

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, February 12, 2013
11:10 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR.
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN KENYATTA JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILMAN JAMES KENNEY
COUNCILMAN DAVID OH
COUNCILMAN BRIAN J. O'NEILL
COUNCILWOMAN MARIA D. QUINONES-SANCHEZ
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA

RESOLUTION 121006 - Resolution calling on the
City Council Committee on Education to hold
hearings concerning the planned closure of
approximately forty public schools and the
impact that said closures will have on
students, parents, teachers, principals and
members of all school district unions.

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COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good

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morning. May we have your attention. We

4

have many guests, and this will be a long

5

day. We thank you all for coming, but

6

we'd like to get started right away.

7

To my colleagues who are in

8

their offices, we will get started, so we

9

invite you to join us.

10

Good morning. Thank you again

11

for being here. This is the City Council

12

Committee on Education. We are grateful

13

for your presence. Thank you very much.

14

And the Committee is called to order to

15

consider Resolution No. 120 -- excuse me;

16

121006.

17

We will ask the Clerk to please

18

read the title of the resolution.

19

THE CLERK: Calling on the City

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Council Committee on Education to hold

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hearings concerning the planned closure

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of approximately forty public schools and

23

the impact that said closures will have

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on students, parents, teachers,

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principals and members of all school

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2 district unions.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you very much.

5 Again, good morning. We thank
6 God for your presence this day, and we're
7 grateful to be able to consider the most
8 important issue of the closure of 37
9 public schools.

10 The month of February is
11 dedicated to black history, and we wanted
12 to use this forum to recognize an
13 important person now who struggled for
14 freedom and civil rights and the right to
15 a better education. I refer to Justice
16 Thurgood Marshall, who attended Abraham
17 Lincoln, whose birthday is today, Abraham
18 Lincoln University, an historically black
19 college in Pennsylvania, and was a
20 classmate of Kwame Nkrumah, the future
21 President of Ghana; Langston Hughes, a
22 distinguished black poet of the Harlem
23 Renaissance period; and Cab Calloway, a
24 famous jazz singer and musician.

25 After graduating from Lincoln

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2 University with honors in 1930, Marshall
3 applied to the University of Maryland Law
4 School. Despite being overqualified
5 academically, he was rejected because of
6 his race. This firsthand experience with
7 discrimination in education made a
8 lasting impression on Marshall and helped
9 determine the future course of his
10 career. Instead of Maryland, Marshall
11 attended law school in Washington, DC,
12 another historically black university,
13 Howard University, and graduated magna
14 cum laude in 1933.

15 Thurgood Marshall became the
16 first African American to serve of the
17 nation's highest court, the Supreme
18 Court. He went on to lead the fight
19 Brown versus the Board of Education and
20 the landmark decision which overturned
21 separate but equal in public education.
22 He died on January 24th, 1993 at the age
23 of 84.

24 So we are grateful for his
25 legacy. We honor his legacy, and we

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2 realize today, in 2013, that many of the
3 struggles that he endured are struggles
4 we still have with education in this city
5 and in this country.

6 So, again, thank you for -- we
7 wanted to take that moment to acknowledge
8 his life and the contributions of so many
9 with regard to education and the forward
10 movement of all people in this country.

11 So we call on our Committee on
12 Education to acknowledge that
13 three-quarters of the schools slated to
14 close have more than 80 percent African
15 American students. We acknowledge that
16 some students may need to close, but
17 certainly not 37. We suggest that true
18 meetings take place with community after
19 discussions before the decisions are
20 made, and that may solve many of these
21 issues.

22 We thank you, Dr. Hite, members
23 of the SRC, PCAPS, Jerry Jordan, all
24 union representatives, elected officials,
25 ministers, community leaders, teachers,

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2 students, and members of the community
3 who are here.

4 I thank my colleague Honorable
5 W. Wilson Goode. He's always here,
6 always here early, and many others who
7 will be in and who will be out of this
8 hearing today.

9 I want to thank the statement
10 certainly from the Black Caucus, Vanessa
11 Lowery Brown, Michelle Brownlee, State
12 Representative Curtis Thomas, Jim
13 Roebuck. They're in session today, but
14 their comments and their statements are
15 certainly available to all who are here.

16 We acknowledge the
17 participation of charter schools,
18 renaissance schools, and promise
19 academies, and certainly ask the School
20 District to appeal to them as part of the
21 solution.

22 We note that we expect all
23 questions raised here to be responded to
24 in short order. We have been waiting for
25 several months to receive responses to

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2 questions posed at our last hearing.

3 Please note this is not an option for

4 you, School District. It is mandatory

5 that you respond to our questions. We

6 expect these responses and other requests

7 of information today in a timely fashion.

8 The School District cannot expect City

9 Council to pass a budget with

10 insufficient information, and we've asked

11 for the responses nearly daily.

12 We are now requesting that as

13 you make your response, you respond to

14 the following questions and issues:

15 Number one, schools like Paul

16 Robeson who spent a million dollars on a

17 boiler system is on the list for closure.

18 Why? And why when students said if you

19 must close us, can't we join with

20 University City High? Why did you say

21 they still have to deal with School of

22 the Future or make no response?

23 We spoke with Dr. Arlene

24 Ackerman, God bless her, since she

25 passed, with regard to McMichael School.

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2 McMichael School is the school at 36th
3 and Fairmount. We let her know that we
4 didn't want to lose a vice principal,
5 because we were building brand new
6 housing development called Mantua Square
7 with several hundred more people across
8 the street. We note that this school is
9 on the list for closure in spite of us
10 building an entirely new community across
11 the street from McMichael.

12 We have, for example -- in
13 fact, the person who made the posters,
14 Ms. Dolores Mohammed, seated to my left,
15 has Essence International School, whose
16 Board I sit on in Nigeria, and we note
17 that she is one of the people who even
18 donated playground equipment to McMichael
19 School years ago in her mother's name.
20 So we would like to have answers to
21 issues such as that.

22 Mr. Jerry Jordan, President of
23 the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers,
24 walked the length from McMichael School
25 to Locke School. It took him 40 minutes

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2 each way. How is that safe? How does it
3 make sense? How will you deal with
4 distances and turf wars between these
5 areas? This is just one example in my
6 district of what happened.

7 We also acknowledge that the
8 United States Office of Civil Rights
9 filed a claim, as you know, that was
10 accepted to investigate discrimination of
11 students built on physical and mental
12 disparities as well as racial
13 discrimination. Where are you on that
14 issue?

15 Finally, we note that those who
16 live in Philadelphia Housing Authority,
17 or PHA, many are adversely affected. We
18 received information from the
19 Philadelphia Housing Authority that nine
20 out of 11 schools that are proposed to
21 close in North Philadelphia affect those
22 students living in Philadelphia Housing
23 Authority. It's something like three in
24 my district in the area of West
25 Philadelphia.

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2 Per news reports, why does the
3 District propose to close 11 schools that
4 are rated in good condition? Why are you
5 taking schools that have made AYP and put
6 them in schools whose condition is bad or
7 whose students have not made adequate
8 yearly progress?

9 Also per news reports, the
10 closings that you propose would move
11 17,000 students and save only one percent
12 of the operating budget. Please respond
13 and tell us why we are where we are.

14 And these are just some issues.
15 My colleagues will have more, and we open
16 the floor to them for these comments. We
17 want to thank Cindy Bass for her letter
18 regarding Germantown High School and all
19 of our elected officials whose statements
20 are here and who have responded in-kind.

21 To my colleagues -- we invite
22 Dr. Hite to come forward. We invite
23 certainly whomever he would like to bring
24 with him, and we invite -- per our list,
25 we have a letter from State

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2 Representative Vanessa Lowery Brown and
3 Curtis Thomas that they want to be made,
4 just their letter, not a proposal,
5 certainly supporting this lack of
6 closure. And while you're coming
7 forward, we will open our floor for any
8 comments by my colleagues and members of
9 the Education Committee.

10 Our Vice Chair, Blondell
11 Reynolds Brown, is to my left. The
12 Majority Leader, Curtis Jones, is to her
13 left, and, again, the Honorable W. Wilson
14 Goode to my right.

15 Thank you very much. We
16 certainly also thank Councilman Kenyatta
17 Johnson for being here. Thank you.

18 (Witnesses approached witness
19 table.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much. We are ready. So good
22 morning again, Dr. Hite, Ms. Floyd. And,
23 gosh, I think I saw you yesterday. Are
24 you trying to move in here at City
25 Council?

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2 CHIEF INSPECTOR DORSEY: Yes.

3 Yes, I am.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you very much, all of you, for being
6 here.

7 So we will open the floor to
8 you for your comments. Thank you.

9 DR. HITE: Good morning, and
10 thank you, Council Committee President
11 Clarke, Chairwoman Blackwell, and members
12 of the Committee on Education. My name
13 is William Hite and I'm Superintendent of
14 the School District of Philadelphia. I
15 appreciate the opportunity this morning
16 to testify before you.

17 Before I get into responding to
18 some of the questions that we can answer
19 this morning, I do have a prepared
20 statement that I would like to read at
21 this time.

22 Once again, I'd like to express
23 my appreciation for your continued
24 support of the District, particularly
25 during these last few months. Thanks to

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2 those of you who attended the District's
3 community meetings in December and
4 January on the Facilities Master Plan.
5 Since announcing the proposed school
6 closures in mid December, we have
7 received 38 alternative plans from school
8 communities. Our 14 community meetings
9 drew more than 4,000 people. As you saw
10 firsthand, parents, students, families,
11 and residents who attended these meetings
12 were passionate, emotional, and
13 thoughtful about the future of our school
14 system. I appreciate the opportunity
15 today to discuss the challenging but
16 necessary steps that we will take to
17 provide our students and families with
18 better educational options and outcomes
19 while preserving the School District for
20 students and families to come.

21 As Superintendent, my
22 obligation is to do what is in the best
23 for the entire District, for all of the
24 students in all of our schools. The
25 Facilities Master Plan process has been a

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2 two-year process involving more than 80
3 meetings with community groups and
4 individuals leading up to the
5 announcement of proposed closures on
6 December 13th. These conversations
7 around school closings have undoubtedly
8 been painful, as were the decisions to
9 cut the central office staff by nearly 50
10 percent, request concessions from our
11 employees, and curtail the expansion of
12 charter schools despite parent demand.
13 More closely aligning our number of
14 schools to the number of students we
15 serve is a vital aspect of realizing our
16 vision for the District as described in
17 the action plan released earlier this
18 year. In building a stronger District,
19 we must anchor our work in the goal of
20 improving academic outcomes for all
21 students by providing more support for
22 our struggling students and more rigor
23 for our high-achieving students. Our
24 vision is also anchored in the goal of
25 stabilizing the District from a financial

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2 standpoint.

3 The District is only as strong
4 as its weakest link. Right now our
5 weakest link centers on our financial
6 situation. We are facing with \$1.35
7 billion deficit over five years. In the
8 last 15 years, an estimated 60,000
9 students have left our school system.
10 Since 2003, our enrollment has fallen
11 from 193,000 students to our current
12 enrollment of 149,000 students, even
13 while our number of schools has remained,
14 for the most part, steady. In this
15 context, we cannot spend money that we do
16 not have on empty seats and empty space.
17 The District's average utilization rate
18 is 67 percent. That means only
19 two-thirds of our schools are being used.
20 Our facilities need \$4 billion in
21 renovations and repairs.

22 The recommendation to close
23 schools is an acknowledgment of how dire
24 our situation has become. I do believe,
25 however, that it is the right decision,

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2 although a very drastic step, to change
3 the District's trajectory. If we do
4 nothing, if only for one year, that would
5 mean an unknown budget forecast, near
6 certain job cuts, and another year of
7 struggling to make our limited ends meet.
8 It also means that students will remain
9 in crumbling schools with limited
10 academic opportunities. District-wide
11 less than half of our students can read
12 or do math at grade level. Some of the
13 buildings recommended for closures have
14 proficiency rates of less than 25
15 percent. We must do better by these and
16 all students. To do nothing, if only for
17 a year, would mean another year of lost
18 learning opportunities or shortchanging
19 those who are at the heart of this work.

20 To do nothing, if only for a
21 year, would prolong the years of
22 enrollment declines without remedy, years
23 of indecision, years of waiting in vain
24 for this to become someone else's
25 problem. The District has been

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2 criticized for proposing to close schools
3 in poor, mostly African American
4 neighborhoods. Yet, if and when you take
5 a closer look inside these schools, you
6 will see that their student achievement
7 levels are dismal, some hovering around
8 10 percent passing in reading and math.
9 Even if we had more money, if for only a
10 year, it is difficult to justify
11 investing in schools that are not serving
12 the needs of our children. Our students
13 cannot --

14 (Audience members talking.)

15 DR. HITE: Our students cannot
16 afford us to wait.

17 Since announcing the proposed
18 closures, we have been in contact with
19 school communities through in-person
20 meetings, through many phone calls and
21 e-mails. We have heard about quality
22 programs, travel time, and supporting
23 students with special needs. We have
24 listened and are continuing to listen.
25 The initial recommendations were

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2 proposals, not foregone conclusions in
3 every case. Several school communities
4 have submitted alternative proposals. We
5 value the feedback that other
6 organizations have also provided on the
7 initial recommendations. My team will
8 hold six meetings this week with specific
9 school communities to discuss specific
10 proposals from those communities and
11 their viability.

12 As a District, we are committed
13 to addressing parents', families'
14 concerns around safety, transportation,
15 and climate. We are working with the
16 Philadelphia Police Department and SEPTA
17 Police to ensure there is a strong and
18 effective plan in place as we prepare for
19 the 2013-14 school year. We aim to
20 provide students in all schools with
21 safer environments and better academic
22 programs, surrounded by the same loving
23 and caring staff members that they
24 described at the community meetings. If
25 we cannot preserve a building, then we

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2 will work to preserve successful
3 programs. The funds that are being spent
4 on empty spaces will be reinvested in the
5 students that we do have, without
6 crowding our schools or increasing class
7 sizes.

8 There have been some
9 misconceptions about our estimated
10 savings that I wish to clarify this
11 morning as well. By closing facilities,
12 we do project to save \$28 million
13 annually. This does not --

14 (Audience members yelling.)

15 DR. HITE: This does not
16 include our transition costs in the first
17 year after the closings, where we will
18 take into account issues related to
19 relocating approximately 17,000 students,
20 including preparing the facilities to
21 receive those students and the academic
22 and climate measures we will put in place
23 to support their transition. Over the
24 five years, we project to save \$140
25 million. By contrast, if we do nothing,

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2 if only for a year, we will spend another
3 \$28 million that we do not have. If we
4 will do nothing for five years, we will
5 have spent 140 million on the same empty
6 spaces. Twenty-eight million dollars a
7 year could support over 200 teachers. It
8 could also supplement our curriculum with
9 technology. It could also enhance our
10 art and music programs. It is no small
11 amount of money or a mere budget
12 percentage.

13 As contentious as some of these
14 discussions around school closures have
15 been, there is a lot of common ground.
16 We believe that schools should have
17 full-time nurses and counselors, and that
18 students should have a wealth of options
19 in art and music, access to technology,
20 and enhanced CTE programs. The reality
21 is that when you are in a deficit
22 situation and when you have schools with
23 only a low number of students, we'll
24 never be able to offer students the
25 world-class education that we want them

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2 to have and that they deserve. Some of
3 the schools are struggling even to
4 provide a basic education. Our resources
5 are being spread too thin across too many
6 schools.

7 Dwindling funds and resources
8 present you with scant options. However,
9 this is an opportunity to refocus our
10 energy, funds, and time around areas
11 where they can have the most impact. It
12 is my hope that we can take and solve
13 this problem together, with the shared
14 goal of creating better futures for every
15 student in every classroom at every
16 school in the School District of
17 Philadelphia.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you, Dr. Hite.

20 And we're going to ask everyone
21 to allow order to be here so that --
22 everybody has their opinions, but let's
23 try to hear everybody's opinion and make
24 sure everybody gets an opportunity to
25 speak.

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2 Thank you very much. I posed
3 my questions, so I will defer to members
4 of the Committee for questions. Any
5 questions?

6 Councilman Goode.

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Good
8 morning, Dr. Hite.

9 DR. HITE: Good morning.

10 COUNCILMAN GOODE: And
11 congratulations again. I'm not sure you
12 knew totally what you were in for, but
13 when we spoke while you were being
14 interviewed, it seems that you did.

15 The first question I will ask
16 is actually a serious question. Did you
17 write your own testimony?

18 DR. HITE: Actually, I did have
19 a part in that, Mr. Goode, and so, yes.

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay. Did
21 you write all of it?

22 DR. HITE: No, I did not write
23 all of it.

24 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I want to
25 focus on just two sentences. The first

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2 sentence is "\$28 million a year could
3 support 200 teachers, supplement our
4 curriculum with technology, and enhance
5 art and music programs."

6 Did you write that line?

7 DR. HITE: Yes, I did.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Okay. It
9 uses the word "could." It doesn't say
10 \$28 million will be spent on that.

11 (Applause.)

12 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So what was
13 actually intended by that sentence? Were
14 you intending to say the \$28 million will
15 be spent on that or not?

16 DR. HITE: No. I was intending
17 to represent the \$28 million as an amount
18 of money that could buy support for our
19 schools and for our teachers.

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So you were
21 not saying the \$28 million will be spent
22 on that?

23 DR. HITE: No. It was not
24 saying it will be. I was making a point
25 to say that it's being represented as one

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2 percent of our budget, and I wanted to
3 make the point of what one percent
4 represents in terms of the number of
5 teachers or other resources that we could
6 have in our schools.

7 COUNCILMAN GOODE: But that
8 money won't be spent on that.

9 DR. HITE: Not necessarily, no,
10 sir.

11 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I mean, you
12 already know, that money won't be spent
13 on that.

14 DR. HITE: No, it will not. We
15 have a hole that we need to fill --

16 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So for
17 clarity's sake, that \$28 million, if it
18 turns out to be \$28 million, will not be
19 spent on 200 teachers, to supplement
20 curriculum with technology or art and
21 music programs?

22 DR. HITE: Not next year, no,
23 sir, because we would have to fill a
24 budget gap. But in the future, \$28
25 million could be spent on that

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2 information.

3 COUNCILMAN GOODE: But I want
4 to start with the fact that that \$28
5 million will not be spent that way.

6 DR. HITE: Yes. Not next year,
7 no, sir.

8 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I'm going to
9 go to the next sentence. The next
10 sentence is, "It is no small sum of money
11 or a mere budget percentage." What does
12 that mean?

13 DR. HITE: It means that it's
14 being characterized as representing one
15 percent of the School District's budget.
16 And so what my point is, that one percent
17 is a significant amount of money that
18 also, in the equivalent of that, are the
19 200 teachers, the technology, the art and
20 music that could be purchased with that
21 amount of money.

22 COUNCILMAN GOODE: But our --
23 well, it won't be purchased with that
24 amount of money.

25 DR. HITE: Not next year, no.

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2 COUNCILMAN GOODE: One percent
3 does not even begin to tell us the size
4 of our fiscal problem, does it?

5 DR. HITE: No, it does not.

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So this plan
7 or whatever plan is finalized will not
8 come close to solving our problem?

9 (Applause.)

10 DR. HITE: This is one
11 component of multiple things that must
12 happen, Councilmember, and it is --
13 Councilman, and it is one of like six or
14 seven things that must also occur.

15 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Six or seven
16 major things that must occur?

17 DR. HITE: Six or seven major
18 things, yes, sir.

19 COUNCILMAN GOODE: So this is
20 actually a budget percentage of one
21 percent. It is actually a small sum
22 related to a much larger fiscal problem,
23 and regardless of whether this plan moves
24 forward or some other plan moves forward,
25 this is really small potatoes in the end

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2 of the day?

3 DR. HITE: It's not small
4 potatoes if in fact we can't --

5 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I said
6 regardless of whether it moves forward or
7 not, let's say it moves forward, it's
8 still small potatoes at the end of the
9 day.

10 DR. HITE: Yeah; I don't
11 characterize it as small potatoes,
12 because \$28 million in a district that's
13 already experiencing a deficit actually
14 is a pretty significant amount. And if
15 in fact -- we have to come to a point
16 where we're getting the 28 million, even
17 though small, and so there are other
18 things that we would have to do in order
19 to arrive at 28 million.

20 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Well, let me
21 just say this, and I'll conclude with
22 this, and you can respond to it. The
23 reason why it's a small amount to me is
24 because we already know that money is not
25 going to be invested in making our

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2 schools better. We already know that --

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILMAN GOODE: -- even if

5 it was being invested, it wouldn't go

6 that far in terms of making our schools

7 better. And while this is a hearing

8 about facilities management, and I get

9 that side of it, the characterization of

10 the \$28 million would go toward 200

11 teachers and those things is presenting

12 things falsely to me, one, and the

13 characterization saying this is not a

14 small sum of money or a small percentage

15 for someone who is going to have to deal

16 with property tax issues and other issues

17 during this budget cycle, I just have

18 issues with that. And I think the School

19 District before it comes here later this

20 spring should change some of the way it

21 presents the problem. You should not

22 come before this Council later this

23 spring saying you're going to improve

24 education with whatever money you request

25 or don't request if in fact you're not

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2 going to do it. If you're not going to
3 pay teachers what they should be paid, if
4 you're not going to --

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILMAN GOODE: If you're
7 not going to improve art and music and
8 technology, then don't ask for \$28
9 million, don't ask for \$58 million, don't
10 ask for \$78 million, unless you can tell
11 us what it's really going to be spent on.

12 DR. HITE: Sure.

13 COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.

14 (Applause.)

15 DR. HITE: Madam Chair, may I
16 respond?

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.
18 Pull your mic closer, Dr. Hite. Thank
19 you.

20 DR. HITE: Okay. Yeah. So the
21 Councilman is correct. And we do have
22 monies for the purpose of investment next
23 year. It is not the 28 million. I was
24 talking about the equivalent of that, but
25 let's talk about it from a different

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2 perspective. So, in fact, if we aren't
3 able to realize the \$28 million, then it
4 does become people that then we have to
5 lay off. That could be over 200 people.
6 It does become programs that could be
7 cut. Those could be art and music, or
8 nurses.

9 COUNCILMAN GOODE: I'm not
10 talking about cuts, and we will have to
11 have a conversation about cuts. What I
12 said was don't come to us asking for more
13 money unless you can tell us what it's
14 actually going to be invested in. That's
15 all I said.

16 DR. HITE: I got you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you.

19 Councilman Jones.

20 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
21 Madam Chair, and thank you for convening
22 these hearings on education and bringing
23 forth this issue in a timely manner.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you.

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2 COUNCILMAN JONES: Good

3 morning. Still good morning? Good

4 morning, Dr. Hite.

5 DR. HITE: Good morning.

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: Welcome to

7 Philadelphia. I have to say that to you.

8 I'd like to question a couple

9 of things. First of all, one of the

10 things I've learned in my second term

11 here is that we should be cautious in

12 making long-term decisions with half

13 information. And we have deliberated

14 about, worked with you on, met with

15 parents, teachers, administrators out at

16 Dobbins, out at Lambertton in my district,

17 out of Overbrook in my district, at a

18 number of schools, and you've joined us

19 in a few of those occasions. And there

20 are serious questions. People aren't

21 against the SRC and the administration

22 trying to get their budget house in

23 order. The question becomes, as I guess

24 I interpret from my colleague Wilson

25 Goode is, how you prioritize this set of

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2 means to balance budgets as opposed to
3 some other option. That's A. But, B,
4 when we dig down into the issue of school
5 closures -- and I know you've done a lot
6 of pre-work on this -- there are some
7 unanswered questions that, quite frankly,
8 frighten a lot of the parents. The
9 distance between the school that closes
10 and the school that they are proposed to
11 go to, I've actually had an opportunity
12 to walk some of those distances, and,
13 quite frankly, I'm a grown man and it
14 scares me. They've had to cross major
15 thoroughfares that are wide as rivers.
16 They've had to go through -- and my staff
17 has done some of the work between
18 Whittier and Rhodes, and we actually
19 juxtaposed over the map and the route
20 some of the crime statistics that these
21 young people are forced to walk through.

22 We walked with several parents
23 who are going to be forced to make a
24 decision about the safety of my child and
25 escorting them to school or being late or

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2 absent from work. These are terrible
3 false choices that some of them have to
4 make.

5 The other issue that I've heard
6 from hundreds, literally hundreds, of
7 parents is that if you are taking a
8 school that has tender-age children --
9 and I use that term specifically because
10 it is a term used by law enforcement to
11 prioritize the age of young people and
12 the tender age to protect them -- merging
13 them into middle schools -- and it's
14 chronicled and even laughed about by some
15 of my colleagues I learned how to fight
16 at Beeber Junior High School because of a
17 guy named Ray-Ray.

18 How do we protect the younger
19 tender age kids from middle age kids?
20 And that is a legitimate concern of many
21 parents.

22 In addition, where were the
23 assurances of if a school closes, that
24 the types of specialized education
25 supports and programs that are in one

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2 school will meet or exceed those in the
3 school that they're proposing?

4 So what we did was, in light of
5 that, we sent you a letter chronicling a
6 lot of the concerns by the parents, and,
7 quite frankly, we didn't hear the kind of
8 responses or even receive the responses
9 that we needed.

10 Now, I understand you have to
11 kind of narrow down the school you got to
12 go to, but I would be hard-pressed to ask
13 my colleagues to make a decision on half
14 information. So until these kinds of
15 things, wouldn't it be prudent to have a
16 moratorium on closings until we figured
17 out these and many other questions?

18 (Applause.)

19 DR. HITE: Councilman, thank
20 you for your question. So we do have to
21 answer those questions, and we are also
22 concerned with the transportation and
23 safe corridors. It's why we're working
24 with police --

25 (Audience members talking.)

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Excuse
3 me, Dr. Hite.

4 Please, we need order. Please.

5 DR. HITE: And at every school
6 that will receive students, we do have to
7 have a plan in place for safety, support
8 to make sure individuals are getting to
9 school on time, to make sure that there
10 are corridors that are safe to those
11 facilities.

12 We are still in the process of
13 reviewing some of the recommendations.
14 Naturally, I indicated earlier that those
15 recommendations aren't foregone
16 conclusions. We have also participated
17 or walked some of the routes from school
18 to school, and it will be a part of the
19 revised recommendations that will come
20 out to take some of those things into
21 consideration.

22 We also recognize that new
23 transportation patterns, because students
24 will be crossing streets and dangerous
25 intersections, and that we will have to

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2 also provide transportation for some
3 students now who are not currently
4 receiving transportation.

5 But you're right, all of those
6 things have to be determined student by
7 student once a vote is taken and once the
8 schools are determined. It's hard for us
9 to really now talk about that when there
10 hasn't been a vote, and that's why the
11 vote is in March.

12 COUNCILMAN JONES: So, again,
13 what you're asking parents to do is say,
14 we're going to make a decision about
15 closures, and trust us, we'll figure it
16 out as we go, and that is at least
17 concerning --

18 (Applause.)

19 DR. HITE: No. We're also
20 asking parents and community members to
21 also work with us to really help us think
22 about how do we provide for safe
23 corridors to school, no matter where
24 students are attending school. And we
25 have to do that whether these

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2 recommendations move forward or not. So
3 we should be doing that with all of our
4 schools right now.

5 COUNCILMAN JONES: I agree --
6 we agree on that point, that these are
7 critical plans. I think the number one
8 issue even above and beyond education for
9 parents is safety. And so what my
10 concern is that as we start to kind of
11 fix on the run some of these systems that
12 need to be addressed, we're more prone
13 while we're acting in our haste to make
14 critical mistakes.

15 I don't mean to pile on, but we
16 had a series of hearings about the state
17 of electronic surveillance and cameras
18 yesterday, and one of the issues was
19 safety of our children in public schools
20 and, in light of some of the things that
21 have occurred, beefing that up. So my
22 point is, we've got a lot of system
23 checks that we have to put in order. And
24 I don't envy your task of trying to make
25 a dollar out of 50 cents, but as a

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2 parent, as a parent, the number one
3 concern is not that. The number one
4 concern has to be those babies. It has
5 to be.

6 (Applause.)

7 DR. HITE: Councilman, you're
8 right, and the number one concern has to
9 be the safety of those students to and
10 from school and at school. And the other
11 number one concern has to be the quality
12 of education that they receive when
13 they're in school and making sure we're
14 making whatever the investments are to
15 improve the conditions for students as
16 well.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you,
18 Madam Chairman.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you.

21 And we note, that is why we
22 feel that something should happen, and
23 whatever changes that you may be willing
24 to make to your plan should be taken
25 before you go to the SRC and ask for

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2 these school closings. That's what part
3 of this hearing is all about. We don't
4 want you to ask for the schools to close
5 and then come back and say they voted.
6 We want schools taken off the list before
7 you go to the SRC in March and ask for
8 those school closings. That's what it's
9 all about.

10 (Applause.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: The
12 Chair recognizes -- certainly we want to
13 note that Councilman Oh is here. We
14 thank him for being here. Councilman Bob
15 Henon, Councilwoman Cindy Bass. We did
16 not mention that earlier. We will call
17 on Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds Brown,
18 then Councilman Kenyatta Johnson. We're
19 going to move fast. We're sorry,
20 Reverend Waller. We know that you were
21 due to be preaching at 12:00. So we're
22 trying to move this along quickly, and
23 thank you for your patience.

24 Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds
25 Brown.

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2 DR. HITE: Madam Chair, while
3 we're waiting for the Councilwoman to
4 speak, we are planning to make a set of
5 revised recommendations prior to the vote
6 at the SRC.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you. Thank you. Thank you very much.
9 Great news.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: That is
11 good news.

12 Good morning. Good morning,
13 Dr. Hite. For sure the close of 37
14 school buildings is unprecedented in
15 Philadelphia's history, and I'm always
16 curious to know what lessons we can learn
17 from other cities that have been down
18 this road, because this is uncharted
19 territory for Philadelphia.

20 First I need to know, is this
21 the first time in your professional
22 experience where you've had to be engaged
23 in dialogue around the closing of
24 schools, just to give us a context?

25 DR. HITE: No, ma'am.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: It is not?

3 DR. HITE: It is not.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: So let's
5 first look to your own lessons learned
6 from your past experiences. What one,
7 two or three lessons did you learn that
8 you bring to this experience as
9 guideposts for the recommendations?

10 DR. HITE: That you have to
11 have opportunities for honest engagement
12 with communities, number one; that,
13 number two, the original recommendations
14 don't always become the final
15 recommendations and that there has to be
16 flexibility in the process that allows
17 for revisions to be made. Number three
18 is that you have to then pivot very
19 quickly from this notion of school
20 closures to school openings and making
21 sure that there's a focus on every school
22 that's receiving students so that those
23 schools are set and ready to offer the
24 supports, the structures, the safe
25 environment, the academic programs when

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2 school begins next fall. And so those
3 were some of the things that in -- other
4 districts did not close this many at one
5 time, but that's one piece, and that's
6 from personal experience from other large
7 districts that have had large numbers of
8 schools.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Like New
10 York, Chicago.

11 DR. HITE: Like New York,
12 Chicago.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: DC.

14 DR. HITE: DC. Pittsburgh had
15 a large number of schools several years
16 ago, and those schools -- in those
17 processes, they also talked about the
18 notion of quickly creating supports and
19 systems for the students who would then
20 be transferred to the new schools so that
21 those students had opportunities for
22 success immediately.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Then to
24 underscore Councilman Jones' concern,
25 which was mine too. Before young people

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2 can even get to the classroom, getting
3 there becomes a priority. So school
4 safety for me remains the number one
5 priority, and it seems to be the glue for
6 many parents and school administrators as
7 well, children just being safe from their
8 home to the schoolhouse door. So as you
9 look to refine your list, what I'm
10 hearing is that that is a consideration
11 and this notion of instituting new bus
12 routes will capture or remedy the concern
13 around school safety. Is that what I'm
14 hearing?

15 DR. HITE: It will remedy some.
16 It will not remedy all. And for some
17 students, there will be longer walks to
18 school. However, however, for
19 individuals who have to cross dangerous
20 intersections or dangerous roadways, just
21 as we do now, we consider all of those
22 routes individually, and if in fact that
23 is a danger presented to children or
24 their families, then we do provide
25 transportation.

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2 I will have the Chief Inspector
3 also speak to what we're doing around
4 safety as well.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you.

6 CHIEF INSPECTOR DORSEY: Good
7 morning, Chairman. Good morning, members
8 of the Council. My name is Chief
9 Inspector Cynthia Dorsey. I'm the Chief
10 of the Office of School Safety. And some
11 of these things, especially the distances
12 that especially school-age young children
13 will have to walk if these school changes
14 take place, are paramount and are a
15 safety issue.

16 For instance, from Cooke, which
17 is at 13th and Loudon, to the Steel
18 School, one of the recommendations would
19 involve small children having to cross
20 Broad Street. We talked about Whittier
21 to Rhodes, which is a substantial
22 distance. And we've also sat down with
23 Philadelphia Anti-Violence Network, Town
24 Watch, other organizations. We're
25 talking to parents. They have also

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2 approached me about walking some of these
3 routes. Some of these that I know,
4 because I was a student at Whittier and
5 my brother was a student at Rhodes and I
6 was born and raised in the 39th District,
7 I know what the distances are.

8 So what we're doing is, we have
9 to consider the reallocation of school
10 crossing guards. Right now we have over
11 a thousand school crossing guards. They
12 would have to be redeployed. We would
13 have to look at each individual route,
14 especially pertaining to elementary
15 school and small children. We're going
16 to have to listen to parents, involve the
17 home and school associations.

18 We also sat down and talked
19 about safe corridors. I just left the
20 Fulton School. When I was Captain of the
21 14th District, we had a beautiful safe
22 corridors program. That was the job of
23 not only the school police officer, the
24 police officers assigned to those
25 schools, also parents and concerned

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2 citizens, and we would make sure that the
3 children were safe going to school,
4 coming from school, and actually it was a
5 route that was thought out and people
6 would actually stand out there. We would
7 have roving patrols. And this is a
8 serious issue. We have traffic, high
9 traffic areas. We have dangerous areas,
10 drug-ridden areas that are going to have
11 to be dealt with. So we understand that.

12 What it's going to take is a
13 collaborative approach between the School
14 District, the Police Department, and
15 working and listening to the community,
16 especially the parents. And we have
17 started those dialogues. We have sat
18 down and talked about that, but that is
19 something in my safety plan. My
20 recommendation is that safety has to
21 be -- is paramount, but it also takes a
22 holistic and collaborative approach in
23 order to be successful, and we have to
24 make sure that the small children,
25 especially the small -- you know,

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2 everyone, all students, but we're talking
3 about safety, that the small children are
4 taken into consideration when we're
5 talking about these things.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Madam
7 Chairwoman, I do have other questions,
8 but I want to respect Reverend Waller's
9 demanding schedule and I'll hold going
10 forward.

11 Thank you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
13 you very much.

14 Yes. We're going to hear
15 from -- everyone is willing to wait for
16 Pastor Waller? Yes. Is that all right?
17 And then we'll ask you, Dr. Hite and
18 company, if you would wait. We'll let
19 Pastor Waller on. He is supposed to be a
20 block away preaching. And then we'll
21 call you back to finish the questions for
22 you and your testimony.

23 Thank you, Council colleagues,
24 for allowing this to happen. We're going
25 to have -- we'll ask Pastor Alyn E.

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2 Waller, Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church,
3 to come forward with his group.

4 (Applause.)

5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 PASTOR WALLER: Thank you,
8 Councilwoman Blackwell and all of who
9 hold seats of distinction. Thank you,
10 Dr. Hite and all that are here concerned
11 about our children.

12 My name is Alyn Waller. I'm
13 the Senior Pastor of the Enon Tabernacle
14 Baptist Church as well as wrestling coach
15 at Martin Luther King High School. I
16 will not be long because the report
17 speaks for itself.

18 For the last 19 years, I've
19 been interested in the education of our
20 children. We have made a report
21 available to all Councilmembers and for
22 all persons who are here. You can look
23 at this report on the Enon Tabernacle
24 Baptist Church website or just ask and we
25 will e-mail a report.

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2 What we attempted to do, in
3 partnership with Next Steps Associates,
4 the Education Committee of the Enon
5 Tabernacle Baptist Church -- I must say,
6 I am not here representing any official
7 body. I am not a member of the Black
8 Clergy nor any other body. I'm simply
9 here representing the concerns that began
10 in the Northwest, but spill over to the
11 entire City.

12 When we heard of the school
13 closings, we said we wanted to do an
14 independent search of the facts just to
15 raise the question and the word. Since
16 the School District was telling us that
17 12 divided by 4 equals 3, simple math
18 says if we multiply 3 times 4, we ought
19 to get 12. So it was our intention to
20 just look at the facts and reflect back
21 to the School District what we have
22 found.

23 The report is very, very plain.
24 That would suggest to us there are
25 concerns with the actions that are taking

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2 place.

3 Number one, I want to say for
4 the record that I do believe that
5 Dr. William Hite is a man qualified, of
6 character, and can do the job. I do
7 believe that it is immoral of this city
8 to act as if he is the villain, because
9 this is something that has been going on
10 that predates him, and if he is going to
11 be brought before us, then Tom Corbett
12 needs to be brought before us, Pedro
13 Ramos needs to be brought before us --

14 (Applause.)

15 PASTOR WALLER: -- and Mayor
16 Nutter needs to be brought before us.

17 (Applause.)

18 PASTOR WALLER: Because the
19 reality is -- and I'm free to say that
20 because I don't have a job that I can
21 lose by speaking the truth. The reality
22 is, there are other persons -- and this
23 dialogue predates Dr. Hite. What has
24 happened is that he has been hamstrung,
25 given faulty information. Now he is

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2 trying to put together something that the
3 facts just don't add up. The reality is,
4 they took into consideration four
5 criteria when there are really eight
6 criteria that should be considered. What
7 we have pointed out is in the report.

8 Also, not all schools were
9 considered in all areas of -- in all
10 areas of Philadelphia. There are racial
11 implications for how the --

12 (Applause.)

13 PASTOR WALLER: -- decisions
14 were made. But, again, I will point you
15 to the facts that are in this report.

16 I am clear that if given
17 resources and time and the real voice of
18 the community, that Dr. Hite and his
19 committee can come up with a better plan.

20 You will hear other voices
21 after me, some of us who may disagree in
22 pedagogical, approach but we are all
23 agreed that this particular plan by
24 itself is not the answer. This
25 particular plan --

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2 (Applause.)

3 PASTOR WALLER: -- does not
4 take into consideration that there will
5 be more school closings after this, which
6 is not being talked about. It does not
7 take into consideration things that save
8 the school system money but put our
9 children at risk. The reality is --

10 (Applause.)

11 PASTOR WALLER: For instance,
12 and we cite in the program, for instance,
13 if a child has to move more than 1.5
14 miles away, then the School District is
15 required to give them a TransPass. They
16 were very effective at making sure they
17 didn't go 1.5 miles, but some go 1.4,
18 which does save the School District, but
19 it puts the child outside of a safety
20 zone.

21 Many of the things that we're
22 seeing happen in schools recently reflect
23 that there is a lack of esprit de corps
24 amongst the teachers, a lack of esprit de
25 corps amongst those who work because of

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2 the tenuous nature of their working
3 conditions.

4 To make these type of drastic
5 cuts without the ability to really think
6 it through is dangerous for our children.
7 No one here today thinks that nothing
8 should be done. There is no one that
9 thinks there won't be any school
10 closings. There is no one that thinks
11 there won't be any rearrangements to our
12 present configuration, but all of us know
13 that within one year of coming here,
14 Dr. Hite could not have done all of this
15 without receiving some information that
16 predates him and, therefore, it needs to
17 be looked at further.

18 So fundamentally what we are
19 here to suggest -- and I am grateful to
20 hear that the SRC will be hearing from
21 each individual school. We have Part 2
22 to this report. All of those reports, it
23 is a 150-page document that points out
24 other solutions to this problem. It is
25 ludicrous to believe that a document that

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2 significant can be given to the SRC on
3 the 21st and they digest it and make real
4 adjustments by the 6th or the 7th to make
5 a vote. What we are suggesting is that
6 this is a beginning and that a moratorium
7 would be right so that we have time to --

8 (Applause.)

9 PASTOR WALLER: So that we have
10 time to make a real decision.

11 The reality is this: If the
12 moratorium happens, the School District
13 needs money. We need people like you and
14 other people of influence to make sure
15 that the money gets to the School
16 District so that nothing happens during
17 this one year.

18 (Applause.)

19 PASTOR WALLER: I want to thank
20 Dr. Cassandra Jones and Next Step
21 Associates, and I implore you to read the
22 document. The facts are, Dr. Hite was
23 not given the truth. Dr. Hite worked
24 with what he has and has come out with a
25 plan that is faulty, not because of his

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2 inability but is faulty because junk in,
3 junk out. The reality is --

4 (Applause.)

5 PASTOR WALLER: -- until -- the
6 fact that we are sitting here talking
7 about having to borrow money to take care
8 of our children shows the real -- the
9 real issue of our culture is that we
10 don't love our children, we tolerate
11 them, and until we get back to loving our
12 children and their safety and their
13 education and think in a strategic
14 long-range way, we're not going to solve
15 this problem. This plan will not solve
16 the problem and we will be back here next
17 year unless we decide to think
18 strategically and deeply about it.

19 Thank you very much.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We say
22 thank you, Pastor Waller. We have
23 attended meetings that you've had across
24 the City. We thank you for taking this
25 issue on and being involved from the very

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2 beginning and going citywide with
3 meetings at schools where they were
4 proposed to close. We thank you for your
5 team, certainly Dr. Cassandra Jones,
6 certainly we thank Sandra Dungee Glenn
7 and all who are on your team who worked
8 so hard to bring us this far.

9 Certainly we challenge the
10 School District as well to read the full
11 report -- and if anybody needs it, I'll
12 make copies available -- so that they may
13 know the work you've done, the study
14 you've done and your commitment to our
15 children.

16 God bless you. Thank you.

17 PASTOR WALLER: Thank you.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you. As soon as these Councilpeople
21 raise their questions, Panel 1, we will
22 be ready for you. That's certainly our
23 Controller, Alan Butkovitz; Michael Karp,
24 President of Belmont Charter School;
25 Jerry Mondesire, President NAACP;

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2 Dr. Walter D. Palmer, Walter D. Palmer
3 Leadership Learning Partners Charter
4 School; Mark Gleason, Executive Director
5 of Philadelphia School Partnership. And
6 we want to move really quick. We always
7 have Jerry Jordan waiting too long.
8 We're not going to have you waiting too
9 long, I promise you today.

10 Thank you very much.

11 Councilman Kenyatta Johnson, your
12 question is next.

13 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you,
14 Madam Chair.

15 Thank you, Dr. Hite and staff,
16 for being here today. I just had a
17 couple questions.

18 To Chief Inspector, regarding
19 this particular plan from a public safety
20 standpoint, I wanted to get an idea of
21 the agency that you're going to be
22 partnering with. I know you talked about
23 PAAN. I have an interest in juvenile
24 probation and parole as well as the
25 Philadelphia Police Department Gang Task

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2 Force, because in looking at, I know
3 specifically, my district and
4 Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell's district,
5 we neighbor one another, and when you
6 look at some of these school transitions
7 and mergers, you will be bringing
8 children from the north part of West
9 Philadelphia over into Southwest, and
10 obviously the neighborhoods are very
11 geographical in terms of neighborhood
12 boundaries. And so I wanted to see at
13 least with some of the parents have asked
14 me, like what's the actual plan in terms
15 of specifics? Like we know we want
16 children safe. We know that should be a
17 priority, but the actual specific plan,
18 saying, Okay, in this particular
19 geographical area, this is what we look
20 to do from a strategy standpoint
21 regarding public safety.

