment and population, but
4 schools have always been the center
5 of community, a gathering point, a
6 beacon of hope, what produces
7 better outcomes. How do we make
8 sure to support those schools in a
9 way that we're not just
10 numbers-driven where you're having
11 population increases.

12 At the same time in the
13 urban space when you have areas
14 that are growing in population, as
15 a Superintendent and a Board of
16 Education we've got to figure out
17 how to serve all of our communities
18 because every kid who leaves to
19 choose some other -- parent that
20 leaves to choose some other
21 schooling option, those are dollars
22 not coming to the School District
23 of Philadelphia.

24 And so, we've got to make
25 sure that we're serving all of our

1 communities and employ that equity
2 lens and we've got to be real
3 careful about us versus them
4 sometimes, because the squeaky
5 voices sometimes -- what does it
6 say, the squeaky wheel gets oiled?

7 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

8 RICHARDSON: Right.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: And we've
10 got to make sure that we're
11 supporting those communities and
12 families also who may not readily
13 show up to make their voices heard.
14 So anyway, long story short, yes,
15 we're very driven by those equity
16 considerations.

17 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

18 RICHARDSON: And I have to say I
19 completely agree with you. I'm
20 dealing with the same issues with
21 the SEPTA Bus Revolution process.
22 So know that I completely agree
23 with your point there.

24 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you.

25 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

1 RICHARDSON: While you were
2 talking, it made me think about the
3 Northeast because we know a lot of
4 schools in the Northeast, they are
5 bursting at the seams. They have a
6 ton of students in their areas.
7 And then we have other areas like
8 maybe out in West Philly or in
9 North Philly where we have rapid
10 decline in some of our larger
11 buildings.

12 I'll give you an example,
13 like Overbrook as an example where
14 I used to teach early in my career
15 in Classroom 205. We didn't have a
16 lot of students. And even when I
17 taught there almost 20 years ago,
18 the fourth and fifth floor were
19 closed even at that time.

20 So think about how we think
21 differently about our school
22 buildings, our beacons of hope.
23 How do we look at those buildings
24 differently and help them to be a
25 service to the community and also

1 to our students and to our young
2 people. So when you talked about
3 that, it's exactly what's happening
4 here in the Northeast versus some
5 of the other communities.

6 And they'll probably need
7 more schools and assistance with
8 class sizes and capping class sizes
9 in the Northeast just because of
10 the amount of young people who are
11 moving into that area, but whereas
12 we have West Philly and North
13 Philly and some of the other
14 communities who will need
15 additional assistance.

16 DR. WATLINGTON:
17 Absolutely. I'll just simply say
18 what we really want to do to be
19 able to better serve both scenarios
20 is we want to stem the declining
21 enrollment. We want to slow the
22 bleed of the declining enrollment.

23 And we see a vision for the
24 day where not only we lose
25 students, but we'll actually get to

1 a place where we will begin to
2 recruit more students into the
3 School District of Philadelphia.
4 It's one of the big priorities for
5 our Chief of Communications and
6 Customer Service, Alex Coppadge and
7 her team.

8 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

9 RICHARDSON: Okay.

10 DR. WATLINGTON: And so,
11 we're making the case to families
12 to say, listen, Harvard and
13 Stanford just released a study in
14 the past three weeks that says the
15 School District of Philadelphia is
16 leading all the urban school
17 districts in terms of academic
18 rebound through 3rd through 8th
19 grade reading and math. So we're
20 telling that story so that people
21 will consider this School District
22 as an option. Great parents like
23 you who are already with us --

24 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

25 RICHARDSON: I'm trying to hold on.

1 DR. WATLINGTON: We're
2 going to hold on with you, Majority
3 Leader. And for others who might
4 choose to be a parent. We're
5 committed to getting better and we
6 want to do a better job telling our
7 story, and we want to hear the
8 voices of families and staff around
9 leveling and let them know that
10 it's not falling on deaf ears, that
11 we intend to go to the Board, we
12 intend to come back to Council and
13 we intend to move to a better
14 place.

