

1 COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

2
3 COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE4 City Hall, Room 400
5 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
6 Wednesday, April 22, 2026
7 10:00 a.m.

8 PRESENT:

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT KENYATTA JOHNSON
10 COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU
11 COUNCILWOMAN NINA AHMAD
12 COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS
13 COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
14 COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE-RICHARDSON
15 COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA
16 COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
17 COUNCILMAN MICHAEL DRISCOLL
18 COUNCILMAN CURTIS J. JONES, JR.
19 COUNCILMAN NICOLAS O'ROURKE
20 COUNCILMAN JEFFREY YOUNG, JR.
21 COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS22
23 HELEN LOUGHEAD, The Clerk
24

P R O C E E D I N G S

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

Members, please take your seats. Always good to see Harim Ashanti, A.K.A Will -- good morning, everyone. Good morning, everyone.

Good morning, members of City Council, members of the public. Thank you for being here.

This is the public hearing and public meeting of the Committee of the Whole regarding Bill Nos. 260199, 260200, 260201, 260202, 260203, 260204, 260205, 260206, 260208, 260209; and Resolution Numbers 260227 and 181014.

Ms. Loughhead, will you please take attendance.

THE CLERK: Councilmember Squilla. Councilmember Gauthier.

COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
Present.

THE CLERK: Councilmember Jones.

1 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:

2 Present.

3 THE CLERK: Councilmember

4 Young.

5 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:

6 Present.

7 THE CLERK: Councilmember

8 Driscoll.

9 COUNCILMEMBER DRISCOLL:

10 Present.

11 THE CLERK: Councilmember

12 Lozada.

13 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

14 Present.

15 THE CLERK: Councilmember

16 Bass.

17 COUNCILMEMBER BASS:

18 Present.

19 THE CLERK: Councilmember

20 Phillips. Councilmember O'Neill.

21 Councilmember Gilmore-Richardson.

22 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

23 RICHARDSON: Present.

24 THE CLERK: Councilmember

1 Thomas.

2 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

3 Present.

4 THE CLERK: Councilmember

5 Harrity.

6 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

7 Present.

8 THE CLERK: Councilmember

9 Ahmad.

10 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD:

11 Present.

12 THE CLERK: Councilmember

13 Landau.

14 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

15 Present.

16 THE CLERK: Councilmember

17 Brooks. Councilmember O'Rourke.

18 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

19 Present.

20 THE CLERK: Council

21 President Johnson.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Present. Thank you, Ms. Loughead.

24 I'm calling the committee as present

1 and this hearing is now called to
2 order.

3 Ms. Loughead, will you
4 please read the title of the bills
5 and resolutions.

6 THE CLERK: Bill No.
7 260199, an ordinance adopting the
8 operating budget for fiscal year
9 2027.

10 Bill No. 260200, an
11 ordinance to adopt a fiscal year
12 2027 capital budget.

13 Bill No. 260201, an
14 ordinance to adopt a capital program
15 for the six fiscal years 2027
16 through 2032, inclusive.

17 Bill No. 260202, an
18 ordinance amending Chapter 19-2400
19 of the Philadelphia Code entitled
20 Hotel Room Rental Tax by providing
21 for an additional excise tax on
22 hotel room rentals, all under
23 certain terms and conditions.

24 Bill No. 260203, an

1 ordinance amending Sub-Code A, the
2 Philadelphia Administrative Code of
3 Title IV of the Philadelphia Code,
4 the Building, Construction and
5 Occupancy Code by adding and
6 revising zoning board of adjustment
7 fees and provisions regarding
8 hearing scheduling, all under
9 certain terms and conditions.

10 Bill No. 260204, an
11 ordinance amending Title 3 of the
12 Philadelphia Code entitled Air
13 Management Code to modify the
14 amounts of license and permit fees
15 under certain terms and conditions.

16 Bill No. 260205, an
17 ordinance amending Section 19-1806
18 of the Philadelphia Code entitled
19 Authorization of Realty Use and
20 Occupancy Tax to clarify the
21 imposition of the tax on the use or
22 occupancy of real estate with
23 respect to cell towers, all under
24 certain terms and conditions.

1 Bill No. 260206, an
2 ordinance amending Chapter 6-600 of
3 the Philadelphia Code, Asbestos, by
4 adding and revising provisions
5 related to various fees, all under
6 certain terms and conditions.

7 Bill No. 260208, an
8 ordinance amending Chapter 19-1800
9 of the Philadelphia Code entitled
10 School Tax Authorization to add a
11 new Section 19-1808 entitled
12 Authorization of Ride Share Use Tax
13 to authorize the Board of the School
14 District of Philadelphia to levy a
15 tax upon the use by a passenger of a
16 transportation network company for a
17 prearranged ride that originates in
18 Philadelphia, all under certain
19 terms and conditions.

20 Bill No. 260209, an
21 ordinance amending Title 19 of the
22 Philadelphia Code entitled Finance
23 Taxes and Collections to add a new
24 Chapter 19-4800 entitled Retail

1 Delivery Tax to establish a tax on
2 orders for the delivery in
3 Philadelphia of retail consumer and
4 other tangible goods, all under
5 certain terms and conditions.

6 Resolution No. 260227,
7 providing for the approval by the
8 Council of the City of Philadelphia
9 of a revised five-year financial
10 plan for the City of Philadelphia,
11 covering fiscal years 2027 through
12 2031 and incorporating revisions
13 with respect to fiscal year 2026,
14 which is to be submitted by the
15 Mayor to the Pennsylvania
16 Intergovernmental Cooperation
17 Authority pursuant to an
18 intergovernmental cooperation
19 agreement by and between the city
20 and the authority.