22 So that's to the Chief
23 Inspector. And then to Dr. Hite, the
24 other component is, you talked about
25 briefly early on being open to some new

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2 recommendations based upon community
3 input that you've received through going
4 to the meetings throughout the City. You
5 touched on that, and I really want to get
6 an idea of where you're at, what things
7 have over the past reached out to you --
8 I mean stuck out to you that kind of
9 start giving you an idea to look at
10 things differently or things to take into
11 consideration as you move forward in this
12 process. And the key component is the
13 sustainability of academic achievement.
14 Some schools aren't doing good and there
15 needs to be some improvement. So I'll
16 have to be -- I would be lying if I would
17 be sitting at this table and saying
18 that's not the case. But what does that
19 transition look like? Because some folks
20 will say, Well -- at least the town hall
21 meetings that I went to, what does that
22 merger or that transition look like? One
23 school I'm taking a look at, although
24 Edward Bok isn't in my district, I know
25 it's going to merger with potentially

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2 South Philadelphia High, but those are
3 two totally different cultures. And so
4 it's like, okay, the students will ask
5 me, When I go there, will it be the same
6 principal? Will I have two principals?
7 What does that sustainability from an
8 academic achievement point look like?

9 CHIEF INSPECTOR DORSEY: As far
10 as you asked for a strategy and what's
11 going on, and I'll explain the Office of
12 School Safety and our role in this
13 process.

14 We were given a list of the
15 schools that were slated to close, and
16 from the Police Department's and the
17 Office of School Safety standpoint, we
18 had to look at these schools and give our
19 recommendations as far as what we saw as
20 potential conflict and specifically --
21 especially the high schools. We know
22 that there have been rivalries between
23 certain high schools. For instance, MLK
24 and Germantown, University City and West
25 Philadelphia.

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2 So we sat down and we looked at
3 these list of schools and also the
4 schools around them, the elementary
5 schools and middle schools around them,
6 Gompers, Beeber, Lamberton, also West
7 Philadelphia coming -- Sayre students.
8 And we looked at our list of 14 focus
9 schools, which include the six
10 persistently dangerous schools. We said,
11 Well, we have Beeber and Sayre, who are
12 focus schools, which means we look at
13 them for incidents of violence, incidents
14 of arrests. We also sat down and looked
15 at the -- asked the Criminal Intelligence
16 Unit from the Police Department to give
17 us a list of gangs, groups, territorial
18 areas, neighborhood conflicts. So we got
19 a list from, say, the 22nd Police
20 District in North Central or the 12th and
21 18th District in Southwest or South
22 Philly. So we looked at the entire city,
23 and we plugged those schools in.

24 So we came up with what could
25 cause -- what we don't want is for

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2 violence -- we don't want any violence,
3 but we don't want to increase violence
4 and we don't want to, through mergers or
5 whether these schools merge or not, to
6 create situations where we may create
7 gangs.

8 We also listened at these SRC
9 meetings, we listened to parents, we
10 listened to students, and we listened to
11 community leaders.

12 And as far as our strategy,
13 what it's going to involve -- and we gave
14 the recommendations to the School
15 District and to the Police Department as
16 to what we saw. For instance, if we're
17 talking about West
18 Philadelphia/University, we talked about
19 rivalries, we talked about potential and
20 increased violence. And what we also
21 noted was that we need to sit down and
22 begin a dialogue between students
23 involving parents and involving the
24 community, because there's -- what a lot
25 of people may not know is, we deal with

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2 the -- I'm talking about the Office of
3 School Safety and the Police Department
4 and schools. We deal with violence. We
5 deal with fights. We deal with
6 aggression. We also actively take
7 proactive steps as far as looking at
8 social media, looking at Facebook, and if
9 we see two groups of students, say
10 there's going to be a fight, you know,
11 we're going to fight, we're going to
12 represent, we're going to war, we
13 actually take -- if we can find the
14 students that are involved in them, we'll
15 talk to those students before dismissal.
16 We don't just wait for the fight to
17 happen. So we're doing this on a daily
18 basis.

19 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Based upon
20 what's been recommended thus far, have
21 you found any scenario where, from your
22 professional expertise, thinks that under
23 no circumstances this should take place?

24 CHIEF INSPECTOR DORSEY: Well,
25 my recommendations are the potential for

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2 violence, the potential for strife, and
3 especially we focused on the high
4 schools. There is potential for
5 violence, but I do believe that starting
6 now and starting dialogues and starting
7 talks and also putting things into place
8 that we can stem -- we can actually have
9 to look at ways to stem that violence,
10 including conflict resolution, education,
11 pulling the parents in, the home and
12 school associations, and staff. So we're
13 looking at that.

14 To be specific -- and I'm going
15 back to Germantown and Martin Luther
16 King -- it may be -- or West Philadelphia
17 and University City. Is it impossible?
18 Can it not work? I cannot tell you that.
19 I can tell you that there's potential for
20 conflict, and we have to get into these
21 schools, talk to the students, get the
22 students and the parents involved. We
23 have a wealthy community here of
24 community resources. And we have to sit
25 down and talk and we have to come up with

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2 a plan.

3 My plan includes not only Town
4 Watch and PAAN, but the Office of School
5 Safety. We sit down and we talk about
6 these things. We have safety team
7 meetings within -- the principals have
8 safety plans. So let's look at the best
9 practices. What are some of these high
10 schools that don't have problems, that
11 are not on the persistently dangerous
12 list, that are not the focus schools,
13 what are they doing? South Philadelphia
14 High School, the first community meeting
15 I went to -- and I've been to just about
16 every one -- the principal said -- and
17 there were problems there. There was
18 racial tension. There were conflicts.
19 South Philadelphia has improved. And I
20 spoke to the principal. The principal
21 said, Listen, I'd just like to introduce
22 yourself.

23 I said, You're doing a nice
24 job.

25 He said, I don't care whether

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2 my school stays on the radar. I'm
3 reporting incidents and I'm dealing with
4 things. We're engaging in conflict
5 resolution before this happens, and we're
6 listening to the students. So this is
7 what we will have to do.

8 (Audience member yelling.)

9 DR. HITE: Thank you,
10 Councilman, for the question. The other
11 things that we are considering as we're
12 thinking about revising the list are
13 things like the academic performance of
14 some of the schools, and at some places,
15 we do have schools that are performing
16 really well and they were recommended for
17 relocation, and we're looking at that
18 piece, both at the sending school and the
19 receiving school.

20 The other thing is, as the
21 Chief Inspector just mentioned, in areas
22 where there is high potential for
23 conflict, we're also revisiting some of
24 those as well. And so if there are areas
25 where the Chief Inspector has made a

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2 recommendation, we're going back to look
3 at those.

4 The other is the cost of the
5 investment versus the decision to close,
6 and if it outweighs -- so if the
7 investment to get the building up and
8 ready to receive students is exorbitant,
9 then we're thinking that we can make some
10 other recommendations to support that.
11 And some of the proposals have been
12 individuals or two groups that may come
13 together and they will even submit, We
14 understand the need to merge, but let us
15 think and let us help you think about
16 where we merge versus the place where you
17 recommended. So we're also looking at
18 those pieces as well.

19 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you.
20 Just one last, Chairwoman, just real
21 quick.

22 In the last component, you
23 touched on earlier about you taking a
24 look at some recommendations based upon
25 the various proposals, the various

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2 community meetings that have been taking
3 place to give you additional insight on
4 this actual process. Is it too early for
5 you to begin taking a look at or can you
6 provide some examples of, When I first
7 started, I might have been at Point A,
8 but just based upon community feedback,
9 I'm at Point B now in terms of
10 considering this actual whole plan?

11 DR. HITE: Yeah. We're
12 definitely -- there's some places where
13 we've rethought the recommendations. It
14 would be premature for me to talk about
15 those today, but there are some places
16 where we actually have looked at the
17 receiving school as the wrong school to
18 receive students. And so there are some
19 cases where the receiving schools could
20 change.

21 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you very much. We're going to call
24 Councilwoman Bass and then Councilman Oh,
25 and then we'll ask you to wait while we

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2 bring on the next panel.

3 Next panel, get ready. These
4 are the last questions.

5 Councilwoman Bass.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you,
7 Madam Chair.

8 Good morning.

9 DR. HITE: Good morning.

10 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I just had
11 a couple of questions, and I guess first
12 I wanted to ask, Dr. Hite, knowing that
13 you are from Maryland, just curiosity,
14 are you from a district -- when you went
15 to school, would characterize the
16 district as similar to Philadelphia, like
17 an urban district?

18 DR. HITE: Yeah. I didn't
19 attend school in Maryland. I attended
20 school in Richmond, Virginia, a much
21 smaller district, but a city district
22 nonetheless.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: But an
24 urban environment?

25 DR. HITE: Right. And I

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2 attended three different elementary
3 schools because the city was going
4 through a lot of what many cities are
5 going through, and I remember attending
6 three elementary schools because they
7 kept closing.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: And the
9 reason I ask that is because -- well,
10 first, both King and Germantown are in my
11 district. And so there was an editorial
12 the other day in one of the papers that
13 this is something that really should be
14 embraced, and I think that if an urban
15 educational environment is foreign to
16 you, then you may not understand some of
17 the ramifications of merging a school
18 like King and Germantown and some of the
19 effects that it will have on the
20 community. So I just wanted to ask you
21 that, if that was something that was
22 relevant to your educational experience.

23 DR. HITE: Sure.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: A couple of
25 questions for you. I know that

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2 Councilman Jones had mentioned that he
3 did a walk from, I believe it was, Peirce
4 Elementary School.

5 Councilman, is that correct?

6 COUNCILMAN JONES: Yes.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Peirce
8 Elementary School over to Rhodes. Peirce
9 is at 23rd and Cambria. That's in my
10 district. And Rhodes is at 29th and
11 Clearfield. That's in Councilman Jones'
12 district. So he started in my mine and
13 he ended in his. I'm very familiar with
14 the neighborhood. It's the neighborhood
15 I grew up in. I went to Whittier also.
16 I went to Rhodes also. So I know that
17 there's a two-block difference between
18 Whittier and Rhodes, but there's been
19 eight, nine-block difference between
20 Peirce and Rhodes. And so when we're
21 asking children as young as six years old
22 to walk an additional nine blocks, I
23 think that that's something that
24 absolutely has to be reconsidered. I
25 don't know anyone --

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2 (Applause.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I don't
4 know -- I'm the parent of a young child.
5 I don't know anyone who would want their
6 child to walk that distance in a
7 neighborhood that has a number of issues.
8 And so I don't know if you or your team
9 has been out and walked that. I know you
10 said you walked a number of these
11 corridors.

12 DR. HITE: I have not walked
13 that one. I have not walked that, no.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. I
15 would --

16 (Audience members yelling.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So I would
18 strongly encourage you and your team to
19 make that walk and to see the distance
20 that we're asking these young people to
21 travel. So that's one thing I'd like to
22 recommend.

23 Also, part of the reason that
24 we're doing this, that we have to close
25 these schools, is because we have so many

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2 empty seats, particularly on the west,
3 anything west of Broad Street. So on the
4 east side of Broad Street, if you sort of
5 look at the City that way and divide it
6 down the middle and look on the east side
7 of Broad Street, in some instances there
8 is significant overcrowding in some
9 schools and even wait lists for programs
10 such as kindergarten and so forth, as I
11 understand it.

12 Has there been any
13 consideration to possibly thinking about
14 transporting some kids in schools where
15 there is an abundance, where there's
16 overcrowding, over to schools on the west
17 side of Broad Street? Has there been any
18 thought or consideration of doing
19 something like that?

20 MS. FLOYD: So to answer your
21 question about that, you are correct.
22 There are very different dynamics
23 happening with schools on the west side
24 of Broad where we've seen populations
25 decline.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please
3 identify yourself.

4 MS. FLOYD: I'm sorry. I
5 apologize. Danielle Floyd, Office of
6 Capital Programs.

7 In terms of addressing
8 overcrowding, specifically in the River
9 Wards area around Port Richmond,
10 Fishtown, Kensington, those areas, it
11 hasn't been the District's practice to
12 offer those families the other schools.
13 We try to find schools as close as
14 possible. If for some reason there's
15 kindergarten overflow, we try to identify
16 schools, the next two to three schools
17 that may be close by.

18 We traditionally have addressed
19 those types of issues through boundary
20 changes. We haven't done boundary
21 changes in this district in almost four
22 or five years. And so the problem is, in
23 some areas even doing a boundary change
24 doesn't address the overcrowding, because
25 the next school, the next neighboring

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2 school, may also be in that same
3 situation. And so doing something that
4 you suggested would have to be a
5 different practice that would be
6 introduced. We historically have tried
7 to do it through a boundary change.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So are you
9 open to considering that since -- I
10 understand it's not something that has
11 been done in the past, but since we're
12 closing 37 schools, I think that that's
13 something we've never done in the past,
14 and we should be thinking about ways to
15 look outside the box. Is that something
16 the District is interested in
17 considering?

18 DR. HITE: You're talking about
19 at the elementary school level?

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

21 DR. HITE: And we would have to
22 look at that as a part of the next
23 boundary change, but, yeah, we would
24 consider it. We would consider students
25 moving across those -- Broad is a natural

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2 boundary, and so we would talk about how
3 do we reconstruct boundaries so that
4 students have access across.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: When you
6 were doing the planning, I know you said
7 that this was a two-year process. When
8 you were doing the planning and
9 discussing schools to be closed, did you
10 talk to your principals, your turnaround
11 teams as a part of the decision-making
12 process? And the reason I ask that is
13 because I actually went out -- I try to
14 go to every school in my district. I was
15 at a school last year, and the principal
16 told me flat out, the school should
17 close. It had a number of issues that
18 they went through with me. So imagine my
19 surprise when the list came out and the
20 school was not on the list and it was
21 recommended by the people who were on the
22 ground that this school had a number of
23 issues and should not continue.

24 Did you talk to your own people
25 before making these decisions?

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2 DR. HITE: We had a meeting
3 with principals about these issues. We
4 also went out to every school to walk
5 those schools. We had staff who went out
6 to every school to walk the schools with
7 the principals, but this was when the
8 list contained a lot more schools than it
9 does now. But before we made the
10 announcement, we did go out and we spoke
11 to all of the principals of schools that
12 could be closed.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Were the
14 principals invited to make
15 recommendations or suggestions or were
16 they just told?

17 MS. FLOYD: So when we went out
18 to schools, there was -- we did a number
19 of different things when we went out to
20 schools. One of the things that our team
21 does is just share information. So, for
22 instance -- the first thing I would say
23 is that we don't look at individual
24 schools in isolation. The one thing we
25 do have to look at is relationships

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2 between schools. So, for example, there
3 was a very big push for schools to become
4 K-8's under a previous administration.
5 That had a major impact on the number of
6 middle schools, the population and
7 enrollment in some of our middle schools.
8 And so while we may go to a specific
9 elementary school to talk about one
10 thing, we have gone to neighboring
11 schools as well to talk about those.

12 In terms of recommendations by
13 principals, we did get feedback from
14 them. So in the case of one of the
15 schools that I shared when I walked the
16 school -- because they were like, We're a
17 little bit confused why we're here, help
18 me understand what it is that you're
19 looking at, and one of the things that I
20 raised as a concern from the District
21 perspective was around the cost for
22 transportation, and the principal
23 actually shared some feedback and said,
24 Well, we think we actually have some
25 ideas about how we might be able to be

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2 more efficient in that area and not --
3 and be able to save the District money
4 but still be able to get students safely
5 to and from school.

6 And so there were other
7 questions and concerns raised about
8 travel, much like we've heard in the
9 community, concerns around, hey, you know
10 what? I would love to have another pre-K
11 program here. Have you guys thought
12 about that? Or we would love to do a
13 continuum for our special education
14 programs. I have a three to five
15 program. I don't have the six to eight
16 portion. My students have to leave to go
17 somewhere else to access that program.

18 So we got lots of different
19 feedback in lots of different ways, and
20 there were some principals who were very
21 up front about submitting ideas. And I
22 would also share with you out of the 38
23 recommendations that were received, the
24 counterproposal from schools, a number of
25 them did come from principals making

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2 recommendations about how we could look
3 at things differently.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.
5 Question: Dr. Hite, one of the things
6 you mentioned early on was that your
7 number one concern was safety and the
8 quality of education, but I guess my
9 thought is that this decision is strictly
10 a financial decision. It's not --
11 there's no additional immediate money. I
12 know you said years down the road, there
13 would be investment, additional
14 investment, but immediately this is
15 for -- the \$28 million will go to debt
16 and deficit reduction; is that correct?

17 DR. HITE: That's correct,
18 although we have money in next year's
19 budget for the purpose of investing in
20 the receiving schools.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay. But
22 for right now, we're making a financial
23 decision?

24 DR. HITE: Well, right now
25 we're trying to make an educational

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2 decision based on our finances. So our
3 finances don't allow us -- our finances
4 don't allow us to put an art teacher in
5 every school. Our finances don't allow
6 us to put a music teacher in every school
7 or technology. And so part of the reason
8 we are -- we have schools that don't have
9 the ability to educate some students is
10 because of finance. And so we know that
11 we can't do anything unless we address
12 the finance issue.

13 And so, yes, this is an
14 educational issue, and we have to have
15 the ability to offer students something
16 that's better than what they have today.
17 And, once again, that's just not based on
18 the recommendations; that's what we have
19 to do if we did nothing.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I agree. I
21 think we have to do better. I think we
22 have to do better. I think there's a lot
23 of work to be done. I think we can do
24 better, but I guess the question is the
25 way we go about it. And so I certainly

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2 don't want to be someone who traps a
3 child into a failing public school or a
4 school that's falling apart, the building
5 is inadequate for what our young people
6 need but, at the same time, recognize
7 that these decisions, while difficult and
8 painful and complicated, we will be at
9 this same point next year if we don't get
10 it right now, which is my fear, and we
11 will have wasted a lot of time, we will
12 have wasted a lot of money, and we will
13 have put children's safety at risk,
14 without offering any additional
15 educational opportunity based on what's
16 been provided so far. So those are just
17 my concerns.

18 (Applause.)

19 DR. HITE: Yeah. And I
20 think -- I do think there's some
21 important points that we also have to
22 communicate, particularly around safety,
23 and I think that if we look at the
24 schools -- and this is not from data that
25 is on our website. This is data from the

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2 state's website that collects this
3 information.

4 So if you look at our sending
5 schools, the incidents of -- the
6 discipline incidents are six to every 100
7 students on average. Our receiving
8 schools, they're two to every 100
9 students on average. And so if you look
10 at it as a complete group, students are
11 going to schools where there are not the
12 number of disciplinary incidents.

13 Additionally, the same holds
14 true overall, not in every case, but the
15 same holds true with academics. The
16 schools that are receiving schools, not
17 everyone, but on a whole, are performing
18 both in reading and in math on average
19 better than the schools that are the
20 sending schools, that are the proposed
21 sending schools. Let me correct that.
22 So I think we also have to think about
23 those data as we talk about this process
24 as well.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Okay.

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2 Thank you.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you very much.

5 The Chair notes the presence of
6 Councilman Mark Squilla and certainly
7 Maria Quinones-Sanchez, and we thank
8 them. They're part of this Committee as
9 well.

10 We're going to call on David
11 Oh, Councilwoman Sanchez has questions,
12 and that will be it for this panel and
13 then we will -- for the Superintendent,
14 and then we'll have the panel just
15 referenced come forward and ask the
16 Superintendent to stay to hear these next
17 panelists.

18 Thank you very much.
19 Councilman Oh.

20 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
21 much, Madam Chairwoman.

22 Thank you very much, Dr. Hite,
23 first of all, for being here, making
24 yourself accessible. And also I would
25 like to thank you for taking on this very

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2 difficult job that you knew would be this
3 challenging, and it is very difficult.

4 Having said that, this
5 restructuring of our school system is
6 long overdue, as I think most people will
7 agree, should have been done a long time
8 ago, in which we could have done it
9 smartly and gradually over time, with the
10 point of improving our school system for
11 parents, residents, and children. The
12 issue raised today is the suddenness and
13 drasticness of the actions being taken,
14 which seems to be motivated by financial
15 failure.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILMAN OH: Do you believe
18 that is true? Is that what you're
19 confronted with?

20 DR. HITE: Well, I think there
21 have been a couple of things, Councilman
22 Oh. I think that it is the inability
23 over a series of years -- and I do -- and
24 many of the individuals here have been to
25 the community meetings, so they've heard

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2 me say this before. So it wasn't after
3 my arrival that 60,000 students began
4 attending other schools. Sixty thousand
5 students have been attending other
6 schools and families have been making
7 those decisions over the last 15 years.

8 And to your point, the fact
9 that, for whatever reason, the District
10 did not begin to address this issue and
11 we could have been talking about far
12 fewer schools over a period of time and
13 we would not be in a situation where we
14 are having these types of problems. But
15 I do think that in the past we have
16 borrowed too much to meet operational
17 types of things. We have long-term debt
18 now that we're paying on one-time
19 expenses. And these are all things that
20 have occurred year after year.

21 We've had budgets that did not
22 reflect revenue. In fact, there were
23 budgets that had more money than the
24 revenue that we knew we would receive.
25 And I think this is an unfortunate

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2 product of a lot of things that have not
3 been managed over the last several years,
4 not just with the last four or five
5 years, but this is over a long period of
6 time that has brought us to this point,
7 and it's why we're facing such a
8 significant deficit moving forward.

9 COUNCILMAN OH: So at least the
10 entity that has been in charge of our
11 School District for the last ten years or
12 so is the SRC, and that ultimately is at
13 this point in time run out of Harrisburg,
14 particularly by our governor, Governor
15 Tom Corbett, and so --

16 (Audience members booing.)

17 COUNCILMAN OH: So while the
18 changes should have occurred and all
19 these problems have occurred over the
20 last ten years, it would seem to me that
21 the SRC should take responsibility for
22 paying for the moratorium until we are
23 ensured that we have an excellent system.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILMAN OH: That's really

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2 just my opinion that I'm sharing, but the
3 reason I'm saying that is that we're
4 challenged, as you are challenged in
5 particular as our Superintendent, not
6 just to save the school system from
7 failure, not just to save a bad system
8 from getting worse, but to make this
9 system better. And so any reforms or
10 changes that you're recommending should
11 primarily be around making our School
12 District and our schools better, more
13 competitive and more successful.

14 (Applause.)

15 COUNCILMAN OH: And then I
16 think the issue of who is going to pay
17 for this falls upon the people in charge,
18 which is in Harrisburg, and I think
19 that's where the heavy lifting has got to
20 be.

21 (Applause.)

22 COUNCILMAN OH: So my question,
23 Dr. Hite, in your opinion as the
24 Superintendent, do you think at this
25 point in time, as you sit before this

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2 Committee, that it is too late to
3 reconsider the process of these school
4 closures in favor of a plan that is
5 primarily motivated by better education
6 and not simply saving dollars?

7 (Applause.)

8 DR. HITE: So, Councilman Oh,
9 you started your comments with a
10 statement about some of these changes
11 should have started years ago, and the
12 unfortunate realization of this is that
13 we have young people right now in schools
14 that are not educated for whatever
15 reason. So we have too many of our young
16 children, particularly poor minority
17 students, who are not being taught to
18 read, who are not being taught to do
19 math, and we don't have the ability to
20 address that issue. And so I'm not in
21 support of -- I'm in support of
22 recommendations that are revised as a
23 result of the work that we've done in the
24 community. I'm not in support of
25 prolonging any longer our ability to

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2 address the educational needs of
3 students, particularly at poor and
4 minority students in their schools. We
5 have to do that right now.

6 COUNCILMAN OH: Well, I
7 appreciate that answer. So contained in
8 that answer is the fact that by closing
9 these schools right now and that you are
10 looking to save money, prevent school --

11 DR. HITE: And improve schools.

12 COUNCILMAN OH: And improve
13 schools.

14 DR. HITE: Yes, sir. And, in
15 fact, it is -- what we are attempting to
16 do is -- this has become a conversation,
17 and rightly so, about school closures,
18 but we also have to talk about --
19 whatever the result is of this moving
20 forward, we also have to begin to talk
21 about school opening and what all of
22 those schools should look like and what
23 should be available for every single
24 child who is attending our District
25 schools. And so at some point, this

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2 conversation has to pivot to how are we
3 going to ensure that we have the
4 educational options available to every
5 single student no matter where they
6 attend school.

7 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. I would
8 point out that I believe from what you
9 said, that the immediacy of addressing
10 the issues of educating those students
11 has to do with the fact that the closures
12 are immediate, and that is because of
13 financial reasons, and if the financial
14 responsibilities of allowing the schools
15 not to be under such pressure of
16 immediate closure was assumed by the
17 people in charge, that being the Governor
18 and the SRC, in terms of providing the
19 funds to give you the time to not have to
20 be under that type of pressure of
21 immediate closures, couldn't you come up
22 with a better, more educational
23 outcome-oriented plan?

24 DR. HITE: Our whole attempt,
25 Councilman Oh, is to come up with a

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2 better, more educationally sound plan for
3 all of our schools. And to your question
4 specifically, so even if individuals
5 provided the resources needed, some of
6 our schools should not continue to
7 operate. As a matter of fact, we should
8 have the same level of passion around the
9 fact that these schools have not been
10 serving children that we're having about
11 the closure of the schools. And we have
12 too many young people, once again,
13 particularly poor minority students who
14 are sitting in schools that don't offer
15 them the type of quality education that
16 we should be providing. And even if we
17 had money, we should be addressing those
18 schools, no question about it.

19 COUNCILMAN OH: Okay. Thank
20 you. I do understand your answer. I
21 will echo Pastor Waller in the sense that
22 I do think many people understand schools
23 have got to close. The question I think
24 is the drasticness and suddenness, which
25 what seems to be a response to the lack

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2 of money rather than a thoughtful, purely
3 thoughtful, plan that is well, not only
4 thought out, but properly implemented in
5 the time periods necessary for the
6 community, for the students, for parents,
7 for all the employees to adjust to. And
8 I think that is a financial
9 responsibility issue of who is in charge
10 and who is properly stepping up.

11 But thank you very much.

12 (Applause.)

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you very much.

15 The last question for Dr. Hite.
16 And let me note that for Mr. LaRue and
17 others who are here for Vanessa Lowery
18 Brown, who wanted to read the statement
19 from the Pennsylvania Black Legislative
20 Caucus saying they were against the
21 closings, we will make that part of the
22 record and any statement as we will for
23 the other state representatives, Michelle
24 Brownlee, Curtis Thomas, Chair of the
25 Education Committee James Roebuck, and

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2 all other statements from elected
3 officials will be made part of the record
4 as if they were here. But we are really
5 short on time, so we will not have you
6 come forward. So if you're here, just
7 check with my staff back here and they
8 will assure you that your statement will
9 be made part of the record.

10 Thank you very much. Thank
11 you.

12 Councilwoman Sanchez and then
13 Councilman Squilla.

14 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Good
15 afternoon.

16 DR. HITE: Good afternoon.

17 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ:
18 Dr. Hite, I also too want to thank you.
19 I've sat through many discussions,
20 particularly in my district, and you have
21 been patient, and I am pleased that you
22 are publicly acknowledging that there are
23 some changes that need to be made to your
24 plan as a result of what I consider to be
25 tremendous input from parents and

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2 students. And I hope that in this
3 process, you will see that Philadelphia
4 and the parents and the students are very
5 passionate about their schools, but
6 they're also very keenly aware of what
7 their needs are in the school. So for
8 the parents and the students who have
9 attended these meetings, I hope that you
10 have in fact heard them and will make
11 those adjustments to the plan
12 accordingly.

13 I do want to address the issue
14 of March 7th and how it works backwards
15 so that we're clear about it, because
16 March 7th is a discussion and a decision
17 that gets made before the Council budget.
18 And so I want to be clear on that.

19 There's still many questions
20 that the parents have asked around the
21 school-by-school kind of assessment and
22 their closing. Before that happens, are
23 parents going to be able to see not only
24 the matrix of your decision but what
25 additional changes or restructuring

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2 you're going to do? Because you're
3 saying you're making changes. At what
4 point is that going to become public
5 before it becomes final?

6 DR. HITE: We want to have that
7 information available for the SRC before
8 they take a vote.

9 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: So that
10 the SRC is going to get that information.
11 How do you intend to share that publicly
12 with elected officials and other
13 stakeholders if modifications are made?

14 DR. HITE: So we would have --
15 we would make an announcement about the
16 revisions sometime next week before the
17 hearings begin, and then we would also
18 make that information available to
19 Council and to the public.

20 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Before
21 you make your decision on March 7th,
22 there is an expectation that you will
23 outline, and you talked about it earlier
24 today and you had an exchange with my
25 Council colleague Wilson Goode, and you

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2 alluded to it now with Councilman Oh.
3 What in fact should be our expectations
4 on the receiving schools? Because you
5 made a statement that there's not going
6 to be reinvestment in the receiving
7 schools. Is that accurate?

8 DR. HITE: No. We do have
9 money set aside for the purpose of
10 investing in receiving schools. The
11 point was about the \$28 million in
12 savings, reinvesting that. That would
13 not -- in year one, naturally that would
14 be in the receiving schools, but it's
15 going to pay for other things as well,
16 not just the things that I mentioned,
17 like teachers, technology. We also have
18 in our budget an amount for what we call
19 high-performing seats, and those are
20 monies also directed to the receiving
21 schools.

22 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: So will
23 the public, stakeholders have an
24 opportunity to view how you prioritize
25 what those investments are in those

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2 schools?

3 DR. HITE: Yes. Yes.

4 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Is there
5 a matrix now by which those decisions are
6 getting made? Is there a matrix now?
7 We've sat here in Council two years in a
8 row battling for more money for the
9 School District to preserve public
10 safety, teacher assistants, nurses,
11 librarians, kitchen personnel,
12 transportation.

13 What is -- and we've very
14 successfully and much to -- I appreciate
15 my Council colleagues doing the heavy
16 lifting. We voted for taxes many times.

17 What are we going to get at
18 those schools based on these two years of
19 cuts? I mean, there's bare bones at
20 these schools as they are.

21 DR. HITE: Right. So, in fact,
22 I've been talking very publicly about
23 this notion of what I would like to see
24 at all of the receiving schools and then
25 across our District at every school, but

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2 let's focus on the receiving schools
3 first. So I would --

4 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: I want
5 to be public. My concern is, you're
6 going to make decisions March 7th.

7 DR. HITE: Yes.

8 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: When do
9 we get to see a matrix about what a good
10 high-performing seat looks like in every
11 part of the City? When do we get to see
12 on a school-by-school basis, the parents,
13 when do they get to see that information?

14 DR. HITE: When we make the
15 information public. We will have that
16 information available and it will not --
17 so it will not be specific to -- because
18 some of the high schools are contextually
19 based. It means that they're serving
20 certain students. So the Bok program,
21 naturally that's a different investment
22 than having an art teacher at an
23 elementary school. So we could talk
24 about what those things will look like in
25 terms of a high-quality seat across all

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2 three levels.

3 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Is that
4 information going to be public for the
5 parents of those individual schools?

6 DR. HITE: Yes.

7 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: And
8 when?

9 DR. HITE: So that information
10 will be made public as soon as we make
11 the recommendations for the revisions.

12 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: So in
13 terms of your schedule, March 7th --
14 you're saying next week you're going to
15 put out a revised plan?

16 DR. HITE: Correct.

17 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: And then
18 that revised plan is going to include
19 your matrix on your closures and the
20 receiving schools?

21 DR. HITE: Yes. It would
22 include what will be at -- what will be
23 foundational at the receiving schools,
24 yes.

25 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: And

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2 that's going to be given to all parents
3 and all schools? How are we going to be
4 seeking parent input at the school-base
5 level?

6 DR. HITE: Well, we're doing
7 that now. Particularly in many of the
8 community meetings, the principals are
9 sharing information with us from schools.
10 Many of the individuals who have school
11 advisory committees are also sharing
12 information. Home and schools are
13 sharing information. So that's how we're
14 putting that information out now.

15 We're also providing on our web
16 page the responses to all of the
17 questions that are coming from all
18 parents. And so what we're attempting to
19 do is capture all of those questions and
20 put the responses there as well.

21 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: When you
22 make a decision on March 7th, what
23 happens thereafter in terms of community
24 engagement?

25 DR. HITE: So on March -- so a

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2 couple things happen before March 7th.
3 So next week there are three hearings
4 that the SRC will have on all of the
5 schools. We will have the information
6 prior to those hearings so that
7 individuals understand what schools are
8 in the revised set of recommendations.
9 Then the SRC is slated to take a vote on
10 March 7th. Once they take a vote on
11 March 7th, then we would begin -- if that
12 vote is to move forward, we would
13 immediately begin to work with those
14 schools formulating an SAC at the school,
15 providing the input from the receiving
16 school to the sending school, and
17 assisting their principals with getting
18 together with their communities and with
19 parents to talk about the programs that
20 will be available at their receiving
21 schools.

22 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: So there
23 will be a meeting at every single school
24 impacted?

25 DR. HITE: Yes.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN SANCHEZ: Okay. I
3 guess we'll have to wait to see your
4 revised plan. I think there's some --
5 and, again, I'm going to trust that you
6 heard the parents like I heard the
7 parents at these meetings. There's still
8 a lot of unanswered questions.

9 I don't think there should be a
10 debate about whether this is just
11 financial driven or slot driven, because
12 I don't think it's an either/or. It has
13 to be an "and." If you're making a
14 financial consideration, therefore "and"
15 you have to provide this stuff, and I
16 think that's been missing in this debate.

17 I still don't have all the
18 answers. I'm very concerned about
19 parents who are making a whole lot of
20 other decisions understanding the noise
21 and ultimately how they get a choice
22 about where their child goes in a safe
23 environment. And so to the extent that
24 that information becomes public sooner
25 rather than later, I think all of us will

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2 have a better understanding of this, and
3 while I don't expect this process to be
4 perfect, I do feel encouraged and
5 strongly suggest that you continue to be
6 open to the discussion and the feedback
7 that comes from the communities.

8 Philadelphia is very, very
9 unique. We are a city of neighborhoods,
10 extremely proud of that. I was watching
11 the video on NewsWorks about the
12 Germantown/Martin Luther King experience,
13 and I didn't know that history. And if
14 you haven't watched the video, I think
15 you should, because it really speaks to
16 the passion that exists in the
17 neighborhoods, but it also speaks to the
18 challenges.

19 One of the concerning issues
20 around that video is the fact that in
21 addition to the safety plan, how do we
22 break down some of these silos that don't
23 exist. And this cannot be a discussion
24 about them versus us; this has to be
25 about the children and the parents.

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2 Thank you.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

5 Councilman Squilla will the have the last
6 say at this time.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you,
8 Chairwoman.

9 I'm glad to hear too and
10 echoing my colleague Councilman
11 Quinones-Sanchez on the ability that our
12 schools are based in neighborhoods, and
13 neighborhoods are part of the City of
14 Philadelphia and also important to the
15 people who go to these schools. And I'm
16 excited to hear that you are taking some
17 consideration from information you
18 received from principals or parents and
19 reconsidering some of these.

20 If there was a principal or a
21 teachers group or parents group that
22 wanted to get you information now that
23 will maybe help you make your final
24 decision, who would they give it to?

25 DR. HITE: They could send it

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2 directly to me. They could send it to
3 Danielle Floyd or they could send it to
4 the Superintendent's Office, the Deputy
5 Superintendent's Office. There are a
6 whole -- it's a whole host of individuals
7 that they could send that information to.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And is it
9 too late now for any of these either
10 parent groups or principals to get you
11 more information to help you make this
12 final decision next week?

13 MS. FLOYD: I wouldn't say it's
14 too late, but I think the sooner, the
15 better to be fair. We have -- Chief
16 Dorsey and I were at a meeting with
17 parents this morning. We actually have
18 two more meetings today that we're going
19 to. I'm reading every petition, every
20 letter, everything that's coming in from
21 principals, every e-mail, because as you
22 said, the more information that we can
23 have to inform how we rethink and how we
24 readjust is very helpful.

25 To specifically -- in terms of

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2 submission by electronically, the best
3 way to send it is to the e-mail address
4 that we've set up as part of this
5 process, which is FMP@philasd.org, and
6 it's the quickest, easiest way to be able
7 to make sure that information gets to the
8 District, and we take responsibility to
9 getting it to the different departments
10 that need to take a look at it.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Thank you.
12 Because I know it's important for us to
13 know that you're receiving the same
14 information that we're receiving from the
15 communities and the neighborhoods.

16 The other thing is, there's
17 some demographics with the schools, and I
18 know you're moving some schools and
19 programs around or contemplating doing
20 that. We have a new initiative coming
21 out. I know everybody has heard about
22 it, AVI, and taxes and a higher percent
23 of the taxes go to the School District,
24 and people are saying there's some
25 neighborhoods that are going to be left

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2 without a school altogether. They're
3 paying taxes and their taxes are going to
4 the school, yet they can't send the kid
5 to a school in their own neighborhood. I
6 mean, how do you address something like
7 that when people are paying that amount
8 of money to send their kids to a school
9 and that they would have to either bus
10 them or send them somewhere else? Do you
11 take that in consideration on this final
12 decision?

13 DR. HITE: In some. And there
14 was a question earlier, Councilman, that
15 was asked about what types of things are
16 we considering as we talk about the set
17 of revised recommendations. That's one
18 of them that -- I mean, if we leave areas
19 completely without an option, then we are
20 really looking very closely at that, and
21 that may be an opportunity to revise
22 that.

23 But, yes, we're looking at
24 that, but in some areas a neighborhood is
25 a very -- it could be defined as a very

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2 large area, a very small area, and so
3 part of it is making sure that
4 geographically that we have school
5 options available, which may not always
6 necessarily fall in the neighborhood.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I mean,
8 you have to be very careful understanding
9 the makeup of our neighborhoods
10 throughout the City of Philadelphia. You
11 could go four blocks in one direction and
12 you're in a totally different
13 neighborhood that can cause problems with
14 people traveling into different areas.
15 So, I mean, that also has to be known,
16 and I think that needs to be taken under
17 consideration. And, I mean, we have
18 schools in my district -- and I heard you
19 talk about -- some of them were
20 mentioned -- where we have a vo-tech
21 school that's moving into another
22 location, where we need to actually grow
23 these type of schools instead of moving
24 them. But, I mean, these are all the
25 concerns that we're hearing as

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2 Councilmembers and people in our
3 district, and I'm just hoping that you're
4 hearing the same thing. I want to make
5 sure we get you all the information that
6 hopefully can help you make this decision
7 in the end, because obviously when they
8 complain to us, we're going to complain
9 to you, and hopefully we could help you
10 with that final decision. And what I'm
11 hearing is next week that will be made
12 public, so anybody who didn't get
13 information to you, I hope from this
14 hearing at least they'll hear that they
15 need to do that ASAP and get you anything
16 that may help you change your mind.

17 The last thing before we move
18 on, once this decision is made next week
19 and you present it to the SRC, they will
20 actually vote on it and then it will be
21 implemented?

22 DR. HITE: Yes. The SRC is
23 scheduled to have hearings at the end of
24 next week, and then following that, they
25 will have -- they have a meeting

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2 scheduled for a vote on March 7th. And
3 then once that vote takes place, we would
4 then begin to move into notification,
5 implementation, really beginning the
6 process of any of the capital projects
7 that we would need to begin starting and
8 then the educational options and the
9 academic options at the schools.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Is it
11 possible for them to have alternatives or
12 suggestions to you during this process
13 that may change some other closings or
14 are they just voting specifically on what
15 you present them?

16 DR. HITE: As a governing body,
17 they could always make other
18 recommendations. They will have all of
19 the information contained inside of the
20 information that we use to make the
21 recommendations. So naturally they could
22 vote on some or all or none of the
23 recommendations that we make.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All right.
25 Thank you very much, and thank you for

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2 your time.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you very much.

5 We thank you for your patience.
6 We've been asked to mention this
7 institutionalized lower expectations,
8 this issue that's out there where African
9 Americans have a different pass rate that
10 is lower than that of Asians, whites, and
11 Latinos. So I'm sure since that's kind
12 of out there now, that I want to know if
13 you've taken a position on it. Well,
14 obviously we're not pleased with that.

15 DR. HITE: I'm not sure I know
16 exactly what you're referring to, Madam
17 Chair, but that is -- this whole notion
18 of expectations is extremely important,
19 and that is -- the problem with the low
20 expectations is just that, that we can
21 never expect our children to achieve if
22 we are expecting less of them than other
23 children inside of our District. And so
24 that's a culture that we have to change
25 across the City, and so that regardless

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2 of where students attend school, people
3 expect them to perform at very high
4 levels. And that's not just the case
5 here in Philadelphia; that's
6 unfortunately a phenomenon now that's
7 going on all across the country, and
8 people are really beginning to try to
9 address that issue, which also gets to
10 the achievement gap issue.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
12 Absolutely. We're in total agreement
13 with you on that. So we'll ask you to
14 remain while we call forward Alan
15 Butkovitz, Michael Karp, Jerry Mondesire,
16 Mark Gleason, Dr. Walter D. Palmer.
17 We're going to call after that -- and,
18 remember, Panel 3, we'll have Pastor
19 Johnson, Pastor Cedric Jones from the
20 Black Clergy, Pastor Johnson from Bright
21 Hope. And the next panel along with
22 Jerry Jordan, PFT; Anne Gemmell,
23 Political Director for Fight for Philly;
24 George Ricchezza, great leader of SEIU;
25 Gabe Morgan, Vice President, SEIU; Kia

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2 Hinton, parent leader from Action United;
3 Hiram Rivera, Executive Director of
4 Philadelphia Student Union; and Ms. Andi
5 Perez, Executive Director, Youth United
6 for Change. That's our next panel.

7 So I know you're here. I know
8 you've been patient. And we're going to
9 ask my colleagues to keep it short, and
10 thank you for your patience. So you may
11 begin in any order you choose.

12 (Witnesses approached witness
13 table.)

14 DR. PALMER: Thank you, Madam
15 Chairman.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you. Thank you, Dr. Palmer.

18 DR. PALMER: Good afternoon,
19 Madam Chairman, Councilmembers,
20 Superintendent Hite, students, educators,
21 parents, community members. My name is
22 Dr. Walt Palmer and I'm here to ask
23 several questions and offer several
24 solutions to targeted closures of 37
25 schools.

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2 Who runs the Philadelphia
3 School District? Is it the Governor? Is
4 the state Legislature? Is it the SRC?
5 Is it the Mayor? Is it the City Council?
6 Is it the Superintendent of Education?
7 Is it a teachers union? Is it the
8 parents? Is it the students? Is it the
9 business and money interest of
10 Philadelphia? Is it the outside business
11 and money interest? Is it the
12 Philadelphia School Partnership? Is it
13 the Great Schools Compact? Is it the
14 Philadelphia media that attempts to write
15 the narrative and discourse on urban
16 public education?

17 How did we get to this place,
18 where the state blames the Department of
19 Education, where the Department of
20 Education blames the District
21 Superintendent, who blames the school
22 administrators, and the administrators
23 blame the principals, who blames the
24 teachers, the teachers blame the parents,
25 the parents blame the children, the Mayor

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2 blames the teachers union, and the
3 teachers union blames the Governor, and
4 the Governor blames the Mayor and the
5 teachers union, all of whom blame charter
6 schools and cyber schools.