15 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
16 RICHARDSON: That's great. And
17 while your Chief of Communications
18 is here, I wanted to notate
19 something that I heard from the
20 girls at Girls' High when I was
21 there about a month ago and I will
22 be going there every month until
23 the end of the school year.

24 But one recommendation they
25 had that I want to share in this

1 hearing directly from the young
2 women was that we should be doing
3 more marketing directly to families
4 in the City. I'll give you an
5 example. I receive postcards every
6 summer, maybe three or four
7 postcards from my local catchment
8 school, which is technically a
9 Renaissance charter school. I
10 receive three or four postcards,
11 although my younger two have never
12 attended those schools. My older
13 girl did.

14 And so, I receive nothing
15 from the local school outside of
16 what we get on ClassDoJo, but
17 meaning from a marketing
18 perspective that is our closest
19 local public school that's still
20 available for our young people to
21 attend. I had to go through
22 Enrollment Management to even get
23 my kids -- and you know that whole
24 story, and I have to go there
25 now -- to even get my kids enrolled

1 in the closest public school.

2 And so, while we're still
3 working with the District and
4 understanding this whole leveling
5 piece because I think it all feeds
6 into this issue, this enrollment
7 issue, the cap class sizes, the
8 special criteria-based schools, the
9 CTE schools, I think all of this is
10 feeding into this issue, this new
11 special admission policy. All of
12 this is going to impact the
13 leveling.

14 And then also I guess
15 whenever you all produce this
16 report, we need to look at how the
17 District is recruiting young people
18 to come to the School District of
19 Philadelphia. Parents should not
20 have to go through the Enrollment
21 Office to simply sign their child
22 up for their closest local public
23 school. We shouldn't have to do
24 that.

25 The option should be on the

1 website where the closest local
2 public school should populate once
3 you insert your address. And then
4 once that school populates, then
5 you can give the other choices and
6 say, here's your closest local
7 public school based on your
8 catchment and then here are the
9 other schools that are available
10 and here's the distance from your
11 home to those locations.

12 But we shouldn't have to go
13 through Enrollment Management in
14 order to go to our closest local
15 public school and the District
16 certainly should not be doing the
17 marketing for the charter schools
18 if you're coming every year to tell
19 us that it's a challenge around the
20 funding.

21 And I'm not against charter
22 schools. I'm not even getting into
23 that conversation. Okay. But all
24 I'm asking is that if we're serious
25 about increasing enrollment for the

1 District schools, that we have to
2 do a better job with marketing to
3 local families and ensuring that
4 when they come to philasd.org and
5 they go to the school finder app on
6 your website, that you all give
7 them the closest local public
8 school. And I know that's a larger
9 conversation around the catchment
10 area work that will continue to
11 take place now under this new
12 Administration over the next three
13 or four years, which was taking
14 place under the last one three or
15 four years. But we have to be
16 serious --

17 DR. WATLINGTON: Sure.

18 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

19 RICHARDSON: -- about getting our
20 young people to the right schools.
21 If I'm a family or a parent that
22 knows nothing about Philadelphia,
23 I'm just moving here, I moved to
24 this house or apartment, I follow
25 your instructions and go to

1 philasd.org, put in my address and
2 a whole other school comes up, I
3 wouldn't know the difference. If
4 I'm new to Philadelphia, I wouldn't
5 know the difference at all.

6 DR. WATLINGTON: We
7 recruited Chief Coppadge from
8 another school organization here in
9 the City because of her expertise
10 in doing just that. We're always
11 open to feedback. And she's here
12 and hears that feedback, and I'm
13 sure we will very strongly consider
14 how we might do some of that
15 extended marketing as well.

16 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
17 RICHARDSON: Right, and that was
18 feedback directly from the girls at
19 Girls' High. They said their
20 enrollment has declined
21 significantly since I was even a
22 student at Girls' High 20-plus
23 years ago now and -- wow, 25 years
24 ago, a long time ago now.