21 Resolution No. 181014,
22 calling for the Council Committee of
23 the Whole to convene public meetings
24 and public hearings pursuant to the

1 educational supplement of the
2 Philadelphia Home Rule Charter to
3 review the administration,
4 management, operation and finances
5 of the school district and adopt
6 plans to coordinate the activities
7 of the Board of Education, the Mayor
8 and the City Council for the
9 improvement and benefit of public
10 education in Philadelphia.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

12 Thank you very much, Ms. Loughead.

13 Today we hold the public
14 hearing of the Committee of the
15 Whole to consider the bills read by
16 the clerk that constitute proposed
17 operating and capital spending
18 measures for fiscal year 2027, a
19 capital program and a forward-
20 looking capital plan for fiscal year
21 2027 through fiscal year 2032.

22 Additionally, this meeting
23 meets the requirement of the
24 educational supplement of the

1 Philadelphia Home Rule Charter to
2 review the administration, the
3 management operations and finances
4 of the School District of
5 Philadelphia on a bi-annual basis.

6 This morning we will hear
7 testimony from the School District
8 of Philadelphia, and in the
9 afternoon, we will have public
10 testimony. I'd like to also
11 acknowledge in our presence today
12 who will be joining us for this
13 hearing is State Representative
14 Elizabeth Fiedler. Thank you for
15 joining us. Ms. Loughhead, will you
16 please call the first person to
17 testify.

18 THE CLERK: Mayor Cherelle
19 L. Parker.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 The suspense. The Chair also
22 recognizes the presence of
23 Councilman Dr. Anthony Phillips, as
24 well as Councilman Mark Squilla as

1 present. As always, Madam Mayor,
2 welcome home. And when you are
3 ready, state your name for the
4 record and please begin your
5 testimony.

6 MAYOR PARKER: Since you
7 said welcome home, Mr. President,
8 can I introduce myself as Cherelle
9 Parker, former intern in the City
10 Council of Philadelphia and former
11 member of the City Council of
12 Philadelphia, who has the greatest
13 admiration and respect for this
14 legislative body.

15 And I want to say thank you
16 to you, Mr. President, along with
17 Majority Leader Gilmore-Richardson,
18 Majority Whip in Education
19 Committee, Chairman Thomas, and all
20 members of Council. Thank you for
21 the opportunity to be here today to
22 speak about a topic that is
23 critically important to me, and I
24 know to all of you, the 198,000

1 students educated in our district
2 and charter schools.

3 Councilmembers, I want to
4 thank you and, historically, the
5 City Council of Philadelphia,
6 because with all due respect,
7 Mr. President, this body has been
8 the leader in funding public
9 education in the city of
10 Philadelphia. And the records
11 stated, I want to, before I leave,
12 if you will allow, Mr. President, to
13 submit for the journal or for the
14 stenographer comments that I made
15 that are listed in the Pennsylvania
16 Legislative Journal from 2013 when
17 we first increased the sales tax
18 enabling authority.

19 And I want to submit this
20 for the record as a part of my
21 testimony, but it also encouraged
22 me, Mr. President, to take a stroll
23 through Philadelphia's history as it
24 relates to our investment in public

1 education so that residents of the
2 city of Philadelphia don't ever
3 forget that it has been this
4 legislative body in the city of
5 Philadelphia proper that has been
6 the foundation for funding the
7 School District of Philadelphia.

8 Quite frankly, when the
9 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania didn't
10 get it right, it was this body that
11 laid the groundwork. And I went
12 back, I just got off the phone,
13 Mr. President, with Ambassador David
14 Cohen, and because reading up all
15 night, going through these notes,
16 for those of you who have been
17 around long enough, I went back to
18 1994.

19 I was a senior at Lincoln
20 University hoping that my mentors
21 would show up for my graduation.
22 But I knew that they were in deep
23 conversations and negotiations about
24 something called the Liquor by the

1 Drink tax. And I asked Ambassador
2 David Cohen, I said, "Do you
3 remember the struggle with the
4 Liquor by the Drink tax?" And he
5 says, "I still have scars today from
6 it." I remember industry coming in.
7 I remember -- I don't know how many
8 people, and I was thinking about
9 this, Philadelphia, it is important
10 for me to just share.

11 We used to have a newspaper
12 called the Night Scene. And the
13 Night Scene was in neighborhood-
14 base, bars and taverns and
15 restaurants. It was a balance
16 between the scoop and what we had
17 with the Jimmy Tayoun paper. But it
18 was very well read. And the Liquor
19 by the Drink tax was being
20 socialized in communities across the
21 city.

22 And we were told that our
23 institutions, our restaurants and
24 our bars, they would shut down,

1 Mr. President, if we did not have
2 access to that revenue. And guess
3 what, this City Council of
4 Philadelphia led and made sure that
5 that Liquor by the Drink tax was
6 passed. I wanted to get that part
7 on the record because later on in
8 the testimony, that's the first sort
9 of point of reference of when the
10 City of Philadelphia stepped up to
11 generate revenue for the School
12 District of Philadelphia.

13 And I'm going to go through
14 2013 and 2014 in my testimony so
15 that we can measure up our
16 contributions to public education
17 that were raised solely here on the
18 backs of Philadelphians by the work
19 that this legislative body and the
20 executive branch would do during
21 those years before the courts ruled
22 in our favor. It is with that in
23 mind, Mr. President, that I want to,
24 again, thank you and Council for

1 always standing up for public
2 education and our students. And
3 quite frankly, I don't expect
4 anything to be any different this
5 year because we have always done it.

6 It has always been tough,
7 it has always been a great deal of
8 communication. But we've had talks
9 in behind closed doors in public
10 forums like this. But whenever the
11 moment called, this legislative body
12 and the executive branch, we have
13 always risen to the occasion.

14 It is with that in mind,
15 Mr. President, that I want to
16 acknowledge Board President Reginald
17 Streater, Vice President Sarah
18 Ashley Andrews, and all members of
19 the Board of Education. I want to
20 wholeheartedly thank each of them
21 for their dedicated service to
22 Philadelphia students and for their
23 stewardship of our district. Also
24 preparing last night I Googled

1 Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Mont
2 Co. And I'm going through our four
3 counties.