7 If we look at the education in
8 Philadelphia from the 1950s or the last
9 time that Philadelphia was believed to
10 have had a great public education system,
11 we'll note two remarkable events. This
12 was when Philadelphia had a population of
13 two million people, which is now dwindled
14 to 1.5 million and that time we shared in
15 the post Second World War prosperity.
16 This was before the exodus of the textile
17 industries and other businesses that
18 moved to the Sun Belt, coupled with white
19 flight from the City to the suburbs, all
20 of whom left black parents behind to
21 confront a hostile education system that
22 shunned them, ignored them, and turned
23 them back at the door.

24 In the 1960s we saw the rise of
25 black power and the call for community

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2 control of schools because of a
3 hundred-year legacy of a racialized
4 education system in Philadelphia.

5 By the mid 1960s, I and others
6 were called to organize the largest
7 50,000 to 100,000 student protest and
8 school strike. It was the largest in the
9 history of America. It was for education
10 reform.

11 I and a number of community
12 activists and students went to jail, but
13 not before we got attention of local and
14 national authorities. Maybe the time has
15 come for me and others to go to jail
16 again to get the national attention and
17 to showcase the crisis and dilemma.

18 (Applause.)

19 DR. PALMER: This dilemma is
20 not just closing of 37 neighborhood
21 schools, nor should the focus be on a new
22 superintendent who inherited the
23 dysfunctional and bankrupt educational
24 system. It really centers around the
25 failure of the combined bureaucracies in

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2 the City that perpetually frustrate real
3 education reform and the will of the
4 people in general and parents in
5 particular.

6 In the 1960s former Mayor
7 Richardson Dilworth, who became President
8 of the Philadelphia School Board, he said
9 this: We are graduating students as
10 functional illiterates with a fourth
11 grade reading level, and most cannot
12 address an envelope. That was over 50
13 years ago, a half a century, and we're
14 here today to address only the closing of
15 37 schools. And no matter what the
16 resolution of this might be, the reality
17 is, it must be understood that this will
18 not solve the necessary need for
19 macrostructural changes in a flawed
20 system.

21 As to the closing of these
22 schools, I recommend that some be turned
23 over to the parents, the students, the
24 administrators, the teachers --

25 (Applause.)

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2 DR. PALMER: -- and be turned
3 into neighborhood promise academies. Or
4 if in fact the parents decide, allow them
5 to make it an independent neighborhood
6 community charter school. Return a
7 number of the renaissance schools, bring
8 them back to the School District. Stop
9 having charter schools create and take
10 over EMO's position by running other
11 charters.

12 You must resist privatizing
13 education in Philadelphia. Do not use
14 charter schools to run public schools,
15 which frustrates the intent of the
16 legislature. I do not try -- and do not
17 try to replace the Philadelphia school
18 system with renaissance schools or make
19 them mini districts where the same usual
20 suspects are awarded those schools.

21 Create a unified working
22 relationship between traditional public
23 schools, promise academies, charters,
24 cybers, and the parents. Make real
25 parental choice be a reality.

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2 It is very easy for us to come
3 before you and to raise hell. The
4 question we have to ask ourselves is, can
5 we also help you raise money and help
6 solve the problem?

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you, Dr. Palmer.

10 Controller Butkovitz.

11 CONTROLLER BUTKOVITZ: Good
12 afternoon. I'm Alan Butkovitz. I'm the
13 Philadelphia City Controller and I'm
14 accompanied today by our Policy Director,
15 Jeff Hornstein, and I also have the PAL
16 Shadow Controller, Sharif Jones, who is
17 actually a student at Bok, one of the
18 schools that's on the closure list.

19 Our office has done an analysis
20 of the closure plan, and there's really
21 three or four points that I just want to
22 hit. I'm not going to read anything.

23 First of all, the anticipated
24 savings are overstated at \$28 million a
25 year, because they are overoptimistic in

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2 estimating the amounts that can be
3 recovered for most of these buildings and
4 understate the costs that will be
5 associated with maintaining these
6 buildings.

7 The School District has had
8 some positive experience in spinning off
9 several of the buildings for a decent
10 price, but for the most part -- and the
11 updated Pew study shows this -- that
12 they're in the 50 to 70 percent range of
13 their asking price, for the most part.

14 The plan assumes huge savings
15 by not paying any utilities, for example,
16 for five years when in fact if the School
17 District anticipates to sell these
18 buildings, as they say in the plan,
19 they're going to find that they have
20 burst pipes and that they're not going to
21 be able to turn them around. The plan is
22 internally inconsistent in that way.

23 We have had experience in
24 Philadelphia with vandalism and
25 destruction of vacant school buildings.

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2 We had a notorious situation with the
3 fire at the former Edison School. Prior
4 to that, there were estimates that it
5 would take \$5 million to demolish the
6 school. The school should have been
7 demolished. Demolition is probably going
8 to in fact be the remedy indicated in
9 most of these schools. The School
10 District doesn't have the money to do it,
11 so the properties are going to become
12 eyesores and become problems for the most
13 part for the neighborhood.

14 Finally, Dr. Hornstein and our
15 office developed a schedule that has not
16 been referred to earlier, and that is the
17 blight effect of the closure of a school
18 on neighborhoods. Essentially he has
19 determined that people who live in
20 neighborhoods where the school has been
21 shuttered are on average going to lose
22 about \$2,000 each on the value of their
23 property. It basically redlines the
24 neighborhood and identifies it as a dying
25 neighborhood.

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2 The final point will be -- and
3 I surprisingly haven't heard it addressed
4 today at all -- is that under the
5 proposed plan, one-third of the students
6 are being moved to schools that perform
7 less well academically than the schools
8 that they're coming from, when studies
9 have indicated that the only hope for
10 improved student performance is to move
11 in the other direction.

12 That's the summary of our
13 findings.

14 Do you think you want to expand
15 on any of that?

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you, Controller.

18 MR. HORNSTEIN: No, unless
19 there are any questions. I think you hit
20 it all.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you very much, and thank you, young man,
23 for being here as well. Thank you.
24 Thank you.

25 Michael Karp.

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2 And, Superintendent Hite, he's
3 one of the creative leaders who was
4 trying to talk with you. Michael Karp.

5 MR. KARP: Thank you. My name
6 is Michael Karp. I'm the founder and the
7 Board Chairman of two charter schools,
8 Belmont Academy and Belmont Charter
9 School, and I wanted to say, first of
10 all, many Councilpeople here today
11 expresses the desire to maintain
12 neighborhood schools. And I believe
13 people have to understand that in
14 Philadelphia, many, many neighborhoods
15 are really defined by their school,
16 whether it's McMichael in Mantua, whether
17 it's Belmont in Belmont, over in
18 Parkside, over in Mill Creek. We have
19 many, many neighborhoods. The school is
20 the central point of the neighborhood,
21 and I feel that to close the schools,
22 which is the center of the neighborhood,
23 as Alan just said, it almost goes to the
24 death of the neighborhood. It changes
25 the identity. People live in their

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2 neighborhood. I just think it's
3 heartwrenching. Leidy School, for
4 example, which is in Jannie's district,
5 is slated for closure, with kids going to
6 53rd and Lansdowne to the Heston School,
7 which is right by Overbrook High School.
8 You got kids there from 38th and Girard
9 Avenue, in theory, walking to 53rd and
10 Lansdowne. It just doesn't make any
11 sense.

12 And while I understand the
13 District on the other hand saying we have
14 to save money, and to save money, the
15 buildings cost too much to operate. So
16 we're going in and saying, the first
17 preference, before this is rushed
18 through, should be can we find a way to
19 have people maintain that school as a
20 neighborhood school. So, for example, in
21 West Philly where we are, we have
22 McMichael at 35th and Fairmount, and we
23 have Leidy up on Belmont Avenue. We
24 would be willing to maintain those
25 schools and operate those schools as

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2 existing elementary schools where the
3 kids would continue to go there. And we
4 take the position that we're willing if
5 there's going to be a cost to operate
6 those schools greater than the revenue as
7 a charter school, we'll absorb that.
8 We'll pay for it.

9 We feel stabilizing communities
10 is a very, very important thing, and we
11 feel the District is not sensitive to the
12 needs of the local communities. We
13 just -- it's just unconscionable to close
14 them.

15 Secondly, we also look at this
16 as a major opportunity. Whereas the
17 District is saying we have more space in
18 those schools than we need, we feel it's
19 important to have that extra space
20 because we believe in the integration of
21 social services and education.

22 (Applause.)

23 MR. KARP: So when we started
24 operating two schools, our goal was
25 twofold. Number one, of course,

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2 education. We want to educate the
3 students. But number two, we feel
4 equally, equally important is breaking
5 the poverty for the children in those
6 schools, and we feel that you have to
7 look at a school not just a place that
8 delivers classroom instruction, but the
9 question is, will that school -- will
10 that education dramatically lower the
11 poverty of those students, who often come
12 from multi-generational poverty homes.
13 And if you don't break the poverty cycle,
14 you've not educated the student. That,
15 to us, is critical.

16 (Applause.)

17 MR. KARP: So we would like to
18 request that there be an opportunity for
19 us to sit down with the Superintendent
20 and look where we can take over existing
21 buildings, maintain the schools. We
22 would be responsible for any extra
23 operating costs in those buildings with
24 those students retained, and we want to
25 bring in the social services, the mental

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2 health, the DHS, all the other jobs, job
3 placement, job training, everything we
4 can do to help the community to rise and
5 to be helpful to breaking poverty. And
6 we look at these schools as great
7 opportunities to provide for the whole
8 community and to all the students those
9 services. We think it's a critical piece
10 that should be addressed hand in hand
11 with the issue of school closing, with
12 the issue of education, with the issue of
13 the needs of the students.

14 Anyway, that's just my comment.
15 We'd like to be helpful in any way we
16 can.

17 We also note that when we
18 started our school, we were the first
19 charter that was a catchment area school.
20 So we have in our school at Belmont,
21 which Councilwoman Blackwell has
22 supported very, very strongly, we are the
23 neighborhood school. And we want to do
24 the same thing. We're not looking to
25 have citywide charters. We're looking to

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2 maintain McMichael or Leidy as local
3 catchment area, local schools, and we
4 feel that's what's in the best interest
5 of all the students. Keep those schools
6 open.

7 Thank you very much.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you.

11 Thank you all. And let me note
12 that we have been saying for, I don't
13 know, at least a year that Michael Karp
14 was willing to contribute. We talked
15 about our universities contributing to
16 the School District about keeping schools
17 open. We've asked them to meet with you.

18 And I apologize that you have
19 to come and make your request public.
20 And we have been saying it over and over
21 again, and the School District has not
22 contacted you. We keep saying we have
23 some people willing to give. I'll always
24 use you as an example. And yet the
25 School District, we tell them over and

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2 over and over and over again, we have
3 people who want to contribute. Won't you
4 meet with them. And the answer has
5 obviously been no, because they don't get
6 calls back.

7 I thank you for your commitment
8 to kids in this area, Mr. Karp, and
9 certainly we look forward to the District
10 responding by saying a meeting is
11 scheduled or that the meeting occurred.

12 Thank you. Thank you very
13 much.

14 MR. KARP: Thank you very much,
15 Councilwoman. Thank you.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you.

18 Thank you very much. Thank you
19 for your patience. Mr. Mondesire, thank
20 you for your commitment to this and so
21 many issues in our city. We thank you,
22 and we thank the NAACP, Mark Gleason.
23 Thank you for all you've been doing with
24 the School Partnership.

25 MR. MONDESIRE: Good morning.

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2 My name is Jerome Mondesire. I am
3 President of the Philadelphia NAACP
4 branch and serve also as President of the
5 NAACP's Pennsylvania State Conference.

6 The NAACP is profoundly
7 grateful to you, Councilwoman Jannie
8 Blackwell, and your courageous leadership
9 of Council's Education Committee which
10 has made this public forum on the
11 recommended school closing possible. The
12 NAACP also salutes Mrs. Blackwell's 13
13 colleagues who supported her call for a
14 one-year moratorium on school closings.

15 So that it is clear from the
16 outset, while the NAACP supports the
17 general concept of school consolidation
18 as a laudable goal to foster greater
19 savings and educational achievement, we
20 also believe that there is a right way to
21 close schools and there is a wrong way.
22 And believe me, this is the wrong way.

23 (Applause.)

24 MR. MONDESIRE: We believe the
25 current Facilities Master Plan is the

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2 wrong way to close schools. It is bad
3 for students, bad for the teachers and
4 other staff, and bad for the overall
5 health of the City. In basic language,
6 what's the rush?

7 We have closed schools before,
8 more slowly, more deliberately and with
9 far fewer disruptions for the students.
10 Now we are talking about shutting down 37
11 schools, affecting nearly 20,000 students
12 and maybe as many as 1,000 or more
13 workers, with no real vision for how the
14 system will look when the task is
15 complete.

16 Since the Enon study clearly
17 documents in dramatic details the
18 failings of this plan, there is no need
19 to repeat the obvious facts. However,
20 after listening to many hours of public
21 testimony and conferring with parent
22 groups and union officials, it is clear
23 to the NAACP that this plan moves too
24 fast, is really not well thought out,
25 will harm more students than it will

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2 benefit, will slash and burn careers of
3 too many dedicated teachers, principals,
4 and support staff and, finally, threatens
5 to undermine too many families and
6 neighborhoods even as it promises savings
7 not really justified by the evidence
8 presented. Again, look at the Enon
9 report for the supporting facts.

10 Clearly then, no one in
11 Philadelphia should be surprised when I
12 say to you today that the NAACP will
13 oppose this consolidation plan by every
14 means necessary.

15 (Applause.)

16 MR. MONDESIRE: We will resist
17 it at meetings, public forums, in the
18 courts, and even with civil disobedience
19 if warranted. Furthermore, we will hold
20 all elected officials who support this
21 plan accountable. And we are 103 years
22 old. The NAACP has a very long memory.

23 Again, we say what's the rush?

24 According to the SDP, if their
25 plan were to work perfectly, the

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2 projected savings would amount to only
3 \$28 million, about one percent of the
4 total education budget. That's if
5 everything worked perfectly.

6 Real simply, we're saying that
7 \$28 million is not that much money. Why
8 can't this Council and this Mayor either
9 raise the revenues for that \$28 million
10 or borrow the money or begin to put
11 pressure on Harrisburg and the Governor
12 to get the \$28 million so that the
13 moratorium --

14 (Applause.)

15 MR. MONDESIRE: -- so that the
16 moratorium would have the impact we need
17 it to have, which is to slow down the
18 process, have some considerable thought,
19 and take the real work and talk to people
20 before we shut the schools.

21 The NAACP clearly knows who the
22 enemy is, and we will not be turned
23 around. We never have. We never will.

24 Thank you.

25 (Applause.)

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you.

4 Mr. Gleason.

5 MR. GLEASON: Madam Chairwoman,
6 members of the Committee, thank you for
7 the opportunity to comment today. My
8 name is Mark Gleason and I'm the
9 Executive Director of the Philadelphia
10 School Partnership. I would like to
11 first congratulate the newest member of
12 the School Reform Commission, Sylvia
13 Simms, who is sitting in the front row,
14 and I believe --

15 (Applause.)

16 MR. GLEASON: -- I see Chairman
17 Pedro Ramos also in the room.

18 The Philadelphia School
19 Partnership is a non-profit that is
20 working to expand the number of great
21 schools serving children in Philadelphia.
22 To date, we have invested just under \$10
23 million in about a dozen schools across
24 the City. These schools are now serving
25 approximately 7,500 more students as a

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2 result of those investments. These
3 schools include District, charter, and
4 Catholic schools. Eighty-one percent of
5 the students in the schools we've
6 invested in are low income, 84 percent
7 are African American or Hispanic.

8 As a reference, we've provided
9 City Council members through the
10 Chairwoman's office folders. These
11 folders include maps that indicate where
12 the schools are that we've invested in,
13 which ones are in your respective
14 districts and across the City. We plan
15 to give a total of \$100 million to
16 roughly 60 schools across the City by
17 2016.

18 But we're here today to discuss
19 the effect the proposed school closings
20 will have on communities in Philadelphia.
21 This is a critical question. There's
22 simply no doubt that closing schools is
23 hard. Communities are experiencing a
24 sense of loss, and families are grappling
25 with very tough changes.

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2 Equally important, though, is
3 recognizing how the schools slated for
4 closure have affected the future
5 prospects of their students and
6 remembering that fundamentally these
7 closings are not about finance, but about
8 improving the futures of all Philadelphia
9 students.

10 I'm not here to judge the
11 individual recommendations contained in
12 the District's plan. I know that the
13 folks at the District are taking every
14 alternative seriously and doing
15 exhaustive analysis on the various
16 scenarios for how to come up with the
17 savings that they need. But what I do
18 want to do is share some hard facts.
19 There will be a lot of general statements
20 made today. It's important that we
21 remember what's actually happening.

22 In the schools listed to close,
23 just 35 percent of students are
24 proficient in math and only 29 percent
25 are proficient in reading. That's

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2 compared with 56 percent in math and 50
3 percent in reading in all the other
4 schools in the District combined.

5 African American students are
6 vastly underserved in the schools
7 selected to close. In these schools, 30
8 percent more black students fall short of
9 grade level standards in reading and math
10 than in the rest of the District schools.
11 The unacceptable reality for African
12 American students in these schools is
13 that their chances of going to college or
14 landing a good job are dramatically lower
15 than if they attended one of many other
16 schools in the City.

17 The schools scheduled to close
18 are more dangerous for children. The
19 Superintendent referenced this earlier.
20 Last year there were almost three times
21 as many violent incidents in schools
22 selected to close compared with the rest
23 of the District. Observers and families
24 have fairly raised safety concerns for
25 the young people who now may have to

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2 travel farther to get to school. But
3 let's please not forget that there are
4 big safety concerns already confronting
5 those students today inside many of the
6 schools they attend now.

7 Finally, the high school
8 graduation rate in the schools listed to
9 close is just 54 percent, 15 points lower
10 than in the schools not on the closing
11 list. This means that a student
12 attending one of these high schools is
13 significantly more likely to drop out of
14 school.

15 Tens of thousands of parents
16 already know these facts. Almost four in
17 ten children who live in the catchment
18 areas for the schools on the closing list
19 have already left. Those families have
20 chosen other options, in some cases all
21 the way across the City and in many cases
22 to other District schools in search of a
23 better education for their children.

24 Ultimately the larger problem
25 is that we don't have enough high-quality

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2 schools in our city. Closing schools
3 will be a lot easier if we did, but we
4 don't. As has been said, next year some
5 students will likely have to move to
6 schools that have proven no better than
7 the schools they are leaving. And this
8 is exactly why dramatic changes are
9 needed across the system, changes that
10 will be hard to make unless we stop
11 spending money to light, clean, and heat
12 half empty buildings, unless we find a
13 way to balance the school budget, and
14 unless we stop accepting the existence of
15 schools that don't provide quality
16 educational programs in safe and
17 nurturing environments.

18 While it is right to ask
19 questions about the impact of closings on
20 particular schools, the biggest question
21 we have to ask is what is the collective
22 set of actions that will lead to a better
23 education for all of our students? There
24 are public schools providing quality
25 education to children from low-income

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2 communities in buildings across the City,
3 but there are not enough of them. Last
4 spring the School Reform Commission moved
5 to increase access to many of our city's
6 best schools by adding more than 2,000
7 seats in more than a dozen buildings.
8 Students, parents, and grandparents seek
9 these seats out in and fill them up. My
10 hope is that District leadership and City
11 Council and other civic leaders will
12 focus their energies on how we create
13 more of these schools and on how we can
14 leverage planning, talent, and resources,
15 to start schools that will receive new
16 students next fall as a result of this
17 plan on the path to improvement.

18 The Philadelphia School
19 Partnership is ready to be a partner in
20 this effort. We have been meeting
21 regularly with District staff and school
22 leaders to identify ways that the
23 Partnership's Great Schools Fund can best
24 ramp up its investments in District
25 schools in ways that align with

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2 Dr. Hite's action plan and where the
3 students will be traveling as a result of
4 closings that end up being approved.

5 Whatever the final outcome of
6 the District's Facilities Master Plan, it
7 is clear that thousands of families will
8 experience changes next year. Great
9 Philly schools created by the
10 Philadelphia School Partnership, together
11 with the Urban Affairs Coalition, is a
12 new website and print guide -- there's a
13 high school and a K to 8 version -- that
14 can help families find, compare, and
15 choose schools or simply see how their
16 school is doing in a variety of ways.
17 Tens of thousands of families have
18 already benefited, and we are working
19 with hundreds of government agencies,
20 non-profits, and community centers to
21 ensure every family in the City has the
22 information that they need.

23 We appreciate the support of
24 Councilwoman Blackwell and her staff in
25 helping us to get the word out to her

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2 constituents. Hopefully you have all
3 received some copies of the free print
4 guides, and we hope to work with other
5 members of Council going forward to
6 continue to provide this information for
7 parents and students.

8 Finally, I want to appreciate
9 the powerful voices of vocal parents who
10 have come out over the past two months to
11 advocate for their neighborhoods and
12 criticize and question the closings. On
13 the one hand, their pain is harrowing to
14 observe because we know that this city
15 does not offer enough educational
16 opportunities for all. And at these
17 closings, while intended to be a step
18 toward making things better do not by
19 themselves give families much benefit in
20 the short run.

21 On the other hand, their voices
22 remind us that parents' love and
23 involvement our key ingredients in our
24 kids' education. Public education in
25 Philadelphia has not done enough to

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2 harness the ideas and involvement of
3 parents and guardians. Let these
4 closings be the spark that leads to a
5 school advisory council at every school
6 that remains open and to greater day in
7 and day out partnership between families
8 and schools.

9 Thank you again for the
10 opportunity to be here today and thank
11 you for your commitment to ensuring that
12 every child in every neighborhood in
13 Philadelphia has an equal opportunity to
14 a great education.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you very much.

17 Are there any questions?

18 Thank you very, very much.

19 COUNCILMAN OH: Yes. I would
20 like to ask a question, Madam Chairwoman.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes,
22 Councilman Oh.

23 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
24 much for your testimony, Mr. Gleason. I
25 do have some questions for you. One is

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2 that you have indicated the poor
3 performance of the schools that are
4 designated to be closed, and I don't
5 think anybody is disagreeing with those
6 facts. I think the issue is that when
7 you close them, are you making education
8 better for the students who go there?
9 And I don't know that that is the case,
10 because there is not an alternative plan
11 presented that provides those students
12 and those parents with a better education
13 and better opportunities. So I cannot
14 equate that simply closing the schools
15 equals better education and better
16 opportunities.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILMAN OH: And it does
19 seem to be a matter of money that you did
20 raise. We're trying to save money to
21 invest for the students' education, and
22 so money seems to me to be a motivating
23 factor in the sudden and drastic closing
24 of these schools. What I'm concerned
25 about with and what I do -- and I

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2 appreciate your advocacy, which is
3 fantastic. You're really a wonderful
4 organization and champion of education,
5 but what I find frustrating -- and I
6 think I probably reflect the frustration
7 of many people, like President Mondesire
8 and Pastor Waller -- is there are good
9 schools. I took a visit last year to
10 Pathways to Technology Early College
11 Education in Brooklyn, you know. There
12 are schools in Philadelphia that are
13 excellent, be they private, charter or
14 public, magnet or neighborhood. There
15 are excellent schools around the world
16 that are far superior to us with less
17 money being used and higher salaries for
18 teachers. But I have yet to see and I'm
19 waiting for and I'm very expectant
20 optimistically that the leadership of the
21 School District will present us with a
22 plan that systemically changes the way
23 education is done so that we have good
24 education for every child in Philadelphia
25 based on the methodology and that is

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2 practical and affordable.

3 And so while taking everything
4 you said about the need to close the
5 schools, yet the question is, does simply
6 closing these schools mean that those
7 parents and families and children will
8 get a better education? And I think the
9 answer is no.

10 (Applause.)

11 MR. GLEASON: Absolutely the
12 answer is no. That by itself doesn't
13 solve the problem, but it seems clear
14 that with a \$300 million operating
15 deficit, the School Reform Commission and
16 the School District can't focus properly
17 on what needs to happen to make every
18 school better with that hanging over its
19 head. So this is one step of many steps
20 that are going to be required.

21 I think Dr. Hite has put an
22 action plan out that has 51 action items
23 included in it. That's going to take
24 years to accomplish all of those. This
25 is one step that has to be part of a mix,

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2 and it may be that individual
3 recommendations on the list are not the
4 best plan for that particular
5 neighborhood, that particular set of
6 circumstances, but if we were to punt the
7 fiscal question down the road, we're
8 not -- that's just delaying the day when
9 we finally can take the steps that are
10 needed to create the kind of schools that
11 you're talking about.

12 COUNCILMAN OH: Well, I want to
13 be clear. I'm not looking to punt the
14 fiscal responsibility down the road. I
15 think the fiscal responsibility clearly
16 lays with the entity in charge. And I
17 know it's tough. I mean, I like the
18 governors that we've had, from -- but
19 we've had governors, we've had SRCs.
20 This SRC is a fantastic SRC, Pedro Ramos,
21 the great job that he does, but one thing
22 is that everybody signed on knowing the
23 problem, and one of the issues is when
24 you sign on, you take full responsibility
25 for coming up with the best possible

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2 plan, all of us.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILMAN OH: So I think the

5 issue is this the best possible plan.

6 And it may be that the best possible plan

7 calls upon the SRC and the State of

8 Pennsylvania, the Commonwealth and the

9 Governor's Office to put that money in

10 there. It may put more pressure on us in

11 City Council, but I think that this plan

12 is not the best possible plan that is out

13 there.

14 MR. GLEASON: I would just

15 echo -- I think we can all agree in this

16 room that Philadelphia's public schools

17 are underfunded. Not just the ones on

18 the closing list, but all of them. So

19 more money is needed. But even if more

20 money were available, the best use of it,

21 in my view, would not be to save

22 buildings that are underutilized that

23 families are not attending. The best --

24 we have to change the focus of the system

25 to investing the money in the students,

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2 not in the facilities.

3 COUNCILMAN OH: I agree and
4 have to point out again that nobody is
5 talking about keeping these buildings
6 open for no reason at all. They got to
7 close. Some of them got to close. The
8 issue is closing them with the purpose of
9 improving education as opposed to closing
10 them and then hoping for better
11 education.

12 MR. GLEASON: Wholeheartedly
13 agree.

14 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you.

17 Mr. Mondesire?

18 MR. MONDESIRE: I just want to
19 add one last word to you, Councilwoman
20 Jannie Blackwell. Your leadership is so
21 critical on this very important issue.
22 You've been steadfast for more than a
23 quarter of a century as an education
24 advocate.

25 We don't want to have to drag

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2 the School District or the SRC through
3 the courts. We don't want to have to
4 start civil disobedience en mass,
5 demonstrations down at 440 North Broad,
6 but if you don't find the political will
7 or the find money to solve this problem,
8 you leave us no choice. We cannot sit by
9 and watch this plan go into effect.

10 (Applause.)

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
12 you very much. Thank you very much. We
13 appreciate your commitment and understand
14 how important this is. Thank you both.
15 Thank you very much.

16 Reverend Johnson, Bright Hope
17 Baptist Church, and Reverend Cedric
18 Jones, Pastor Cedric Jones, Chair of the
19 Black Clergy of Philadelphia and
20 Vicinity, Education/Director of their
21 committee. Then we'll ask -- we're going
22 to have Panels 2 and 3 come up together,
23 PCAPS, Jerry Jordan, and after that,
24 we're going to ask you all to come
25 forward.

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2 (Witnesses approached witness
3 table.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you very much for your patience.

6 REVEREND JOHNSON: Thank you,
7 Councilwoman Blackwell and to all the
8 City Council members, to the
9 Superintendent, as well as to the Chair
10 of the SRC, Mr. Ramos. I appreciate this
11 opportunity to come before the City
12 Council to share with you my testimony.

13 My name is Reverend Kevin R.
14 Johnson and I serve as Pastor of Bright
15 Hope baptist Church in North Philadelphia
16 and also as President of the Bridge of
17 Hope Community Development Corporation.
18 Today I come before you to offer my
19 support for the one-year moratorium and
20 to halt --

21 (Applause.)

22 REVEREND JOHNSON: -- the
23 School District of Philadelphia's
24 proposal to close 37 schools. I come to
25 you not just as a community leader, but

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2 also come to you as a resident. And I
3 must stress that, a resident of the great
4 City of Philadelphia, as a taxpayer, and
5 as a proud father of three beautiful
6 children who are in Philadelphia's public
7 schools.

8 My passion around public
9 education is not political, but personal.
10 My wife and I, like other parents who
11 choose to -- chose to enroll their
12 children in the School District of
13 Philadelphia, are invested in public
14 education, not just for our children but
15 for all children, especially 17,000
16 children who will be impacted by the 37
17 schools proposed to be closed.

18 (Applause.)

19 REVEREND JOHNSON: As I stated
20 in an article, fixing the public
21 educational school system in Philadelphia
22 is like building a house in a storm. It
23 can be done, but it's hard.

24 Over the past several years,
25 there has been a plethora of public

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2 education plans written to provide a
3 roadmap of success for our children.
4 These plans range from David Hornbeck's
5 Children Achieving Initiative in 1994, to
6 the Philadelphia School District
7 Improvement Plan 2000, to Paul Vallas's
8 Diverse Provider Model 2002, to Arlene
9 Ackerman's Imagine 2014, to the
10 Philadelphia Great Schools Compact 2011,
11 to the Boston Consulting Group's
12 Transforming Philadelphia Public Schools
13 2012.

14 It shouldn't be so complicated,
15 but it is. Whoever sits at the helm of
16 the School District of Philadelphia has
17 to be prepared to take the long view,
18 riffle through the debris, and get all
19 the stakeholders to the table to tackle a
20 number of the urgent questions that
21 demand our full attention.

22 Amidst this gusty political and
23 economic winds, our new superintendent,
24 who I have a great deal of respect for,
25 Dr. Hite, recently has issued his own

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2 plan entitled Action Plan V1.0. Given
3 the media publicity around this plan, I
4 expect that this plan to be holistic and
5 to achieve what the other plans were not
6 able to do, to provide an inspirational
7 vision and a plan of action that is
8 student centered -- and I must stress
9 that, student centered -- and a plan that
10 would help educators, administrators,
11 students, parents, politicians, and also
12 supported by taxpayers. However, it
13 appears to be missing one critical
14 element, and I think that you have talked
15 about that, Mr. Oh, and, that is, it does
16 not express the heart for our children.
17 Where is the heart, when 37 schools are
18 slated to be closed in one year,
19 impacting more than 17,000 children and
20 their families? Where is the heart when
21 17,000 children who will be displaced and
22 will have to travel over dangerous roads?
23 Where is the heart for children who live
24 in North Philadelphia, most of them in
25 black and brown communities? And why

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2 aren't there similar closings taking
3 place in the Northeast? And beyond all
4 of this --

5 (Applause.)

6 REVEREND JOHNSON: -- today the
7 real question is, where is the vision?
8 Instead of providing the vision, the
9 District has sought to attack community
10 leaders, as it did today, in the
11 Philadelphia Tribune, trying to place the
12 burden on the community to develop an
13 alternative plan for the District.
14 However, why should the community and why
15 should leaders be the ones with the
16 responsibility of developing a vision?
17 Isn't that the District's plan to do so?

18 Moreover, closings buildings
19 will not save nearly as much as the
20 District has proposed. The District has
21 said that its annual budget deficit is
22 \$250 million a year and that it needs to
23 save \$28 million a year. Now, maybe it's
24 just me, but when I subtract \$28 million
25 from \$250 million, I'm still left with a

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2 deficit of \$222 million.

3 (Applause.)

4 REVEREND JOHNSON: Beloved,

5 it's like Bill Clinton, it's the

6 arithmetic, baby. It's the arithmetic.

7 Over five years, that still is

8 a budget deficit of \$1.1 billion. You

9 don't have to have a doctor degree to do

10 the math. You just need a pencil and a

11 piece of paper.

12 So, beloved, we are here today

13 to press you as City Council, to press

14 the Mayor, to even press the Governor

15 that it's time for us to be concerned

16 about our children. Why do our children

17 and their families have to suffer? Why

18 do our children have to pay the price

19 because of the District's poor fiscal

20 management? Why should children have to

21 walk blocks in order just to get to

22 school?

23 We are here today because I'm

24 reminded of another great John by the

25 name of Martin Luther King, Jr., who said

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2 that education which stops with
3 efficiency may prove to be the greatest
4 menace to society.

5 We need you, City Council. We
6 need the Mayor, Mayor Michael Nutter, to
7 show leadership. We need the Governor to
8 do what's right for our children. I'm
9 asking you to issue and to put pressure
10 on, and even if you have to withhold some
11 money from the District, it's time for
12 this moratorium so that we can make sure
13 that the right things happen for our
14 children.

15 (Applause.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you, Pastor Johnson. We appreciate being
18 at your church for the Civil Rights, the
19 Office of Civil Rights, all of that
20 action that you've been supporting from
21 the beginning. Thank you.

22 Pastor Jones.

23 REVEREND JONES: Good
24 afternoon, Councilwoman Blackwell. I
25 stand here with my colleague in ministry

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2 and I also stand representing Black
3 Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity. And
4 so I want to share this and add to this
5 chorus that says, not like this. Not
6 like this.

7 So let me begin with the sense
8 of I'm the Pastor of the Mount Zion
9 Baptist Church in Southwest Philadelphia
10 at 50th and Woodland Avenue. We've been
11 on that same block now for 91 years.
12 There have only been four pastors there.
13 So we will be here when the next
14 generation comes, and we have been there
15 and supported all along that journey.

16 I stand here also as a pastor
17 and also as one part of the religious
18 leadership and faith communities. And in
19 a very real way, we stand really in
20 concert with all of those who genuinely
21 care about children and students, for we
22 are the ones who were there depending on
23 your religious tradition and your
24 theology. We are there when the babies
25 are born to bless them, to dedicate them,

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2 to christian them, even to circumcise
3 them in some traditions. And so we are
4 there when they are born. We are there
5 when they go off to school. We are there
6 when their hormones are raging in the
7 teenage years. We are there when they
8 graduate from high school. We are there
9 when over 40 percent of them in the
10 Philadelphia School District don't
11 graduate from high school. We are there.

12 And so our point is really in
13 concert with those educators like
14 Dr. Hite who want to put the children
15 first. However, we believe, though, that
16 every action, including looking at school
17 closings, has to have the student and
18 educational outcomes at the top of the
19 list. And we are concerned, when we say
20 not like this, that this particular
21 process as it has unfolded has some
22 serious shortcomings in it. Our concerns
23 are that the process itself has not been
24 as transparent as it could be and needs
25 to be. We are concerned that it hasn't

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2 had the level of sufficient community
3 engagement over time as it should be.
4 We're concerned about the fact that the
5 pacing and timing of this seems
6 altogether too hurried, leaving the
7 impression that somehow the decision has
8 been made and this is much adieu about
9 something that's already been decided and
10 we're just waiting to walk through the
11 process.

12 And so I say, and all the Black
13 Clergy says, not like this. There is a
14 way in which we ought to do things. We
15 understand, as has been the case
16 throughout time, that education is the
17 passport to mobility. I stand as a
18 personal witness that that has been the
19 case in my own family. But let me offer
20 to you this in the way that Dr. King once
21 said, and it will be interesting, because
22 these words come from his final book,
23 Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or
24 Community?

25 That question was raised in

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2 1967 when the book was published, and it
3 is still relevant right now. Where Do We
4 Go From Here: Chaos or Community? And I
5 believe that we stand to say not like
6 this.

7 Here are these words that come
8 from Dr. King: Schools have been the
9 historic routes of social mobility, but
10 when others of the underclass, including
11 at that time Negroes, now ask that the
12 schools play the same function for them,
13 many within and outside the school system
14 answered that the schools cannot do the
15 job. They would impose on the family the
16 whole task of preparing and leading
17 youngsters into educational advance. And
18 this reluctance to engage with the great
19 issue of our day the full emancipation
20 and equalities of Negroes and the poor
21 comes at a time when education is more
22 than ever the passport to decent economic
23 positions. Whatever pathology may exist
24 in Negro families and communities are far
25 exceeded by this social pathology in a

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2 system that refuses to accept a
3 responsibility that no one else can bear,
4 and then scapegoats families and
5 communities for failing to do the job.

6 The United States is far from
7 providing each child with as much
8 education as he or she can use. The
9 unrealized capacities of many of our
10 youth are an indictment of our society's
11 lack of concern for justice and its
12 proclivity for wasting human resources.
13 And so with much else in this potentially
14 great society, injustice and waste go
15 together and endanger stability.

16 It is quite significant to
17 simply say this. Why is it at all just
18 when the students of the Philadelphia
19 School District are -- \$7,500 are spent
20 per student there and then you go across
21 the state to Pittsburgh and it's \$3,000
22 higher. You don't even have to go across
23 the state. You can go across City Line
24 Avenue. You can go across Cheltenham
25 Avenue, and those numbers would be

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2 significantly higher.

3 And so I say to all of us, not
4 like this. This process for school
5 closings has not had the process that
6 would be transparent and accountable. We
7 stand with all of those who are concerned
8 about students, but not like this.

9 And I end with it this way:
10 Black Clergy of Philadelphia was founded
11 more than 30 years ago because we are the
12 ones who stood when babies are born to be
13 blessed, dedicated, circumcised, and
14 christian. So at that time, Black Clergy
15 came together because there was a School
16 District strike then. Because we stood
17 in the unique place to be able to say we
18 all must come together and we must come
19 together with the student as the center,
20 that this is a justice issue, and as it
21 relates to school closings, we need to
22 make sure that the process is
23 transparent, that there is
24 accountability, and that the analysis of
25 the entire thing includes some sense of

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2 community trauma. We don't believe that
3 that has been fully accounted for,
4 because the cost that the School District
5 may save may be the one that the criminal
6 justice may have to pay.

7 Not like this.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you very much. We appreciate your
11 patience. We appreciate your coming. We
12 do acknowledge the presence of Sylvia
13 Simms. We're glad to have you in the
14 School Reform Commission, and President
15 Pedro Ramos.

16 Now the next voice -- we're
17 going to break for three minutes for the
18 stenographer. Three. Three. The next
19 voice you will hear will be that of Jerry
20 Jordan. We got PCAPS. Very important
21 testimony coming, and we look forward to
22 it.

23 Three minutes only. Thank you.

24 (Short recess for
25 stenographer.)

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: May we
3 have your attention. We're ready to
4 resume our hearing. Thank you all for
5 your patience. It's such an important
6 hearing and we have such important
7 testimony to hear.

8 Thank you very much. We will
9 join Panels 2 and 3. Philadelphia
10 Coalition Advocating for Public Schools.

11 I left my glasses. You hear me
12 reading slowly.

13 Jerry Jordan, President of
14 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, my
15 good friend; Anne Gemmell; Political
16 Director, Fight for Philly; George
17 Ricchezza, District Leader, SEIU; Gabe
18 Morgan, Vice President, SEIU; Kia Hinton,
19 parent leader, Action United; Mr. Rivera,
20 Executive Director of Student Union; Andi
21 Perez, Executive Director, Youth United
22 for Change; and Kate Shaw, Executive
23 Director, Research for Action.

24 And, my staff, please bring me
25 some glasses.

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2 (Witnesses approached witness
3 table.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you so much. I promise everybody next
6 Education hearing we have Jerry Jordan,
7 PFT, should be first.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes,
10 he will.

11 Thank you very much. We're
12 ready to begin. Thank you.

13 MR. JORDAN: Good afternoon,
14 Councilwoman Blackwell and members of
15 City Council. On behalf of the 15,000
16 teachers and instructional support staff
17 that make up the Philadelphia Federation
18 of Teachers, I'm pleased to have this
19 opportunity to share our thoughts about
20 the future of public education in
21 Philadelphia.

22 The debate on the future of
23 public schools has been intensifying for
24 several months. Much dialogue has taken
25 place right here in these very Chambers.

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2 I have had the privilege of speaking to
3 this body on numerous occasions. For
4 that reason, I want to be as concise as
5 possible as I provide some specific
6 school-related examples of why the School
7 Reform Commission's plan to close schools
8 is the wrong choice economically and
9 academically.

10 The most pressing issue before
11 us today is the fate of the 37
12 neighborhood schools recommended for
13 closure by the SRC. We are on record
14 with our support of a one-year moratorium
15 on school closings. The moratorium to me
16 is about much more than what happens to
17 these 37 school buildings. The
18 moratorium lends itself to the research,
19 discussions, and investigations that need
20 to happen before making such a drastic
21 decision.

22 It is the opinion of the
23 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers that
24 such thoughtful analysis needs to take
25 place prior to the announcement of the

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2 latest round of school closures.

3 The closings of these school
4 buildings raises a number of logistical
5 and safety concerns, including, but not
6 limited to, transportation issues related
7 to longer walks for small children and
8 turf issues that will likely arise when
9 students from certain neighborhoods are
10 suddenly forced to cross neighborhood
11 boundaries to attend their new schools.

12 I am sure you have all heard
13 the in-depth news stories about old but
14 pervasive rivalries that exist between
15 students who live in the neighborhoods
16 that feed Germantown High School and
17 Martin Luther King High School. Parents
18 and students alike are extremely worried
19 about these tensions boiling over into
20 violence when Germantown students are
21 relocated to King.

22 The same thing is true at
23 Robeson High School where students have
24 very plainly indicated that they are
25 afraid to be sent to Sayre. They would

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2 rather go to University City, which is
3 also on the closure list.

4 Are we doing right by our kids
5 when we make their fears into a reality?

6 I have personally walked the
7 long dangerous blocks young children will
8 be expected to travel from McMichael
9 Elementary to Locke and Martha
10 Washington. If it takes an adult over 30
11 minutes, imagine how long it would take a
12 child. With all due respect to the
13 School District's plan to work with
14 transportation and safety officials,
15 these are issues that should have been
16 analyzed before plans are made to close a
17 school, not after.

18 We have reached a sad point
19 where the bottom line is overriding our
20 commitment to giving our students
21 something more than the A-B-C's. A
22 quality education should include a safe,
23 nurturing environment that fosters fond
24 memories for students. Sadly, seniors at
25 Vaux and Strawberry Mansion will once

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2 again be uprooted and deprived of the
3 kind of stability and senior year most of
4 us in this room were able to enjoy.

5 Adding to the argument for a
6 moratorium is the fact that these
7 projected savings will certainly be
8 offset by the realities associated with
9 closing school buildings. For example,
10 at Bok, there is a thriving career and
11 technical program in place. When these
12 students are moved to South Philadelphia
13 High School, it will cost lots of money
14 to replicate the infrastructure of
15 offerings like the culinary arts program,
16 which requires specific equipment and
17 modifications to ventilation systems to
18 make sure the building is up to code.
19 Where will the money come from for these
20 modifications, or will the District
21 simply do away with this invaluable
22 curriculum?

23 Vaux, which was converted a few
24 years ago to a promise academy, is now
25 expected to be converted from a high

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2 school to a K to 8 school. This will
3 require an extensive refitting of the
4 desk and chairs and classrooms as well as
5 changes to the fixtures in the bathrooms,
6 among other changes, changes that will
7 certainly eat into any projected savings.

8 And what about the millions
9 that were spent on making physical
10 improvements to schools? At Robeson, a
11 million dollars was spent on a new
12 heating system. A new annex was just
13 built at Motivation High School. There
14 seems to be no clear plan for these newly
15 appointed -- newly improved buildings.