25 But at any rate, what the

1 girls were stating is that they
2 wanted the opportunity to market
3 Girls' High. They said, well, what
4 if we did a billboard to tell
5 people about our school. And I'm
6 sure other students feel that way
7 across the District.

8 But I think to your point
9 we have to talk about some of the
10 gains that have been made and what
11 the District is seeking to do --

12 DR. WATLINGTON: Right.

13 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

14 RICHARDSON: -- to bring more
15 families back into the District
16 fold. But that direct
17 communication, that direct
18 marketing, those postcards I think
19 are powerful because I even receive
20 three or four of those every summer
21 even though I'm not considering
22 sending my kids to that particular
23 school. Now, there's a few others
24 I'm considering, but it's not that
25 particular school. So I just

1 wanted to put that out there.

2 Okay. All right?

3 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

5 RICHARDSON: Okay. I don't have
6 any additional questions, but I
7 just wanted to say thank you for
8 your time and for the work that you
9 all are undertaking to perform this
10 comprehensive review.

11 And I just ask that we
12 continue to receive this
13 information via Chairman Thomas so
14 that he can disseminate the
15 information to the broader Council
16 prior to us undertaking our budget
17 process, because I do think
18 recognizing where I'm sure you all
19 know where you are and us
20 recognizing where we will be, we
21 have to make a lot of very
22 important decisions over the next
23 couple of months based on what we
24 know to be true about our budget,
25 and particularly for us in the

1 outyears of that five-year plan.

2 And so, for me I really
3 want to see detailed, concrete
4 information on exactly how some of
5 the funding will be utilized to
6 ensure that we avoid some of these
7 hiccups and issues in the upcoming
8 school year, but also how we're
9 going to utilize the budget process
10 as a time for us to really, really
11 seek to help our young people get
12 on grade level with reading and
13 with math and preparing them for
14 opportunities of the future.

15 I think you all have done a
16 stellar job with the attendance
17 piece. Like I said, Superintendent
18 Watlington, we get the papers at
19 home. You have to be at least 95
20 percent for attendance. My
21 daughter has been a little under
22 the weather but they've been pretty
23 much at school every single day,
24 and we can feel that attendance
25 push coming from the District.

1 We want to feel the same
2 way about some of the other issues
3 that we know have been ongoing
4 challenges in the District. We
5 want to feel that not only as
6 parents, but as folks who care
7 about the broader education
8 community in Philadelphia.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: Duly
10 noted. And, Majority Leader
11 Gilmore Richardson, let me just say
12 thank you, A, for the Council
13 support of the District
14 budgetarily. I hope you feel like
15 we're being good stewards of those
16 local tax dollars. And then
17 second, thank you for the
18 opportunity to testify at this
19 hearing regarding leveling and we
20 look forward to coming back in the
21 next couple of months.

22 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE
23 RICHARDSON: Okay. Great. Thank
24 you. Thank you very much.

25 And, Mr. Maynard, are there

1 any other additional witnesses for
2 this hearing?

3 THE CLERK: Madam Majority
4 Leader, we have no further
5 witnesses for this hearing.

6 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

7 RICHARDSON: Okay. Hearing none, I
8 want to thank all the panels and
9 witnesses for their participation
10 today. We value your opinions.

11 This concludes the business
12 of the Committee on Education. We
13 will now recess this hearing to the
14 call of the Chair, Chairman Isaiah
15 Thomas. Have a good afternoon.
16 Thank you.

17 THE CLERK: And thank you,
18 Madam Majority Leader.

19 COUNCILWOMAN GILMORE

20 RICHARDSON: Thank you.

21 (Committee on Education
22 concluded at 12:52 p.m.)

23

24

25

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

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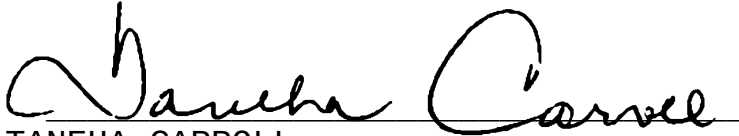
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