4 And I know there's been
5 some discussion about whether or not
6 the city of Philadelphia should have
7 an elected school board or an
8 appointed school board. And for the
9 record, I have always not been in
10 support of an elected school board
11 with taxing authority because I have
12 always ruled that as a sacred -- as
13 a sacred tool and power of this
14 legislative body. And I
15 wholeheartedly still do not believe
16 that we ever need to defer taxing
17 authority, that important tool, to
18 any other entity, especially when it
19 comes to education in the city of
20 Philadelphia because of our history.

21 I also want to thank,
22 Mr. President, Dr. Tony Watlington
23 and his amazing leadership team. I
24 just read somewhere recently that

1 one of the members of your
2 leadership team, if you're here,
3 Doc, has recently been poached to
4 become the new leader of the
5 Baltimore school district because
6 they were so impressed,
7 Mr. President, with the work that
8 had been done here in the city of
9 Philadelphia.

10 So I want to thank you,
11 Dr. Watlington. You came here and
12 set an ambitious goal, and I want to
13 get it right because I get right,
14 Safe, Clean, and Green with economic
15 opportunity for all. But I always
16 screw this part up. I want to get
17 it right. When you came here, you
18 set an ambitious goal to make
19 Philadelphia the fastest-improving
20 large urban district in the country.
21 That was Dr. Watlington's mantra in
22 everything about his work as our
23 school superintendent.
24 Mr. President has affirmed that

1 we're working to get that done.

2 Finally, I want to
3 acknowledge the members of our
4 extended community, the education
5 community, who are advocating every
6 day, Mr. President, to ensure that
7 our students have what they need to
8 learn and grow. So when I looked at
9 Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Mont
10 Co., and the amount of times that
11 they have raised revenue, taxes,
12 Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Mont
13 Co., the amount of times that they
14 have raised taxes from 2020 up until
15 now, solely dedicated to their
16 public-school systems.

17 And, you know, they have
18 multiple districts in those
19 counties. But when we took a look
20 at that, I thought to myself how
21 grateful we are to have an education
22 community at large that is also
23 advocating for our school district
24 so that our students can have what

1 they need to learn and grow. And
2 that would be Art Steinberg from the
3 PFT, Dr. Robin Cooper from CASA,
4 Nicole Hunt from UNITE HERE,
5 Bernadette Ambrose-Smith of the
6 School Police, all of the
7 principals, the teachers, all of our
8 advocacy partners, and the parents
9 and community members who care about
10 Philadelphia schools.

11 I am incredibly proud,
12 Mr. President, of the progress that
13 our Philadelphia school district --
14 I'm proud of the progress that it is
15 making under this leadership. Why?
16 Student attendance, test scores and
17 graduation rates are increasing
18 while dropout rates are decreasing.
19 We are doing something right,
20 Mr. President.

21 Our extended day, extended
22 year program, it is delivering real
23 results for Philadelphia families, a
24 true path to economic mobility. How

1 do we know? Because 97 percent of
2 parents report that they are
3 satisfied with before and after
4 school programming, that reflects
5 real trust. Now, just as important
6 is that 95 percent say that this
7 free programming allows them, the
8 parents and caregivers, to focus on
9 work. And 92 percent say that it is
10 ultimately helping them save money.
11 Extended day, extended year
12 programming, it helps students build
13 strong connections to their schools.

14 This year, students who
15 attended extended day, extended year
16 programs, just one day a week, this
17 is just one day a week,
18 Mr. President, they had a 78 percent
19 attendance rate. And those who came
20 four days a week, they had an
21 attendance rate of 82 percent.
22 That's higher than the district
23 average for all elementary schools.
24 We are moving in the right direction

1 and making progress, Mr. President.

2 And let me say one more
3 thing about this program, because I
4 know there was some -- some were
5 skeptical about the thought and the
6 idea of these extended day, extended
7 year programs at first. And when
8 you're doing something new and
9 different, I understand that. But
10 what I said when we first started,
11 it remains true. And that's why I
12 stayed stuck last night on Bucks,
13 Chester, Delaware, and Mont Co.

14 Our children deserve the
15 same kinds of educational enrichment
16 programs that kids in the suburbs
17 get. That's a path to self-
18 sufficiency. And I'm unapologetic
19 about it. They're not better
20 standardized test takers than we
21 are. They're not smarter than our
22 kids.

23 But when you build in all
24 of the assistance they get outside

1 of the traditional school day, not
2 just what they do during the day,
3 but when you build in all of the
4 academic enrichment, you say, well,
5 wow, when I see your regions making
6 that kind of investment in you, we
7 now know why that investment is
8 clearly connected to student
9 performance.

10 Why is this important? I
11 want you to know that strengthening
12 academic proficiency and performance
13 is the foundation of it all. There
14 is a school board member and she
15 will beat you over the head with it
16 if you don't listen to it. Cheryl
17 Harper, I've known her for a very
18 long time. She and all of the
19 members of the board.

20 I mean, you know, arts and
21 culture and music, those things are
22 extremely important. But if
23 academic performance is not
24 improving, nothing else matters.

1 Why are we strengthening academics?
2 Because it is essential. And I want
3 you to listen to these pilot
4 programs that are in 10 schools.
5 Ten schools, Chairman Thomas.
6 Joyful Readers; I had never heard of
7 Joyful Readers.

8 And then, Mr. President,
9 Kumon; Kumon, Mr. President. Now,
10 for those of you who are smiling and
11 you know Kumon, I want you to know
12 I'm late to the party.

13 I didn't find out about
14 Kumon until last year or the year
15 before, because personally, I needed
16 access to the resource for my own
17 child. He needed some additional
18 support. Until I got in there for
19 the interview. And they said, well,
20 we're going to introduce you to some
21 parents who have been a part of
22 Kumon for many years so you can
23 understand what it is like. And
24 they had about three or four

1 parents. I said, well, how long
2 have you been here? Well, my child
3 started at four, my child started at
4 five. And I said, I'm way behind.
5 I'm behind here. Like, I should
6 have had him enrolled in this kind
7 of program much earlier.