16 These are just a few of the
17 issues that have been raised at public
18 forums by parents and students who will
19 be directly affected by the school
20 closures. Closing these schools puts the
21 District in a mode to scramble for
22 patchwork fixes to these concerns. A
23 moratorium would give us time to develop
24 real alternatives and solutions.

25 There are other pressing

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2 concerns for our city, like the school
3 employees who will lose their jobs in a
4 city where the last thing we need is more
5 unemployed workers, and the addition of
6 large, vacant, blighted buildings that
7 will be added to the landscape of some of
8 our most under-resourced neighborhoods.

9 And let's not forget the
10 privatization of Philadelphia's
11 District-run early childhood programs.
12 In the face of growing evidence that
13 early childhood education is a critical
14 stage for preparing children for the
15 common core curriculum they will need to
16 know, we have opted to break up a
17 nationally renowned system run by highly
18 qualified educators and turn it over to
19 differing private entities. It is
20 unlikely that these very providers will
21 be able to consistently deliver the
22 quality early education that we have
23 grown accustomed to here in Philadelphia.

24 Despite the School District's
25 claim that they are not wedded to the

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2 Boston Consulting Group's
3 recommendations, they have certainly been
4 in lockstep with the BCG's major goals.
5 One of these goals is to move 40 percent
6 of Philadelphia students into charter
7 schools regardless of whether or not
8 these schools provide a better education.
9 Just look at the situation at Cramp
10 Elementary where a portion of the
11 students will be relocated to Stetson, a
12 charter school. It's no coincidence that
13 the next steps for these Stetson students
14 will be Olney High School, another
15 charter school. All of this is being
16 done in the name of a projected \$28
17 million annual cost savings to the School
18 District, savings that, according to
19 research done on the topic, may never
20 actually be realized.

21 Even if none of the other
22 concerns raised by parents and students
23 can compel us to consider a moratorium,
24 surely the distinct possibility that the
25 cost savings are not real should give us

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2 all pause.

3 The SRC's insistence that the
4 school closings proceed as planned is
5 disturbing, not only for the reasons I
6 gist listed, but also because it reveals
7 a number of troubling philosophies on how
8 we go about improving our education
9 system. We have long been told by the
10 SRC and the School District that these
11 closings are a necessary evil, that there
12 will be some pain, but ultimately it will
13 help us to rightsize the School District.
14 This may sound good, until you consider
15 the fact that the latest round of
16 proposed school closures will not be the
17 District's first time closing schools in
18 an attempt to make the District fiscally
19 sound. This tactic has yet to be proven
20 effective for raising academic
21 achievement or easing the financial
22 crises that we have been dealing with for
23 the past decade.

24 Community engagement is not
25 deciding on a plan of action, then

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2 holding a series of hastily arranged
3 meetings which, while they allow the
4 community to vent and ask questions, are
5 not designed to give the community
6 meaningful input or a chance to shape the
7 vision for their own schools. It's
8 little wonder that the cry for a
9 moratorium on these school closings is
10 growing louder. More and more
11 organizations have signed on in support
12 of a moratorium, including most of the
13 members of City Council. And thank you
14 for that.

15 Unfortunately, the moratorium
16 has been taken by some to mean that we
17 can never close a school again. That is
18 not the case. Rather than being seen as
19 an obstacle to making our school system
20 better, the moratorium is an opportunity
21 to bring educators, administrators,
22 parents, students, and communities
23 together to make sure that we have a plan
24 that truly creates better schools.

25 Operating in austerity mode has

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2 not gotten us to where we need to be.

3 After years of budget cuts, we can no
4 longer accept the notion that we can cut,
5 lay off, and close our way to better
6 schools.

7 We should be concerned that
8 there has been little or no discussion of
9 precisely how these supposed cost savings
10 will be used to restore the academic,
11 extracurricular, and social programs and
12 services that our schools have had to
13 shed over the years. It would appear
14 that saving money has been the only goal
15 of this endeavor. The SRC's five-year
16 plan and the Superintendent's action plan
17 for our schools assumes no additional
18 revenues for Philadelphia schools, which
19 begs the question, how do we intend to
20 reinvest in our schools?

21 Adding insult to injury is the
22 fact that in the SRC's five-year plan
23 there is absolutely no additional money
24 slated for traditional public schools and
25 the instructional programs, while over

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2 \$500 million has been dedicated to
3 charter schools. Over \$800 million will
4 be devoted to charter schools in year
5 five of the plan. Being told there's no
6 money for public schools, even as we
7 spend hundreds of millions on charters
8 that have yet to prove they're a better
9 options for students, is upsetting
10 enough, but the real insult is the
11 acceptance of this dynamic. We should
12 all be appalled at the apparent comfort
13 many officials have with the notion that
14 we should accept this as reality, that
15 there is nothing we can do but close
16 schools, shed educators and essential
17 personnel, eliminate academic programs
18 and services, and continue to ask our
19 students to do more with less than their
20 peers in our neighboring districts.

21 In fact, this reality has been
22 created and implemented by Harrisburg,
23 which has done nothing but work to starve
24 traditional public schools in favor of
25 voucher schemes and charter school

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2 expansion --

3 (Applause.)

4 MR. JORDAN: -- without any
5 evidence that this is a better education
6 solution.

7 From the formation of the SRC
8 to the draconian public education budget,
9 we have seen our communities stripped of
10 any meaningful democratic input into the
11 future of our schools. It's time for a
12 new approach, one that includes School
13 District, education unions,
14 administrators, elected officials, and
15 the business community working together
16 to come up with ideas that spark
17 investment in our schools. The PFT is
18 also ready to stand with any group with
19 the political will to demand that
20 Harrisburg restore adequate funding
21 levels to our schools across the state.

22 (Applause.)

23 MR. JORDAN: Thank you,
24 Councilwoman Blackwell and members of
25 City Council, for bringing us together

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2 today.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you very much. Always excellent.

5 Any questions? Councilman
6 Johnson, then Councilman Oh.

7 COUNCILMAN JOHNSON: Thank you,
8 Madam Chair. I just wanted to just
9 briefly make a statement regarding
10 President Jordan's testimony. A critical
11 part that he just talked about that I
12 hope that everyone still continue to
13 rally behind is to also take in
14 consideration the \$1 billion cut to
15 education. And although it's separate
16 but at the same time it's a part of this
17 overall conversation that we're having,
18 and that's something that's critical that
19 need to be taken in account as we move
20 forward in this process, totally separate
21 from the plan, but making sure that those
22 who represent us on the state level
23 advocate just as aggressively, have these
24 type of forums that we're having right
25 now and addressing the issue head on,

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2 because at the end of the day, it's the
3 children who are being impacted. Most of
4 us have jobs. Most of us are going to
5 come and go, but at the end of the day,
6 it's the children and the parents who are
7 going to be impacted significantly
8 regarding this discussion that we're
9 having.

10 So I just wanted to make sure I
11 acknowledge that component of your
12 testimony, because I want to make sure as
13 we go through this process and beyond, we
14 hold those accountable, who significantly
15 put us in the predicament that we're in
16 and who also play a part in this process.

17 So thank you.

18 MR. JORDAN: Thank you,
19 Councilman Johnson, and I couldn't agree
20 with you more. The proposed budget that
21 is coming from -- that the Governor
22 proposed last week does not make up for
23 the billion dollar cut to education. So
24 we've been paying for that. And even
25 with the proposal to sell the state

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2 stores, that that would be a one-time
3 hit, and it's going to come in as a Block
4 Grant for a billion dollars, and that's
5 not going to make up -- that's not going
6 to be new money. It would only -- if
7 anything, bring us back to where we were
8 for a short period of time, because it is
9 not money that will come to us each year.

10 So we are behind, and as I
11 said, the Federation and many of the
12 community groups in this city are
13 prepared to go to Harrisburg and to lobby
14 in Harrisburg for more money.

15 (Applause.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you very much.

18 Councilman Oh.

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

21 Thank you very much for being
22 here and for your testimony. I do have
23 some questions. I'll start by saying
24 this, that when I got elected and sworn
25 in last year, despite the fact that I was

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2 not here before, I instantly became
3 responsible and accountable for what's
4 happening here today. And in that light,
5 my question to you as President of the
6 PFT is that should a moratorium be
7 granted or obtained, what will the PFT do
8 to work with the School District given
9 its current financial situation and
10 demands placed upon it, as well as the
11 fact that many parents have lost
12 confidence in many public schools and are
13 going to charter schools?

14 MR. JORDAN: We have always
15 been willing to work with the School
16 District to make our schools better. One
17 of the issues that has been discussed
18 even this morning is the issue of school
19 safety, and it's intertwined with the
20 budget. The cuts to non-instructional
21 support personnel in our buildings over
22 the last few years have gone a long ways
23 to making schools less safe. There are
24 not the adults available to children
25 where if an incident is about to occur in

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2 a school, that would be able to be there
3 to talk to the children about things that
4 are happening in the communities. Many
5 of the community people who worked in our
6 schools are no longer there. And so I
7 believe that safety is one of the first
8 things that we really have to look at to
9 make sure that schools are operating well
10 and that kids are safe and parents feel
11 and know that their kids are safe in the
12 schools.

13 And then, secondly, in order to
14 enhance the instructional delivery in a
15 school, there are certain things that are
16 needed. You need to have ongoing
17 professional development in order to
18 support the instructional program. Well,
19 the School District can't do that without
20 the funds to provide those services. And
21 there are none of us -- my members want
22 the schools to work. My members are
23 spending -- recently I got something
24 where one teacher talked about spending
25 \$2,000 out of her pocket in order to

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2 provide basic materials for the children
3 in her classrooms because of the limited
4 resources that schools have in their
5 budgets for basics such as paper.

6 And so our members are doing
7 all that they can, but it's not going to
8 be enough to unilaterally do it within
9 the fiscal constraints that the District
10 has now.

11 COUNCILMAN OH: Well, could I
12 ask you then, a teacher who is that
13 committed, who is a great teacher, spends
14 her own money, \$2,000, or his own money,
15 that's a wonderful teacher, be they an
16 experienced teacher of older years or a
17 younger teacher. If the School District
18 is trying to obtain from the PFT the
19 ability to have within it, whether
20 through administrators or principals, an
21 ability to promote those more meritorious
22 teachers and to not promote teachers that
23 are not as productive or energetic, which
24 I know is an issue that occurs, what is
25 the thoughts on the PFT concerning moving

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2 our city forward? In other words, we're
3 challenged to keep the status quo. What
4 are the changes that you see from the
5 PFT's point of view that is geared
6 towards better educational outcomes in
7 the classroom?

8 MR. JORDAN: Well, the thing
9 that is going to lead to better outcomes
10 in the classroom is to make sure that we
11 have the very best and well-trained
12 teachers in the classroom providing
13 instruction. I mean, it's just that
14 simple. What happens in that classroom
15 between the teacher and the children is
16 what really makes a difference and
17 whether that teacher has the necessary
18 materials as well as the skills to
19 provide that amount of instruction.

20 You earlier talked about the
21 ability to identify essentially an
22 effective teacher, and we have to really
23 figure out what that looks like, because
24 what does that mean to identify a teacher
25 as effective versus less effective.

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2 COUNCILMAN OH: I agree, and I
3 will end by saying that I would like to
4 see in my personal world, which doesn't
5 amount to much, that that is worked on,
6 because we do have to hold schools
7 accountable, we have to hold
8 administrators accountable, we have to
9 hold City Council people accountable.
10 There has to be some type of standard
11 that we could all agree on on
12 accountability so that people can
13 understand what our jobs are, what we're
14 supposed to do, and whether or not we've
15 achieved that. And that should be for
16 everybody.

17 Thank you.

18 MR. JORDAN: I agree, but there
19 has to be a shared accountability.

20 COUNCILMAN OH: Yes.

21 MR. JORDAN: And that includes
22 Harrisburg.

23 COUNCILMAN OH: Yes,
24 absolutely. I think I've said that, and
25 I agree with you. Thank you.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you very much.

4 Any other questions?

5 (No response.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you very much, Mr. President.

8 MR. JORDAN: Thank you.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Anne
10 Gemmell, Political Director, Fight for
11 Philly; George Ricchezza, you're up next.

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. ALMIRON: We're going to
14 actually go first. Sorry about that.

15 MS. SMITH: We're here to
16 represent PCAPS and then we're
17 introducing the other speakers.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Fine.

19 MS. SMITH: So thank you,
20 Councilmembers of the Education
21 Committee, for having this meeting today
22 and for passing the recent resolution
23 asking for a moratorium on school
24 closings, a call that PCAPS and more than
25 50 organizations, many of them have been

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2 present here today, have joined you in
3 endorsing.

4 My name is Quanisha Smith. I
5 am the Leadership and Community
6 Development Director for Action United,
7 and I'm here today to speak on behalf of
8 PCAPS, the Philadelphia Coalition
9 Advocating for Public Schools. First I
10 will give just a brief overview of PCAPS
11 and then explain one of our major
12 systemic alternative solutions to school
13 closures that PCAPS has recommended in
14 our community plan.

15 So PCAPS was founded by four
16 member organizations - Action United, the
17 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, the
18 Philadelphia Student Union, and Youth
19 United for Change - after many of us
20 worked together to oppose the
21 implementation of the Boston Consulting
22 Group's recommendations. We decided to
23 do what the SRC, the School District, and
24 the BCG organizations did not do, which
25 was embark on an effort to get feedback

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2 from the major stakeholders of public
3 education, that being students, parents,
4 teachers, student employees, and members
5 of the community.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. SMITH: We were able to
8 gather extensive input through developing
9 and administering a survey to about 1,600
10 parents, teachers, students, and
11 community members. We had a full-day
12 conference and two town hall meetings in
13 the fall, which cumulatively had been 750
14 participants, and we held 26 listening
15 sessions of approximately 750 students
16 from traditional public schools, charter
17 schools, and accelerated schools. We
18 took their feedback and combined it with
19 strategies proven successful in districts
20 similar to Philadelphia and we publicized
21 our research last December in a ten-point
22 plan called The Philadelphia Community
23 Education Plan: Excellent Schools for
24 All Children, which we hand-delivered to
25 Council at that time.

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2 PCAPS has now grown to 17
3 groups, a collaboration of community,
4 labor, and faith organizations. This is
5 actually a historic coalition that's
6 formed. And through our groups, we
7 continue to grow. We have been
8 consistent in emphasizing a very simple
9 idea, that the District needs to
10 prioritize best practices in education.

11 One of our major
12 recommendations is for the District to
13 adopt a holistic approach to meeting
14 student needs and transform local schools
15 into community hubs that exist as a
16 partnership between school and community
17 resources. The community school strategy
18 integrates academic, health and social
19 services, youth and community
20 development, and civic engagement to
21 improve learning and to develop stronger
22 families and healthier communities. This
23 model has been proven successful in a
24 district similar to Philadelphia. In
25 Cincinnati, every school has become a

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2 Community Learning Center that provides
3 year-round programming during and beyond
4 the school day, after school and summer
5 enrichment, community health services,
6 adult education, and mentoring and
7 tutoring, and unique partnerships are
8 customized to each site.

9 Since the program began in
10 2000, high school graduation rates there
11 climbed from 51 percent to 83 percent.
12 Achievement gaps have narrowed
13 considerably. And Cincinnati has become
14 the highest performing urban district in
15 Ohio.

16 In fact, in Philadelphia there
17 are already successful examples of
18 community wrap-around schools. For
19 example, the Penn Alexander School and
20 the Netter Center at Penn maintains
21 numerous collaborations with traditional
22 public schools in the City. And for more
23 information about community schools, we
24 invited Council already to come to our
25 learning session on community schools

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2 this Friday, February 15th.

3 We have been advocating for
4 this moratorium on school closures, not
5 only to pursue this alternative of
6 community schools, but also to understand
7 how these closures will affect the local
8 community. Many have testified to that
9 today. And two weeks ago, we released on
10 Action United's Title VI complaint, which
11 the Office of Civil Rights is currently
12 investigating the School District. The
13 complaint alleges that the past closures
14 will continue to have a disparate impact
15 on African American, Latino, poor
16 students, and students with disabilities.
17 PCAPS believes based on publicly
18 available data that this year's proposed
19 37 closures will follow a similarly
20 unfortunate pattern and we have to do
21 more analysis to fully understand how
22 these new closures will impact already
23 struggling communities but, most
24 importantly, the students and the
25 children in those areas.

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2 Many people actually talked
3 about examples this week where Arica
4 Simms walked the distance her two school
5 children, James and Abdul, would have to
6 walk if their school closed in North
7 Philadelphia. It was a little over a
8 mile to East Washington Rhodes High
9 School. The family lives near Judson and
10 West Lehigh, and the kids currently
11 attend Peirce Elementary School only two
12 blocks away. Simms, Councilman Curtis
13 Jones, and Action United walked the
14 distance together, which took about 20
15 minutes. Arica Simms says it's not just
16 the length of time she's worried about,
17 it's also the safety of her kids. Quote,
18 "They are two little boys. They're not
19 big boys. And they're walking from one
20 part of North Philly to another by
21 themselves," end quote. Councilman
22 Curtis Jones told the press that, quote,
23 "The streets aren't safe. We saw drug
24 paraphernalia on the ground," end quote.

25 So the Philadelphia Coalition

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2 Advocating for Public Schools is pushing
3 for a moratorium on the closures until a
4 review of these safety, transportation,
5 cost and, most importantly, community
6 impact issues as well as alternatives
7 like community schools can be examined.

8 Now my colleague Erika will
9 speak on some of the financial issues
10 around these closures.

11 (Applause.)

12 MS. ALMIRON: Thank you so much
13 for having us here today. My name is
14 Erika Almiron and I'm the Executive
15 Director of Juntos. Juntos is the Latino
16 community-led organization, Latino
17 immigrant community-led organization in
18 Philadelphia, and our community works to
19 fight for our rights, our human rights,
20 around issues of education, immigration,
21 worker rights, et cetera. And we've been
22 doing this work around fighting for
23 educational rights for almost ten years.
24 Mostly it's been parents and youth alike,
25 and it's been around issues of access to

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2 a quality education and closing the
3 achievement gap for our youth to ensuring
4 access to college. A lot of our young
5 people are very concerned about their
6 ability to access college in the coming
7 future.

8 Our goal in this work has
9 always been to ensure that the schools
10 our communities have access to are
11 schools that serve the educational need
12 of our parents and our youth regardless
13 of language and to ensure effective
14 parent engagement, to ensure college
15 access for our young people, and to
16 increase accountability, which I've heard
17 echoed all day today here. And Juntos is
18 one of the 17 member organizations of
19 PCAPS.

20 And I'm testifying today
21 because we in Juntos see the importance
22 of having neighborhood schools that are
23 both fully funded and community based.
24 Based on what Quanisha says, we are very
25 interested also in thinking much further

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2 about what a community school and
3 different community schools in
4 Philadelphia could look like, and that
5 these schools best serve the needs of not
6 just Philadelphia's Latino immigrant
7 communities, but for all of our
8 communities.

9 Over the last several years,
10 our parents have had to fight back
11 against the accelerated budget cuts that
12 have been very harmful in reducing
13 language supports. Just last year our
14 families came here and testified, and
15 they were testifying on account that
16 there were more cuts coming to ELL
17 programming in schools, more cuts coming
18 down to support staff of our young people
19 and for our parents for translation
20 services.

21 So every year these cuts get
22 given into our community more and more,
23 and so then more and more of our young
24 people become less engaged in school.
25 They fall victim to a system that has

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2 failed to support their educational needs
3 and get fed into a system that causes a
4 dropout. So we have -- Latino immigrant
5 communities have a high dropout rate, and
6 so our concern is that when you
7 consolidate schools the way that we're
8 doing now, that that would just increase
9 the dropout rate for our communities.

10 In Juntos many of our parents
11 come to our office trying to figure out
12 what they can do to prevent that from
13 happening, and they start asking a lot
14 about options. We hear a lot about how
15 there are options for a lot of our
16 communities. And for many years they've
17 heard of charter schools that brag about
18 being options for them to go to their
19 schools to be able to function, but it's
20 far from the truth from their reality. A
21 lot of these charter schools have 20-page
22 applications that are mostly in English,
23 all in English, and if our parents can't
24 speak English or can't figure out how to
25 apply, then they don't apply. And then

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2 if they can apply, that doesn't guarantee
3 that they get in. And then when they do
4 get in, most of them are counseled out.
5 And we have cases of people that come
6 back into our offices and say, they're
7 saying that they don't serve Latino
8 students, they don't serve immigrant
9 students. We also have issues about some
10 of our young people who are not just ELL,
11 but who are special needs also having
12 been counseled out.

13 So then our families come back
14 to square one, and that's why we're here.
15 That's why I'm here and that's why our
16 communities fight, because they have no
17 other option but to fight. So it's our
18 communities that are fighting, along with
19 mostly poor and working-class communities
20 and communities of color in the City.

21 So unfortunately the School
22 District's plan of closing the dozen
23 schools or the dozens of schools,
24 including some with severe -- several
25 with extremely high Latino student

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2 population will not ease the burden that
3 local Latino immigrant families are
4 bearing.

5 So rather than closing schools
6 and displacing thousands of students,
7 PCAPS has presented a comprehensive plan
8 for improving local education. Juntos is
9 proud that PCAPS calls for a student bill
10 of rights, which demands a healthy,
11 non-violent, and supportive school
12 climate for every member of the school
13 community regardless of race, ethnicity,
14 national origin, socioeconomic status,
15 English language proficiency, and
16 immigration status.

17 The Coalition's ten-point
18 community education plan prioritizes
19 proper staffing, including ESOL teachers,
20 English for speakers of another language.
21 And then rather than boil school
22 curricula down to a one-size-fits-all
23 approach, PCAPS wants an engaging lively
24 plan that includes ESOL curriculum and
25 that connects language instruction to

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2 high-quality content instruction. Rather
3 than increasing the emphasis on
4 standardized test scores that put ELL
5 learners at a disadvantage, PCAPS calls
6 for a comprehensive innovative school
7 assessment program that takes into
8 account ESOL students.

9 Instead of closing down
10 schools, we see this as an opportunity
11 for the School District to create the
12 kinds of schools our community needs.
13 Why not create a community school that
14 fits the needs of not just Latino
15 immigrant community, but for all of our
16 communities that have been
17 disenfranchised by this false educational
18 option system? You have an opportunity
19 here to be at the vanguard, to choose
20 something different. We in PCAPS are
21 pursuing a vision of neighborhood public
22 schools that provide Philadelphia
23 families, including Latino and immigrant
24 ones, with the resources and stability to
25 succeed at school and create better, more

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2 productive lives and ones that give them
3 real options to college.

4 We in Juntos and in PCAPS
5 understand that the economic recession in
6 state funding cuts have burdened the
7 School District of Philadelphia. We also
8 understand that our comprehensive
9 community education plan is not revenue
10 neutral.

11 Most importantly, however, we
12 believe that we cannot in good conscience
13 continue asking families, teachers, and
14 faculty to do even more with even less.

15 So at PCAPS, we have outlined
16 on Page 15 of our plan that there is
17 several potential revenue sources that
18 could be dedicated towards improving
19 public school. At its basic, these
20 include restoring state funds cut by
21 Governor Corbett, returning to the fairer
22 school funding formula enacted under
23 Governor Rendell in 2008, halting charter
24 expansions and closing poor performing
25 charters, and reallocating funding from

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2 lower priority projects, like the
3 expansion of prisons and detention
4 centers that deport our families.

5 I want to thank you for your
6 consideration of my testimony and your
7 dedication to improving local schools for
8 students, families, teachers, and faculty
9 of all backgrounds. Juntos, PCAPS, and
10 our students, parents, and teacher
11 members look forward to continuing this
12 important discussion moving forward.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you very much.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you very much. We have no questions. We
19 thank you.

20 MS. GEMMELL: Hi, Madam Chair.
21 How are you?

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Just
23 fine. How are you?

24 MS. GEMMELL: Here we are
25 again. My name is Anne Gemmell,

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2 Political Director at Fight for Philly,
3 and I have a fight for Philly activist
4 that's going to submit testimony.

5 MS. CHRISTOPHER: Good morning,
6 everyone. My name is --

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Fine.
8 Bring your mic closer to you, please.

9 MS. CHRISTOPHER: Can you hear
10 me now?

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

12 MS. CHRISTOPHER: Good morning.
13 My name is Stalana Christopher. I am a
14 member of Fight for Philly.

15 We're all here today discussing
16 whether to close the schools or not to
17 close the schools, debating on that. Why
18 not close the schools of Philadelphia?
19 You'll only be failing the children of
20 Philadelphia, depriving the leaders of
21 tomorrow, and condoning to the huge
22 dropout numbers, causing Alex and
23 Chantel's classes will be overly crowded,
24 and the pressures of learning will be
25 maximized. So they'll give up and drop

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2 out, because they have problems
3 concentrating, observing lessons in
4 larger classes. Not everyone can cope
5 under pressure. Some teachers can't deal
6 with 25 eighth graders, let alone 36 to
7 42 of them. Can you imagine those high
8 numbers in kindergarten classes?

9 Going over the student and
10 teacher ratio will cause teachers to
11 become overwhelmed and frustrated. They
12 are already making threats to strike each
13 school year. I guess the mood and
14 actions of teachers don't have strong
15 impact on the ability to properly teach,
16 which I guess doesn't impact our
17 children's education.

18 Why not close these schools?
19 Due to the failed education budget -- by
20 the way, thank you, Governor Corbett --
21 school workers will increase the lines in
22 unemployment and welfare offices, if
23 those resources still even exist. What
24 about the free Head Start programs within
25 these closing schools where parents who

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2 don't qualify for child care assistance
3 can enroll their children in early
4 childhood intervention?

5 Those of you in charge of
6 making these decisions, you have to see a
7 bigger picture and understand the
8 destructions that these school closings
9 will cause our city. We're already known
10 as Killadelphia and Philthadelphia.
11 Let's save Philadelphia from the threat
12 of being known as the illiterate city.

13 Philadelphia was once known as
14 the City of Brotherly Love. Let's prove
15 to our children of Philadelphia this city
16 still loves and it still cares. Find
17 another option. Keep our schools open.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you. Thank you.

21 MS. GEMMELL: Madam Chair,
22 thank you so much for having this
23 Council. This is leadership, giving the
24 community the opportunity to talk about
25 something that's going to impact our

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2 community so much.

3 I think it's very well
4 established that the school closings plan
5 is ill-conceived and that it needs some
6 time for further analysis. But just to
7 recap, school closings are going to hurt
8 our communities, our families, our kids,
9 our property values, our communities so
10 much more. But another thing that hasn't
11 been said so much is that it's going to
12 destroy -- the school closings, when the
13 other foot falls, is going to destroy
14 middle-class jobs in this city, replacing
15 them with low-wage, dead-end jobs,
16 hurting the households that rely on
17 public education the most; therefore,
18 hurting the schools that are trying to
19 educate kids whose families and
20 communities are now in more stress than
21 we have had since 2008's economic
22 meltdown.

23 Our School District and many
24 around the state are in a state-created
25 crisis, as many of you have pointed out,

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2 exacerbated by the choices of Governor
3 Corbett, but going back before Governor
4 Corbett even. But since 2010, we have
5 made -- we have all been asked to
6 sacrifice while oil and gas companies and
7 other wealthy companies get financial
8 favors.

9 (Applause.)

10 MS. GEMMELL: And, you know,
11 it's very often said in Philadelphia, Oh,
12 if you think you're going to get anything
13 out of Harrisburg, that's so naive, don't
14 waste your time. The Inquirer op-ed
15 basically said that. But the reality is
16 is that in just a week, two weeks ago,
17 Governor Corbett changed his position and
18 admitted that -- his own staffer admitted
19 that communities are at their pain point.
20 He is finally recognizing that public
21 education is something you cannot mess
22 with, because that's mothers and their
23 children.

24 (Applause.)

25 MS. GEMMELL: So he's finally

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2 admitting that his choices have been
3 devastating and he's finally admitting,
4 changing his tune. First it was, I'm
5 going to pit pensions against school
6 kids, and then it was, I'm going to sell
7 the liquor stores, pitting workers
8 against kids. And he's creating -- he's
9 tying funding to critical things and
10 creating funding for critical things to
11 political games, and he continues to
12 create false choices designed to divide
13 us, divide us and distract us from the
14 billions of dollars in corporate tax
15 giveaways that he has managed to send off
16 into corporate jets around the state.

17 (Applause.)

18 MS. GEMMELL: CEOs are the main
19 beneficiaries.

20 Where is the urgency to address
21 this from our civic leadership, from our
22 Superintendent, from our Mayor? Many of
23 you here in Council have adopted urgency,
24 trying to address delinquent tax issues,
25 trying to reform AVI, trying to come up

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2 with the good neighbors program to ask
3 large non-profits to pay their fair
4 share. So we have seen urgency at
5 Council to do this, but we need urgency
6 at the next level, because Philadelphia
7 is now in the forefront of a national
8 fight, a national ideologically driven
9 effort to close public education and
10 privatize it. Where is America's Mayor?
11 Where is America's Mayor when it comes to
12 public education?

13 (Applause.)

14 MS. GEMMELL: I appreciate
15 Mayor Nutter's efforts on gun control,
16 and that is a national issue and very
17 appropriate for America's Mayor to adopt.
18 But who are we kidding if we think that
19 gun violence isn't tied to public
20 education? That's a problem.

21 (Applause.)

22 MS. GEMMELL: So ideologues at
23 the state and federal level of
24 governments are creating false urgency,
25 and we need to respond with urgency. We

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2 need to respond appropriately. The
3 federal -- look at the federal fiscal
4 debate invented by a Tea Party Congress.
5 They invented urgency, and now we are
6 suffering austerity as a result. They
7 know how to create urgency. When are we
8 going to learn how to create urgency too?

9 (Applause.)

10 MS. GEMMELL: Where is the
11 urgency for funding essential services
12 for all of our families? All of our
13 families rely on schools.

14 You know, we have -- Dr. Hite
15 is in a tough position. I don't envy
16 Dr. Hite. I thank him for taking the
17 job. I think eventually he's going to be
18 a great leader for this School District,
19 but right now, he himself says we're only
20 as strong as our weakest link, and that's
21 our financial situation. Closing schools
22 does not bring in more revenue. It's
23 going to cost money in the long run.

24 So my expectations, just like
25 the School District leaders have

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2 expectations of every school to deliver
3 academics, me as a citizen, as a mother
4 with children in the School District, I
5 also have expectations, and I expect the
6 leaders, elected leaders and educational
7 leaders of our city, to have urgency
8 about revenue, finding, creating,
9 demanding more revenue at the state level
10 and finding ways at the local level.

11 (Applause.)

12 MS. GEMMELL: And I can
13 honestly say that Fight for Philly and me
14 personally, we are doing everything in
15 our power to help create transformative
16 change. We are not for the status quo,
17 as our critics would say. We are for
18 transformative change, but we also
19 recognize that transformative change
20 costs money. And you cannot have a
21 conversation about transformative change
22 or music and art or anything else unless
23 you actually have a political plan, a
24 real plan for revenue.

25 Each of -- and the reason I

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2 have urgency is because when we mess this
3 up, my third grader, she doesn't get to
4 go third grade again. My seventh grader,
5 he doesn't get to do seventh grade again.
6 My sophomore, she doesn't get to do tenth
7 grade again. So we need to get it right.

8 So I have urgency, and I want
9 to see urgency from all of our elected
10 leaders. I want them to seek revenue
11 like the house is on fire.

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. GEMMELL: So I want to
14 thank Council for the efforts afoot.
15 There's a tax fairness effort afoot to
16 collect delinquent taxes. This is great.
17 There's plans about zero-based budgeting.
18 This is great. We should have each
19 school offer zero-based budgeting. What
20 does it cost to run your school the way
21 you would like? Not just the budget that
22 you're surviving with now, but the budget
23 that you would like to see, and what does
24 that cost? Let's do zero-based budgeting
25 for our schools, not looking for what can

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2 we do with for less.

3 Other things, the good
4 neighbors taxation. I had to read in the
5 paper last week about Penn building the
6 Penn Towers, \$1,300 a month for Penn
7 students, luxury, everything else. And
8 my question that was not answered in that
9 news article is, is Penn going to pay
10 property taxes on this amazing luxury
11 dorm?

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. GEMMELL: I don't know. I
14 don't know the answer to that, but I
15 think it's a question that we need to
16 ask.

17 The soda tax, I think it's time
18 for the soda tax to come back, a hundred
19 million dollars in potential revenue. I
20 know that Mayor Nutter does not want to
21 attempt to fail at this again, but, I
22 mean, on a day that pitchers and catchers
23 return to Florida, really would the
24 Phillies give up just because they don't
25 make it to the playoffs? We need to

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2 think about keep trying, because the
3 crisis has been made apparent. The
4 School District, the new Superintendent
5 is saying, We're broke, we're broke,
6 we're broke. It's time to try the soda
7 tax again.

8 AVI property tax reform, we
9 mentioned that before. That's looking
10 positive. We should think about getting
11 more revenue and making sure that AVI is
12 balanced, that we're not asking a higher
13 percentage from homeowners instead of
14 corporations. Corporations sit in
15 keystone opportunity zones, which I know
16 is not this body's doing, it's a state
17 level doing, but we need to ask everybody
18 in this time of crisis to pay their fair
19 share.

20 Unfortunately, last week my
21 grandmother passed away and she was one
22 of the greatest -- she was a member of
23 the, quote, greatest generation. She was
24 a teenager during the Depression, and in
25 that time of crisis when our country was

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2 in crisis and there's no money for
3 anybody, for anything, elected leaders
4 back then, they didn't hesitate to ask
5 Carnegie and Rockefeller and every other
6 one-percenter back then to pony up and
7 pay their fair share. And we need
8 elected leaders to address this question
9 at every level of government. Governor
10 Corbett, clearly he is on the side of
11 free jet rides wherever he wants to go.
12 We know that, but at every level of
13 government, we have to call out everybody
14 to pay their fair share, because this
15 just cannot go on any longer.

16 So, lastly, we have a financial
17 plan, but there also needs to be a
18 political plan. Mayor Nutter and
19 Dr. Hite, they need more urgency in their
20 political approach. Philadelphia going
21 to Harrisburg is not necessarily going to
22 work, but there's lots of other school
23 districts, lots of other school districts
24 with high immigrant places, like Reading,
25 Pittsburgh, Lancaster. These are cities

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2 that have been totally destroyed as well
3 by the elimination of a reliable, fair
4 funding formula that we used to have.
5 How can you create fiscal plans if you
6 don't have reliable sources of funding?

7 So with all these other leaders
8 around the state, we need to reach out to
9 them. We need to have a statewide
10 education summit led by our
11 Superintendent to other superintendents,
12 our Mayor to other mayors. And I hope
13 that this happens. I hope it's happening
14 behind the scenes. I really do.

15 (Applause.)

16 MS. GEMMELL: And the political
17 plan should be created and implemented
18 with the idea that we cannot go on with
19 this Governor any longer. And he is
20 polling not -- it would be one thing like
21 when he got elected, it would be one
22 thing to say, All right, he's not going
23 to be our friend, but he is attacking us
24 and we need to respond. Now he's
25 polling -- the rest of the state gets it

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2 too, and he's polling at 25 percent
3 approval rating. Only two percent of
4 Pennsylvanians think he's doing an
5 excellent job.

6 Where's the urgency and the
7 effort from Philadelphia's educational
8 and executive leaders to demand needed
9 revenue for our families to a Governor
10 that is so deeply unpopular? This
11 shouldn't be a hard thing to do.

12 We have reliable knowledge that
13 the cost of running classrooms and
14 schools is going to rise, and we need
15 reliable revenue to meet the needs of our
16 classrooms, because kids only get one
17 second grade, they only get one third
18 grade. We have to address this, and we
19 need leaders to step up. And,
20 Councilwoman, Madam Chair, I appreciate
21 you for doing your part, and I appreciate
22 all the Councilpeople that are listening
23 and coming here today.

24 (Applause.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

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2 you very much. Thank you for your
3 commitment to these issues. Thank you.

4 SEIU.

5 MR. MORGAN: Hello, Madam
6 Chair. My name is Gabe Morgan. I'm the
7 Vice President of SEIU 32BJ and the
8 Pennsylvania State Director. SEIU is the
9 largest union in North America. We are
10 the largest property service local union
11 in the eastern seaboard. We represent
12 10,000 working men and women in the City
13 of Philadelphia, 2,000 of which are in
14 District 1201 cleaning the schools. We
15 clean and maintain the majority of the
16 properties and protect the majority of
17 the properties in the City of
18 Philadelphia and most of the major cities
19 in the eastern seaboard. And we
20 represent School District members who do
21 the same job that our members do here,
22 take kids to school, make sure the
23 bathrooms are clean, the facilities are
24 taken care of, the boiler works in both
25 major metropolitan areas, like

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2 Philadelphia and New York, and in very
3 small communities, coal communities, and
4 wealthy suburban communities. And I'll
5 tell you what has struck me as being the
6 most ironic is that under Corbett's
7 budget, what we've seen is the districts
8 that we represent that are the wealthiest
9 are seeing the biggest increases and the
10 districts that we represent that are the
11 most distressed are receiving the
12 smallest increases.

13 So I think what you're going to
14 hear from me and District leader George
15 Ricchezza today is simply going to
16 reenforce most of what you already heard.
17 We've tried to put it together in a very
18 simple argument.

19 Before I make that argument,
20 though, I would say this: A lot of our
21 perspective is informed as being a huge
22 stakeholder. We met many of you last
23 summer when after watching nearly a
24 quarter of our members lose their jobs
25 over the course of 20 years -- or not 20

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2 years, since the SRC took over, we went
3 into bargaining when we were told that
4 every member of ours was going to lose
5 their job in July. And I heard people
6 talk about civil disobedience at Broad
7 Street, and that touched me, because
8 George and I just got out of jail last
9 summer because we came to the last City
10 Council hearing when we sat down on Broad
11 Street with thousands of our members and
12 thousands of working people across the
13 State of Pennsylvania protesting the same
14 thing.

15 Our members, the bus drivers,
16 the School District custodian, the
17 maintenance mechanics, the engineers are
18 the second largest financial contributors
19 to the School District of Philadelphia.
20 We contribute directly from our pockets a
21 hundred million dollars a year to the
22 budget to try and keep the schools open.

23 (Applause.)

24 MR. MORGAN: So we're not
25 coming to you with an ill-informed

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2 position. We believe strongly in
3 education reform. Our members clean
4 these schools. Their kids go to these
5 schools, whether they work at the school
6 or in the private sector. We understand
7 this issue very, very well, and we see
8 the difference between what's happening
9 in Philadelphia and what's happening in
10 other districts that maybe voted in a
11 different way than Philadelphia.

12 So our response to the school
13 closure is that this essentially is an
14 arbitrary plan that is not really
15 grounded in any financial reality or
16 solves any long-term education problem in
17 Philadelphia. That's our response to an
18 imposed budget crisis that was imposed by
19 a governor two years ago.

20 George is reminding me that in
21 2008, he remembers when former
22 superintendent was saying we will have a
23 balanced budget that will go through
24 2010.

25 There's been an education

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2 crisis in Philadelphia for a long time,
3 but the budget crisis, the fiscal crisis
4 is something that the state has imposed
5 upon the City. And it's important to
6 remember that while elected officials
7 like the City Council of Philadelphia
8 have routinely stepped up to try and
9 raise revenue and figure out what they
10 could do to try and help, the folks
11 actually in charge of the School
12 District, the state, have driven it to
13 the ground.

14 (Applause.)

15 MR. MORGAN: So it's simple.
16 If you cut a billion dollars and then you
17 acquire the District that lost hundreds
18 of millions to spend more and more every
19 year on charter schools, with very little
20 regulation, then quickly you have a
21 financial crisis. It's not that
22 complicated. If I take a huge chunk of
23 your money and I tell you you have to
24 spend a huge other chunk of your money
25 how I direct, regardless of what you

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2 want, you get a financial crisis, and
3 that's what's happened.

4 Philadelphia's funding
5 education decreased 10 percent, which is
6 sharper than the rest of the state. In
7 fact, Philadelphia ranks number one in
8 the State of Pennsylvania in pupil
9 spending cuts. Philadelphia has cut more
10 money going to an average student than
11 any other district in the State of
12 Pennsylvania.

13 Philadelphia actually spends
14 among the least on any student of any
15 major city in the United States of
16 America. So the idea that a school
17 district that spend this little on
18 students and has its blue-collar workers
19 contributing even so much to try to keep
20 the School District open as its local
21 body raising revenue on its businesses to
22 try and keep the School District open,
23 the idea that this financial crisis that
24 we're experiencing is because people in
25 Philadelphia are not doing the part is

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2 just not true. And I think a lot of the
3 debate that I hear when I'm here in
4 Philadelphia is people debating amongst
5 themselves in a crisis without ever
6 looking at the boss, the one in charge.
7 And one of the things that we found in
8 the union world is that if you want to
9 get money from someone, you have to get
10 it from the boss. I can't turn to my
11 co-worker while I'm cleaning the floor
12 and say, You know what, we deserve a
13 raise, give me \$5. And I can't sit here
14 in Philadelphia and say, Well, we'll
15 spend the least that we can. We have
16 members -- we have thousands of people
17 conceding their benefits, making direct
18 contributions out of their check, our
19 local city body raising tax after tax, I
20 can't keep looking and saying we're the
21 problem.

22 The problem is, the school
23 system is not run by Philadelphia. The
24 problem is, the school system is run by
25 Harrisburg.

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2 (Applause.)

3 MR. MORGAN: Over the coming
4 years, in fact, under this current
5 formula, not only are we seeing the
6 budget being cut, but we're seeing
7 state-imposed requirements that charter
8 spending go up in total, both as a
9 percentage of the budget and in total.
10 Even when the SRC attempts to get some
11 control of the charter school --
12 charters, by the way, don't test better
13 than the public schools, or there's no
14 data showing that charter schools do a
15 better job educating children than public
16 schools in this city or really any other
17 city. There is a mandate from the state
18 to continue to spend more and more money
19 on them.

20 If you look then at sort of
21 this plan, you can say it's either a
22 failure to plan or it's a plan to fail.
23 But what's happened makes perfect sense.
24 We've removed local control to schools
25 from Philadelphia, cut the education

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2 funding to Philadelphia, shifted the
3 state funding burden on to local
4 communities instead of taxing the
5 wealthiest corporations and world's
6 largest natural gas supply, we've shifted
7 then funding to privatize education, and
8 it's no wonder here we are talking about
9 how we have to close 37 schools. And
10 then the solution that's currently being
11 offered to us by the state is to
12 privatize something that brings in half a
13 billion dollars a year in order to get
14 one year's worth of revenue, and then to
15 say, We'll only do that, we'll only agree
16 to give you your one billion a year in
17 revenue if teachers give up their
18 retirement.

19 It's more of the same, and that
20 is why we're in the crisis that we're in.

21 We don't believe that randomly
22 picking 37 schools -- which I think
23 George will walk through why we think
24 it's almost not an effective process,
25 whatever it was, to choose those 37

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2 schools -- randomly picking 37 schools to
3 say, Hey, we're going to save 28 million,
4 we're doing something, is not a solution
5 to the fiscal crisis facing Philadelphia
6 schools.

7 I think we want to actually
8 show what's happened since the state has
9 taken control, and here's what we would
10 say. We believe that the state control
11 of Philadelphia schools has in fact
12 harmed Philadelphia schools. The most
13 central fact is --

14 (Applause.)

15 MR. MORGAN: I can show you
16 these different graphs that show
17 decreased operations of maintenance
18 costs, increased debt service, which I'll
19 come back to, and increased charter
20 school payments and decreased state
21 funding has resulted in a district that
22 was put into receivership because there
23 was a debt of 200 million that now is
24 projected to be a debt of 1.3 billion by
25 2017.

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2 Generally, we would not
3 consider that high performance. We don't
4 think that the District under state
5 control is doing better than it would do
6 under local control, and, in fact, one of
7 the frustrations --

8 (Applause.)

9 MR. MORGAN: -- that I think we
10 share with most folks in Philadelphia is
11 that we'll sit here today because our
12 local elected officials actually care,
13 because you feel accountable to what
14 happens to the folks who live and work
15 and send their children to schools in
16 your communities. But the folks running
17 the school system currently do not feel
18 accountable to the District or the City
19 of Philadelphia. They don't expect to
20 garner votes from Philadelphia in the
21 next election.

22 When issues and things they've
23 imposed on Philadelphia have come up in
24 other places, places that we represent,
25 places like Pittsburgh, rural, completely

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2 destroyed, impoverished school districts
3 in Cole County, no one ever suggests, You
4 know what we should is privatize the
5 school system and hand out charters to
6 people who gave me campaign
7 contributions. That's not the
8 discussion.

9 When we see suburban school
10 districts receiving increases in funding,
11 who spend way more per pupil than anyone
12 does in Philadelphia, and what we're
13 being given as the tough love of 37
14 school closures, without community
15 hearings and no talk about restoring
16 funding unless we give up our pensions
17 and revenue that the state already has,
18 it's tough to describe or imagine how we
19 wouldn't do better if we all just ran it
20 ourselves.

21 And so we don't believe -- I
22 think George is going to walk through why
23 this plan specifically doesn't make any
24 sense, why the schools that have been
25 picked often don't make any sense, many

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2 of the things I think you guys have
3 already heard, but I think echoing what
4 Anne Gemmell said from Fight for Philly.
5 Unless funding is restored, unless you
6 tax the people who have money, if you
7 have the world's largest natural gas
8 supply, you should probably tax it like
9 every other state does.

10 (Applause.)

11 MR. MORGAN: That would be a
12 way to fund education.

13 Close the Delaware Loopholes,
14 that would be a way to fund education.
15 It's not a solution to fund education by
16 taking that money from other workers.
17 I'm saying that as a group of workers who
18 have been willing to reach directly into
19 our pockets and contribute to keeping the
20 system open. So I feel perfectly
21 comfortable in suggesting that the gas
22 industry should feel comfortable to reach
23 into their pockets and contribute to keep
24 schools open in Philadelphia.

25 I think when you really go

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2 through it, when you look at the whole
3 picture, I guess what we just want to get
4 across and urge our elected officials in
5 Philadelphia to keep in mind is that
6 ultimately unless the School District
7 comes back into the control of
8 Philadelphia and unless school funding is
9 submitted back to Philadelphia, unless
10 it's restored, there is no solution to
11 the crisis in Philadelphia. You can't
12 get enough money just from the people of
13 Philadelphia. You need control, and you
14 need Harrisburg to restore funding.

15 (Applause.)

16 MR. RICCHEZZA: Good afternoon,
17 Madam Chair. My name is George
18 Ricchezza. I'm the District Leader of
19 Local 32BJ District 1201. Good to see
20 you outside of the schools.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you. Yes.

23 MR. RICCHEZZA: I want to speak
24 on the school closures, a failure to plan
25 or a plan to fail.

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2 The District's plan is
3 completely arbitrary. It comes at a
4 great cost to students, parents, our
5 communities, and workers. The SRC should
6 stop this plan of shutting down good
7 schools and shutting the door on entire
8 communities. We ask the question, is the
9 SRC failing to plan or planning to fail?

10 We need to invest in our
11 communities. We know this
12 disproportionately affects students of
13 color, primarily African American
14 students, who represent 54 percent of the
15 District but 79 percent of displaced
16 students. We need to invest in our
17 children.

18 In five of the schools set to
19 close, students have scored above
20 percentages in math and reading, and 12
21 schools are proficient in both math and
22 reading the last two years.

23 Transportation: As you know,
24 I've attended quite a few of these
25 meetings in schools, and one of the

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2 biggest issues that our parents have and
3 the community has and every one of you
4 heard today was about safety in schools
5 and the distances that children have to
6 walk. Well, it's not just about
7 distance. It's about rain, snow, cold
8 weather. They're going to be forced to
9 walk major distances to schools, and in
10 some cases the distances, not
11 walking-wise, but they could range from a
12 half a mile to a mile and a quarter, and
13 that's a large distance for a child.

14 The SRC's plan fails to address
15 the transportation and safety for
16 relocated students. Students may be
17 forced to travel long distances.
18 Students from University City High School
19 and Leidy Elementary School will be
20 reassigned from schools presently located
21 in districts that are below average in
22 crime to schools that are in a higher
23 crime rate.

24 Carroll High School, Gompers
25 Elementary, and Overbrook Elementary

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2 schools are being relocated to
3 persistently dangerous schools, according
4 to the 2012-13 data we presently have.
5 Deputy Superintendent kind of
6 acknowledged that not every transition
7 cost has been fully determined. This is
8 not acceptable.

9 And it does cause a real
10 financial impact. You heard Controller
11 Butkovitz here today with some of the
12 problems that we're experiencing. I
13 brought two pictures today of two of the
14 schools that have been shuttered to close
15 for a period of time. One of the schools
16 was a major fire in the City. As you
17 know, the old Edison School, and another
18 school. And I only picked two. There
19 are 16 schools right now that are closed.
20 And the Spring Garden School that's not
21 far from here on North 12th Street has
22 been shuttered for about 15 minutes. It
23 becomes a drug haven. It becomes
24 problems within the neighborhood. It has
25 syringes outside of it. It's got fecal

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2 waste from humans out there, and it's
3 just an issue that we cannot tolerate.
4 Our children need to be able to go to
5 schools in their community that are clean
6 and safe, and I think we all recognize
7 that.

8 The SRC likely overestimated --
9 (Applause.)

10 MR. RICCHEZZA: The SRC likely
11 overestimated savings from school
12 closures, failure to plan for many of the
13 unexpected costs that go with it. You
14 don't just close a school and it's done.
15 When you close a school, that school has
16 got to be -- everything has got to be
17 taken out. It's got to be moved. It's
18 got to be relocated. And not all that
19 equipment can go to the sending school
20 that these children are going to go.
21 There's a major expense that goes along
22 with closing a school and putting it in
23 another school, and I don't think the SRC
24 or the School District has taken that in
25 consideration.

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2 My experience has been, it
3 costs hundreds of thousands of dollars
4 minimum just to move from one location to
5 the other. And it's not acceptable that
6 Dr. Hite comes and says that they're
7 going to save \$28 million. They're not
8 going to save \$28 million. It's going to
9 be much less than that when this whole
10 process takes shape.

11 (Applause.)

12 MR. RICCHEZZA: I would also
13 like to say, we have 16 shuttered
14 buildings right now, and they've been on
15 the market for a while and they don't
16 seem to be able to sell them. I
17 understand six of those buildings are
18 under contract right now, but the price
19 that they're getting for these buildings
20 are well under market value. If we're
21 going to close 37 schools and we have
22 trouble selling 16, what is going to
23 happen in these communities down the
24 road? It's going to shutter communities.
25 People will not be able to live in them.

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2 They will not be able to sell their
3 houses, and it's just unacceptable that
4 we're allowing our children to be moved
5 to different areas when we could find
6 viable solutions to schools here in the
7 City.

8 (Applause.)

9 MR. RICCHEZZA: The SRC has
10 failed to adequately plan for previous
11 school closures. According to the
12 Philadelphia Controller Butkovitz,
13 previous school closures became immediate
14 public safety hazards and put communities
15 at risk. Controller Butkovitz concluded
16 that three schools became location of
17 crime after closing and were sites of
18 robbery, theft, drug, and weapons
19 possessions and assault.

20 So we get to save our schools.
21 We need accountability from the SRC. A
22 one-year moratorium does not seem out of
23 line so we could get a plan together and
24 do what's right for our children here in
25 Philadelphia. We need to work together

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2 to adequately assess schools set for
3 closure based on real research, action
4 from the state, restore education
5 funding, return Philadelphia schools to
6 local control, invest in our schools'
7 future.

8 (Applause.)

9 MR. RICCHEZZA: And I'd just
10 like to say that 12 years ago, the state
11 came into the City of Philadelphia and
12 said we were a city in distress and they
13 took it over. They formed the SRC.
14 Since that time, we've had 15 different
15 SRC members. We've had four different
16 chairs. We've had eight different
17 superintendents, either hire or interim,
18 in the last 12 years. We've had
19 corruption in charter schools. We've had
20 indictments. All of this goes to the
21 amount of money and the state's failure
22 to adequately fund our schools here in
23 Philadelphia. We need to do something
24 about that. President Obama has said
25 when he was running for office, are we

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2 better off now than we were four years
3 ago? And my question is, are we better
4 off now than we were 12 years ago? And I
5 think everybody in this room will say no.

6 (Applause.)

7 MR. RICCHEZZA: Madam Chair,
8 I'd like to speak on two people that you
9 probably know pretty well, and this goes
10 back to 1998, and that was Floyd Alston,
11 who was President of the School District,
12 and Ruth Wright-Hayre. They came to this
13 Council 12 years ago and he said, I urge
14 you in this room, in Harrisburg, at every
15 level of government, in your homes, in
16 your businesses, in our schools and
17 classrooms to ask yourself that question,
18 which Dr. Ruth Wright-Hayre consistently
19 posed, are we doing what's best for the
20 children? Until each of us can
21 truthfully answer with a resounding yes,
22 our work is not done.

23 And I'd like to quote from one
24 of the greatest leaders we've ever had,
25 Dr. Martin Luther King. From his "I've

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2 Been to the Mountain." Speaking of
3 African Americans, he said he remembered
4 when they were going around scratching
5 where they didn't itch and laughing when
6 they were not tickled. But Dr. King went
7 on to say, That day is all over. We mean
8 business now, and we are determined to
9 gain our rightful place. For years, we
10 in Philadelphia have said each year that
11 we need certain resources to meet the
12 needs of our children, and year after
13 year after year, we just took what was
14 given to us by Harrisburg. We weren't
15 happy about it, but we made it. What we
16 are saying today is that the time of
17 scratching when you don't itch and
18 laughing when there's nothing funny has
19 ended.

20 In Dr. King's immortal words,
21 that day is over. We mean business now.
22 We are determined to get our rightful
23 place.

24 Thank you.

25 (Applause.)

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you. Thank you very much. Thank you
4 very much.

5 Any questions?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you very much.

9 Is Kia Hinton there, Hiram
10 Rivera, please come forward, Andi Perez,
11 Youth United for Change.

12 (Audience members talking.)

13 (Witnesses approached witness
14 table.)

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
16 afternoon. Thank you for your patience.

17 MS. HINTON: Good afternoon,
18 Madam Councilperson Jannie Blackwell as
19 well as the Education Committee and
20 everyone in the audience today. My name
21 is Kia Hinton and I am a parent of four
22 children who are in the Philadelphia
23 public school system. I'm an Action
24 United parent leader. Action United is a
25 membership organization of low- and

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2 moderate-income families. We organize to
3 make change in our neighborhoods and on
4 the issues that we feel are important to
5 us. We have 52,000 members statewide and
6 27,000 locally.

7 Today I wanted to share my
8 experience as a parent with children who
9 are in the Philadelphia school system.
10 First, I would like to talk about my
11 daughter. She's 12 years old. She's in
12 the fifth grade, and my experience with
13 her started in the second grade. She had
14 a new teacher, an inexperienced teacher,
15 and what I observed was a lack of support
16 for her teacher, an oversized class, a
17 lack of support for the students as well.
18 That year my daughter was held back. She
19 didn't learn how to read. And I had her
20 evaluated the following year, and we were
21 able to get her into a special education
22 class, and I think it's called inclusion
23 where they have her in a regular at class
24 and they pull her out from for
25 instruction for extra support that she

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2 need for reading.

3 So today I can say that after
4 having that smaller class size and that
5 one-on-one interaction that she has with
6 her teacher -- and she even tells me
7 about that today whenever she has
8 problems or she doesn't understand the
9 work. She can go to this teacher and she
10 gets that one-on-one support. And so now
11 she has gone from scoring below basic to
12 proficient and advanced, and she's very
13 engaged in her education. She looks
14 forward to trying to do better and trying
15 to excel.

16 What I wanted to talk about was
17 class size. So in the second grade, she
18 had anywhere from 28 to 35 other students
19 in her classroom, and so I feel like that
20 contributed to her low test scores and
21 being held back.

22 The PCAPS plan refers to
23 providing new teachers and struggling
24 teachers with intensive assistance,
25 mentoring, and training from skilled

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2 colleagues with its PAR program.

3 Late last year in November, I
4 was able to go to Montgomery County,
5 Maryland and met with teachers and
6 administration who implemented a PAR
7 program, and what they saw was their
8 students' test scores increase and
9 overall it was a much better situation.

10 I also want to talk about
11 teacher and principal stability and
12 equity. Last year Action United put out
13 a report, and it showed that schools in
14 high poverty areas experience higher
15 turnover than other -- higher turnover as
16 far as teachers and principals as opposed
17 to other schools.

18 We also talked about set up --
19 in the PCAPS plan they talk about setting
20 up incentives to attract experienced
21 teachers to neighborhood schools, but
22 also to keep them there too. We have
23 another parent organizer, Dawn Hawkins,
24 who has seen five principals in five
25 years at her children's school.

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2 I support the community schools
3 that the PCAPS plan talks about, because
4 I feel like the social, emotional,
5 physical, and intellectual needs of
6 children need to be met, and my children
7 fell into that category as well. Like I
8 said, my daughter received a diagnosis.
9 And so a lot of times I would have to go
10 to her school and pick her up, transport
11 her to therapy sessions, and that time
12 was time away from instruction and
13 classroom time and missed assignments.
14 And so I support a community school that
15 has those resources and those supports in
16 the school. I think it would limit
17 children missing assignments, bring
18 parents to the school to make it more --
19 have more parental engagement.

20 In the end, when I read
21 statistics that \$33,000 per year is spent
22 to incarcerate offenders and there's
23 \$11,000 to educate our students, I'm very
24 concerned. I support the Title VI
25 complaint that Action United has filed,

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2 because these school closures have a
3 disparate impact on African American
4 students as well as students with
5 disabilities. And overall I just think
6 that closing schools is not the answer to
7 improving our communities. We need to
8 come up with alternative ideas that helps
9 our children and our families within the
10 communities and -- that's it. Thank you.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good
12 afternoon, Councilwoman Blackwell --

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good
14 afternoon.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- and
16 other City Council.

17 (Applause.)

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So good
19 afternoon. Unfortunately, Andi Perez is
20 unable to be here today. So I'm going to
21 be reading her testimony.

22 My name is Andi Perez. I'm the
23 Executive Director of Youth United for
24 Change, which is a member organization of
25 the Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for

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2 Public Schools, PCAPS.

3 The statement that the
4 Philadelphia public school system is in
5 acute crisis might be viewed as cliché
6 were it not so obviously painful, so
7 pervasive, and so damaging to the
8 well-being of our communities. We
9 believe that we as Philadelphians deserve
10 better. Of course, there are no quick
11 fixes or magic elixirs in education
12 reform. That does not mean that fixing
13 Philadelphia's education system cannot be
14 done.

15 Our School District has made
16 unfortunate decisions that have damaged
17 the quality of our schools. One out of
18 every four schools lacks a full-time
19 music teacher. There's only 42
20 librarians left in the School District.
21 The number of counselors, student
22 advisors, social service liaisons have
23 been cut in half. The dramatic cuts
24 limit Philadelphia students access to the
25 services and programs necessary for a

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2 high-quality education, particularly our
3 students in the most need of a stable
4 supportive learning environment.

5 We believe that all youth in
6 Philadelphia have the right to
7 high-quality pre-K-12 education in their
8 neighborhood public schools, and that
9 includes a full and equal opportunity to
10 develop their minds, personalities,
11 talents, fulfill their potential, achieve
12 their goals, improve the quality of their
13 lives, and graduate from high school
14 qualified for college, a living wage job,
15 and thoughtful, responsible participation
16 in our democracy.

17 To implement our vision we have
18 developed a ten-point strategy. This
19 ten-point strategy was not lifted from
20 the reform template of a global
21 consulting group. Instead, it was
22 developed from over 1,600 survey
23 responses from Philadelphia parents,
24 students, and educators. We held
25 listening sessions with over 750 youth,

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2 actual students who live and learn in our
3 schools. We held a school and
4 neighborhood -- we held a community
5 conference with hundreds of participants
6 and facilitated multiple town halls in
7 schools and neighborhoods across the
8 City. We compiled the community's input
9 and supported that input with research
10 and evidence-based solutions from
11 districts around the country. Here are
12 the ten fundamental components of our
13 strategy:

14 One, high-quality learning
15 conditions: Ensure that every student
16 has access to appropriate facilities and
17 learning materials and that every school
18 is properly staffed.

19 Two, comprehensive student
20 supports: We should be incorporating a
21 full array of wrap-around services in
22 schools such as healthy meals, tutoring,
23 mental health services, and medical
24 services, with a particular emphasis on
25 serving schools with the most high need

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2 students. This has been successful in
3 Cincinnati where schools have become
4 Community Learning Centers, and as a
5 result, graduate rates in public schools
6 climbed from 51 percent to 83 percent.
7 This is an alternative to closing schools
8 with excess capacity. That space should
9 be utilized to turn schools into
10 community hubs instead of creating
11 resource and school deserts. Our schools
12 can help revitalize our communities.

13 Three, enhanced curriculum:
14 Ensure that every student has access to
15 an academically rigorous curriculum that
16 is enriched, well-rounded, engaging and
17 culturally relevant.

18 Improved instruction: Build
19 collective instructional capacity in the
20 District through enhanced professional
21 development, equitable staffing, career
22 advancement opportunities for teachers,
23 and internal leadership development. We
24 believe the District should invest in
25 professional learning communities, which

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2 are teams of teachers who dedicate
3 in-school time to work together and
4 bolster their practice. In California's
5 Central Valley, Sanger School District
6 located in a high poverty region went
7 from being one of the lowest performing
8 districts in the state to being one of
9 the highest by developing professional
10 learning communities that build the
11 capacity of teachers and district staff
12 and increased communication and
13 collaboration.

14 Performance assessments:
15 Develop a comprehensive local assessment
16 system that provides more meaningful
17 information and supports improved
18 teaching and learning.

19 Authentic accountability:
20 Create an accountability system that
21 promotes school improvement through
22 community involvement and comprehensive
23 school quality review.

24 Support struggling schools by
25 identifying a set of research-based

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2 improvement strategies that can be
3 adapted to the individual school.
4 Designate several high-performing schools
5 as professional development lab sites,
6 where teams from schools in need of
7 improvement can observe and learn new
8 practices that they can replicate.
9 Provide the resources and supports
10 necessary to help the target schools
11 develop and implement improvement plans
12 in collaboration with their student,
13 parent, and community constituencies.
14 Instead of the typical cookie-cutter
15 model reforms, the District must
16 implement intensive supports and
17 interventions that fit the particular
18 needs of a school and produce dramatic
19 improvements without undercutting vital
20 community resources.

21 Truly safe schools: Adopt a
22 new understanding of school safety and
23 discipline that focuses on improving
24 school climate.

25 Convene multiple stakeholders

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2 to identify strategies for improving
3 opportunities and outcomes for
4 Philadelphia's children and youth. We
5 recognize that to truly transform our
6 educational system, we will need the
7 participation of the entire City,
8 including the business sector, non-profit
9 organizations, the faith community, and
10 other government agencies.

11 And, ten, restore
12 Philadelphia's local school board.

13 Real school improvements
14 require sound specific strategies,
15 targeted investments, and sustained
16 efforts. It is time for our city to
17 unify and invest in young people and make
18 education our priority.

19 As leaders in Philadelphia, we
20 need you to stand up to one of the
21 nation's most unpopular governors and a
22 national pro-privatization agenda. We
23 commend you for asking the SRC to halt
24 closures for one year, but must do more.
25 We ask that you demand accountability

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2 from the SRC regarding these closures and
3 the financial future of the School
4 District of Philadelphia. We need to
5 take our fight to Harrisburg. We need to
6 take our fight to Governor Corbett. We
7 ask that you take whatever actions are
8 necessary locally and in Harrisburg to
9 obtain adequate education funding for
10 Philadelphia students and to ensure that
11 we can strengthen and not destroy our
12 public school system. Our children and
13 our communities are depending on you.

14 Thank you.

15 (Applause.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you very much.

18 Any questions?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: The
21 last part of this panel will be Ms.
22 Danita Bates, Duckrey School. Then we'll
23 ask to come forward Kate Shaw. I
24 apologize, because I was supposed to call
25 you early. Kate Shaw, Executive Director

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2 of Research for Action; Joanne Weeks,
3 Associate Director, the Netter Center for
4 Community Partnerships, Penn; Dr. Tina
5 Richardson, Associate Dean for Academic
6 Affairs, Drexel; Mr. Darien Spielman,
7 President and CEO of Philadelphia
8 Education Fund; Donna Cooper, Executive
9 Director of Public Citizens for Children
10 and Youth; and Dr. Graynle Edwards,
11 Co-Chair, Education Committee,
12 Pennsylvania Chapter of the National
13 Action Network.

14 Thank you.

15 (Witnesses approached witness
16 table.)

17 MS. BATES: Hello, City
18 Council. Thanks for allowing me to speak
19 today. I'm sorry for the rush, but I
20 have a 4 o'clock meeting at my school
21 with the Superintendent.

22 My name is Danita Bates. I'm a
23 parent, community activist, and community
24 organizer in North Philadelphia. I
25 advocate for education, community youth,

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2 parents, senior citizens, and mental
3 health. I am here for the structure of
4 no schools being closed, especially in
5 North Philadelphia. My home school is
6 Dr. Tanner G. Duckrey School, which is in
7 North Philadelphia.

8 I am here not only to thank
9 City Council for allowing me to speak on
10 the many concerns revolving around the
11 school closures and that we all should be
12 reminded that the most important of the
13 whole process is our students, education,
14 communities, families, and safety.

15 Charter schools and prisons are
16 not the answers or resolutions. Charter
17 schools are underperforming as well, and
18 that is not publicly announced and/or
19 charter school closures before the
20 decision of charters. My question, why
21 is it so easy for folks to gamble on
22 prisons versus education? Why is there a
23 bid for prisons on Wall Street versus
24 education? I am sure many of you are in
25 the horrible deal belittling the future

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2 of our youth and adolescents today who
3 can make a difference for the best for
4 our city and our country.

5 Thank you, City Council, for
6 the outstanding job on the vote for the
7 moratorium, and now we need the School
8 Commission Reform Board to do the same.

9 We as a community, city,
10 family, students, taxpayers, and parents
11 are demanding to be heard and no longer
12 ignored by our local political officials
13 and SRC members, along with charter
14 school lovers, who are in denial of the
15 many failures of many of the charter
16 schools, such as lack of investigation on
17 the progress and the activities that goes
18 on inside the charter schools, knowing
19 that there are no resources for our
20 special needs students in charter
21 schools.

22 We have been demanding and
23 expressing the many concerns with these
24 members that are on the SRC Board, and
25 that there is no need for an SRC Board.

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2 All they have been to our educational
3 done is a disaster, and they have done
4 nothing but to compromise the learning of
5 our Philadelphia School District
6 students. Unacceptable.

7 There is no longer the need for
8 outsiders coming into our school district
9 with their plans without knowing our
10 students and communities and engaging
11 with our parents.

12 We as parents, community
13 leaders, and students are demanding that
14 the City of Philadelphia take back
15 control of Philadelphia School District,
16 along with obtaining the records of the
17 failing charter schools, before making
18 any unwise decisions to allow our schools
19 to close and children being sent to
20 charter schools, where they have no
21 knowledge or progress of their academics,
22 along with no certified teachers, where
23 we have them in our public schools.

24 We as parents, community
25 organizers and leaders are demanding that

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2 removal of the SRC Board and their plans.
3 We are sick and tired of hoping for the
4 best for our students and children and
5 their education, and what has happened
6 has been nothing but a disaster. Now
7 school closures from a Superintendent who
8 has no clue about this city, our schools
9 or our communities.

10 So our next strategy plan is to
11 take our demands to the streets until
12 laws are changed and our schools stay
13 open, along with having the equal
14 learning opportunities as charters and
15 our suburban school districts, and our
16 public schools having full funding versus
17 constantly cutting funding.

18 So I am demanding that City
19 Council continues to listen to the
20 people. And I know that people is power
21 and that we are going to rise and fight
22 until our education system is right for
23 all students, rather than being special
24 needs or non-special need students.

25 Thank you for your time in

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2 advance.

3 (Applause.)

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you, Ms. Bates. Thank you very much. We
6 thank you for your commitment to Duckrey.

7 Please come forward. Welcome.
8 Thank you for your patience. Please
9 begin your testimony. And thank you for
10 being here all day.

11 MS. SHAW: Good afternoon,
12 Councilwoman. Thank you for giving me
13 the time to testify. My name is Kate
14 Shaw and I'm the Executive Director of
15 Research for Action. We're a non-profit
16 independent educational research
17 organization that's been in Philadelphia
18 about 20 years, and we've worked closely
19 with the School District for those 20
20 years, providing them with independent,
21 non-partisan research to help inform
22 their decision-making.

23 As I've been sitting here
24 listening all day, my testimony has been
25 getting shorter and shorter.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I'm
3 sorry.

4 MS. SHAW: No. It's fine. I
5 think it's been terrific testimony, but
6 you have a full set of my testimony that
7 you can review, but I just want focus in
8 on one piece of research that I think is
9 important for Council to think about,
10 and, that is, the research that is
11 available regarding the academic impact
12 of school closings.

13 Generally speaking, we know
14 that the academic performance of students
15 does not improve when they are
16 transferred from performing schools, and
17 we know that from research that's been
18 done in other districts where there have
19 been school closings, like Chicago,
20 Pittsburgh, and New York. However, one
21 thing that we do know from those school
22 districts is when students are
23 transferred to higher performing schools,
24 they do better. So, generally speaking,
25 when students transfer from closing

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2 schools to any schools, their academic
3 performance dips. That's generally true.
4 But if we can ensure that they get
5 transferred to higher performing schools,
6 that academic dip will be much less.

7 And so that's the key piece of
8 information that I hope you think about
9 as you work with the SRC and with
10 Superintendent Hite in thinking about how
11 the plans for school closings might
12 change, because if the schools are closed
13 and if the students are transferred, it's
14 so important to make sure that they're
15 transferred to schools that are high
16 performing so that those students benefit
17 in ways that will help mitigate some of
18 the downside of school closings.

19 So I think I'm going to stop
20 there.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: That's
22 very important testimony. We will for
23 sure submit your full testimony for the
24 record as if you read it all.

25 MS. SHAW: Okay.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
3 you very much. Very important. Thank
4 you.

5 Any questions?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you.

9 (Applause.)

10 MS. WEEKS: Good afternoon,
11 members of Council. On behalf of Ira
12 Harkavy, Director of the Netter Center
13 for Community Partnerships at the
14 University of Pennsylvania, who could not
15 be with us today, I'm Joanne Weeks, one
16 of the Associate Directors, and would
17 like to very much thank the Education
18 Committee for this opportunity to submit
19 this testimony.

20 As Dr. Harkavy noted in
21 testimony at the School Reform Commission
22 on January 14th, he and his colleagues at
23 the Netter Center are first struck and
24 pleased with the School District's action
25 plans and emphasis that it is a work in

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2 progress that will change and develop as
3 the result of experience, of reflection
4 on the experience, and through ongoing
5 learning. There is not a more
6 significant nor difficult problem in our
7 society than to provide an effective
8 education for all students, particularly
9 students in our cities who live in
10 communities faced with significant
11 poverty. Philadelphia is the poorest
12 large city in America, with 28 percent of
13 the overall population in poverty, 39
14 percent of our children in poverty, 19
15 percent of whom are in extreme poverty.
16 The problem of educating all of our
17 children is not rocket science. It is
18 much more difficult than rocket science,
19 regarding hard work and resources,
20 sustained commitment, as well as
21 humility, flexibility and adaptability.

22 Second, the plan makes clear
23 that we can only solve this problem if
24 we, all segments of the community, work
25 together as partners to achieve the

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2 common goal of improved learning and
3 development for all Philadelphia's
4 children. That fact, made so clearly in
5 the action plan, has been brought home to
6 us through experience. Since 1985,
7 Penn's Netter Center for Community
8 Partnerships and its predecessor
9 organizations have worked with partners
10 to create and develop university-assisted
11 community schools. University-assisted
12 community schools educate, engage, and
13 empower and serve all members of the
14 community in which the school is located.
15 They involve students in real-world
16 community problem-solving that is
17 integrated into the school curriculum as
18 well as through the extended day
19 programs. We currently work with over
20 4,000 children and their families in West
21 Philadelphia public schools in school
22 day, after school, and summer programs.
23 This work simply would not have been
24 possible without a partnership from day
25 one that involved parents, teachers,

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2 principals, community members, elected
3 officials; in particular, the Chair of
4 this Committee, Councilwoman Blackwell,
5 faith-based institutions, businesses, the
6 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, and
7 the School District of Philadelphia.

8 We also see a connection in the
9 action plan's concept of anchor goals
10 with that of anchor institutions. The
11 argument, simply stated, is that anchor
12 institutions are essential to reaching
13 the action plan's goal of anchoring and
14 improving academic outcomes for students.
15 Anchor institutions like Penn are major
16 rooted institutions in our city and
17 communities that have been and are in
18 those cities and communities for the long
19 haul. And of all anchors, higher
20 educational and medical institutions are
21 by far among the most important.

22 The Philadelphia region has the
23 greatest concentration of jobs in the
24 higher educational and medical sector of
25 any major metropolitan region in the

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2 United States. Across the Philadelphia
3 region, higher educational and medical
4 institutions comprise four of the five
5 largest and 15 of the 20 largest private
6 employers. They are leaders in
7 education, employment, purchasing,
8 cultural development, services, housing,
9 real estate, health, business, and
10 technical innovation. They are, in
11 short, an extraordinary resource.

12 The action plan calls for the
13 creation of the Office of Strategic
14 Partnerships that can tap this
15 extraordinary resource and engage higher
16 educational and medical institutions in
17 mutually beneficial, democratic
18 partnerships with schools and communities
19 throughout the City to provide, for
20 example, health and human services along
21 with cultural and family educational
22 programs, such as provided at Sayre
23 Health Center at the Sayre High School.
24 A partnership between Sayre High School,
25 the surrounding community, and Penn

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established a federally qualified community health center that provides high quality care to all members of the communities, including students and their family, without regard to ability to pay, and also serves health and education career programs for Sayre and Penn students.

Most centrally, the Office of Strategic Partnerships can create one schooling system, pre-K through higher education, and tap the greatest resources of higher education, the talents and abilities of its students, faculty, and staff. The action plan, for example, highlights the goal of improving student nutrition and points to progress that has already been made. The Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative, a core program of the Netter Center, works to create and develop university-assisted community schools, has contributed to this improvement through its work with over 12,000 children in 20 schools across

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2 grades K to 12 to provide school
3 nutrition education that supports the
4 core curriculum, develops school gardens,
5 after school fruit stands, fitness
6 programs, and year-round internships for
7 our high school students that incorporate
8 career readiness and college access
9 programs. This work is accomplished
10 through numerous service learning
11 courses, academic internships, community
12 service work study, and volunteers from
13 Penn.

14 The action plan also calls for
15 working with higher education and
16 business to clarify the profile of
17 college and career ready graduates. The
18 potential is enormous for developing
19 school-to-career and school-to-college
20 programs with Philadelphia's higher
21 educational and medical institutions.

22 Fortunately, there is a
23 citywide organization that can and should
24 serve as a powerful partner in this
25 collaborative work, the Philadelphia

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2 Higher Education Network for Neighborhood
3 Development, which is actually
4 celebrating its 25th year, which works
5 with 35 colleges and universities from
6 across our region.

7 PHENND, as we call it, actively
8 seeks to revitalize local communities and
9 schools and foster responsibility among
10 the region's colleges and universities.
11 PHENND provides a vehicle for
12 coordinating and, where appropriate,
13 combining the efforts of higher education
14 so that they can contribute significantly
15 to improving our region. And due to an
16 increasing interest of higher ed/school
17 partnerships, PHENND recently has been
18 convening a K-16 Partnerships Network,
19 which brings together faculty,
20 administrators, and non-profit leaders
21 interested in improving and expanding
22 school partnerships.

23 For example, one of PHENND's
24 programs is working with the School
25 District on GEAR UP. PHENND helps to

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2 coordinate the involvement of college
3 student tutors from over seven campuses
4 to help serve children in 16 schools. An
5 Office of Strategic Partnerships will
6 help intermediary organizations like
7 PHENND better coordinate and examine
8 District-wide all of these types of
9 activities, school-to-career, college
10 access, STEM, the arts, family
11 employment.

12 The partnership approach to
13 change will also help realize each of the
14 core strategies of the action plan. The
15 Netter Center makes this claim based on
16 its work in West Philadelphia. Our
17 partnerships with Sayre and University
18 High Schools, for example, have
19 contributed to the overall recent
20 increase in the school-wide rates of
21 seniors graduating with post-secondary
22 plans, college acceptances, and
23 scholarships awarded. This success was
24 recognized this past October by the AT&T
25 Aspire High School Foundation, which

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2 awarded a Local High School Impact grant
3 to our partnership. Over 1,000 programs
4 from across the United States applied.
5 Only 47 were chosen. And the partnership
6 in West Philadelphia was the only Aspire
7 awardee in the Commonwealth of
8 Pennsylvania.

9 The Netter Center's work also
10 supports the creation and development of
11 safe after school places. For example,
12 in partnership with the Pennsylvania
13 Department of Education, we work with
14 three elementary schools to operate
15 out-of-school-time programs supported by
16 the 21st Century Community Learning
17 Center's fund. A recent evaluation by
18 Research for Action found that among the
19 fifth to eighth graders at Lea School,
20 where the program has run the longest,
21 approximately two-thirds of the regularly
22 participating students made gains on the
23 PSSA in both math and reading.

24 In addition, the Netter Center
25 supports school-day education. For

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2 example, in the STEM fields, Penn faculty
3 and students from across campus provide
4 content-based professional development to
5 teachers and direct classroom support for
6 implementing quality hands-on and small
7 group activities. Penn students learn
8 math, physics, biology, and environmental
9 science along with K-12 students as they
10 work on collaborative projects to improve
11 environmental science and nutritional
12 health in the school and community.

13 We have developed a program
14 with national significance through a
15 tutoring partnership from Penn with Huey
16 Elementary School that is working to
17 improve literacy in the early grades.
18 The Penn Reading Initiative, led by
19 Professor of Linguistics, Bill Labov,
20 connects Penn tutors to Huey students.
21 The PRI works primarily with students who
22 are one or two grade levels behind
23 tutoring these same students over several
24 years. Data has shown that the program
25 is making positive impact, and the

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2 Reading Road curriculum developed by
3 Dr. Labov, which is the basis for their
4 reading initiative, is currently being
5 used at several colleges across the
6 country.

7 More generally, with higher
8 education as a core, ongoing partner with
9 pre-K public schools and their
10 communities, we will be able to
11 powerfully increase the number and
12 percentage of career and college students
13 who graduate from our high schools and
14 colleges and function as confident,
15 creative, caring, and contributing
16 citizens of our city, state, and nation.
17 In short, through the democratic,
18 evolving, collaborative partnership
19 approach called for in the action plan
20 and put into practice through the
21 office's strategic partnerships, together
22 we will be able to significantly improve
23 the learning of all Philadelphia
24 students.

25 Thank you for your time. Sorry

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2 for the voice.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you very much.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Give
7 Dr. Harkavy our best. Thank you.

8 Dr. Richardson, Ms. Donna
9 Cooper, and Dr. Graynle Edwards. After
10 that, we know you all, the Cloudens, have
11 a meeting with the Superintendent and
12 we'll try to pull you up.

13 Thank you, everybody, for your
14 patience. Thank you very much. Thank
15 you so much.

16 (Witnesses approached witness
17 table.)

18 DR. RICHARDSON: Dear Madam
19 Chairperson and Committee members, good
20 afternoon and thank you for giving Drexel
21 the opportunity to testify on such an
22 important matter for our great city, the
23 community and, most importantly, our
24 children. My name is Dr. Tina Richardson
25 and I am the Associate Dean of the School

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2 of Education at Drexel University.
3 President Fry sends his apologies for not
4 being able to be here today, but I am
5 pleased to make a few brief remarks on
6 behalf of Drexel University.

7 We at Drexel University believe
8 that universities have an obligation and
9 a great opportunity to work in
10 partnership with their neighbors to help
11 to provide education and bring resources
12 to the children and adults, the
13 businesses, and non-profit organizations
14 in the communities. Drexel is committed
15 and enthusiastically a supporter of
16 public schools in our neighborhoods.

17 Today, one of the most
18 important educational leaders in
19 Philadelphia is District Superintendent
20 William Hite. He carries the heavy
21 burden of influencing the educational
22 success of the City. While universities
23 will educate the graduates of
24 Philadelphia schools, we rely on
25 Superintendent Hite to ensure that

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2 Philadelphia children make it to college
3 adequately prepared to succeed.

4 We appreciate the challenges
5 Superintendent Hite and the District face
6 in rightsizing the district. As painful
7 as school closings are and as difficult
8 as they are for families and for
9 neighborhoods, we recognize that there
10 may be few other options, because we
11 cannot maintain school buildings that are
12 nearly empty, and we cannot continue to
13 allow children in Philadelphia to attend
14 schools that are not able to address
15 their educational needs.

16 As we labor to make changes,
17 let's make sure that we are making the
18 right choices in closing schools and have
19 considered alternative options, including
20 uses of buildings and the configuration
21 of grades. But in the end, once the
22 difficult decisions are made, we have to
23 make this work. We have to make
24 education work. We have to make it work
25 for the children who are being moved to

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2 new schools. We have to make it work for
3 the schools and the teachers and the
4 principals included and the children who
5 are being received by new classmates.

6 A great burden will be on the
7 receiving schools. We urge the District
8 to ensure that all records of new
9 students be shared with the receiving
10 schools as early in the summer as
11 possible so the schools have time to
12 understand the new students and their
13 needs and develop the best possible plans
14 for each one of those students.

15 We urge that the receiving
16 schools receive the additional manpower
17 they will need, including behavioral
18 support as well as additional
19 instructional supports. Let's not
20 pretend that it's easy to bring new
21 students into an existing school culture.
22 There are going to be challenges, and we
23 need to make sure we have our eyes open
24 to respond to each one of those
25 challenges. The receiving schools must

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2 have the support that they need to
3 maintain their stability and to create a
4 new home for their new student
5 populations.

6 We also encourage a
7 concentrated effort be made to bring new
8 parents into home and school associations
9 so that they are welcomed into their new
10 school communities.

11 We have to make education work.
12 The colleges and universities in
13 Philadelphia are a critical partner in
14 supporting these schools. Many of us
15 prepare teachers and school leaders, and
16 we have students that can mentor, tutor,
17 coach, serve as role models, and provide
18 volunteer services for recess and
19 after-school programs.

20 For those universities that
21 have schools of education like Drexel, we
22 can roll up our sleeves and help to
23 improve instruction. Drexel works
24 directly with the principals in our
25 neighborhood schools, helping develop

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2 improvement plans, helping implement new
3 approaches to student learning and
4 instruction. We provide professional
5 development to teachers and tutors of
6 children. We help stabilize school
7 climate, and we pay for the excellent
8 recess services of Playworks. We provide
9 after-school programming that carries
10 children through to dinnertime, and then
11 we provide that meal.

12 We commit ourselves and our
13 university to supporting Superintendent
14 Hite as he takes these difficult next
15 steps to stabilize the Philadelphia
16 School District. We at Drexel call on
17 our faculty, our students, our staff, and
18 our sister universities in the City to
19 step up and support the School District,
20 to support Superintendent Hite and, most
21 importantly, to support the children and
22 the families of Philadelphia. We have to
23 make education work.

24 Thank you for giving me an
25 opportunity to make a brief statement.

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2 I'll be glad to answer or respond to any
3 questions that you may have.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you very much, Dr. Richardson. Certainly
6 we thank you for this important
7 testimony, and we realize that certainly
8 Drexel, Penn, and our institutions need
9 to help us to maintain our neighborhoods,
10 to help us to have schools in the areas
11 survive, and we thank you for the part
12 that you play. Thank you.

13 Thank you.

14 MS. COOPER: Good afternoon.
15 Thank you very much, Councilwoman
16 Blackwell, Councilman Oh. It's an honor
17 to be here today, and it's particularly
18 an honor because you have taken the
19 leadership to spend the time thinking
20 about this very issue, and this is
21 obviously not the first time Council has
22 delved into this. You took a very
23 important vote vis-a-vis the school
24 closures, and regardless of what people's
25 vote was, the fact that there was a

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2 serious consideration of this really
3 speaks to the commitment that Council has
4 to making this process work. So at
5 Public Citizens for Children and Youth,
6 we totally appreciate the consideration
7 and the deliberation.

8 I have submitted written
9 testimony, but I'll just make a few
10 comments to you. I have, like you and
11 many people in Philadelphia, we have
12 questions about the District's plan in
13 many respects.

14 COURT STENOGRAPHER: Can you
15 state your name, please.

16 MS. COOPER: I'm sorry. It's
17 Donna Cooper, Public Citizens for
18 Children and Youth. Thank you.

19 Obviously we think the District
20 needs to do a better job answering the
21 basic financial questions of how much
22 money will be saved by doing this? Is it
23 recurring savings? Is it one time? But
24 I think that we all agree that in a
25 district that has 50,000 fewer students

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2 than it had 11 years ago, it probably
3 makes sense to think about -- or 45,000
4 students compared to 11 years ago, it
5 probably makes sense to think about the
6 number of buildings we have. Some of
7 them have very small numbers of
8 enrollment, and so closure of the
9 buildings in some cases may make sense.

10 It's interesting, in preparing
11 coming here today, I kept thinking about
12 why has the District's enrollment
13 declined such. And I think the lure is
14 that mostly kids have gone to charters,
15 but I do want to point out that overall
16 between charters, parochial schools, and
17 public schools, the number of students in
18 this city K-12 has declined by 33,000
19 kids in the last 11 years. So, in
20 general, we're just a smaller city, and
21 we were built for more. So we need to
22 make this work for the size of our city
23 now.

24 So our view in terms of the
25 fact that the School District's

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2 enrollment has declined is to say that
3 instead of approaching this as a
4 facilities plan, we should be thinking
5 about this as a school improvement plan,
6 and where we find that children are in
7 underperforming buildings that are unsafe
8 and there is room for them to be in
9 buildings that are safe and higher
10 performing, we should actively support
11 that transfer. And I think, Councilman
12 Oh, you've spoken to that. Councilwoman
13 Quinones talked a bit to that as well.
14 We very much believe that nothing should
15 be in the way of putting children in
16 highly -- in good schools and in better
17 schools than they're in.

18 We do think, however, that some
19 of the data that's been presented to
20 suggest that in general this is going to
21 be better for every kid is a bit
22 misleading. And I know some of that data
23 was shared earlier today by other
24 organizations that when you look at the
25 closing schools, their scores are X and

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2 when you look at the opening schools,
3 their scores are Y, and in aggregate,
4 that may be the case, but it's really at
5 the building level that we need to look
6 at that.