8 But Mr. President, I never
9 knew it existed until I saw it on
10 Germantown Avenue. But guess what,
11 Mr. President -- and yes, it is in
12 Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Mont
13 Co., and so many other places, but
14 guess where it is now,
15 Mr. President? It is in the School
16 District of Philadelphia. And our
17 children get access to Kumon and
18 their parents don't have to pay for
19 it.

20 Important. Another one I
21 didn't know about, and many of you
22 may be familiar with this one,
23 Springboard Academy -- I mean,
24 Springboard Collaborative. I had

1 never heard of the Springboard
2 Collaborative before. Now, it is
3 actually in our School District of
4 Philadelphia. We're also expanding
5 enrichment.

6 This is important. You
7 shouldn't be confined to what is
8 occurring in your zip code. So what
9 else are they doing aside from those
10 pilot programs? Strengthening
11 academics, field trips. They've
12 been, Mr. President, to the Marian
13 Anderson Museum. They know who she
14 is and they've been able to feel her
15 and experience it. They've been to
16 the Arden.

17 You would be surprised how
18 many of our children have not had
19 access to the opportunity to
20 participate in a live viewing of
21 theater. They've been there. A
22 partnership with the Arden and the
23 Spirit of Philadelphia. I don't
24 care how old I get, it is always

1 going to be a super big deal to me.
2 I remember the first time I went on
3 the Spirit of Philadelphia. It is a
4 tradition that is continuing now.
5 And, Mr. President, through the One
6 Philly Produce Project.

7 And we learned how
8 important this was during the SNAP
9 crisis that occurred. A lot of
10 discussion here about geometric, if
11 things ride about, if this happens,
12 are we going to be prepared? Well,
13 Mr. President, I am so proud that
14 when that crisis with SNAP occurred
15 as a result of those federal
16 actions, and the Commonwealth of
17 Pennsylvania attempted to respond
18 and did the best it could, our One
19 Philly Produce Project, we have
20 distributed, Mr. President, 38,000
21 pounds of food to families, because
22 supportive learning, it means
23 supporting the whole child, our
24 investments in public education, and

1 that supporting families and
2 children. So I'm proud of that.

3 I am also pleased,
4 Mr. President, that my
5 administration, the school district
6 and the board and this council, we
7 are aligned. We are all aligned.
8 Please don't allow people to do this
9 divide and conquer strategy. It is
10 great, Mr. President, when somebody
11 is trying to get some clicks and get
12 some likes and some views.

13 But you can't say that my
14 administration, this school
15 district, this school board, and
16 this City Council are not aligned in
17 our commitment to public education
18 and student success. I don't care
19 who's selling it, I'm not buying it.
20 We are united. People just don't
21 want us to get together and figure
22 it out because they benefit when
23 there's chaos and confusion.

24 Mr. President, Chairman

1 Thomas, we've done some good work,
2 Mr. Chairman, but we cannot rest.
3 We are facing headwinds that
4 threaten the progress, it threatens
5 to stop that progress from moving
6 forward. And that's just not my
7 opinion. The data affirms what I --
8 what I just shared. And in essence,
9 this reminds me of approximately 12
10 years ago. And this is what kept me
11 up, you know, all night, when the
12 district, the School District of
13 Philadelphia was facing a financial
14 crisis.

15 And this is when I said,
16 wait a minute, I need to go back and
17 get a history of when we've
18 generated additional revenue. I'm
19 not talking about what comes to us
20 through the Commonwealth's formula
21 or dollars coming from the
22 Commonwealth. I'm talking about
23 dollars that are solely generated
24 here in the city of Philadelphia.

1 Our local share, just like Bucks,
2 Chester, Delaware, and Mont Co.
3 raise taxes to support their local
4 school district. What have we as
5 the city of Philadelphia done? And
6 when I started thinking about 12
7 years ago and that crisis, listen,
8 it was due to circumstances once
9 again, beyond its control.

10 It was the loss of both
11 state funding and federal funding.
12 And here we are, back to the future,
13 right back at the same place. We
14 all have been asking the question,
15 how is the city of Philadelphia
16 going to be prepared when we get hit
17 by the federal government? We've
18 been hit. We've been hit by the
19 federal government. As soon as that
20 \$300 million in ARPA funding
21 expired, that was the hit. We've
22 got to respond. I've heard that
23 from members of this body.

24 You've asked over and over

1 and over again, what are we going to
2 do if the federal government does
3 this? What are we going to do if
4 the federal government does this?
5 Guess what? They've already acted.
6 And guess what? It is done.

7 Mr. President, it has created a \$300
8 million structural deficit in the
9 School District of Philadelphia. To
10 the viewing public, I want you to
11 know, none of this has anything to
12 do with mismanagement of funds.

13 The School District of
14 Philadelphia has crossed its
15 financial T's and dotted its I's.
16 They've made central office cuts.
17 We are here today because that
18 federal government stopped \$300
19 million in revenue that our school
20 district received in order for it to
21 function. And now we have to figure
22 out a way to continue. So don't let
23 anybody say, this is not the
24 council's fault. This is not the

1 school board's fault. This is not
2 Dr. Watlington's fault.

3 We are trying to fix what
4 the federal government has in
5 essence, how it has impacted our
6 school district, because that \$300
7 million in ARPA funding is gone.
8 And that's why we're here right now.
9 And so let me affirm that when we
10 were going through this crisis, and
11 it is eerie, the numbers are really
12 basically the same. That's why I
13 want my notes on the floor -- from
14 the floor of the house to be
15 submitted as testimony. Because it
16 is almost the same exact message.

17 I was chairing the
18 Philadelphia delegation at that
19 time, Mr. President. And then
20 Council President Darryl Clarke was
21 here. And you will remember we were
22 fighting for the sales tax and then
23 we were fighting for the cigarette
24 tax. I see the depressor outside of

1 -- in the Capitol where we had to
2 ask R's and D's. I see Chairman
3 Harris and Mayor Nutter, Leader
4 Dermody, standing right there with
5 us. And we were -- we were angry,
6 Mr. President, because it was July.
7 Bill Gray had passed away.
8 Congressman Bill Gray. It was like
9 the 1st of July. Everybody was
10 standing up on the floor of the
11 house giving speeches in honor of
12 Congressman Gray. And I remember
13 getting ready. We all have
14 conversations about partisan
15 politics.