7 And so tomorrow Public Citizens
8 for Children and Youth will be publishing
9 data that those building-by-building
10 closure pattern by closure pattern so
11 that people can see the percent
12 utilization in the building, the
13 performance of the building over the last
14 two years on the PSSAs, the School
15 Performance Index, which I realize is in
16 abeyance but nevertheless, was a basis of
17 information, and the number of serious
18 incidents in the building. So we can
19 judge this not just at the aggregate, but
20 what's it mean for my kid going to that
21 building, because that's what matters to
22 you and that's what matters to the
23 citizens of Philadelphia. And I think in
24 some cases the story is good and in some
25 cases the story is bad, and where the

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2 story is bad, I think we need to revisit
3 it. And hopefully that's what Dr. Hite
4 meant when he testified earlier today and
5 said that the list will be different when
6 he releases it because they've looked at
7 some of this.

8 And I commend the District as
9 well for having the community hearings
10 and for being willing to reexamine its
11 Facilities Plan, and hopefully we're
12 moving into a stage where it's a school
13 improvement plan.

14 I also want to say that if we
15 find that there's a building where the
16 kids are going to do as well as they are
17 now and be equally as safe as they are
18 now but their other building is at a
19 hundred kids and so it's underutilized
20 and so they should move. Okay, fine,
21 let's say we bite the bullet and do that.
22 We have to do it right.

23 We shouldn't be moving
24 elementary school kids into elementary
25 schools where their class is going to

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2 increase. We shouldn't be looking at
3 models that depend on expanding middle
4 schools at the disadvantage of growing
5 K-8's. We shouldn't be looking at models
6 where we can't follow the kids with the
7 supportive services that matter. So if
8 we're closing down a high school and it
9 has a Head Start center in it and we know
10 there's teen parents moving to a new high
11 school, is that Head Start center also
12 going to that new high school? And there
13 are three high schools in fact where Head
14 Start centers are currently located for
15 the teen parents who go there, and we
16 just want to make sure that that kind of
17 teen parenting support follows the kid so
18 they can stay in school.

19 Behavioral health supports:

20 There are numerous schools where there
21 are behavioral health on-site services.
22 That's a pretty important population to
23 make sure there's a continuity of
24 service.

25 So our view is, how do we make

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2 sure that at the academics, the grade
3 span, and the student supports the school
4 is going to be as good as or better than
5 they currently are. That's an essential
6 element of planning.

7 The second essential element of
8 planning is safety, and maybe from a
9 parent's perspective, it's the first
10 element. What is the transportation
11 plan, what's the safe corridors plan,
12 what's the school opening and closing
13 plan so we don't have nine million kids
14 in one place at a time. How do we manage
15 school safety well and how do we build
16 intergroup harmony, because it's tough
17 stuff, especially for teenagers. All of
18 us remember being teenagers, and the idea
19 of going to the next high school was
20 something that was ominous and
21 unwelcomed. So we need to turn that
22 around. We're adults. We can do that.

23 And the third part of our
24 strategy -- and we're releasing a
25 checklist today, which we call a

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2 Checklist for School Improvement for
3 parents to really think about this and
4 the District -- is to say that the
5 District needs to create a structure.
6 They need one person in charge downtown.
7 This is the person in charge. Everybody
8 knows who that is. And in every
9 building, there needs to be a lead
10 person, and that person is regularly in
11 contact with folks. So all this what's
12 going on and what's the information
13 that's needed, there's a source, and that
14 source has a timeline for when student
15 records will transfer, as Drexel reported
16 to. They have a timeline for when kids
17 can transfer. They have an expectation
18 for when there's going to be community
19 meetings to inform parents. Our
20 checklist lists a set of administrative
21 practices that we think are bottom-line
22 basic to do this well.

23 Now, I raise those three areas,
24 the academic and the student support
25 structures, the organizational structure

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2 and processes downtown, and the safety
3 planning, to say even where a kid is
4 going to be transferred from a closing
5 building to a new building that is better
6 or the same, as good as, if the plan
7 isn't in place, it's a problem, if
8 there's not a reasonable plan in place.
9 And I will just make a plug that I urge
10 the District to open the voluntary
11 transfer deadline, which has already
12 passed, so that high school kids may have
13 more options than just going to the
14 schools they've been identified as their
15 transfer location. That deadline passed
16 before the school closure list was
17 released.

18 So there's a set of things we
19 can do to make this work, and we've tried
20 to identify those in those three buckets,
21 and we're encouraging the District to
22 really think about that seriously.

23 But I think we should commit
24 ourselves where the opportunity is as
25 good or better if there's a good plan in

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2 place, the City agencies, the non-profits
3 like Drexel and the United Way, we band
4 together and we help make this happen.
5 But where there isn't a plan in place, we
6 delay that transfer until there is one.
7 So even if it's as good a school or
8 better, if we don't have all this stuff
9 laid out in one particular case, hold
10 off. We can do it next year.

11 So our view is, do it right.
12 Use this as a momentum-building
13 opportunity where parents can see that
14 the District has the interest of children
15 first and where it's obvious that
16 savings, if they are there, are going to
17 result in better education for the kids
18 going to the buildings.

19 So that's our offer and our
20 approach to this, and happy to take
21 questions, if you have any.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Let me
23 thank you for that commonsense approach
24 to it all, and maybe we would not be here
25 had we not had responses to so many of

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2 these. But certainly we thank you, and
3 we thank you for the long-term
4 relationship and your commitment here in
5 the future.

6 MS. COOPER: Thank you.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
8 you very much.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: After
11 the Cloudens, then we'll have Helen Gym,
12 Irving Jones, Rich Gardner. I'm sorry.
13 Dr. Graynle Edwards, you're here. You
14 were supposed to speak too.

15 Let Dr. Edwards speak first,
16 Mr. Clouden, and then you. And after
17 that, I don't think Rahim Islam is here,
18 but I saw Dr. Lawrence Jones and
19 Dr. Booker here, and you'll be next.
20 That's the next group.

21 (Witnesses approached witness
22 table.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you, Dr. Edwards. Then we'll bring the
25 Cloudens. Then we'll go to Helen Gym,

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2 Irving Jones, Rich Gardner, Dr. Lawrence

3 Jones, and Dr. Naomi Booker. Okay?

4 Thank you.

5 DR. EDWARDS: Good afternoon --

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Good

7 afternoon.

8 DR. EDWARDS: -- Councilwoman

9 Blackwell, Councilman Mr. Oh. It's my

10 pleasure to be here to share with you

11 some concerns that we have in our

12 organization. Again, my name is Graynle

13 Edwards and I come to you representing

14 the Education Committee of the

15 Pennsylvania National Action Network.

16 That is the Pennsylvania affiliate of

17 Reverend Al Sharpton's National Action

18 Network.

19 My objective in attending your

20 hearing is to seek your assistance in

21 convincing the School Reform Commission,

22 the SRC, to delay the implementation of

23 the reported school closings for at least

24 one year. We reject, without exception,

25 the current SRC plan to close the

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2 proposed schools without meaningful input
3 from those who will be affected the most.

4 I've come to you this morning
5 having had an extensive experience in
6 education over a 50-year period. I'm a
7 product of the Philadelphia public
8 schools, going on to teach, building
9 principal, central office administrator,
10 whole school reform, researcher in five
11 different states, and currently an
12 adjunct professor in some of our local
13 universities.

14 During this period, I've been
15 able to observe how many minority and
16 low-income children have not received the
17 essential resources and academic
18 performance expectation -- I want to
19 underline that -- academic performance
20 expectations required to enable them to
21 compete effectively on local, state, and
22 national stages. We've reached a point
23 in our lives now where we're competing on
24 an international level in many different
25 kinds of career areas.

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2 The notion of equity was
3 demonized by some in decision-making
4 capacity at the local and state levels in
5 the 1980s, while we celebrated the
6 expansion of our academic magnet and
7 charter school options. Families with
8 limited or no social capital were denied
9 the type of lobbying for their interest
10 as enjoyed by the more affluent,
11 socially, and politically connected.

12 With the advent of President
13 Bush's No Child Left Behind, NCLB, many
14 who occupied the District public schools
15 were in fact left behind due to the
16 significant increase of charter schools
17 and, at the same time, there was a
18 reneging on additional funding that was
19 to support the necessary new demands
20 required under NCLB.

21 We also failed to acknowledge
22 how a transfer of funds to charter
23 schools impacted on neighborhood District
24 elementary and secondary public schools
25 in terms of resources and enrollment. We

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2 ignore the fact that a significantly
3 increasing number of influential
4 governmental, political, and business
5 leaders believe that turning our schools
6 over to private enterprises is ethical,
7 efficient, and profitable. We perceive
8 such attitudes as an abdication of civic
9 responsibility to the more vulnerable of
10 our citizens.

11 Some parents support charter
12 schools as evidenced by their children
13 enrolled in such schools for a variety of
14 reasons, such as safety factors, orderly
15 environment, improved instruction, and
16 learning. Unfortunately, the data do not
17 support the beliefs of the superiority of
18 charter over District schools, but many
19 continue to ignore that reality.

20 The school closure provokes all
21 kinds of consternation for parents who
22 must confront a number of issues as
23 follows: teacher quality and leadership;
24 student travel, safety issues, elementary
25 and secondary levels; children adjustment

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2 in new school cultures and environments;
3 presence of adequate resources and
4 support staff; arts instruction and
5 intramural funds restoration;
6 discriminatory school selection in the
7 process that we're now experiencing; loss
8 of middle school jobs created by the
9 anticipated \$33 million cost saving in
10 the SRC plan.

11 We request your support by
12 lobbying the local and state government
13 in the following areas: the
14 establishment of a panel of people
15 indigenous to the communities and local
16 educators that will be affected by such
17 closings, as well as SRC-selected experts
18 to work collaboratively for one year
19 prior to selecting school closures.

20 It's important that we have the
21 restoration of state funds cut by
22 Governor Corbett; the funding of schools
23 equitably through use of funding formula
24 enacted in 2008, which is not happening
25 now; stop the expansion of charter

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2 schools, and close all charters that fail
3 to demonstrate superiority in educating
4 all students.

5 It's important that all schools
6 have innovative models that will allow
7 them to be successful. You've heard all
8 kinds of suggestions. I thought one of
9 the most poignant ones was the notion of
10 cities and schools where a variety of
11 social services are placed in the schools
12 themselves. There's a real need for
13 that.

14 I think it's important that
15 there be a reallocation of funds from
16 lower priority projects, such as the
17 Governor's expansion of the PA prison
18 system. We think it's also important
19 that we ensure that special needs
20 populations receive adequate and
21 appropriate funding, because oftentimes
22 when we have these kinds of massive
23 organizational shifts, special needs
24 children are the ones who lose out the
25 most.

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2 Pennsylvania NAN believes that
3 someone should champion the rights of the
4 underserved, and it is our hope that you
5 as a councilmanic body will provide our
6 assistance in trying to pull this off.

7 I'm influenced a great deal by
8 Reverend Al Sharpton when he talks about
9 it's important that people in leadership
10 roles lead. He also says that when that
11 does not happen, the people will lead.
12 We've seen a demonstration of that in a
13 number of areas over the past several
14 years.

15 This should not be a fight
16 between the citizens of Philadelphia,
17 City Council, school board, and Mayor.
18 This should really be a fight directed
19 toward our state government, because they
20 have not been financing our public
21 schools to the extent that is required.
22 When we talk about adequate educational
23 adequate -- when we talk about an
24 adequate education for free and
25 appropriate education for our children,

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2 that's not happening in Philadelphia for
3 too many students.

4 I would suggest that we need a
5 quasi marshal plan in the City of
6 Philadelphia to correct a number of the
7 ills that have been in this city for
8 years.

9 I want to thank you for your
10 attention, and hopefully we can see some
11 movement in the direction as reflected in
12 this request.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you very, very much. Very important
15 testimony.

16 (Applause.)

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you very much.

19 After the Cloudens, then again
20 Helen Gym, Irving Jones, Richmond
21 Gardner, Dr. Lawrence Jones, and
22 Dr. Naomi Booker, you're next.

23 Thank you. Thank you for your
24 patience. I know you have a meeting.

25 MR. CLOUDEN: Thank you,

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2 Chairpeople. My name is Horace Clouden.
3 I'm an engineer for the School District
4 of Philadelphia.

5 I've taken the proposal
6 submitted by the School District and
7 modified it based on my experience while
8 working in over 100 schools and having
9 countless conversations with staff,
10 students, and the community using the
11 School District's own figures. I've seen
12 and heard other proposals, but I feel
13 this proposal, while directly and
14 indirectly affecting the entire School
15 District, is the direction we need to go
16 in.

17 Up until the 1980s, we had the
18 grade configurations of K to 6; 7th, 8th,
19 and 9th; 10th, 11th, 12th. It was placed
20 in structures of elementary, middle, and
21 high school. We need to go back to the
22 old grade configurations and structure.
23 It can be put back into operation,
24 because you still have most of your
25 middle school buildings still in place

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2 and ready -- I repeat -- ready to receive
3 students at minimum cost of renovations
4 and at no cost to transition a K to 8
5 grade or a K to 5 grade back to a K to 6
6 grade.

7 There's a savings with the
8 Clouden proposal, but only the School
9 District can provide that number. What
10 the District, parents, and community must
11 realize is that the elementary schools
12 were designed for K to 6 grade, the
13 middle schools were designed for 7th,
14 8th, and 9th, and the high schools were
15 designed to better prepare the students
16 with just 10th, 11th, and 12th for what
17 awaits them in life.

18 You must place them in these
19 grade sets to ensure safety, academics,
20 physical, and mental growth. The money
21 is there. The building is there. The
22 staff will have to be willing to put
23 aside their own vested interest as well
24 as some of the private partnerships
25 established with universities, colleges,

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2 hospitals, and teachers groups. There
3 are too many distractions in these
4 schools.

5 The Clouden proposal is putting
6 forth a plan that can help the entire
7 School District, especially the children
8 and the families they serve. But if
9 you're going to make the change, this one
10 can refill unoccupied seats and increase
11 revenue from student population. This
12 counterproposal is intended to assist the
13 School District's transformation, one,
14 with their image. They need to advertise
15 for better schools, campaign to bring
16 students back.

17 Two, school safety. New grade
18 sets K to 6, 7th to 9th, 10th to 12th.
19 More of a controlled school climate goal
20 is to improve behavior and academics.

21 Space: Open seats give you the
22 ability to modify growth.

23 Number four, resources. The
24 School District has the \$9 million
25 designated from the operating fund,

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2 designated priorities from the capital
3 fund, and designated priorities from the
4 CTE projected plan to help make citywide
5 transition.

6 Number five, bussing. K to 6
7 graders can still walk to school with
8 their parents. Our plan with the
9 closures, we go up to five blocks.
10 That's the maximum increased walking
11 distance with our schools. This is up to
12 five blocks.

13 Parent concerns: Increase
14 parent engagement by developing home and
15 school associations, SACs and et cetera.

16 Student concerns: Academics,
17 sports, trades, and neighborhoods, to
18 address the fears that has been expressed
19 by youth and parents.

20 Budget/deficit: We recommend
21 19 school closings instead of 38. Now,
22 some of our 19 schools, ten of them are
23 high schools. So it's just a matter of
24 combining -- like, for example, we would
25 take University High School and put six

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2 of your other magnet high schools in that
3 location. Three of those schools are
4 being leased for over, combined, over \$2
5 million. So it's a savings right there.

6 Our elementary schools, six of
7 them of the 19 proposed closures are
8 again within five blocks walking distance
9 of the other schools, and also they are
10 moving to high performance programs.

11 And then our last is our middle
12 school transitions. We have like two
13 schools that will be transferred up into
14 another middle school.

15 Transition period: One year.

16 The special needs population:
17 Unnecessary to move them.

18 Facilities: Whether it's over
19 or under capacity, it's important to
20 manage staff differently for better
21 results. You must change your operating
22 procedures when it comes to maintenance.
23 While much focus continues to be on
24 capital improvement projects, there
25 should be special attention on preventive

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2 maintenance to avoid more building in
3 disrepair.

4 Basically in a nutshell, this
5 is -- we believe that our 7th, 8th, and
6 9th grade model is where you make the
7 transition from -- instead of a K to 8,
8 the transition was just one year into 9th
9 grade. That 9th grade created your most
10 persistently dangerous schools. So you
11 have to bring them back into 7th, 8th,
12 and 9th and give a better transition
13 period.

14 Now, also in your middle
15 schools, that's where you could introduce
16 more trades to your CTE programs. The
17 money is there, whether you use the money
18 from the CTE program or take the
19 additional money from the special ed
20 child to help pay for the trades in that
21 school. And also you can start your
22 sports programs at an earlier age like
23 there used to be back in the '80s, back
24 in your middle schools. So you can have
25 your -- the family doesn't want to use

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2 the word "competition," but competition
3 between. And it is 25 middle schools.
4 That's how many schools it would be
5 across the City of Philadelphia.

6 So it addresses all six
7 regions. I think this is the proposal or
8 the plan that even if you had your
9 moratorium, it would have to come down to
10 this. Bring it back to the way it was.
11 Get the special interest groups out of
12 these schools, because some of them are
13 stepping over each other trying to
14 provide service for maybe 10 percent of
15 the children that's in these schools. So
16 you have 90 percent of these children
17 still losing out. So, in other words,
18 the School District has to learn how to
19 manage their facilities, their employees,
20 everybody better. And that's all I got
21 to say.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you very much. We want to thank you,
24 Mr. Clouden. As many of you may or may
25 not know, we have 23 groups in Southwest

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2 who have come together to deal with this
3 issue, and Mr. Clouden wrote a plan first
4 for them and then for the rest of the
5 City that he took upon himself to do and
6 get published and printed.

7 We want to thank Mama Gail, his
8 wife, his daughter, and thank them for
9 their commitment to public education in
10 their community.

11 (Thank you.)

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. CLOUDEN: Madam Chairwoman,
14 I'd like to say something.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

16 MS. CLOUDEN: And this is
17 separate from the proposal. I have some
18 real concerns. And for folks that know
19 me, I've been an advocate for a long
20 time, and I want to ask that we take a
21 look when it comes to the District at the
22 northeast region, where there are, I
23 believe, 21 schools that are
24 overcapacity. While we're talking about
25 empty seats in other parts of the City,

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2 there are about 21 schools I read that's
3 overcapacity, and that's over 100 to 800
4 students where for many of those children
5 they may be bussed, and that's a cost to
6 the District.

7 I have concerns about that,
8 especially if children are moving or even
9 being -- let me say being bussed to the
10 northeast, and only two of them out of
11 those schools are making AYP. And my
12 figures may be wrong, but it's something
13 to look into. If the schools are not
14 making AYP and they're overcapacity by
15 100 to 800 students, that's too much.

16 Thank you.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you all very much. Thank you for your
19 commitment. Great. Thank you very much.

20 Helen Gym, Irving Jones,
21 Richmond Gardner, you're up. Then we'll
22 have Lawrence Jones and Dr. Booker.

23 (Witnesses approached witness
24 table.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

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2 you for your patience. See, if they
3 would commit to giving us two days, we
4 wouldn't go through this. Hard enough to
5 get them to stay the time they do.
6 That's the issue, my issue. So I
7 apologize to all of you for such a long
8 day.

9 Thank you.

10 MS. GYM: Thank you very much,
11 Councilwoman Blackwell, especially for
12 your interest not only in this issue but
13 in the broad range of issues around
14 public schools and public education.

15 So I also am not going to go on
16 very long, because I think you've heard
17 some really excellent testimony, and the
18 primary issue that I think that we as
19 parents at Parents United for Public
20 Education have concern about is how do we
21 end up with a better school system than
22 the one that we currently have. And one
23 of our biggest concerns is that school
24 closings have become an end in
25 themselves. That is the purpose. But

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2 they are not an end in themselves. They
3 are simply a means to achieve different
4 ends. And it's very important to
5 remember that we've got data on more than
6 a decade of school closings in cities all
7 across the country, and one of the
8 critical questions we've often asked is
9 what lessons have we learned from those
10 cities. What do we know from them that
11 we can do better in Philadelphia so we
12 don't repeat their mistakes. I think
13 that's supposed to be the lesson of
14 experience in history.

15 But almost to a point, the
16 School District has failed to demonstrate
17 that it has learned some critical lessons
18 from other cities. Among them is that
19 there's almost zero focus right now on
20 receiving schools. Kate Shaw from the
21 Research for Action made a very brief
22 point today, that the quality and the
23 academic quality of schools matters if
24 the receiving school is academically
25 superior to the sending school. And you

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2 heard earlier today that the Executive
3 Director of Philadelphia Schools
4 Partnership, Mark Gleason, talked about
5 the failure of the current closing
6 schools, something like 35 percent
7 reading proficiency. But what he
8 conveniently failed to include is that
9 the receiving schools, according to a
10 recent study by the Public School
11 Notebook, have the equal amount of
12 reading proficiency at them. So it's all
13 very well and good to say that these are
14 failing schools that are closing, but it
15 doesn't make any sense if the schools
16 that are receiving them have similar
17 reading proficiency rates.

18 Building conditions are not
19 significantly improved. And we see this
20 repeated in school after school. So we
21 can talk about Pepper Middle School
22 moving into Tilden Middle School. We can
23 talk about Germantown moving into King,
24 about Bok High School moving into South
25 Philadelphia. The School District has

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2 repeated this over and over throughout
3 the school closings plan.

4 And for us, it's fine to say,
5 Okay, well, whatever, we can think about
6 it, but there are some hard consequences
7 to this. And I hope that people have
8 testified multiple times and that we
9 don't forget that in June of 2012,
10 FitzSimons and Rhodes closed, and those
11 two high schools merged into Strawberry
12 Mansion High School. Many of the parents
13 at the time asked the School District the
14 question, how is this school going to be
15 better experience for my child than the
16 school that we are leaving? And the
17 School District said, Well, this is going
18 to be fine, don't worry about it, we'll
19 work something out. And essentially
20 those students go into Strawberry Mansion
21 High School. Lo and behold, Strawberry
22 Mansion High School is on the list this
23 year. Those students are supposed to go
24 into Benjamin Franklin High School. And
25 the same questions should be asked, how

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2 can they show that this is a better high
3 school than the one that we're leaving
4 behind?

5 So through no fault of their
6 own, you have a cohort of students who
7 are going to three different high schools
8 in three different years because the
9 School District didn't answer a
10 fundamental question, will this be a
11 better educational experience.

12 The consequences aren't just
13 for the children from FitzSimons and
14 Rhodes, but you have to think about the
15 ones who came to Strawberry Mansion.
16 FitzSimons and Rhodes are two high
17 schools roughly three, four hundred
18 students a piece, probably in between
19 there. We should have seen the
20 significant increase in the number of
21 students that came to Strawberry Mansion.
22 There were roughly maybe 125, 150 that
23 ended up at Strawberry Mansion.

24 So what happened to the
25 students from FitzSimons and Rhodes, all

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2 those students who should have come to
3 Strawberry Mansion High School. Have we
4 tracked them? Do we know where they went
5 to? Did they seek other options that
6 also have expense and cost for the School
7 District of Philadelphia? And when we
8 don't have those answers and when we
9 don't kind of track what happens to our
10 students, it raises some serious
11 questions, that it's not just about
12 moving students into seats. It's also
13 recognizing that the transfer process is
14 very fragile for students.

15 I'm not sure how many students
16 are going to make it from Strawberry
17 Mansion School to Ben Franklin. If the
18 School District is sure that they can
19 guarantee that 100 percent of those
20 students are going to move from
21 Strawberry Mansion to Ben Franklin, then
22 maybe we might have to start a dialogue,
23 but we've already seen that they couldn't
24 make the promise from FitzSimons and
25 Rhodes to Strawberry Mansion. And when

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2 they fail to make those promises, then
3 when our schools close, we not only risk
4 not fulfilling their seat capacity
5 requirements, but we also risk
6 exacerbating dropout rates. We
7 exacerbate truancy problems. We
8 exacerbate a whole host of other issues
9 that need to be thought about and
10 tracked.

11 So I don't want it just to be
12 about academics and walking and seats and
13 capacity issues. It's really about the
14 fundamental lived experiences of these
15 young people. A whole group of them
16 didn't make the transfer to Strawberry
17 Mansion, and because of that, Strawberry
18 Mansion closes, and then they'll go to
19 Ben Franklin. That's just one school and
20 out of nine where a fundamental mistake
21 has happened. When we have multiplied
22 and quadrupled the number of schools in
23 which we can't make those same promises,
24 then we are taking those children's
25 experiences and multiplying them by the

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2 hundreds. So it is a very serious issue.

3 The second point that I want to
4 make is that I hope that the schools
5 closing process is not just also seen as
6 an individual school-by-school process,
7 because I think that's the temptation
8 from the School District. And I know
9 they don't want to do that, but we are
10 still in very much a school-by-school
11 analysis of the situation. And really we
12 need to be thinking about the overall
13 health and system of the public school
14 system. And many people have already
15 spoken to it, but a couple of points to
16 really think about.

17 The District says it's
18 shrinking, but I'd really question
19 whether it is. Last June the District
20 approved charter school expansions of
21 5,000 students at a cost of \$140 million
22 over five years. So that is an expanding
23 system that they are responsible for
24 financially and overall, both
25 politically, they are responsible for

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2 them administratively. They're not
3 responsible for day-to-day, but we are
4 responsible, and it does matter to us
5 when scandals happen or when children
6 don't get educated properly.

7 So we need to think about this
8 idea that the District is shrinking. We
9 are in fact expanding on an enormous
10 scale that is not being seen except in a
11 handful of places around the country, and
12 I would argue that the consequences of
13 that is thinking about a school system
14 that has changed demographically
15 dramatically. So currently the School
16 District's African American population is
17 55 percent. That is an enormous drop
18 from the last decade. I would argue that
19 given the demographics of the current
20 school closings, that should all those
21 closings go through, you would see the
22 African American population in the School
23 District of Philadelphia drop
24 significantly below 50 percent. And then
25 you have to ask yourself, what kind of

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2 system have we created? We've created a
3 system in which there are magnet schools
4 and high-functioning schools for a
5 handful of those who can get in. We've
6 got leftover schools for special ed and
7 for immigrant youth and for adjudicated
8 youth and for the students who couldn't.
9 And then you have a massive charter
10 system in which students are admitted by
11 lottery, which is not a guarantee. It's
12 not the function of government. When we
13 promise children a quality public
14 education system, that is not a lottery.
15 Nobody believes in that, and it's ironic
16 that we have casino hearings across the
17 street, but...

18 The point being that we have to
19 ask ourselves, is that the end system
20 that we're willing to live with, and what
21 are the consequences of that when a whole
22 group of children are forced into a
23 lottery system in which things are not
24 guaranteed? There's a lot of questions
25 about that.

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2 New Orleans is often propped up
3 as a success rate, but next year New
4 Orleans is reportedly going to 100
5 percent charter, and there will be
6 numerous consequences, and it's worth
7 looking at those very carefully to think
8 about them.

9 We hope that the School
10 District has heard from community plans
11 and will consider endorsing them. We
12 also don't want to see nothing happen in
13 the School District. It's very
14 important. But we also hope that the
15 responses that community members have
16 talked about over and over again, these
17 are not questions of emotion, they are
18 not questions of noise, they are not
19 questions of old Philadelphia and the
20 status quo. These are essential
21 questions that we must be asking
22 ourselves as we move forward with an
23 important thing. It's a question of
24 accountability, it's a question of moral
25 responsibility, and it's a question about

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2 the vision for the School District.

3 So thank you.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you for that fine testimony and your
6 commitment to public education over the
7 years as well. Thank you.

8 (Applause.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Excuse
10 me, Ms. Gym. Councilwoman Blondell
11 Reynolds Brown has a question for you.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Good
13 afternoon.

14 MS. GYM: Good afternoon.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: It goes
16 without saying your activism remains
17 important and necessary. And you've
18 covered a lot of ground.

19 Two things I want to ask about.
20 It was stated today earlier this morning
21 by a number of concerned citizens like
22 yourself, clergy, and otherwise that no
23 one is saying that we should not do
24 something around this notion of school
25 closures given all the reasons that we

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2 know exist. So I need to know where you
3 are in that equation.

4 And then, secondly, when it
5 comes to charters, I've always been under
6 the impression and understanding that
7 parents make decisions about what charter
8 they want to send their young people to
9 for a lot of the reasons that we
10 understand, and if parents make those
11 decisions, they also know when they make
12 those decisions that there's some
13 parameters and criteria that they have to
14 be okay with because they've made a
15 decision to put their young person into a
16 charter school.

17 So comment on those two, as
18 briefly as possible, because there's
19 still many who have been as patient as
20 you have been.

21 MS. GYM: Absolutely. So I
22 think one of the questions that has gone
23 around is what then are your options.
24 The most important thing for us is that
25 school closings are not the end result.

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2 So if school closings are seen as a way
3 in which schools improve overall, then I
4 think we have a conversation going.

5 So, for example, if Bok were to
6 move into South Philly High, I'd like to
7 say that there could be an expansive
8 discussion and dialogue about whether
9 South Philadelphia High School could
10 potentially improve from that scenario.
11 The problem is is that all the focus is
12 on Bok and there's no opportunity for the
13 principal at South Philadelphia High to
14 come up with a vision of how this could
15 potentially benefit both the students at
16 South Philadelphia High School and meet
17 the needs of Bok. We can't have that
18 conversation because there's no
19 conversation with him. He's a receiving
20 school. He's not the closing school.

21 So when all the conversation is
22 focused on the closing school, there's no
23 opportunity for this person to make and
24 perhaps try to create a vision, perhaps a
25 local neighborhood CTE school with an

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2 academic magnet, could there be
3 conversations about expanding and making
4 sure the programs at Bok are brought in
5 in a way that makes the students feel
6 comfortable. None of that happens
7 because the only focus is on closing Bok
8 as a package of 37 schools and not on
9 where will these students get a better
10 educational experience.

11 That is just like a small
12 example, but I would like to see these
13 things thought about and talked about in
14 this way, and then we might have a
15 conversation. But the school closings
16 communities have come up with a number of
17 amazing school closings plans that I
18 think addresses a lot of issues, and then
19 the question on the table is, who is
20 going to step up, including the
21 communities themselves, with the
22 resources to make those things happen.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Okay. All
24 right. Well, then I will be a far bigger
25 optimist, because I think after the

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2 testimony today from the administration
3 to members of City Council who are
4 closely paying attention to a lot of
5 community activists that were here, I
6 think the message is clear that none of
7 this works if administrators and
8 principals are not a part of the dialogue
9 and the equation. And I would hope as
10 well that you simply putting that on the
11 record sends a message that there is an
12 expectation that all parties, all
13 partners, the receiving school, the
14 school that is having the closure or
15 whatever, that it becomes a dialogue and
16 not a dictate about the best way to do
17 that and keep those communities whole.

18 MS. GYM: And I think there's
19 just a mistake that people think -- and
20 it came out through the Pew report last
21 year that there's a mistake that people
22 think this has got to be -- sell the
23 school closings en mass. Give a few
24 away, but stick to your main goal, and
25 there's always going to be noise and

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2 that's just going to be -- and they
3 neglect the fact that the noise that
4 they're talking about are people with
5 real experiences in those neighborhoods.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: And
7 children with --

8 MS. GYM: And they actually
9 have some really strategic ideas that the
10 District hasn't thought about.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Agreed.

12 MS. GYM: In terms of your
13 charter question, I also believe very
14 strongly that parents have the right to
15 think about where they want to have
16 options for their children to go to
17 school. My only suggestion is is that
18 the parents don't get to necessarily
19 determine I'm going to X, Y, and Z
20 charter school. I will get in. They get
21 in if they have a lottery. And one of
22 the things that the Notebook revealed
23 earlier this summer is that a number of
24 schools also have rather archaic entry
25 requirements. People don't know how to

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2 get there. For the 8th grade fair today,
3 my son wanted to look at a charter school
4 for high school, but they didn't even
5 come to the 8th grade fair. So there was
6 no way for us to ask any questions. We'd
7 have to travel all the way out there.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: In a
9 matter like that, who should be held
10 responsible for the presence of a charter
11 school, the profile of a charter school,
12 the representation of a charter school?

13 MS. GYM: Well, I personally
14 think that it should be the School
15 District that needs to make sure that
16 the -- someone needs to make sure that
17 the entry requirements are clean and
18 fair, that people don't have to travel to
19 a country club in the suburbs or outside
20 of Philadelphia if they want to find out
21 an entry packet into a particular charter
22 school. But we don't have that, and I
23 don't know that -- it's a big question
24 about whether the School District has the
25 capacity to do it. But they have already

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2 been on record saying that they are going
3 to continue to expand the charter school
4 process, and I think that that's one of
5 the reasons why we need to ask some fair
6 questions if we're going to -- if this is
7 the way we're going.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Well
9 taken.

10 MS. GYM: Thank you,
11 Councilwoman. Thank you so much.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BROWN: Thank you.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
14 you again.

15 Mr. Jones, Irving Jones,
16 Chairman, Philadelphia National Writers
17 Union, and Mr. Richmond Garner, Education
18 Committee, United for Peace and Justice,
19 Delaware Valley Network.

20 I understand too -- Ms. Gym I'm
21 sure knows this better than I -- that the
22 receiving school must also have a
23 principal just for the new kids
24 irrespective of the old students, I
25 should say, not kids, irrespective of the

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2 old students. So that's another issue
3 that talks about personnel and more that
4 has to be done in that area.

5 (Witnesses approached witness
6 table.)

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

8 Gentlemen, thank you for your patience.

9 MR. IRVING JONES: We're going
10 to be very brief. First of all,
11 greetings to the Philadelphia City
12 Council members, the Philadelphia
13 Federation of Teachers, 32BJ, and all
14 others who labor within the Philadelphia
15 public school system and advocate against
16 school closure. My name is Irving
17 Courtley Jones. I'm Chair of the
18 Philadelphia Chapter of the National
19 Writers Union, Local 1981, United Auto
20 Workers AFL-CIO.

21 The Philadelphia Chapter of the
22 National Writers Union would like to
23 thank the members of the Philadelphia
24 Council for their support of the
25 resolution to military spending as passed

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2 in 2012. Such funding is a waste and is
3 a drag on the school system that is
4 failing for a lack of full funding.

5 As a member of the union of
6 labor against the wars, we have found
7 this to be most useful in our continued
8 struggle to move money in the areas of
9 Philadelphia public school system and
10 other programs provided by social funds
11 around the City of Philadelphia.

12 Philadelphia NWU supports
13 books, not bombs, and the concept of
14 education here in Philadelphia.

15 My major concern is that
16 education is being neglected. It is
17 becoming the poor man of the government.
18 We cut the budget when it comes to
19 teachers' salaries, classroom size,
20 number of schools, number of books,
21 quality of education. It is sinister.
22 We know that privatization of education
23 means no education for the working men
24 and women of this country, no education
25 for the poor, and the ultimate

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2 eradication of Bowel versus Board and the
3 reestablishment of a school system that
4 is very separate and very unequal.

5 It is sinister that America
6 is -- we hear that America is no longer
7 competitive. The salaries of its
8 citizens are simply too high. Everyone
9 knows that education helps people desire
10 better things in life. What we are
11 witnessing is the slow eradication of the
12 public school system, a system that will
13 end and will not be replaced, the
14 beginning of ignorance and intolerance,
15 the beginning of the end of the minimum
16 wage, the beginning of the end of decent
17 wages for the vast majority of our
18 society.

19 So what do we do about it? Why
20 come here today? What's the purpose? We
21 must find the money to educate our
22 children. We must find the time to solve
23 the problem.

24 We face reality that \$30
25 million is three percent of the price of

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2 a fight bomber, the partial cost of a
3 U.S. Navy cruiser, the full cost of two
4 U.S. Navy PT boats. Three hundred
5 million dollars is 33 percent of the
6 price of a fighter bomber.

7 We need to stand firm on our
8 priorities. Do we put the money into
9 education or do we put the money into
10 violence and the destruction of human
11 resources?

12 We ask for time. We ask for
13 money. My union local and I believe that
14 we have both.

15 The Philadelphia NWU will
16 continue to struggle against
17 privatization of the Philadelphia public
18 school system and will confront and
19 overcome the incursion of business
20 interest and the philanthropic takeovers
21 within the Philadelphia public school
22 system. The working-class children and
23 working families deserve no less than
24 this from the Philadelphia NWU and for
25 the rest of those represented.

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2 Thank you.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you very much.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Very
7 important comparisons as well.

8 Thank you for your patience
9 too, Mr. Gardner.

10 MR. GARDNER: Greetings. I am
11 Rich Gardner. I represent the
12 Educational Committee of the United for
13 Peace and Justice Delaware Valley
14 Network.

15 United for Peace and Justice,
16 the national group, was founded a few
17 months after the Iraq War began, and we
18 feel that the establishment, the
19 politicians, most of the press, most of
20 the corporate military spokespeople were
21 pushing very, very hard let's go to war,
22 let's go to war, now, now, now.

23 A year or so into the war, we
24 found out, oh, there were no weapons of
25 mass destruction. There was no crisis.

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2 We feel that there's a lot of
3 that here. There's a lot of rush, rush,
4 rush, now, now, now. We don't see that
5 there's a crisis. We recognize that
6 there is a shrinkage, that there are
7 fewer students than there are seats.
8 There is a reason to push for some
9 shrinkage, some reduction in the number
10 of schools. We need to take our time.
11 We need to look at this carefully.

12 We think that there are two
13 plans out on it. There is the Boston
14 Consulting Group, which is focused on
15 privatization. There is the Philadelphia
16 Coalition Advocating for Public Schools.
17 We strongly recommend and strongly
18 incline towards the PCAPS plan.

19 Thank you.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much.

22 Any questions?

23 (No response.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you, gentlemen. Thank you for your

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2 patience. Thank you. Excellent
3 testimony.

4 Dr. Booker; Lawrence Jones,
5 Chief Executive Officer, Richard Allen
6 Preparatory Charter School, and he heads
7 the charter school organization.

8 Dr. Naomi Booker, Chief Executive
9 Officer, Global Leadership Academy
10 Charter School. Two of my favorite
11 people.

12 (Witnesses approached witness
13 table.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We
15 thank you for your patience. Sorry to
16 hold you so long.

17 MR. LAWRENCE JONES: So I want
18 to first say I know that we had someone
19 who spoke a little bit earlier and gave
20 quotes from Dr. King. Considering the
21 fact that I was educated where he was
22 educated, slept in the same dorm where he
23 slept, and walked the halls that he
24 walked, I think I'd be remiss if I didn't
25 start with one myself, and, that is, that

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2 the day we see the truth and cease to
3 speak is the day we begin to die.

4 So knowing that I would like to
5 keep on living and living correctly, I'm
6 very disappointed in the fact that a lot
7 of what we have heard today about
8 educational plans and specifically
9 involving charter schools has brought a
10 lot of emotion, but much of that emotion
11 has been brought without truth, without
12 facts. And I think that because we're
13 dealing with children, that is
14 unconscionable.

15 I also have got to say that as
16 someone who has been doing this for 19
17 years, all in middle schools in West and
18 Southwest Philadelphia, I appreciate the
19 amount of community outpouring, all of
20 the activists and everyone who is doing
21 so much to save schools, but I have to
22 say some of the schools that have been
23 failing for 30 years, where was the
24 outreach 10, 15, 20, 30 years ago? And
25 if we're not willing to stand up for

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2 children every day that there's failure,
3 we can't stand up simply when a big
4 change comes about. And that may not be
5 popular, but, again, oftentimes truth is
6 not popular.

7 So a couple of things to look
8 at. We have heard charter schools and
9 gone to a couple things about what's been
10 said about them. What I have not seen is
11 the ability for charter schools to be
12 utilized as part of this plan. And I'm
13 saying that not as someone who wants to
14 just see more and more charter schools,
15 but if there is a concern that charter
16 schools are only enrolling certain
17 students, hold our feet to the fire and
18 make us accountable. And if we're saying
19 that we will educate all students, then
20 that option should be available to all
21 students.

22 Helen mentioned, Helen Gym,
23 mentioned Pepper Middle School. I'm
24 going to bring that into play since it
25 was already brought here. I am CEO of a

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2 school in Southwest Philadelphia. I hear
3 people saying that if you go from Pepper
4 to Shaw to Tilden, you're going to have
5 turf wars. I'm not insulted by that
6 because of the fact that I have 250-some
7 students who would be going to Tilden, I
8 have about 87, 90 students who would be
9 going to Shaw, and I have about 40
10 students who would be going to Pepper,
11 and every day we do not have turf wars.
12 That's not an insult to me or my staff.

13 To think that our children
14 can't co-exist with each other without
15 turf wars to some may be a reality. To
16 me that is a low expectation that we are
17 fostering and promoting in the name of
18 keeping schools open. I can't accept
19 that. I don't see how anyone could. If
20 it was their child, they'd be upset, and
21 if it was my child, the only fight that
22 we might be talking about is that person
23 and I.

24 So here's another issue. Pedro
25 Ramos, Chairman Ramos, came up with a

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2 plan for how to expand charter schools,
3 and what he said was back in the spring,
4 that it would be based on fiscal prudence
5 and academic achievement. We agree with
6 that, specifically if it is done with
7 fidelity.

8 And herein is the rub. If we
9 look at the charter school office, we
10 have to hold not only charter schools
11 accountable, but we must hold the charter
12 school office accountable to make sure
13 that any school that is expanded is done
14 so based on the criteria and the
15 measurements that Chairman Ramos and the
16 SRC put forward.

17 But we also need to take it
18 further. So if you have a child that's
19 going from Shaw to Tilden and those
20 scores are similar or worse, how with a
21 good conscience do we do that? The same
22 criteria should be held for traditional
23 public schools, not just for expansion or
24 closures, but for an everyday operation.
25 If a charter school is bad, close it,

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2 because kids deserve better. If a
3 District school is bad, close it, because
4 kids deserve better. And if you're not
5 willing to do that, you're either serving
6 your job, your union, your friends, but
7 you are not serving children, and let's
8 get that straight. Again, it might not
9 be popular, but nobody is here to be
10 popular. And it might not be political,
11 but that's not what I'm here to do as
12 well.

13 The second thing is, I've heard
14 people talk about accountability. There
15 has been fraud. There has been
16 mismanagement of funds. It's been
17 embarrassing. But I ask you, can you
18 tell me the indictment of a charter
19 school official that has occurred outside
20 of Philadelphia? It's quiet, because it
21 hasn't happened. The one thing that all
22 of those indicted have in common is the
23 same authorizer. And I'm not here to
24 slam the School District of Philadelphia.
25 I am here to say that the charter school

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2 office has to do a better job and the
3 authorizer has to do a better job, and we
4 in the charter community have to be held
5 accountable. If we steal from somebody,
6 we need to go to jail. But guess what?
7 If a District administrator steals from
8 children, they should go to jail as well.
9 And if it's not happening, we not only
10 have to look at punishing the charter
11 schools, we have to look at those
12 individuals who have allowed that fraud
13 to go on for years unchecked. They get
14 taxpayer dollars too.

15 One other quick thing, and I'm
16 rushing because I have a board meeting
17 tonight, which is public and open to the
18 Sunshine Law, which some people may not
19 believe.

20 Funding realities. We get more
21 money than traditional public schools.
22 We cost public taxpayers money. That is
23 false, and it's based upon your
24 philosophy. If your philosophy is that
25 public education equals a school

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2 district, whether it's Philadelphia,
3 Cheltenham, Abington, Upper Darby,
4 Duquesne, then you might think that it's
5 costing money. If your philosophy is
6 that public education is the system that
7 is here to educate students on the public
8 dime, then you're correct. And let's
9 look at that.