16 This was pre-MAGA. This
17 was when MAGA was being born. In
18 its infancy it was called the Tea
19 Party. And we had to figure out how
20 to get to yes with that
21 constituency, and we couldn't get it
22 all at once. So this is what they
23 gave us.

24 Remember, the sales tax was

1 expiring, and we needed additional
2 revenue. We said, give us the sales
3 tax and we will use the first \$120
4 million of those dollars to fund the
5 School District of Philadelphia. We
6 were very fortunate. We also
7 negotiated during that time, and it
8 was a bit of a civil war internally
9 for those who are here who were a
10 part of it. You will remember
11 anything over \$120 million we
12 negotiated.

13 And Leader Turzai, who was
14 not the speaker -- Sam Smith was the
15 speaker during that time, I
16 negotiated with Leader Turzai and
17 our chamber to have everything over
18 \$120 million directed to our
19 unfunded liability in our municipal
20 pension fund.

21 Then Council President
22 Darryl Clarke and I, we rumbled
23 back-to-back, again, Mr. President,
24 civil war, because you know, there

1 were some people who didn't support
2 it at that time, but we were able to
3 get it done. That was 120. We
4 couldn't get the cigarette tax. We
5 got the cigarette tax the following
6 year in 14, \$83 million.

7 So I want you to begin to
8 count that up. It was -- I want you
9 to, one, note: Liquor by the Drink.
10 That was 1994. First tax that I can
11 remember, like, in my lifetime,
12 specifically generated here in the
13 city of Philadelphia and directed to
14 public education.

15 In 2013 -- well, we
16 actually got two. We had a tax
17 fairness package, and we asked for
18 the ability to lien properties of
19 owners who were delinquent in paying
20 property taxes here in the city of
21 Philadelphia. And it was projected
22 to generate \$28 million.

23 It was a drop in the bucket
24 for what we needed overall. And

1 that's when we were able to get the
2 \$120 million in sales tax revenue.
3 The following year it was \$83
4 million from the cigarette tax. Why
5 do I affirm that for the record?
6 When you go -- and don't listen to
7 me, right now -- what -- I don't
8 know what we do, you Google Bucks,
9 Chester, Delaware, and Mont Co., and
10 taxes raised for education, public
11 education, in their respective
12 districts. And you will see how
13 many times those local jurisdictions
14 have had to step up for public
15 education, and they have done it
16 time and time again.

17 My ask today is that all of
18 us get together and do what there
19 are some people out there are hoping
20 that we don't do. Guess what
21 they're hoping that we don't do?
22 They're hoping that we don't figure
23 out a way to get it right.

24 They're hoping that we

1 don't figure out a way to get the
2 yes for public education. I'm here
3 on the date, Mr. President, to tell
4 you, I believe in your leadership,
5 Mr. President. I value your
6 leadership, Chairman Thomas,
7 Majority Leader Gilmore-Richardson,
8 and all members of this body. And I
9 know we can figure out a way to do
10 it if we just stand together.

11 Why is all of this
12 important to get on the record?
13 Because when we needed to stabilize
14 the district with new recurring
15 revenue, we stepped up. Guess what?
16 It took nine years, nine years later
17 for the Commonwealth Court to agree
18 with the Education Law Center, the
19 Public Interest Law Center. They
20 had filed a lawsuit. When we
21 passed, we did sales and we did
22 cigarettes.

23 After we did that revenue,
24 they filed a lawsuit claiming that

1 the state system of education
2 funding was unconstitutional, after
3 we had generated that revenue.
4 Yeah, we were happy we were able to
5 do it. It wasn't all that we
6 needed, but we knew it was wrong.
7 And our two educational legal policy
8 centers said, we have to stand up
9 and we need to take this to court.
10 It is fundamentally
11 unconstitutional. Nine years later,
12 Commonwealth Court agreed.

13 The General Assembly told
14 Philadelphia, after the court's
15 ruling, that we were underfunded by
16 \$1.25 billion. The General Assembly
17 acknowledged that. And so, after
18 all these years, when we've been
19 spending our heads trying to raise
20 this local revenue -- and listen,
21 remember this, Bucks, Chester,
22 Delaware, and Mont Co., their
23 property taxes are like mortgages or
24 like second mortgages in those

1 areas. There's no way in the world
2 we, little old city of Philadelphia,
3 we can't afford to increase property
4 taxes at the rates of those other
5 jurisdictions. Our people just
6 can't afford it. I wouldn't support
7 it. You wouldn't support it.

8 We wouldn't support it
9 because it wouldn't be fair if we
10 did it. We are dealing with an
11 affordability challenge, and we
12 didn't have the same tools in the
13 toolbox that our regional partners
14 had. Why is that important,
15 Mr. President? Because right now,
16 we've got a governor named Josh
17 Shapiro, who has led in the funding
18 of public education throughout the
19 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

20 After the court's ruling,
21 the Commonwealth's investment, it
22 has been at a historic rate. I'm
23 thinking about the Philadelphia
24 delegation and Speaker McClinton and

1 Appropriations Chairman Harris and
2 our friend Leader Bradford from Mont
3 Co. The funding that's been driven
4 to the school district, along with
5 that pot called the adequacy sort of
6 pot of funding, they have been
7 fighting to ensure that the
8 Commonwealth is paying off the debt
9 that is owed to Philadelphia
10 students. And we are grateful to
11 them for their advocacy.