10 The way that students get
11 funding in Philadelphia and across the
12 state is, you take a huge pile of money
13 that the School District spends. We are
14 not funded on their revenues. We're
15 funded on their expenditures. So the
16 charter schools aren't starving the
17 District. If the District doesn't eat,
18 we get hungry too. When the District
19 gets fat, our pants get tight as well.
20 That's the way the system works.

21 There's a big pot of money that
22 the District spends. They then take
23 deductions for debt service, facilities
24 costs, adult basic education, and several
25 other line items. As a matter of fact,

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2 21 deductions are taken, despite the fact
3 that charter law says only seven can be
4 taken. You take all of those deductions
5 and then what's left over are divided by
6 the total number of students, charter and
7 traditional District, and you get a
8 per-pupil allotment, which for regular
9 education is approximately 73 percent of
10 what is going to a traditional per-pupil
11 child.

12 The District is getting a bad
13 deal because the funding formula is not
14 per pupil. But that's not our fault.
15 We're not getting more. We are getting
16 less. And despite that fact, we have
17 facilities, we have debt service, we
18 have -- someone mentioned a community
19 school. I've got a clinical manager, a
20 caseworker, social worker, and a nurse
21 that's in our building five days a week.
22 I've got air conditioning, computers in
23 every classroom. And as the CEO and the
24 head ranking officer, I make less than
25 the high school principal in the District

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2 by design, and I will stand behind that
3 any day. And as of last week, we just
4 got reaffirmed, our credit rating, by
5 Standard & Poor. We are being held
6 accountable, and this is the truth. And
7 every parent that's not being told this,
8 you are being lied to. So when you clap
9 your hands and say the charter is the
10 enemy, watch out, because if you don't
11 have the truth, it's you and your
12 children that are going to be getting the
13 shaft again.

14 So this is where we are. And
15 the last thing I will say is that we saw
16 this coming, as has been said before. We
17 don't want to make past mistakes. And
18 there's two. In November of 2008, we
19 gave public testimony to the SRC. We
20 said that there needs to be a
21 reorganization plan. We highlighted
22 specific schools, several of which are on
23 the closure list now, and identified that
24 they were under-enrolled. We asked how
25 come schools couldn't shift in and work

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2 with charters. We saw this coming and we
3 asked for questions. Those questions
4 were not answered until Dr. Hite came to
5 Philadelphia, and this current SRC spoke
6 up as well. We thank them for that.

7 And the last thing is, when we
8 actually look at some of the things with
9 the charter office, we recommended a
10 direct report to the SRC. The Task Force
11 1 of six years ago said that. The Task
12 Force 2 said that. And the Philadelphia
13 Great Schools Compact has looked for
14 that, and up to now, it's been ignored.
15 We cannot have that and repeat the same
16 mistakes.

17 Thank you all very much. I'm
18 sorry if I went over.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you. Excellent testimony. Thank you for
21 your commitment.

22 Dr. Naomi Booker.

23 DR. BOOKER: Thank you. Good
24 evening, everybody. But I've sat here
25 for the last three hours listening to a

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2 lot of comments and a lot of good and
3 negative testimony. And I also sit here
4 and listened to people cast the blame on
5 charter schools. And I have some
6 questions and I have my testimony, but
7 I'm going to add a little bit to it.

8 Someone said something to you
9 about the high school fair and how no
10 schools were down there. Technically it
11 is a high school fair for the District.
12 However, there was a high school fair at
13 Global Leadership Academy a few weeks ago
14 and we had all of the high schools there,
15 and people were invited to attend that.
16 So we do do things and we are allowed to
17 do that.

18 But for everybody, just to let
19 you know, that I've been in the District
20 in the field of education for over 40
21 years. Don't look like that, but that's
22 what it is, right? And so -- and 34 of
23 those years I spent in the School
24 District of Philadelphia. And so during
25 a lot of this time, each of us have seen

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2 a lot of the good, the bad, and the ugly
3 of education.

4 But one of the things that I
5 notice is that no matter how ugly things
6 got, if we set aside our interests and
7 put children first, then miracles
8 happened. And that's what needs to
9 happen now.

10 I am saddened by the fact that
11 people want to keep open schools where
12 less than 25 percent of the children are
13 proficient. I'm also saddened by the
14 fact that we're now talking about this
15 when this is a process that's been
16 happening over years. Ten or 11 years
17 ago, the state took over our School
18 District because it was failing our
19 children. That then became the SRC. Do
20 people remember the School Board of
21 Education and that group that was there
22 then?

23 So now these tough decisions
24 have to be made, and they have to be made
25 because we need to now look at what's

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2 best for these children, for our
3 children.

4 Are we willing now to talk
5 about budgets and figure out what's best
6 for the budget? Are we willing to look
7 at our special interests? Are we willing
8 now to defend these school closures? I
9 just can't get that in my head, because
10 these are schools that have been failing
11 over time.

12 Philadelphia is the home of
13 this country's highest -- excuse me; best
14 public charter schools, but we get blamed
15 for so many things. And regardless of
16 all that sensationalism and negative
17 press that comes to highlight about a
18 handful, just a handful of charter
19 schools, the fact is that we have many
20 public quality charter schools that are
21 willing, ready, and completely able to
22 take in students displaced by the School
23 District.

24 Nobody has asked me. I have
25 three classrooms. I could take 75 more

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2 children. I'm near two schools, Leidy
3 and Blankenburg. Both of them are
4 considered, if you look at the data,
5 where they are in terms of failing the
6 children, but nobody came to me and said,
7 Could you take more children. I could,
8 but I'm not -- I have to be -- it has to
9 go over the cap that's given to me.

10 I happen to be the CEO of
11 Global Leadership Academy, which was also
12 a failing charter school that I took over
13 six years ago. We have made AYP every
14 year since I came to that school. I'm
15 not trying to make this a promotional
16 fact, but the real reason is that we
17 enroll children at many grade levels that
18 are behind and we turn them into
19 scholars, because that's what we call our
20 children, scholars. And we take children
21 from neighborhoods where they can see
22 Center City skyline, but they may not
23 ever get there, because they can't afford
24 the trolley ride down. But we get them
25 not only around the City, but we also

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2 take them out of the country. We provide
3 them with academic excursions throughout
4 the country and the world. We are
5 changing the negative paradigm so
6 wrongfully instilled in many of this
7 city's children, teaching them to believe
8 they are destined for success, provided
9 they are willing to learn. And by the
10 way, 85 percent of my children are below
11 the poverty line.

12 Permanent failure is not an
13 option for the children that go to GLA,
14 and they will become the leaders, the
15 future leaders, of the world. And there
16 are so many other charter schools in the
17 City of Philadelphia making that kind of
18 difference.

19 I am the President of
20 Philadelphia Charters for Excellence, an
21 association of 25 top public charter
22 schools and growing, one of them being
23 FACTS, which Dr. Gym was associated with.
24 And I'm persuaded that charter schools
25 are playing a very important role in

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2 ending this city's minority dropout rate.

3 I think people need to check
4 the data when they talk about failing
5 charter schools, and when they stand up
6 in front of a crowd, they make statements
7 like "all" or "most" when -- be specific,
8 because right now we're talking about 37
9 schools. Be specific when you step up
10 and talk. And if you're saying five
11 charter schools are failing, in my view,
12 if you're a charter school, if you're a
13 traditional public school, if you are a
14 private school, if you are a Catholic
15 school and you are failing children, you
16 need to close, period. That's all of
17 them.

18 So for me, I'm trying to go
19 through my thing, but I just want you to
20 know about the lottery. Somebody came up
21 here and said about this lottery. First
22 of all, people vote with their feet, and
23 if a parent is not happy with the school
24 that they are forced to go to, then they
25 pick up and try to find a better school

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2 for their children. So they come to our
3 schools and they complete an application.
4 Now, I have 700 people who came from
5 January to now to get a spot for 125
6 spots. Now, how do I choose and do that?
7 I have to do a lottery, because it's fair
8 for everybody. And if anybody didn't see
9 "Waiting for Superman," you need to go
10 see it, because it is one of the saddest
11 days in our history at GLA, because I
12 have to sit there and watch disappointed
13 parents walk out with their heads hanging
14 down or in tears because they have to go
15 back to a failing school.

16 And let me tell you something
17 else about charters. These are schools
18 that offer people choice, and when we say
19 take that away and we say go to your
20 neighborhood school because that's what
21 you have to do, then we are taking choice
22 away from people. And to me, that is
23 unfair. Everybody should have the
24 choice. I should have the choice and
25 everybody should have the choice, whether

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2 they have the means to or not.

3 And also in 1998, there was one
4 charter school that was opened, and today
5 there are 80-plus. Well, who authorized
6 them? The School District of
7 Philadelphia. They authorized them along
8 with the way. So are we looking at the
9 change that was occurring in our
10 District? Are we really trying to offer
11 a lot of educational options for children
12 or are we just saying, oh, no, go back to
13 that one option? Well, it's not going to
14 happen. Charter schools are not going
15 anywhere and so we just need to
16 understand that parents are making that
17 choice. And if a school fails, if it's a
18 failing charter school, they will leave.
19 They will walk away. They will go to
20 another one.

21 So I say to you, Council, for
22 the sake of all of our children, they all
23 belong to us, they belong to our city,
24 that we decide to break down these
25 barriers that are in place to keep young

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2 people from going to the best school
3 possible in the City of Philadelphia.

4 Thank you.

5 (Applause.)

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

7 Certainly thank you, Dr. Booker. You do
8 have an excellent school, as does
9 Lawrence Jones, and your comments and
10 your statements were very, very
11 important.

12 Certainly we know her mother is
13 Audrey Johnson-Thornton, who is head of
14 Belmont Plateau. So the leadership is in
15 her genes. It's in her veins.

16 Yes, Councilman Oh.

17 COUNCILMAN OH: Thank you very
18 much, Madam Chairwoman.

19 I certainly do understand what
20 you're saying. I did not want to
21 interrupt in any way what you were
22 saying, because I do understand that you
23 had something to say publicly, but to the
24 extent that you were speaking to Council,
25 I certainly want to assure you and

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2 everyone listening that we certainly are
3 not in any way unclear about the value of
4 charter schools. I think the issue today
5 is not about keeping open bad schools.
6 It is about whether or not closing
7 schools without a good plan and a good
8 alternative is a good thing to do. And
9 part of what certainly you offer, as
10 you've alluded to, is a resource that's
11 available to help the students of this
12 city that may not be fully taking into
13 account in an overall plan, and I think
14 there certainly are some issues that I
15 understand that have been raised in the
16 past about charter schools that perform
17 exceptionally well that are not given an
18 opportunity to do more, including
19 managing some of these neighborhood
20 schools in the neighborhoods with the
21 students that could be very helpful.

22 But I wanted to assure you that
23 as you were speaking out to whatever you
24 heard, that you did not leave here
25 thinking that we were unaware of your

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2 contributions. Okay?

3 Thank you.

4 DR. BOOKER: Thank you, and I
5 know it wasn't this side of the room.

6 MR. LAWRENCE JONES: Thank you
7 so much.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you very, very much. Thank you.

10 Mr. Orlando Acosta, Respect Our
11 Vote Movement; Carl Moore, concerned
12 citizen, 82nd Airborne; Ms. Charisma
13 Presley, Nicetown Parents Association;
14 and my dear Mother Simmons did not get
15 here. You all know she always comes and
16 tells the Superintendent that he's a boy
17 yet, not yet grown. She must be sick.

18 (Witnesses approached witness
19 table.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you for your patience, Mr. Moore.

22 I've known him longer than
23 either of us will say.

24 MR. MOORE: I knew her when she
25 was a teacher, y'all. So we going way

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2 back.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you.

5 MR. MOORE: And the young lady
6 sitting there beside her, I knew her when
7 she was the most beautiful dancer in the
8 world. And the gentleman sitting right
9 there, he's a part of the 82nd Airborne
10 and the unit alumni association. You got
11 to be bad to be a part of that. You're
12 special, because guess what? I jumped so
13 close to God.

14 But my name is Carl S. Moore.
15 I'm a member of the Moore family here in
16 the City of Philadelphia. I'm a
17 69-year-old senior citizen. I got eight
18 kids, 17 grand-kids, and four
19 great-grand-kids. For years my family
20 and I have been demonstrating for a
21 proper education for the citizens of the
22 City of Philadelphia. Every elected
23 politician of color, even a white color,
24 I have worked for or had some
25 participation in their election. I

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2 worked for Frank Rizzo, Bill Green, Eddie
3 Rendell and on. And I even worked for
4 the Councilperson right there, both of
5 them.

6 And what I'm going to say here,
7 it's a shame. If some of my colleagues
8 were alive, like Dave Richardson, we'd be
9 turning over in our damn graves,
10 Councilperson.

11 It's amazing to me that the
12 citizens of Philadelphia would allow 37
13 schools. This man coming to town tell me
14 this has been going on for years. My
15 opinion, if you been here earlier, I
16 asked him what the hell he take the job
17 for. You know what was here.

18 We hired this person here to
19 solve the problem, not to come here and
20 tell us about the problem. We know what
21 the problem is. We know that the State
22 of Pennsylvania took over our educational
23 system, and they donated, they do every
24 damn thing in the world.

25 I'm here to say that there's a

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2 conspiracy on the state part to take over
3 our public education, conspiracy to turn
4 it all into a charter school,
5 public-private educational institution.

6 From listening to all the
7 people here, there's nothing that I don't
8 already know.

9 Children are in charter
10 schools. Parents going to these charter
11 schools are basically trying to find a
12 better education for our children.

13 I'm here today to tell you that
14 I'm drawing the line. Councilperson, my
15 State Representatives, y'all do what
16 y'all going to do. My family of 500
17 members -- and I say 500, here in the
18 City of Philadelphia -- and each one of
19 these Councilperson know, when I give my
20 word on something, I plan to keep it.
21 And I say to you, Councilperson, this man
22 got me at Broad and Spring Garden. I
23 will not allow not one school to be
24 closed. My plan is -- I've already hired
25 an attorney. His name Robert Mozenter.

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2 We plan to block the expressway, every
3 block and everything. I plan to go to
4 jail.

5 I told my grandson that I will
6 do everything. He's a part of this Leeds
7 School, one of the schools to be closed
8 down. My other grandson who was named
9 after me, Carl Moore, III, he graduated
10 from Strawberry Mansion. A lot of my
11 friends who went to Thomas Edison was the
12 high school that lost more alumni in
13 Vietnam than any other high school was
14 there in the United States.

15 I'm a Vietnam vet. I'm a
16 disabled vet. I'm retired. I'm 69. I'm
17 gathering together the senior citizens
18 and all, and we plan to raise holy hell.
19 I'm saying this in public, and here it
20 is. You got any word. I will die first
21 before I let them close that one
22 God-damned-school. That's ghetto talk.

23 (Applause.)

24 MR. MOORE: And I mean it. And
25 these people here will tell you, I give

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2 my word on it. You're not going to close
3 those schools. This state will come in
4 here and allow -- we've had the state
5 take over. We had so many
6 superintendents, hey, it looks like he's
7 just going to be here. In order for a
8 person to be a person who can supervise
9 the schools here in Philadelphia, he must
10 know the character, the background, the
11 neighborhood, the culture, the different
12 race and all.

13 Philadelphia is a very
14 political town. I lived in it. I worked
15 in it. I got some of the best mentors
16 there is. One mentor I got, his name was
17 Sam Evans. When there was a need for
18 black doctors and lawyers, he went out to
19 businesses, started a school, and got it.
20 He did it. He raised 1,800 black doctors
21 and lawyers. We can be innovative and
22 creative and do everything there is.

23 University of Pennsylvania took
24 over one school, and they lined up all
25 the way around the corner to get in.

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2 Each school got to have a character and
3 has to be played upon on the character.
4 If we do not, then we'll fail.

5 Money is not the problem. The
6 problem is, we're not willing to push the
7 button down. And I put it upon you, my
8 friends who are elected officials in the
9 City Council, don't let them do this to
10 us, because if you don't, I'll make this
11 summer hot as hell. And these people
12 know how I am. I'm a man of my word.

13 I am not going to let this go
14 down. I'm not going to let my
15 grand-kids, my great-grand-kids go down.
16 They want to do charter schools. Charter
17 schools are fine. Some of them are fine.
18 They have to be accountable. No one is
19 accountable. The Board of Education
20 right there, they're not accountable.
21 They come in and tell us and show the
22 disrespect that they have for this body
23 of elected officials, City Council
24 members, and to you and every one of
25 them. They come in and told us, hell, we

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2 going to shut your damn schools down. If
3 it had been the '60s and '70s in my day,
4 we'd have burnt their asses down. Why
5 you all sitting here? Y'all being very
6 dignified, very educational-wise. Hey, I
7 got an education too. I left that at the
8 front door. I'm grand-pop here, and I
9 plan to make changes.

10 I'm telling you again, March
11 7th, they say they're going to close the
12 school. Hey, I'm telling you in a very
13 dignified way, I will close what's open
14 in them from the rear up. You got my
15 word on that.

16 Council, I thank you very much
17 for the opportunity to express my anger
18 and my total upset, and I will be back.
19 And those people left here from the Board
20 of Education, your government relations
21 person back over there, tell them, Carl
22 Moore is coming, and I ain't no damn
23 joke. And I got money. I saved my
24 money.

25 (Applause.)

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2 MR. MOORE: And I got a good
3 lawyer too.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you, Carl.

6 MR. MOORE: Thank you very
7 much. Have a very lovely evening.
8 Anything I can do.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
10 you very much.

11 Mr. Orlando Acosta, Respect Our
12 Vote Movement group.

13 MR. ACOSTA: Thank you,
14 Councilwoman Blackwell.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you for your patience and always working
17 so hard.

18 MR. ACOSTA: Thank you very
19 much. Thanks to all the Councilmen,
20 Councilman Oh, everybody at Council
21 Chambers.

22 Basically I'm here to say
23 that -- I mean, you heard it all day.
24 You know, the situation is the District
25 does not care about the students, the

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2 children at all. I don't care how you
3 break it down, how you flip the word, be
4 politically correct about the whole
5 situation. They don't care. They will
6 hijack, sabotage this whole District if
7 it come -- it comes down to y'all, City
8 Council. It comes down to y'all. Y'all
9 are basically the saving grace to the
10 whole community. The community is out
11 here yelling and screaming about, look,
12 they're going to take our schools, take
13 our whole communities and break it down
14 piece by piece. At the end of the day,
15 there will be nobody left. There will be
16 children out there when you have -- when
17 you have jails in the middle of
18 neighborhoods, why are they building the
19 jails in the middle of our neighborhoods?
20 So if they talking about education, why
21 are there jails in the middle of the
22 neighborhoods? You don't put schools,
23 then you put jails right in the middle of
24 the whole neighborhood. If you're trying
25 to academically teach children how to be

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2 successful in college and be lawyers and
3 doctors, why are jails there? Okay?
4 There's no reason for a jail to be in the
5 neighborhood when you're trying to --
6 across the street from schools.

7 And at the end of the day, that
8 psychologically teaching children, Well,
9 if you don't make it in school, jail is
10 next. Okay?

11 I got a 13-year-old child. I
12 got a nine-year-old child -- a
13 ten-year-old child that was physically
14 harmed in school. Okay? Two times.
15 Once was choked around the neck, once was
16 pushed on the ground and smacked the back
17 of his head. So when they talk about
18 safety issues, I take that very
19 personally. Now, by the grace of God, he
20 was okay. But I still worry about if you
21 have a child that's being choked around
22 his neck -- and we're talking about
23 elementary children. So if you can't
24 control elementary children, how can you
25 control everybody else and combine the

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2 schools? And their school is at capacity
3 level, and that's James Logan Elementary.
4 They're at capacity level. Okay? And
5 this violence is going on with elementary
6 children. Okay?

7 So the District -- if the
8 District care and all that, when you have
9 all these fights and all this at schools,
10 why? If they really cared, they would
11 make sure that the funds was there for
12 the safety issue.

13 When you have Bryant Elementary
14 and that girl got taken out of that
15 school, where was the accountability for
16 there? Okay?

17 So I don't want to hear nothing
18 that the District had to say, because at
19 the end of the day, it comes down to the
20 children. Don't give me the aspect about
21 the money. I've looked at the numbers.
22 All their numbers don't add up.
23 Everybody knows the numbers don't add up
24 at the end of the day.

25 They didn't do all the

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2 research. Just like when they talk about
3 no seats and less seats, what about the
4 overcapacity? They didn't look at that.
5 They didn't take the time to do the
6 research within the community, how was it
7 going to affect jobs, how was it going to
8 affect the kids mentally, emotionally.
9 And when they talk about the aspect of
10 the community and the School District
11 plan, it should be a community plan, it
12 should be a City plan, working together
13 as one. Where is that? It's not nowhere
14 around.

15 When you talk about
16 accountability, everybody say, Well,
17 where -- you got 37 million that they
18 spent just in transportation alone back
19 in January on TransPasses. Are you
20 serious? Why? TransPasses, \$37 million.
21 And when you talk about programs, get
22 that aspect of the programs out. Get
23 back into saying courses, teaching kids
24 courses, colleges and teaching them.
25 Everybody talk about programs, program

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2 for this, program for that. No. It's
3 courses, teaching children if you do the
4 courses, then you're getting them
5 prepared for college.

6 Psychologically if you're
7 telling the child, your school -- they
8 let all this out ten days before
9 Christmas. All these recommendations was
10 ten days before Christmas. So that means
11 it was a psychological aspect to the
12 whole community to say just before your
13 holiday, this is what we going to put
14 into your mind. Okay?

15 Everything that they're doing
16 is psychologically destroying the
17 community just by leaving that thought
18 process and planting that seed. Okay?
19 And if the District is going to do that,
20 I have a real serious problem, because at
21 the end of the day when I'm dead and gone
22 and out of here -- I'm 40 years old, but
23 I walk these streets every day on these
24 crutches for my children and everybody's
25 children in this city. Okay? And just

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2 like he said right here, I will go to
3 jail for this. I will go to jail for it.
4 And whatever I need to do to make sure
5 that every child, not just mine, is taken
6 care of even after I'm gone, but that's
7 what I'm going to do. And I don't care
8 how many meetings, what I got to do,
9 rain, sleet or snow, I want this to work
10 for everybody down the line. But at the
11 end of the day, the District does not
12 care and it needs to be given back to the
13 community, along with working with the
14 City.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
16 you. Thank you, Brother Acosta.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: You're
19 always on the case. Thank you very, very
20 much.

21 Is Mr. Michael Thorpe, Chairman
22 of Mt. Vernon Manor Board here? I don't
23 see him. Kim Jones, Director of Families
24 in Schools Together.

25 (Applause.)

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Daphne
3 Young, a parent at McMichael. Are you
4 here? Tracey Gordon, Southwest Concerned
5 Citizens; Rick Young, President of Mantua
6 Community Improvement Committee; Dr. Lee
7 Nunnery, concerned citizen; David
8 McGilberry, concerned parent; Tiffany --
9 I don't see Tiffany. Okay. So Tiffany.

10 Some of these folks I called
11 are here. Then Tiffany Green; Samuel
12 Reed, III, teacher at Beeber, are you
13 here?

14 MR. REED: Yes.

15 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All
16 right. Hillary Linardopoulos. Let me
17 see. Say it.

18 MS. WEINRAUB: I'm not her, but
19 I'm going to take her place.

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: How do
21 you say her last name?

22 MS. WEINRAUB: Her name?
23 Linardopoulos. All right.

24 Is Steve Flemming here?

25 MR. FLEMMING: Yes, ma'am.

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2 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Kristi

3 Thomas?

4 MS. THOMAS: Yes.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Okay.

6 Andrew Schiera, University City High

7 School.

8 MR. SCHIERA: Here.

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Okay.

10 Patrice Berry, University City High

11 School.

12 MS. BERRY: Here.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Glen

14 Casey.

15 MR. CASEY: Here.

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

17 Christian Warwick.

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Evynn

20 Pendergrass.

21 MS. PENDERGRASS: Here.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: And

23 Paul Robeson School.

24 (Here.)

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Elvita

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2 Williams.

3 MS. WILLIAMS: Here.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: All
5 right. That's the whole group. That's
6 my list. Okay.

7 (Applause.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you all for your patience. Please
10 identify yourself for the record and
11 begin your testimony.

12 MS. KIM JONES: Sure. Good
13 afternoon. My name is Kim Jones and I'm
14 the FAST Program Director of the Family
15 and Schools Together program at Turning
16 Points for Children, and just behind me I
17 have some sampling of the FAST families
18 that came out today. I'd just like to
19 recognize them, if you could stand.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
22 Welcome. Welcome. Thank you.

23 MS. KIM JONES: Turning Points
24 for Children is a non-profit
25 organization, the result of a 2008 merger

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2 with the Children's Aid Society of
3 Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Society
4 for Services to Children. Last year
5 alone, Turning Points for Children served
6 more than 2,550 families and 5,700
7 children by providing a variety of
8 programs focused on the needs of children
9 and families.

10 Turning Points for Children's
11 mission is to support families in raising
12 safe, healthy, educated, and strong
13 children by partnering with caregivers to
14 develop and strengthen protective
15 qualities and by offering them the tools,
16 skills, and resources they need to ensure
17 their children's optimal development.

18 Turning Points for Children
19 uses its resources to develop programs
20 for those who are struggling with the
21 effects of chronic poverty; for example,
22 difficult relationships, domestic
23 violence, substance abuse, child abuse
24 and neglect, teen pregnancy, high dropout
25 rates, unemployment, substandard housing,

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2 and inadequate healthcare.

3 Turning Points for Children
4 continues to work with low-income
5 families. The goal is not simply to
6 prevent negative outcomes, but to help
7 families recognize and act upon their
8 strengths, helping them to achieve their
9 optimal potential by identifying and
10 achieving individual and family goals.

11 Throughout Turning Points for
12 Children's programming, there's a long
13 history of effectively working with
14 children, youth, and families to enable
15 them to develop the skills they need to
16 set and achieve goals, overcome
17 obstacles, locate and utilize community
18 resources, advocate for themselves, and
19 develop stability, healthy lifestyles,
20 and productive futures. One such program
21 that lives out its values is our FAST
22 program. FAST provides parenting
23 education and family support services for
24 parents, caregivers, and children by
25 working with schools, mental health, and

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2 substance abuse counselors, along with
3 community volunteers in order to
4 strengthen families through building
5 partnerships and promoting increased
6 success in school. Over the past ten
7 years, FAST was offered in as many as 41
8 elementary schools throughout the City of
9 Philadelphia. FAST serves approximately
10 650 families per year.

11 FAST is currently in 30
12 elementary schools and two middle
13 schools. Of the 41 schools, 11 have been
14 identified as possible closures. The
15 proposed closings may affect 500 or more
16 families that have participated in the
17 FAST program. In speaking with our
18 families, they have expressed numerous
19 concerns and they have many unanswered
20 questions. One such concern is their
21 child's ability to adjust to a new
22 environment. A mother stated to me that
23 her son had ADHD and was extremely shy.
24 She's worried about how he will fair in a
25 new school setting.

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2 In addition, our families have
3 expressed concerns regarding establishing
4 relationships with new school staff and
5 other families while leaving a familiar
6 school community.

7 Our parents are also concerned
8 with class size. Some fear that larger
9 classes, their child will not have
10 adequate attention from their teachers.
11 They're also concerned that the larger
12 class size may give rise to increased
13 negative behavior from other students
14 and, again, their child's learning will
15 be adversely affected.

16 Lastly, the parents I've spoken
17 with have expressed concern over
18 transportation issues. Although most of
19 their schools are within walking
20 distance, some children now face having
21 to cross major intersections in addition
22 to walking through neighborhoods that are
23 not so welcoming.

24 In an attempt to support our
25 families, we are encouraging our parents

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2 to be active participants in this process
3 by attending forums such as this and the
4 meetings that are scheduled in the
5 communities. They need answers to their
6 questions to enable them to make informed
7 decisions regarding their child's future.
8 They want a seat at the table and have
9 their voices heard.

10 On behalf of Turning Points for
11 Children, I'd like to thank you for the
12 opportunity to participate in this
13 hearing. Family and Schools Together
14 will continue to support our families as
15 they partner with schools to help invest
16 in the educational futures of our most
17 precious commodity. That's our children.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
21 you very much, and thank you for your
22 patience. Thank your entire team for
23 cheering you on.

24 MS. WILLIAMS: Good evening,
25 everyone. Thank you for your time. My

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2 name is Elvita Williams and I'm the
3 Secretary from the John L. Kinsey
4 Elementary Home and School Association,
5 and I'm also a FAST parent. So we want
6 to keep FAST alive.

7 (Applause.)

8 MS. WILLIAMS: I'm saddened
9 about the school closings. I pray to God
10 that none of our schools have to close.
11 But I'm here for John L. Kinsey. I've
12 been a Kinsey parent for the past 12
13 years.

14 Kinsey has always provided a
15 great education for my four sons, but the
16 staff here at Kinsey are like a -- have
17 not only -- excuse me; have not only
18 provided a great education for my four
19 sons, but the staff here at Kinsey are
20 like a second family for us as well.

21 The services they provide our
22 families raise from mentoring to
23 assisting my sons in the adjustment from
24 coming from a double-parent home to a
25 single-parent home after the loss of

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2 their father. Even during this
3 transformation, one teacher stuck her
4 neck on the line to get my oldest son,
5 Steven, into Central High School, where
6 he graduated with honors. And I stand
7 before you today as a proud parent,
8 because my son was able to attend and
9 graduate from Central because of the
10 dedicated staff at John L. Kinsey.

11 Here I am now and I look back
12 and I see the changes that are going on
13 today, and I see the children from other
14 schools are being transferred into our
15 school and it's making our school grades
16 and stuff go down lower. And now the
17 same children that you guys have
18 transferred into Kinsey that made our
19 stats and stuff go down, now you want to
20 take our school away and send our kids to
21 Pastorius and other underperforming
22 schools. We would just like a chance to
23 keep our school and to do what we need to
24 do to save it.

25 Thank you.

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2 (Applause.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
4 you, Ms. Williams.

5 We're going to pause for a
6 second while Tiffany Green comes forward.

7 (Short recess for
8 stenographer.)

9 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: So I
10 want you to know these school posters
11 were made by Mrs. Dolores Mohammed who
12 sits there. We met in college, and she
13 went to Nigeria where she's been for more
14 than 40 years and has her own school
15 called Essence International School,
16 people who speak languages from all over.
17 She's my editor. You see my beautiful
18 work. It's not me; it's Dolores
19 Mohammed.

20 MS. GREEN: I like that.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
22 you. And we thank Theresa McCormick,
23 whose nephew is close to heart, as she
24 is. We thank you all for being here.
25 And now we're going to go back to our

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2 program. And as I said during the mini
3 break, Dr. Hite, when you read this
4 transcript, realize you need to give us
5 two full days. It's unfair for people to
6 have to stay this late into one day. You
7 need to give us time. You need to commit
8 yourself to two days when we have
9 education hearings.

10 Thank you very much. Tiffany.

11 MS. GREEN: Okay.

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

13 Introduce yourself for the record.

14 MS. GREEN: Tiffany Green,
15 Concerned Citizens of Point Breeze. It's
16 been a long day.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

18 MS. GREEN: I just want to
19 speak on -- our position was schools, not
20 condominiums. There is -- in Chicago,
21 school closings, there was link to
22 gentrification, and we're seeing at this
23 particular point that -- I just want to
24 read something real quick that really
25 caught my eye, and it stated about Arne

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2 Duncan, who used to run the Chicago
3 public schools. It says, In
4 collaboration with the Mayor Daley office
5 and Chicago corporate elite pursuing an
6 aggressive school privatization agenda in
7 2004, this included an attempt to close
8 20 out of 22 schools in low-income,
9 minority neighborhoods. The effort was
10 clearly linked to the Mayor and property
11 developer efforts to gentrify the
12 neighborhood, to force out minority
13 residents, and glam up the properties for
14 resale in upper middle-income
15 professionals. With all their
16 neighborhood closings -- with all their
17 neighborhood school closings, low-income
18 residents will have no choice but to
19 leave.

20 And this is what we're talking
21 about. I've sat here all day and
22 listened to a lot of testimony, but no
23 one has posed the question, what will
24 happen to all of these schools? Are they
25 going to just sit in our community and be

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2 blighted? Well, we feel as though these
3 schools will be turned into condominiums.
4 It's already been put on record that the
5 old School Board has turned into
6 condominiums. The state building has
7 turned into condominiums. Several
8 schools have already been sold to
9 developers to turn into condominiums.
10 And it's already known based on
11 gentrification research that if you
12 turn -- if you put a condominium in a
13 middle of a low-income community, then
14 that is ground zero to begin to spread
15 out to all the other areas of low income,
16 and will definitely gentrify the
17 community.

18 We're asking, is the real goal
19 here real estate development for the
20 school closings? To sell the schools to
21 developers to build condominiums that
22 will run 300,000 to 3 million, and this
23 will begin a devastating process of
24 gentrification.

25 Many of these schools have been

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2 strategically selected in predominantly
3 African American, Latino, and minority
4 communities. According to the
5 Philadelphia Business Journal article
6 December 2012, commercial real estate in
7 Philadelphia is supposed to boom, and New
8 York developers are lining up to invest
9 in Philadelphia. If these schools are
10 turning to condominiums, this will have a
11 ripple effect of gentrification in many
12 other low-income and working-class
13 communities.

14 Mixing income doesn't work.
15 According to research, building a
16 condominium in a disadvantaged community
17 is the quickest way to displace and push
18 out existing community residents within
19 five to eight years. Example of this
20 condominium gentrification is taking
21 place in Washington, DC; in New York in
22 Prospect Park and in Harlem. Many of
23 these areas are being pushed out and
24 experienced school closings.

25 Chicago school closings was

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2 focused around gentrification and
3 education apartheid in a lot of the
4 articles. The decline of school
5 enrollment is further proof that the
6 gentrification process is having a wider
7 reach in Philadelphia in poor,
8 working-class families, and are being
9 pushed out of the community and the City.
10 Many examples of this is taking place
11 already in Society Hill, down in
12 Fairmount area, Northern Liberties, down
13 in our area, which is Point Breeze, and
14 South Philadelphia around South Street.

15 I just want to make this note,
16 that between South and Washington Avenue,
17 over 60 percent of the low-income and
18 minority residents were moved out from
19 2000 to 2010 as a direct effect to many
20 of the high-end houses that were built in
21 that area with that. Okay?

22 Also, I just want to speak on
23 real quick about the gambling, because we
24 happened to stumble on hearings the other
25 day regarding gambling, and you talk

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2 about two-thirds of some of the profits
3 going to gambling, but we're concerned
4 about that. Because the reality is that
5 gambling -- if you put a casino down in
6 the middle of the City and you're talking
7 about moving Strawberry Mansion students
8 over to Benjamin Franklin, you're going
9 to have students that will be walking
10 over to the casinos. Also, no one is
11 taking into effect that many of our
12 seniors are high -- they're prone to
13 gamble, and you're going to be a subway
14 ride away. It's called enticement.
15 You're enticing these people to come and
16 lose their savings.

17 It's also in the record that
18 many seniors, when they come down to the
19 gambling -- I don't want to go off, but
20 when they come down to the gambling, that
21 they are losing their money and some of
22 them go home, they don't even have money
23 to eat.

24 So we're saying we don't think
25 that school closings or keeping schools

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2 open should be associated with putting or
3 validating putting casinos in the middle
4 of a city.

5 Furthermore, I don't know if
6 anybody thought about this. You're going
7 to have students -- you have young
8 ladies, young girls, college students and
9 everything who may come down thinking
10 that they will be able to meet men and
11 pursue -- a lot of prostitution at this
12 point is not on the street. A lot of
13 this is on Craig's List and everything.
14 They'll be walking around downtown trying
15 to find men with money.

16 So I think that City Council
17 need to think twice about allowing that
18 casino to be put at Broad and Race.

19 Getting back to real quick what
20 I wanted to say is that let's talk about
21 solutions, because we do not want to
22 gentrify our areas. Many of the people
23 who vote for our elected officials are
24 local residents in the area. And if you
25 allow these buildings to be sold to

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2 developers, then you're going to be
3 definitely wiping out communities. We're
4 saying that right now, a bill needs to be
5 passed to designate school buildings for
6 community usage. That means maybe for
7 veteran housing or for -- like right now
8 we have senior citizens wait for
9 independent living. There needs to be
10 some type of designation. If you
11 designate these buildings without being
12 sold to developers, you may see a quick
13 change on trying to keep these schools
14 open. Because maybe there's a financial
15 gain here.

16 Number two, independent audit
17 by the Philadelphia Controller, it needs
18 to be that someone come in and do an
19 independent audit. Chicago has a
20 five-year moratorium right now. They
21 have a five-year moratorium. And they're
22 having an independent study done on
23 school reduction, school enrollment and
24 everything. They were able to get that
25 through. So we're saying that

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2 Philadelphia needs to follow. We need to
3 follow right now. We should not have
4 this right now, because this will
5 definitely create a ripple effect.

6 We're asking for an independent
7 assessment by a firm selected by City
8 Council. Create a fundraising plan for
9 each school that involves stakeholders
10 and the students. Let's start a
11 fundraising plan to at least help with
12 whatever they're lacking.

13 Also, we're talking about adopt
14 a school campaign. You have the top 50
15 corporations. Let them begin to adopt a
16 school. Talk about the fundraising goals
17 and talk about how they can be able to
18 help.

19 And, finally, you have the
20 elimination or the reduction of the
21 ten-year tax abatement. Councilman Goode
22 has put it through. It will be coming
23 up. We need to look at that ten-year tax
24 abatement, because you have close to --
25 and I don't want -- don't quote me --

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2 50,000 condominiums and new development
3 has already been built in the City. Many
4 of them are receiving ten-year tax
5 abatements. That is money that is going
6 right out of -- not that we can recoup
7 that right now, because once they receive
8 the ten-year tax abatement. But if we
9 can stop it now, we will have enough
10 money within the next two years to not
11 only keep the schools open, but also
12 repair the schools. We already had that
13 ten-year tax abatement for ten years. It
14 has run its course, and it's time to
15 rethink it and have it done and moved
16 out.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you, Ms. Green. Thank you very, very
20 much.

21 MS. GREEN: Thank you very
22 much. We just wanted to put that on the
23 record.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you. I missed the first one. I heard

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2 you say creative fundraising plan, adopt
3 a school, reduction dealing with the
4 ten-year tax abatement. What was the
5 first thing you said?

6 MS. GREEN: We say pass a bill
7 that designate that the school
8 buildings -- because after all, they were
9 purchased through taxpayers' money of the
10 City of Philadelphia. I would think that
11 City Council would have a say in terms of
12 how the buildings are utilized or what
13 happens to the building.

14 So we feel as though if you
15 pass a bill or pass an ordinance
16 designating the school building for
17 community usage, if they're too bad to
18 repair, or, for example, like senior
19 citizen independent living, veteran
20 housing, even houses for homeless or
21 single parents. They have -- handicap.
22 They also have something for -- a lot of
23 people like apartments. They don't want
24 to take on the responsibility of a whole
25 house. So if you have apartments with

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2 affordable rents, you could still have
3 the condominium flare, but --

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
5 you.

6 MS. GREEN: -- the income, the
7 rents will be under \$900, and there would
8 be a proviso in there that the rents
9 could not be raised above that, "proviso"
10 being the key word here. So we just
11 saying that it needs to be designated for
12 community, and that would sustain and
13 improve a community, not wipe them out.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you very, very much. Excellent
16 testimony. Thank you both very much.

17 MS. GREEN: Thank you very
18 much.

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: These
20 are folks who fought the RCO. Thank you,
21 Tiffany and Theresa. Thank you very
22 much.

23 Mr. Dave McGilberry, next
24 Samuel Reed, then Hillary Linardopoulos,
25 Steve Flemming, and Kristi Thomas.

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2 (Witnesses approached witness
3 table.)

4 Good evening.

5 MR. MCGILBERRY: Good evening
6 and thank you.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please
8 identify yourself for the record.

9 MR. MCGILBERRY: Thank you. My
10 name is David McGilberry. I'm a parent
11 of Paul Robeson High. And I want to
12 thank God, first of all, and thank all of
13 City Council for allowing me to speak.

14 I'm a parent of Paul Robeson
15 and proud of Mr. Robeson's story and his
16 name for the high school. I don't mind
17 making an effort to help save it.

18 On a daily basis, I help my son
19 stay focused on his schoolwork, his
20 tests, his homework, his spirit and not
21 to worry about this plan for the schools.

22 I see the sadness on his face
23 every morning I take him to school. I
24 know that he's sad about this. And that
25 I teach him the importance of focusing on

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2 his schoolwork.

3 When Paul Robeson High was
4 under construction, even during school
5 hours, to replace a boiler with a
6 million-dollar new boiler, I saw the
7 containment areas caution-taped off. We
8 had to walk around them, the work areas.
9 Students attended classes with
10 construction going on forward.

11 I understand it is a beautiful
12 boiler system in place now. Now Paul
13 Robeson has been placed on the list to be
14 closed or sold. School children to have
15 the students transferring to is worse
16 than Paul Robeson. I rebuke this plan.
17 However, I do support a moratorium to
18 give time to come up with a better plan.

19 If you can't give the students
20 a chance to graduate from the schools
21 that they have come to love, please help
22 us get the moratorium, time to create a
23 better plan for the students and the
24 schools. I think they deserve something.
25 What do the current students get

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2 directly? A direct result when you sell
3 Paul Robeson with the new million-dollar
4 boiler system in place.

5 Thank you.

6 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
7 you very much, Mr. McGilberry. Thank you
8 very much.

9 (Applause.)

10 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:
11 Appreciate your comments, and you're a
12 good parent.

13 Samuel Reed, III, teacher at
14 Beeber.

15 MR. REED: Yes, ma'am. We're
16 going to come up with a group. We're
17 going to follow in order.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Any
19 order you want is fine.

20 (Witnesses approached witness
21 table.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you. Just identify yourself and we'll
24 know who you are.

25 MS. THOMAS: Hi. My name is

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2 Kristianne Thomas and I'm a teacher at
3 Fairhill School. First, I'd like to
4 thank you for the opportunity to speak
5 and for the majority of you passing the
6 resolution for the moratorium.

7 Prior to all the news about
8 school closings, you probably have never
9 even heard of Fairhill School, and yet
10 those of us that are there are part of a
11 very, very long history of educating
12 children.

13 Since 1887, residents of the
14 Fairhill section of the City have had the
15 opportunity to attend our school. Our
16 students' parents and grandparents have
17 the proud honor of saying that they went
18 to Fairhill, and in some cases, even
19 great-grandparents. Now the school and
20 students I've grown to know and love, as
21 well as 126 years of history, are being
22 threatened with the possibility of
23 closing and coming to an end.

24 Our students are being made to
25 feel like failures, yet they're not

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2 failures. They're bright, loving,
3 spirited children, children who deserve
4 to be treated better than they are right
5 now. Our children, our school, the
6 Fairhill community has been placed at a
7 disadvantage. We're doing everything we
8 can to let others know, like yourselves,
9 how much we love our school and
10 desperately want Fairhill to stay open.
11 Our staff has had write-ins and call-ins
12 to contact politicians and express our
13 concerns with the whole situation. Our
14 students, parents, teachers, and other
15 community members have attended and
16 spoken at the Community FMP meetings and
17 the most recent SRC action meeting. And
18 we still have more plans to make our
19 voices heard.

20 Fairhill has so many positive
21 points that those who are trying to close
22 us never even bother to even notice.
23 Over the past five years, our school has
24 had 16 percent of its population to be
25 comprised of students with disabilities.