12 I'm thinking about Chairman
13 Hughes and Leader Costa. I'm
14 thinking about all of their work.
15 But Mr. President, years of chronic
16 underfunding, guess what, it has
17 caught up with us, Mr. Chairman. It
18 is not fuzzy math. I know we --
19 some folks were questioning the
20 math. It is -- like it is not.
21 \$300 million is gone because the
22 federal government no longer has
23 \$300 million on the table in revenue
24 that it is generating and sending to

1 the city of Philadelphia and our
2 school district.

3 We don't have that anymore.

4 The chronic underfunding from the
5 Commonwealth, they are working to
6 pay off the debt owed to students.
7 However, we are right now facing
8 another critical tipping point. The
9 school district and that \$300
10 million structural deficit will
11 result in 340 school-based cuts.
12 Now, this is where I want to be
13 clear: the cuts would have an
14 enormous impact. 149 teachers, 23
15 counselors, 119 climate staff, plus
16 other administrative and support
17 staff, 206 schools would be
18 impacted.

19 Now, in schools across the
20 city, from North Philadelphia to
21 West Philadelphia to the Northeast,
22 students will feel the loss of these
23 trusted adults in their lives. And
24 the impact will be felt in

1 neighborhoods across the city. So
2 what does it mean? And this is the
3 part that scared me the most, and
4 how we got here, and I'm going to
5 walk through that, too.

6 How we get to \$1 with
7 what's being proposed. This is what
8 scared me, and I want to put it on
9 the record so I'm being very
10 transparent with all members of
11 Council. Larger class sizes, less
12 academic and social supports for our
13 students, and less stability in
14 schools that have just started to
15 make progress that we can actually
16 measure. That was unacceptable to
17 me, Mr. President. And I know it is
18 equally unacceptable to all of the
19 members of Council.

20 I want to go back here
21 because I know the timeline about
22 how we go from \$0.20 to \$1, if I'm
23 here, I would question that too.
24 You have a right to question. Came

1 in here, talked to us, gave a budget
2 address, talked about \$0.20, and
3 then about a week later, we hear
4 that the new figure is \$1. You got
5 a right to question that.

6 Let me tell you how we get
7 there. On March 12th, I submitted
8 my proposed FY27 One Philly One
9 Future budget to City Council for
10 its consideration. That evening,
11 Mr. President, we first learned that
12 the school district was planning to
13 eliminate 340 school-based
14 positions, jeopardizing our
15 students' progress. And that was to
16 deal with the \$300 million
17 structural deficit. Unacceptable to
18 me.

19 So I announced at a time
20 that was right afterwards, somebody
21 had to say in this building, wait,
22 you were just here giving your
23 budget address and the number, the
24 amount was \$0.20. It was less --

1 maybe a week or maybe a week and a
2 half, that number went from \$0.20 to
3 \$1.

4 We got there with the
5 dollar on ride shares originating in
6 Philadelphia because, one, when we
7 did the math, we had to get to a
8 number that was \$50 million.

9 I would only hope and dream
10 that the amount could have been,
11 Chairman Thomas, the \$83 million
12 that we got back in 2014 from the --
13 from the cigarette tax, or the \$120
14 million we got from the sales tax.
15 This didn't generate that much
16 revenue, Mr. President. A \$1 tax on
17 ride shares originating in
18 Philadelphia would only raise \$48
19 million a year to help the school
20 district step back from, listen to
21 this number, 240 of those proposed
22 340. So that still wasn't enough.

23 I listened to school union
24 leaders and education advocates, and

1 -- because I want to tell you about
2 this process because some people
3 have been asking, well, you know, I
4 don't understand. And,
5 Mr. President, for us to -- I mean,
6 we -- I sat in this body. I worked
7 in this body. I've been a part of
8 this body. While we are going
9 through the legislative process, we
10 get additional information that
11 informs our decision making on a
12 daily basis.

13 So for anyone to act as if
14 getting additional information while
15 you're going through the legislative
16 process, that's a part of the way we
17 make the sausage. We get additional
18 information from stakeholders who
19 are going to be impacted by the
20 legislative action that we are
21 proposing to take, and then we make
22 adjustments where and when possible.
23 And I want you to know that that is
24 -- that is what we did here,

1 Chairman Thomas.

2 And so 200 -- eliminating
3 or stepping back from 240 of those
4 340 school-based positions being
5 eliminated, that wasn't enough. It
6 was listening to our advocates and
7 our labor leaders: Art Steinberg
8 from the PFT, Robin Cooper from
9 CASA, again UNITE HERE, Donna Cooper
10 from Children First, Dan Ackelsberg
11 from the Public Interest Law Center.

12 We had a roundtable. And
13 I'm going to tell you what they told
14 me at the table. "You're just not
15 listening. You just don't get it.
16 We're talking about 340 school-based
17 cuts. You are being able to do this
18 and only take 240 of the 340
19 proposed school-based cuts off the
20 table. Mayor, thanks, but it is not
21 enough. What do we need to do in
22 order to get there?"

23 We went back to the drawing
24 board. Our finance director, Rob

1 Dubow, our budget director, Sabrina
2 Maynard, working along with the
3 finance department and the School
4 District of Philadelphia, they
5 huddled, and the direction was
6 clear. I left a meeting with those
7 advocates and the goal has to be, if
8 we generate this revenue, we have to
9 make it matter and it has to result
10 in zero school-based cuts.

11 So the math -- somebody
12 questioned the math mathing, they
13 told me my math wasn't mathing,
14 because my math would have only
15 addressed 240 of those school-based
16 positions, and we needed to have
17 zero impact as it related to school-
18 based cuts. I mean, folks have
19 asked the question. So I wanted to
20 be very transparent with you all so
21 that you know how we got here, and
22 I'm sharing with you everything that
23 we have gone through in this
24 process.

1 Once we went back to the
2 drawing board, we were able to come
3 up with the plan so that there would
4 be zero school-based cuts. And they
5 did that. You have to remember,
6 we're talking about \$50.4 million.
7 Remember, Mr. President, I started
8 by saying the number we were trying
9 to get to was that \$50 million.
10 Well, we were able to get there,
11 \$50.4 million in annual recurring
12 revenues. And we were able to
13 accomplish after the school
14 district.

15 And we waited on pins and
16 needles for the finance department,
17 because you and I know, it is just
18 like when we are putting together
19 the budget, Mr. President, we have
20 thoughts and ideas about things we
21 want to get done.

22 You have members in this
23 room who have things that they need
24 to get done in their districts, and

1 your budget team and our budget
2 team, we get together and they get
3 in the room and there are
4 spreadsheets and on computers, and
5 they start trying to make the math
6 matter. That's how we're able to
7 respond to members of this body who
8 have interests and desires and
9 issues that they want to get
10 addressed in their respective
11 communities.

12 Mr. President, what we did
13 here is no different than what we do
14 when we're getting to yes during our
15 budget process here in the city.

16 Why was that important to
17 affirm? Because this week my
18 administration submitted formally
19 those proposed amendments to
20 establish the \$1 ride share tax.
21 Now, this measure combined with an
22 adjustment to the use and occupancy
23 tax on cell phone towers. And for
24 most people, I haven't heard a lot

1 of feedback about it all. We don't
2 -- most people don't even pay
3 attention to it unless you look up
4 in the sky and you see all these
5 contraptions, you know, in certain
6 areas.

7 And, you know, each of them
8 usually represents a cell phone -- a
9 different cell phone carrier in the
10 city. And when you add the two
11 together, that is how we get to
12 \$50.4 million in recurring revenue
13 for the School District of
14 Philadelphia.

15 Just a quick pin. Somebody
16 said, Mr. President, "Why can't we
17 just get a fast infusion, Chairman
18 Thomas; a fast infusion of \$300
19 million from somewhere to support
20 the school district right now and
21 it'll make all of the woes go away."
22 Now, to the member -- the several
23 members of Council who talk about
24 that math is not mathing, I say that

1 math is not mathing.

2 Mr. President, we have a
3 regional transportation authority
4 that's called SEPTA. And we just
5 had to put a band aid on a gunshot
6 wound with a quick one-time infusion
7 of cash and no new recurring revenue
8 source. If you're trying to
9 systemically fix a seemingly
10 intractable problem, you don't fix
11 it with a one-time infusion of cash.

12 Just like any business that
13 you run, you have to have revenue
14 projections about how you're going
15 to pay the workforce. And I know we
16 all care about that workforce. We
17 want everybody, no matter what they
18 do for the school district, we want
19 them to earn a living wage, get
20 healthcare and retirement security.

21 So a one-time infusion is
22 some quick cash. I know,
23 Mr. Chairman, a time is for
24 education. When you hear that, I

1 can only imagine what you're
2 thinking about, because in your mind
3 you're saying, well, whomever is
4 talking about a one-time infusion of
5 cash, they ain't never had to
6 balance a budget or make payroll.
7 Because if they did, you know, the
8 one-time infusion, that just buys
9 you some breath for a little bit,
10 but it doesn't solve the systemic
11 crisis that we have that other
12 school districts can count on, and
13 that is recurring revenue.

14 So if we don't,
15 Mr. President and Chairman and
16 members of Council, approve these
17 measures, we already know what will
18 happen. And it is what, again, will
19 scare the daylights out of me.
20 Academic progress will be
21 jeopardized. Larger class sizes,
22 less support for students and less
23 stability in schools. There has
24 been a great deal of discussion and

1 quite honestly -- and I guess for
2 the people of Philadelphia, this is
3 more so to you, about the ride share
4 tax that I want to share with you,
5 and I want to get this on the
6 record. First, City of Philadelphia
7 ride share taxes, they are common.
8 51 states and localities have passed
9 ride share taxes.

10 You've heard it a thousand
11 times. I just have to get it on the
12 record, Mr. President. Washington
13 D.C. has a ride share tax. Chicago
14 has one and so does New York. Now,
15 San Francisco, Philadelphia -- I
16 just want you to think about what's
17 happening here. San Francisco,
18 where Uber and Lyft are
19 headquartered, has a ride share tax.

20 And guess what, not just
21 yesterday, Mr. President, where
22 these billion-dollar tech companies
23 are located in San Francisco, and
24 I'm just talking about two, they

1 have a local ride share tax and
2 they've had it since 2020, 2026.
3 They've had it where they originate,
4 where they've decided to plant their
5 roots and do business. They've paid
6 a price, a local price to the local
7 community where they are located to
8 do business there.

9 Somebody said -- and I
10 don't know, maybe I was at a meeting
11 or something like that, and somebody
12 said, "Yeah, well, you know, we've
13 heard you mention New York and
14 Chicago, but, you know, you're not
15 talking about scale now. They're
16 not -- Philadelphia is much smaller
17 than New York and Chicago." I said,
18 "Well, okay. I'm sorry, like, does
19 Baltimore matter? Like Baltimore is
20 close to us. Baltimore has a ride
21 share tax, too." So if there is
22 anyone in this city who is watching,
23 who would believe that the city of
24 Philadelphia would be an outlier on

1 this issue, that would be wrong.

2 Now, I can't stop anyone
3 from saying it, but those are not
4 the facts and that's not the truth.
5 In addition to that, Mr. President,
6 and this one got me to my core. It
7 was like -- I was triggered by this
8 one. If you are concerned that this
9 tax will rest on the shoulders of
10 low-income families, let's look at
11 the facts.

12 For those of you who are
13 members of this body who were here
14 in 2016, if you worked here, or if
15 you were a member here, that had to
16 sound familiar to you. Because that
17 was the same thing that we heard
18 when we passed the soda tax. They
19 said, if you pass this tax, it is --
20 one, they said it was --
21 Councilmember O'Rourke, they said
22 the soda tax was a regressive tax,
23 because it would disproportionately
24 impact Black and Brown and

1 low-income communities.

2 And I think that was my
3 seat or either where Councilmember
4 Harrity is, I can't remember what
5 side now, but I remember being
6 patient and listening, but
7 frustrated, because the whole time
8 they're talking about this tax
9 disproportionately impacting
10 low-income Black and Brown
11 communities, the only thing they're
12 doing is talking about Black and
13 Brown communities as consumers.