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2 And during that time, we've made
3 significant academic gains with our
4 special education students, improvement
5 on the PSSA, and many of our special ed
6 students have been able to be placed into
7 the regular education classrooms,
8 stressing a strong belief that special ed
9 is a service, not a life sentence.

10 Even with principals changing
11 over twice in the last two years, we
12 still find our school climate improving.
13 Serious incidents are down, and the
14 attendance rates are up. Fairhill has
15 had tremendous support from the community
16 and outside agencies in the last couple
17 of years. We received a \$20,000 donation
18 from Comcast Cares, giving us a renovated
19 gym and gym equipment, a renovated
20 library, and a Big Brother/Big Sister
21 program that a number of our students
22 have been a part of three, four, and even
23 five years. We have had intramural
24 sports for over ten years and a traveling
25 basketball team. With no recreational

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2 leagues in the area, what's the
3 likelihood that any of our students will
4 play team sports again if we were to
5 close?

6 Who would want all of this and
7 more to just end?

8 I'm sure you're familiar with
9 the Fairhill neighborhood. It's a
10 community that's dealing with great
11 challenges, poverty, drugs, crime, and
12 all the additional problems that flow
13 from each of these. Now we're adding on
14 the problem of living in a neighborhood
15 that's becoming an educational dessert.
16 The old Edison School building adjacent
17 to Fairhill is a burned-out shell that
18 has stood empty for several years now.
19 What will this neighborhood be like if
20 Fairhill closes? I certainly hope the
21 idea isn't to uproot and cause chaos in
22 our children's educational lives simply
23 to sell our building and privatize. How
24 sad that would be.

25 I certainly hope we're not

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2 putting our city's poor business dealings
3 ahead of our children. How sad we would
4 be.

5 This is why we need your help
6 and your voice. This affects all of us
7 in one way or another. The more people
8 from the community who care, the better
9 chance we have of saving our school and
10 thus our community. And that would be a
11 history that we could all be proud to be
12 a part of.

13 Thank you.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you very much. Good testimony. Thank
16 you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you.

20 MR. FLEMMING: Good evening. I
21 had afternoon at first. My name is Steve
22 Flemming and I'm a teacher at John B.
23 Kelly Elementary School in the Germantown
24 section of the City.

25 I sit in front of you this

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2 afternoon to first show my gratitude for
3 your vote on urging the School District
4 of Philadelphia to issue a moratorium on
5 school closures and reconfigurations, and
6 I sure hope that the School District will
7 follow your lead.

8 Secondly, I'd like to speak
9 very briefly on the impact that such
10 closures and reconfigurations would have
11 on families, students, and on the City as
12 a whole. And allow me to use John B.
13 Kelly School as an example.

14 John B. Kelly is currently a K
15 to 6th grade building not slated for
16 closure, but for a grade reconfiguration.
17 This proposal is -- the proposal is to
18 move 6th grade from Kelly to Leeds Middle
19 School in Mt. Airy. Though this move may
20 not be as draconian as entire school
21 buildings being shuttered, parents and
22 families who live across the street and
23 around the corner and just down the way
24 may beg to differ.

25 To move 6th grade from Kelly

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2 and relocate it to Leeds Middle School in
3 Mt. Airy will cause an undue burden and
4 hardship on families who depend on older
5 siblings to escort young children home.

6 To move 6th grade from Kelly
7 would mean that the new class of 6th
8 graders would have to travel nearly three
9 miles to arrive at their new school
10 destination.

11 And to move 6th grade from
12 Kelly to Leeds will likely mean an
13 increase in truancy, as many families
14 will be skeptical to have their child
15 make the journey.

16 To move 6th grade from Kelly
17 would mean to disrupt a teaching team
18 that has five consecutive years of 5th to
19 6th grade PSSA test score gains in both
20 reading and math. Not one year that we
21 have been a teaching team have 5th to 6th
22 grade scores dropped. And since PSSA is
23 what everyone is looking at, I think we
24 should take a closer look at that. When
25 they come to us, we work them and they do

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2 well.

3 To move 6th grade from Kelly to
4 Leeds would mean 6th graders from several
5 different schools converging into one
6 building, thus increasing the probability
7 of neighborhood and gang violence.

8 Somehow we will pay, either in police
9 overtime or unfortunately in the loss of
10 life.

11 Kelly represents the schools
12 that closing and the schools that are
13 being reconfigured. In so many
14 classrooms and so many programs and in so
15 many buildings, teachers are working
16 arduously with a generation much
17 different than the one you or I grew up
18 in. Many parents are forced to work
19 second and third jobs to make ends meet
20 and may not be able to devote the time to
21 homework and studying with their child as
22 they wish.

23 Schools, particularly public
24 schools, are the cornerstones and
25 foundations of our neighborhoods of this

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2 city and of a democratic society.

3 While the skeptics may say,
4 Well, Mr. Flemming, the School District
5 is cash strapped. There is no money.
6 What do you propose?

7 I propose a greater fight in
8 Harrisburg to fund the schools as they
9 should. I propose a halt to what seems
10 like an unchecked charter school
11 expansion, which drains schools of
12 resources needed to be successful,
13 including money. And I heard people said
14 it earlier, but 80 charter schools, that
15 is a lot of money being taken away from
16 the traditional public school and,
17 therefore, diminishing our chances for
18 greater success.

19 I propose that teachers and
20 other school personnel be invited to take
21 a more active role in decisions that
22 affect them. We need to be represented
23 at board meetings, closed door
24 decision-making, and other venues where
25 decisive moves are being made.

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2 In my opinion, this hearing
3 this afternoon is a step in that
4 direction that we need to go in. You are
5 listening, and for that, I am grateful.
6 But we need for more than Philadelphia
7 City Council to listen. Harrisburg needs
8 to listen. Washington needs to listen.
9 The business community at-large needs to
10 listen, and I do pray and I hope that
11 they are.

12 Thank you.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
15 you very much. Thank you very much,
16 Mr. Flemming.

17 MR. REED: Good afternoon.
18 It's a long day, huh?

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

20 MR. REED: I got some nuts and
21 raisins, if you're interested.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: We're
23 fine. Thank you.

24 MR. REED: Okay. For the
25 record, my name is Samuel Reed, III, and

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2 I teach young people at the Beeber Middle
3 School to read, write, and think. I'm a
4 proud member of the Philadelphia
5 Federation of Teachers and the Teacher
6 Action Group, two organizations that are
7 working with PCAPS, a coalition of
8 parents, students, teachers, and
9 community members calling for a one-year
10 moratorium on the school closings.

11 I would like to thank City
12 Council for adopting the non-bonding
13 resolution calling for the moratorium on
14 closing 37 schools in September. I would
15 like to echo the sentiments of my
16 Councilman, Curtis Jones, when he notes
17 people shouldn't make whole decisions on
18 half information.

19 But I want to counter the
20 current notion that frames the one-year
21 moratorium as hitting the pause button.
22 Instead of hitting the pause button, City
23 Council should use its influence to
24 persuade the District to hit the redesign
25 button.

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2 I have attended some of the
3 facility community meetings across the
4 City and I've attended the ones in my
5 community as well, and, in fact, I've
6 even watched a few on live streams. I
7 think I need to get a life, right?

8 But unfortunately the public
9 at-large has not been convinced by the
10 District's plan to engage in a responsive
11 design process, a process that explores
12 and envisions and enacts the educational
13 principles that balance Superintendent
14 Hite's vision to prepare our students for
15 a world beyond our school doors and
16 ensure the District's fiscal
17 survivability.

18 To Dr. Hite's credit, he has
19 publicly noted that the proposed plans to
20 close 37 schools and relocate or
21 reconfigure others is not an inflexible
22 one. The moratorium on school closing
23 makes sense because it will allow the
24 District time to defer judgment and
25 consider the community's input. Any

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2 meaningful design process starts with
3 empathy.

4 Design principles extend beyond
5 empty seats, building utilizations,
6 reconfigurations, or as Winston Churchill
7 said, we shape our buildings, and
8 thereafter they shape us.

9 We need school buildings that
10 shape our social, emotional, academic,
11 cultural, and economic fabric in our
12 communities. If the District imposes its
13 will, closes schools without applying
14 design principles that include the input
15 in alternative proposals from the
16 affected communities, the District's plan
17 will not succeed in meeting the community
18 it serves and will be back here again
19 next year.

20 The Wynnefield and Overbrook
21 community, which I live, put together a
22 proposal that represents a part of a
23 community design process. It's an
24 inclusive process that includes parents,
25 students, teachers, and community

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2 members. We came together, we explored,
3 we envisioned a plan that seeks not just
4 to pause the school closure plan, but to
5 enact and leverage partnerships that
6 expand pre-K and kindergarten options at
7 Gompers and Overbrook Elementary, as well
8 as reimagine Beeber Middle School as a
9 community center, a vital economic health
10 and cultural hub. And I've included the
11 plan that's on the District website. You
12 can go and check it out.

13 As a teacher, I've designed and
14 implemented many engaging lessons and
15 learning experiences for my students,
16 because I believe my students should have
17 the same engaging learning experience of
18 students of more affluent experiences
19 have, and I never let money or the lack
20 of resources get in my way. I write
21 grants. I forge partnerships to ensure
22 that my students can produce original
23 plays, musicals, dance productions, video
24 documentaries, and a host of other
25 creative activities.

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2 The Wynnefield and Overbrook
3 proposal pushes the redesign button.
4 Instead of allowing the constraints that
5 limit our learning possibilities for
6 students, our community plan leverages
7 the community resources and partnerships
8 to transform and reinvent our
9 neighborhood schools.

10 I fully understand the
11 District's financial constraints, but the
12 District has failed to persuade the
13 public that closing 37 schools will save
14 any significant money. The projected 28
15 million in savings from the school
16 closings does not account for the
17 transition costs and other hidden
18 expenses associated with restructuring
19 schools. Basically the devil is in the
20 details.

21 What are the costs in the plans
22 to retrofit the middle schools that are
23 going to be converted to K to 8 schools?
24 What about the additional transportation
25 and safety factors? And how about the

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2 plan to shift cultures from schools to
3 accommodate new students and their
4 families?

5 The District says we can't
6 afford not to act. I say the moratorium
7 will allow us to act in the best interest
8 of our students and families.

9 Accordingly, the District needs
10 to consider the moratorium on the school
11 closing. Not to pause the train, but to
12 put the train on the right track.
13 Pressing the redesign button will provide
14 a time for the District to be on the
15 right track to explore, to envision, and
16 to enact a Facilities Management Plan
17 that is empathetic to the needs of the
18 community and equitably serves the
19 students that I teach.

20 That's my testimony. Thank
21 you.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you very much.

25 MS. WEINRAUB: Hello. Good

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2 evening. My name is Anissa Weinraub and
3 I am filling in for Hillary. So thank
4 you for being here. I know it's been a
5 very long day for all of us, and so I
6 really do appreciate you being here.

7 I am in my seventh year of
8 teaching here in the School District.
9 Actually, this year I am teaching at your
10 alma mater, I believe. Bartram High
11 School. Yes?

12 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Yes.

13 MS. WEINRAUB: Absolutely. I'm
14 a proud member of PFT and Teacher Action
15 Group, and we are also active members of
16 the PCAPS Coalition, of whom I heard
17 spoke very well this morning, and thank
18 you for having them here as well.

19 So, again, I just want to say
20 thank you. I want to reiterate what a
21 lot of people have said around hearing
22 the true feelings of so many of your
23 constituents in the City and voting on
24 the resolution for the moratorium on
25 school closings. It's absolutely a

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2 critical first step, and it reveals to
3 all of us your commitment to our
4 neighborhood schools as important hubs
5 for community health and security.

6 But my question for us here
7 this evening, to you all as elected
8 representatives and to us as the still
9 here members of civil society, what is
10 our next step going to be? And today I
11 want to say I'm hoping that it's our
12 collective effort to actually go after
13 the resources that we need.

14 So I've done some reflecting on
15 my own teaching practice, and one thing
16 that I want to bring here tonight is that
17 as a teacher, I found that my students
18 learn infinitely more from my actions
19 than from my words. See, young people
20 can really see when those words and those
21 actions don't align, and they will call
22 you on it, as they have called me on it
23 several times in my teaching career.

24 So example: If I say that
25 reading is important, but then we go to

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2 my school library and there are no books
3 there, or I only teach short excerpts of
4 test prep curriculum that seem kind of
5 meaningless to them, then my words end up
6 falling short because my actions don't
7 show them that reading is something
8 actually of value. So I work hard to
9 make sure that my actions and my words
10 are always in alignment.

11 And the same thing I think can
12 be true to -- can be applied to our words
13 and actions as school leaders and you all
14 as elected officials. So we can tell our
15 young people to stay in school, right?
16 We can tell them to stop the violence, or
17 we can tell them that education is the
18 key to their futures. And we do that all
19 the time. But we must also take concrete
20 actions to show them that we value
21 education, our city's safety, and their
22 futures, and so should they.

23 So right now the actions of
24 many adults, far too many adults in
25 decision-making seats, are not teaching

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2 our young people that we care about them.

3 In fact, we're showing them quite the
4 opposite, and trust me, they can feel it.

5 Over the past two years, we
6 have seen our public school budget
7 slashed by a billion dollars at the state
8 level. Those who have been elected to
9 lead are vigorously disinvesting in our
10 communities by underfunding our schools
11 and forcing our local School District's
12 hand right now. They're planning to shut
13 down schools or hand them over to the
14 highest bidder, taking away our vital
15 relationships that we've built between
16 adults and young people and expecting us
17 to teach and learn in overcrowded
18 classrooms, to do more with less, forcing
19 us into shallow scripted curriculum so
20 that we can chase test scores instead of
21 really encouraging real student-centered,
22 engaging, participatory learning.

23 But it doesn't have to be the
24 lesson that we teach the young people of
25 Philadelphia about what we think about

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2 what they deserve. In fact, we can make
3 different choices, as you all have taken
4 that first step to do, to really show
5 them that they are our priority and that
6 we won't settle for less than what they
7 deserve.

8 So in Philly, it feels a little
9 hard to stomach the idea that there is no
10 money, when you're kind of under the glow
11 of Comcast's glorious LED screen on 17th
12 Street, or the University of Pennsylvania
13 continues to acquire property in my
14 neighborhood, or when the Department of
15 Corrections' budget increases, or natural
16 gas keeps being drawn out of the earth.

17 So I come here today to ask you
18 all as leaders of the City Council to
19 work with your colleagues to take the
20 next step, to take the action, to show us
21 your continued moral leadership and help
22 us get the resources that our city
23 schools so desperately need so that we
24 don't have to throw our communities into
25 chaos through these massive school

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2 closings and that we can actually
3 redesign our schools, as my colleague
4 just said, in order to meet our students
5 true needs.

6 So how could we do that? So
7 you all -- how could we help raise those
8 hundreds of millions here in
9 Philadelphia? One, by taxing major
10 Center City commercial real estate
11 holders and corporations that are
12 currently not paying their fair share; by
13 taxing these large non-profits on their
14 real estate holdings. And then -- and
15 something I think would be so incredibly
16 powerful -- could we join together, us as
17 your constituents, you as City Council
18 members, and let's go after the money in
19 Harrisburg together. Can we use your
20 political muscle and our strength in
21 numbers of teachers and students and
22 parents and community folks? In fact,
23 that gentleman that said over his dead
24 body, let's take him to Harrisburg and
25 let's go get money that our young people

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2 deserve. I swear to you, if you lead,
3 thousands upon thousands of
4 Philadelphians will follow you. And then
5 we'll truly be aligning our actions with
6 our words as we put down our collective
7 foot and fight for fully and equitably
8 funded public schools so that our young
9 people can be prepared to build a future,
10 which prioritizes human dignity over
11 corporate greed, a future where the very
12 suggestion of selling out our communities
13 to balance a budget will never again be
14 on the table. And that will be the most
15 profound lesson we could ever teach.

16 Thank you so much for your
17 time.

18 (Applause.)

19 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
20 you. Thank you for your great testimony.
21 Thank you very, very much.

22 I understand the Senate is
23 going to have a hearing in Philadelphia.
24 So we all may be together. Yes. That's
25 what I was told today. So we'll keep our

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2 eyes open for that.

3 Andrew Schiera, University City
4 High School, social studies educator;
5 Patrice Berry, University City High
6 School, Site Director for the Netter
7 Center for Community Partnerships; Glen
8 Casey, University City High School, Class
9 of 2013; Christian Warwick, UCHS, Class
10 of 2013; Evynn Pendergrass, UCHS, Class
11 of 2014. After that, Paul Robeson, you
12 will close us out. Thank you. Thank you
13 very much.

14 (Witnesses approached witness
15 table.)

16 MR. SCHIERA: Good evening. My
17 name is A.J. Schiera. I'm a social
18 studies educator at University City High
19 School. Thank you again for your time,
20 for hearing our voices, and for again
21 your vote and leadership on the
22 resolution.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
24 you.

25 MR. SCHIERA: Our remarks as a

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2 group are in the broader context of the
3 37 schools closing, the District's
4 financial challenges, and the need to
5 increase academic success at University
6 City and other schools, but our remarks
7 as a group are particularly in reference
8 to the proposed closing of University
9 City High School.

10 One of the most formative
11 experiences we have had during this
12 process of school closings occurred
13 during our first school stakeholders
14 meeting that we held at University City
15 on January 17th, 2013, which we were
16 grateful for you joining us. Our
17 students who had attended literally every
18 District-run Facilities Master Plan
19 meeting and SRC meeting since the
20 announcement of the proposed closures had
21 been busily preparing solutions and
22 alternatives to keep University City High
23 School and our school community together.
24 But at that first U City stakeholders
25 meetings, we were reminded of the long

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2 history of the community, the capital-C
3 community, in our fight to be at 3601
4 Filbert Street in the first place. The
5 reminder was this: University City High
6 School has three things worth saving, our
7 location, our space, and our school
8 community.

9 And I'm going to speak first
10 just a little bit about what I've learned
11 as an outsider coming in about the
12 history and then pass it along to
13 Mr. Casey to talk about his personal
14 testimony and our school's
15 transformation, then Ms. Berry, the Site
16 Director of our Student Success Center,
17 to discuss the unique partnerships that
18 we have, and then Ms. Pendergrass to
19 discuss our proposals.

20 First, the location: 3601
21 Filbert Street. As someone who grew up
22 literally in the last house of the last
23 suburb hanging on to all the other
24 suburbs of Chicago for dear life, I knew
25 very little of Philadelphia and its

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2 neighborhoods when I came here in 2005 to
3 go to the University of Pennsylvania.
4 And I knew nothing about the role that
5 our university had played in those
6 neighborhood dynamics.

7 As I started working at
8 University City High School in 2007 as a
9 volunteer, in 2009 as a student teacher,
10 and then in 2010 as a full-time teacher,
11 I became interested in knowing the
12 history of the school and the community
13 given what I had learned from others.

14 And in learning that history, I
15 came to learn how strained the
16 relationship with local universities had
17 been across 40-plus years and how
18 critical it was for young West
19 Philadelphia students to go to school in
20 a place that gave them a foothold into
21 this world.

22 In talking to alumni and
23 community members, researching old
24 Evening Bulletin articles, and looking
25 through old yearbook images, I've come to

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2 truly realize the importance of the
3 location of University City High School.
4 Reading articles titled "Demolition of
5 Homes to Begin in Six Months in
6 University City," 1966, and "Group Renews
7 School Protest in West Philadelphia,"
8 1966, reenforced the David and Goliath
9 struggle of the Black Bottom neighborhood
10 to protect its community from being
11 literally torn up, removed, and replaced
12 by the University City Science Center.

13 Further, even as members of
14 this community were being forced out of
15 neighborhood, they were also being shut
16 out from the proposed math-science magnet
17 school to be erected on the sites of many
18 of their former homes and apartment
19 buildings.

20 It was the second fight that
21 many of the alumni reminded us at that
22 January 17th meeting, a brand new school,
23 an education system for the '70s, being
24 raised on plots of former homes and
25 apartments of the members of the Black

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2 Bottom community as residents fought to
3 enroll their students in it.

4 Struggling to get into the,
5 quote, beautiful new school opening right
6 down the block, as one of the alumni has
7 told me, has taught me this story,
8 reminds me that there is an obligation
9 that we have to protect the public school
10 that accepts all neighborhood children
11 and the community that fought long and
12 hard to preserve decades past its
13 heritage and its foothold. So the
14 location at 3601 Filbert Street does
15 matter.

16 So does the building. Though
17 many have left the building unkept and in
18 disrepair, the structure itself was
19 intended to contain magnificent
20 facilities. A quick look at the 1968
21 architect's intentions for the
22 building -- I'm sorry. I'm a history
23 teacher, so that's why this is
24 happening -- built off the educational
25 program, can illustrate. We have a

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2 greenhouse, high-tech science labs,
3 typing labs, auto shop, a dark room for
4 photography, a TV studio, a pool, early
5 childhood rooms, a sprawling auditorium,
6 and a "commons" remarkably aesthetically
7 pleasing for a public school. An
8 instructional material center since ours
9 in 1971 would be filled with more than
10 just books. Literally down to, as the
11 architect said, quote, "since large
12 numbers of students will be moving at one
13 time, many from floor to floor, the
14 possibility of using escalators should be
15 explored."

16 We have no escalators, but this
17 facility has led to opportunities across
18 decades that many and other schools have
19 not had. It is true the building has
20 been left unattended at times by the
21 District and has not been used or kept up
22 to its full potential. As the programs
23 have changed, the original purpose of
24 these spaces, some of these spaces, have
25 been lost. And yet with a little bit of

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2 work, with the right amount of
3 commitment, and with an influx of
4 resources, the spectrum of educational
5 uses for University City High School
6 could be reclaimed and a truly singular
7 educational space for the children of
8 West Philadelphia could be restored.

9 Which brings me to the last
10 aspect. While the alumni and community
11 members reinvigorated our fight for the
12 location and for the facility, our
13 students have always been, first and
14 foremost, committed to the fight to keep
15 our school community together.

16 To provide some context, since
17 I arrived at University City in 2007,
18 many did not always think so highly of
19 the University City High School family
20 and its reputation. Our school has had
21 its peaks and valleys, and one of the
22 greatest damages that has been done is
23 the way that we have internalized what
24 others have told us about ourselves.
25 Yes, University City High School, like

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2 all schools, have had fights. Yes, we
3 are recovering and improving from low
4 academic achievement. And yet this was
5 the only side of University City revealed
6 to members outside of its walls.

7 When one of my -- in one of the
8 days that speaks most to me, the extent
9 of this internalization was evident in
10 summer 2010 when a group of students and
11 teachers were asked by an outside partner
12 organization to describe school culture
13 and neighborhood culture so that that
14 organization could provide better
15 programming, a very neutral question, and
16 to hear our students and teachers
17 self-describe the school culture in ways
18 that they had heard reflected from others
19 in the community as predominantly
20 negative was very hurtful to all of us.

21 But two things stand out from
22 those sort of comments. First, we have
23 had assets all along, students involved
24 in extracurriculars; many creative and
25 caring teachers; students juggling

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2 commitments to family, friends, school,
3 and work successfully; and a neighborhood
4 that has a history of overcoming
5 adversity by sticking together. We have
6 had all those things even amid going back
7 letting others define us.

8 Secondly, and more importantly,
9 these statements show the progress that
10 we have made in just two short years. We
11 are not that University City High School
12 that people say that we are, and that is
13 a testament to the students and staff and
14 parents and teachers and partners and
15 community members and alumni.

16 If these statements represent a
17 nadir of University City High School to
18 some extent, it puts into relief the
19 incredible success that we have made
20 since becoming a promise academy in 2010,
21 an investment on the part of all
22 stakeholders in getting there that should
23 be continued.

24 In a moment, Mr. Casey will
25 provide you with testimony as to this

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2 transformation of University City High
3 School, both as a school and for himself
4 personally, but let me say this first:
5 If there has been an Exhibit A of the
6 change and the conception and
7 self-conception of University City High
8 School in the past two years, it has been
9 the way that students have come together
10 to fight for their school, the way they
11 have approached the District and the
12 various stakeholders and the community to
13 work towards solutions, and the ways that
14 keep our values at the forefront, our
15 location, our building, and our
16 University City High School family.

17 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
18 you very much. I believe that, and I've
19 seen the spirit, fervor, and the desire
20 in their eyes.

21 MR. SCHIERA: Yes. Thank you.

22 MR. CASEY: I want to start off
23 by saying good evening to the Council.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please
25 introduce yourself. Give us your name.

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2 MR. CASEY: My name is Glen
3 Casey. I'm a senior at University City
4 High School.

5 I just want to start out by
6 like just providing an anecdote just to
7 serve as a testament to what my teacher
8 here, Mr. Schiera, was saying.

9 When I think about my past and
10 my future, I feel a great deal of
11 appreciation for the people I have at my
12 school who have given me the support
13 needed to help me strive and reach for my
14 goals. While attending University City
15 for the last four years of my life, they
16 have made huge contributions to the
17 significant progress that I've been able
18 to make as a student.

19 When I first started attending,
20 I involved myself in everything that
21 wasn't beneficial to my education. I
22 bullied other students, skipped school.
23 I didn't have any respect for myself or
24 the people that was around me. The worst
25 thing I could have done during my 9th

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2 grade year was fail out of my classes,
3 and that's exactly what I did. The
4 highest grade I received for my 9th grade
5 year was a D. And now I'm a straight A
6 student.

7 However, to be completely
8 honest, I'm not a hundred percent sure if
9 I would have made the progress, the same
10 type of progress that I made, without the
11 support that I've been receiving from my
12 school. The support system that I've
13 been receiving from the students, the
14 teachers, and the faculty at my school
15 over the course of the last three years
16 has just kept me moving.

17 I remember the first teacher
18 that I met that I was able to actually
19 build a relationship with. I remember
20 him always saying -- telling me actually
21 how much potential I had and how smart I
22 was. And I was young and arrogant, so I
23 didn't open my mind up to really listen
24 to him, but by the time the end of the
25 school year, to me he kind of dug through

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2 my skin and really got in my head and
3 kind of like got me to really start
4 thinking about my future.

5 When I finally made it to the
6 11th grade -- to my 11th grade year, I
7 knew what I wanted for myself, and when I
8 reached out to the staff at University
9 City, they took me by my hand. Then they
10 just got me engaged in the school by
11 helping me. I began to help out with
12 teachers in that classrooms. I began to
13 get involved with doing internships and
14 taking advantage of all the program
15 opportunities, such as Leaders of Change,
16 Peer Group Connections, and Student
17 Leadership Academy, those forces that
18 were influencing me to help my
19 intellectual growth and help me gain
20 social mobility.

21 University City has helped
22 break through the statistics,
23 stereotypes, and everything else that
24 society holds against me as being a young
25 African American male. Despite all the

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2 large-scale forces that's in opposition
3 to my success, I'm still here now in my
4 senior year with multiple college
5 acceptance letters, goals for myself, and
6 a mindset that refuses to fail.

7 (Applause.)

8 MR. CASEY: I truly give thanks
9 to the people not only here with me
10 today, but to my entire school, because
11 I've learned from everyone. This entire
12 time has just been a big learning process
13 for me.

14 University has given me the
15 ability to be courageous, bold, and proud
16 at anything I do in life, and I will
17 continue to succeed with the attitude
18 that University City High School has
19 given to me.

20 Thank you.

21 (Applause.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: What a
23 testimony. Very wonderful. Wish you the
24 best, Mr. Casey.

25 MS. BERRY: Hi. Good evening.

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2 Thank you for giving us this opportunity
3 again.

4 I just want to just --

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Give
6 us your name, please.

7 MS. BERRY: My name is Patrice
8 Berry. I am the Director of the Student
9 Success Center at University City High
10 School and also the Director of
11 University-Assisted Community School
12 Programs at University City High School.

13 I am very proud of our
14 students. And I didn't read Glen's text
15 before he spoke, so it actually almost
16 made me cry a little bit back there. I'm
17 so proud. I saw what his writing looked
18 like when he started Leaders of Change in
19 2012 and I'm looking at it now and it's
20 really a testament to the growth.

21 I wanted to take this
22 opportunity today to speak specifically
23 about the partnerships that University
24 City High School and the Netter Center
25 have been able to establish and to echo

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2 Glen actually in describing the impact
3 that this partnership has been able to
4 make.

5 The University City High
6 School/Netter Center partnership involves
7 more than just after-school programming
8 and campus visits to the University of
9 Pennsylvania. And while it certainly
10 involves those things, it is important to
11 discuss how this comprehensive
12 University-Assisted Community School
13 partnership has enhanced the everyday
14 experiences of students at University
15 City High School. Each year, for
16 example, the Netter Center recruits more
17 than 25 Penn tutors who work over 100
18 hours as tutors to University City High
19 School students directly into their
20 classrooms. Our Penn students not only
21 serve as tutors, but they also become
22 mentors to these students. And like our
23 tutoring program, many of the other
24 opportunities that the Netter Center
25 collaborates with University City High

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2 School to provide operate as a part of
3 the core curriculum during the school
4 day, which has allowed us to offer more
5 relevant and hands-on learning activities
6 as a part of the day-to-day activity.

7 This also allows students to make deeper
8 connections with math, science, and
9 literacy. And this is unique because
10 opportunities like this are typically
11 only accessible as part of after-school
12 programs.

13 Our Access Science Teacher
14 Fellows program hires Penn students to
15 co-plan and co-implement hands-on
16 inquiry-based math and science lessons,
17 activities, and labs in our classrooms.
18 Through Access Science over the last ten
19 years, over 245 Penn students, both
20 undergraduate and graduate students, have
21 worked with 6,000 of our high school and
22 elementary/middle school students working
23 at Netter Center community schools.

24 At University City High School,
25 for instance, students are learning

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2 physics by playing basketball. Our
3 biology students are learning genetics by
4 raising zebrafish farms using microscopes
5 and data journals.

6 This year a Wharton Business
7 School professor is currently partnering
8 with one of our business/technology
9 teachers to co-teach a class wherein 20
10 of our students are developing a business
11 plan designed to help them generate and
12 build financial literacy and
13 entrepreneurship skills. And in addition
14 to all of this, we are offering 15
15 Academically-Based Community Service
16 courses just this year. These
17 service-learning courses connect Penn
18 students and faculty with University City
19 High School students and teachers and
20 involve them in hands-on, real-world
21 problem-solving. This year one of these
22 classes is our Contemporary Issues in
23 Urban Education class taught by
24 Mr. Schiera, and in that class, students
25 are working with a group of Penn students

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2 to research issues in urban education
3 locally here in Philadelphia. Another
4 class is our AP Psychology class, which
5 is partnered with a Penn psych class, and
6 in that class students work with Penn
7 students to research -- they investigated
8 the sleep patterns of students and the
9 effect that those sleep patterns had on
10 academic achievement.

11 None of these opportunities
12 would be possible -- and this is an
13 opinion. I want to say that it's a fact,
14 but it's an opinion. None of these
15 opportunities would be possible without
16 University City High School's unique
17 location, without our staff's willingness
18 to collaborate with Penn faculty and
19 students, and without the Netter Center,
20 who helps facilitate these partnerships.

21 During my tenure at the Netter
22 Center and as a doctoral student and
23 practitioner of education, I have learned
24 that academic success, access to
25 information, mentoring, and experiences

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2 that help young people utilize what
3 they're learning in the classroom and
4 utilizing the information that we're
5 providing are essential ingredients, not
6 merely to college success but to
7 improving the quality of students' lives
8 now and the opportunities later.

9 Getting to college is no longer
10 enough. And this is especially true for
11 Philadelphia, where only a small fraction
12 of our students who actually go to
13 college finish college. To be great
14 students, our children need to know
15 history and algebra. But to be great
16 citizens, our youth need to add to that
17 knowledge leadership skills, the ability
18 to think critically, the confidence to
19 advocate for themselves, and the sense of
20 connectedness that inspires them to give
21 back to their communities.

22 At University City High School
23 these are the tools that this partnership
24 has been able to allow us to give
25 students and help them, equip them with.

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2 The Netter Center and
3 University City High School offers a
4 program called Leaders of Change over the
5 summer. We recruit up to 65 seniors to
6 participate in the program, and they work
7 with University of Pennsylvania mentors
8 to do hands-on research, investigating
9 needs in their community, and they
10 identify a set of recommendations that
11 Philadelphia students can use to address
12 those needs. Leaders of Change students
13 also complete post-secondary plans, and
14 when they get to school the following
15 year as seniors, they use the knowledge
16 that they acquired over the summer to
17 help other students plan and prepare for
18 their futures. So this is also about
19 giving back.

20 As students at University City
21 High School build relationships with each
22 other and with Penn students and they
23 become engaged in these kinds of
24 activities, which our partnership has
25 enabled, they develop the social and

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2 cultural capital that allows them to
3 communicate with diverse people, navigate
4 dynamic environments, and ultimately make
5 successful entry into post-secondary
6 education and careers. And this is
7 central both to University City High
8 School's mission under the leadership of
9 Principal Stults and to Netter Center's
10 vision for University-Assisted Community
11 Schools as established under the
12 leadership of Dr. Ira Harkavy.

13 The students who are sitting
14 with us today and the students you've
15 seen and heard at prior community
16 meetings are evidence of the success of
17 these programs. Last year, all of our
18 Leaders of Change students graduated from
19 high school, and almost 80 percent of
20 them gained at least one college
21 acceptance to college. One student,
22 Karohn Lawrence, is now at LaSalle
23 University on a full ride. And something
24 important to know given my point earlier
25 about giving back, he has since changed

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2 his major from accounting, which is
3 important and lucrative, to education to
4 be a math teacher, because he, during his
5 time working as a part of Netter Center
6 programs, became more connected to his
7 knowledge and to things that he was
8 participating in.

9 The open arms that have
10 received the Netter Center and integrated
11 us into University City High School has
12 enabled this partnership to serve the
13 community, advance the quality of
14 educational experiences for high school
15 and college students, and to break down
16 the most pressing barriers to education
17 attainment and class mobility.

18 The Netter Center is committed
19 to University City High School, and my
20 presence today is a representation of
21 that commitment.

22 Thank you.

23 (Applause.)

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you very much.

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2 Give us your name, please.

3 MS. PENDERGRASS: My name is
4 Evynn Pendergrass. I'm a junior at
5 University City High School.

6 Good evening. Thank you for
7 giving me this time to speak on behalf of
8 my school. And I'm going to speak about
9 the solutions or ways to help keep
10 University City open.

11 On a dreary morning, my mom
12 told me that our school was possibly on
13 the chopping block, and of course I had
14 mixed emotions about this. I was
15 confused. I really didn't understand.
16 And when I went to school, there was also
17 a lot of mixed emotions. A lot of people
18 didn't know what to do. They just kind
19 of seemed helpless. But after a couple
20 days, our students and our teachers got
21 together, formed like a committee at our
22 school, because we're proactive, and we
23 had a list of possible solutions, and I
24 tried to make this list as efficient as
25 possible.

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2 The first one I put on the list
3 was keeping the building open or stay
4 unified. This one solution entails that
5 the building is kept open, that the
6 teachers and students are kept in the
7 building. To make this more flexible for
8 the School District, we've discussed ways
9 to keep the building open and keep it
10 efficient. Merging us with other high
11 schools, because we have so much space;
12 improving and expanding our special
13 education system we have at our school;
14 making our school a 7 to 12, possibly a K
15 to 12; and, lastly, rent our space to
16 other programs or business, including
17 non-profits, universities, and community
18 businesses. We could use the revenues to
19 improve our school. Lastly, the School
20 District itself can utilize the space in
21 our building.

22 The second option is to keep
23 the UNI community together. We emphasize
24 this a lot, because since we are a
25 community and since we are a family, what

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2 we want the most is to stay together.

3 And we understand that the District is in
4 a crisis. However, we believe it's
5 possible to merge us to another school to
6 keep our teachers, staff, and students
7 together, or to send us into a vacant
8 school, which could be smaller and more
9 efficient to run.

10 How does the District benefit
11 from these options? Firstly, by keeping
12 our school open, we are benefiting a
13 community of parents and children who
14 keep the District alive. Also, by
15 renting our space, we raise revenue.
16 Lastly, if you move us to a vacant
17 building that's smaller in size, it saves
18 the District money by not paying for
19 empty spaces. We turn a vacant building,
20 which gains no profit, to a school that
21 has students, which gains a profit and
22 benefits the community.

23 That's my list.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
25 you very much.

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2 (Applause.)

3 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: You
4 have done yourselves and your school
5 proud, as have your teachers. You've
6 done a wonderful job.

7 (Thank you.)

8 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
9 you. Thank you.

10 Paul Robeson, you're next.
11 You'll close us out. We thank you all
12 for coming, your patience.

13 Is there anybody else here to
14 who wants to testify?

15 (No response.)

16 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
17 you. This will be our final group. We
18 thank everybody else who is here in this
19 building.

20 (Witnesses approached witness
21 table.)

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
23 you all for coming. Yours is a very
24 special school right at the corner of
25 41st and Ludlow, but it goes over to

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2 Market. A lot of people are saying
3 that's why they want to close it. That
4 was just an aside.

5 Good evening. Please introduce
6 yourself and then make your statements,
7 and thank you for being here.

8 MR. MOBLEY: Good evening. My
9 name is Rodney Mobley from Robeson High
10 School.

11 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Say
12 that. Rodney?

13 MR. MOBLEY: Mobley.

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Rodney
15 Mobley, okay.

16 MR. MOBLEY: I apologize, but I
17 must expedite my testimony, because my
18 TransPass does end at 7 o'clock.

19 I'm currently a sophomore at
20 Paul Robeson High School. This is my
21 second year here and also my second term
22 as class president. I came to Paul
23 Robeson because of the family structure
24 and academics this school offers. The
25 missions and beliefs of Robeson meet the

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2 requirements most parents should want for
3 their child. Robeson offers a variety of
4 programs for those who pursue a certain
5 occupation.

6 We may be known as a human
7 services or health school, but there is
8 much more to the school that remain
9 unknown to many. There are community
10 service programs, leadership programs,
11 and outstanding athletic teams available.
12 Our Robeson way clearly states our vision
13 of readiness that every student works to
14 achieve is to be responsible, respectful,
15 and to be ready. This mission, this
16 vision expresses what Paul Robeson means
17 to the staff and students and the
18 operational life of the school. There is
19 a sense of expectation for the roles of
20 the faculty, staff and stakeholders to
21 design a way of services that corresponds
22 to the responsibilities to the entire
23 school.

24 What I've gained from Paul
25 Robeson is to be creative and to be a

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2 critical reader, thinker, writer, and
3 communicator who is technologically
4 competent. I'm in one of the health
5 programs offered at Robeson called HRT,
6 health-related technology. Approximately
7 50 students from the entire school are
8 enrolled in this program. So if you base
9 our school on health and decide to move
10 only our CTE program, there are many
11 programs that will be terminated for the
12 residing population of the school. That
13 leaves us with one question: Where will
14 the rest of Paul Robeson's students go?
15 I know I won't be going to Sayre.

16 That's it. Thank you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
19 you very much.

20 MS. MCKINNEY: Hi. My name is
21 Dorian McKinney. I am a junior.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Say
23 your name again.

24 MS. MCKINNEY: Dorian McKinney.

25 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

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2 Dorian?

3 MS. MCKINNEY: McKinney.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Spell
5 your last name.

6 MS. MCKINNEY: M-C-K-I-N-N-E-Y.

7 I am a junior, a cheerleader, a student
8 mentor, a peer mediator, an entrepreneur,
9 and, most importantly, a proud member of
10 Paul Robeson High School, Class of 2014.

11 This evening I will be speaking
12 to you about financial considerations.

13 In order for our school to be
14 considered for closing, there has to be
15 an FIC, which is Facilities Condition
16 Index, of 66 percent. Our school is only
17 at 11 percent. FIC is basically the
18 difference between how much it costs to
19 fix our school and how much it costs to
20 close our school.

21 We just bought a million-dollar
22 boiler, which was installed in 2011. We
23 have two fully equipped computer labs as
24 well as two laptop carts.

25 I just want to say that while

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2 at Paul Robeson, I've grown immensely.

3 I've become a better person in many ways.

4 Paul Robeson has formed an incredible

5 environment for me, where I'm completely

6 comfortable and safe. I know everyone's

7 name, and they know mine.

8 We are planning to be moved to

9 fill chairs, but I believe that I deserve

10 to be more than just a chair at a place

11 where I'm uncomfortable.

12 Thank you.

13 (Applause.)

14 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank

15 you very much. Thank you.

16 MR. PEGRAO: Good evening. My

17 name is Jonathan Pegrao.

18 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Say

19 your name again.

20 MR. PEGRAO: Jonathan Pegrao.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Last

22 name?

23 MR. PEGRAO: Pegrao.

24 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL:

25 P-E-G-R-O?

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2 MR. PEGRAO: R-A-O. I'm a
3 member of Paul Robeson High School, Class
4 of 2014. I'm here to speak while y'all
5 should not -- well, our school should not
6 be merged with Sayre. Sayre is an
7 out-of-control environment. It was so
8 out of control it made the principal want
9 to leave and go to a new school.

10 Sayre is really unsafe. A lot
11 of students pick Paul Robeson because
12 it's a smaller environment and they feel
13 safe.

14 At Sayre last year they had
15 almost 100 suspensions. They had five
16 weapon incidents, and six fire incident
17 reports, which means they tried to set
18 their school on fire six different times.
19 They also had 14 assaults on students,
20 teachers, school police, and employees
21 and six thefts, which means they don't
22 have respect for no one.

23 At our school we have a certain
24 standard for high academic achievements
25 and graduating at a high percentage. So

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2 why would -- in Sayre they really don't
3 meet the same requirement as we do. So
4 why would they try to merge two different
5 schools who have two different
6 backgrounds?

7 And one more thing is, everyone
8 keeps saying that there's no money in the
9 City for the schools, there's no money
10 for us to get new books, no money for us
11 to get this, no money for us to get that,
12 but somehow, some way there was a hundred
13 million dollars just laying around for
14 the new juvenile justice service center
15 that was just built at 40th and
16 Haverford, which I saw get built up from
17 the ground up. So to me, that's saying
18 that y'all have -- they could find a way
19 to lock children up, but won't find a way
20 to make schools safer for students.

21 So that is just saying how much
22 y'all care -- they care more about
23 locking students up than making students
24 want to achieve better and better their
25 selves and going to college.

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2 So that's all I got to say.

3 Thank you.

4 (Applause.)

5 COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank
6 you very much. We appreciate your
7 insight, your intelligence, your
8 commitment, and all of you for coming
9 down today.

10 Let me thank Councilman Oh for
11 staying all day and let all of you know
12 that the testimony for Representative
13 James Roebuck; Curtis Thomas; Michelle
14 Brownlee; the Black Caucus, that is
15 Vanessa Lowery Brown; Mr. Louis Wilson,
16 Pennsylvania Joint Black Radical
17 Congress; Ms. Vera Primus, President of
18 Germantown High School Association; and
19 Darren Spielman, President and CEO of the
20 Philadelphia Educational Fund will be
21 made part of the record as if they were
22 here and had presented it.

23 So, again, we thank everyone.
24 We will recess this subject to the call
25 of the Chair, and, again, thank you for

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2 your commitment to education. God bless
3 you all.

4 Thanks to the stenographer too
5 and our great Sergeants-At-Arms. Thank
6 you, gentlemen. Thank, everybody.

7 (Committee on Education
8 concluded at 6:50 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the
proceedings, evidence and objections are
contained fully and accurately in the
stenographic notes taken by me upon the
foregoing matter, and that this is a true and
correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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