14 Nobody thought about the
15 fact that the stores that are
16 selling the sodas where the Black
17 and Brown people go to buy, they
18 didn't own them. Why are we just
19 talking about this constituency as
20 consumers, not as owners, and then
21 not trying to figure out a way that
22 they could benefit from the revenue
23 being generated from the dollars
24 that they are spending. Same issue

1 today.

2 So let me get the facts on
3 the record for those people who have
4 said that this is a regressive tax.
5 Not according to Mayor Parker, but
6 according to U.S. Census data on
7 Philadelphia's travel patterns.
8 U.S. Census data, would you say if
9 you can't measure it -- if you can't
10 measure it, you can't manage it.
11 Not me. The U.S. Census measured
12 Philadelphia's travel patterns and
13 only one percent of Philadelphians
14 earning under \$50,000 use ride share
15 or taxicab services to get to work
16 on a daily basis.

17 Now, I'm not going to sit
18 here and affirm that some of us
19 don't know an outlier or two. I
20 don't know. Somebody may have given
21 an example about a resident who uses
22 ride share about eight to ten times
23 in the day to go to work, to pick
24 up, drop off, pick up, drop off.

1 And, you know, listen, you know, I
2 don't know, I'm not a regular user
3 of it.

4 So I'm not saying that that
5 is not accurate. I'm not
6 challenging that at all. If that is
7 the pattern that someone has chosen
8 to employ in their life to get to
9 and from, we are struggling in this
10 city. People are trying to make
11 ends meet and they do whatever they
12 can with what they have to make ends
13 meet. So if that's the story, I'm
14 not debating that story. What I am
15 doing, Chairman Thomas, is just
16 formally and officially getting on
17 the record what the U.S. Census data
18 says about Philadelphia's travel
19 patterns.

20 In addition to that, this
21 is another one that bothered me.
22 Somebody said -- and I'm not a
23 lawyer, Mr. President, I was just a
24 little old certified secondary

1 English teacher misspelling stuff
2 sometimes. I'm not a lawyer. But
3 this is what I remember. This is
4 what I remember. I remember that we
5 won the lawsuit for the soda tax. I
6 was up all night.

7 And I want to go back to
8 the basis of the lawsuit because I'm
9 not a lawyer, but I heard the
10 question about the language and why
11 the language is written exactly the
12 way it is written in the text that
13 we are proposing. Don't forget what
14 was challenged, you, Councilmember
15 Driscoll, and I, we know this
16 argument.

17 The first one is the
18 Sterling Act of 1932. We had to
19 debate and keep that Sterling Act
20 alive every year. A Republican in
21 the house, a Republican in the
22 Senate was going to introduce
23 legislation to eliminate the
24 Sterling Act.

1 Now, somebody in here is
2 saying, well, this is pretty boring,
3 she's talking about acts in 1932 and
4 after the Depression. Guess why it
5 is important? It is the enabling
6 authority that gives the city of
7 Philadelphia to collect the wage
8 tax, both the resident and the
9 non-resident wage tax. Without the
10 Sterling Act, we can't do that.

11 Now, somebody's going to
12 say that doesn't make much sense.
13 And I thought about it,
14 Mr. President, and I just wanted for
15 the -- for the record, for someone
16 who's saying that the Sterling Act
17 of -- doesn't make much sense, when
18 we look at the general fund revenue
19 that we collect here in the city to
20 run the city and the budget that we
21 proposed, listen, Mr. President,
22 \$5.4 billion of the revenue that we
23 use to run the City of Philadelphia,
24 guess where it comes from? It is

1 enabled, Chairman Thomas, through
2 the Sterling Act. That's one.

3 The second thing and reason
4 or the explanation as to why the
5 language has to be written that way
6 -- because if you remember the basis
7 of the beverage tax lawsuit, the
8 next thing is my favorite thing.

9 Again, I hate to keep
10 picking on Councilmembers Driscoll
11 and you, President Johnson, but it
12 is because when you had to be on the
13 front line fighting all of this, you
14 know, you remember it. What do we
15 have here that is definitely a line
16 in the sand with the language that
17 we use in everything that we do, and
18 the revenue that we collect, that
19 most of the cities in the nation
20 don't have to contend with? It is
21 almost like it keeps us fiscally
22 handcuffed.

23 We have something called
24 the Uniformity Clause. I'm not

1 making it up. The city of
2 Philadelphia doesn't have the
3 authority, the power, even if we
4 wanted to. And look, you're talking
5 about what would make our jobs a
6 whole lot easier if we did have the
7 ability like other cities do, to
8 charge different tax rates for
9 different classes of property.

10 Man, I don't understand,
11 somebody's watching, what are you
12 saying? Most cities, they charge
13 one rate for industrial properties.
14 They charge another rate for
15 commercial properties, and then they
16 charge another rate for residential
17 properties. That would make what we
18 do, I think, a whole lot simpler if
19 we could just say, we don't want to
20 hurt our residents who are
21 struggling with an affordability
22 crisis.

23 We just made historic
24 efforts working together, no matter

1 how difficult it was, historic \$2
2 billion plan to create and preserve
3 30,000 units of housing in the city
4 of Philadelphia. And we did that
5 together. But guess what? We don't
6 have the power because of the
7 Uniformity Clause.

8 So for the super smart
9 people who questioned why the
10 language was written the way it was
11 written, and that we affirm in the
12 legislation, very specifically, I
13 want you to know that the finance
14 department, the budget department,
15 under strict guidance from the law
16 department, the reason why it is
17 written that way is because we would
18 have had to stop or been finished
19 before we started, because we would
20 have been in violation of the
21 Uniformity Clause and or the
22 Uniformity Act.

23 So when you see the
24 language and you have a right to

1 question it, because when you go
2 outside, people are going to say for
3 the people who do, that's a dollar
4 on me. And you're accurate. It
5 does specifically say a dollar on
6 the rider. But we would have been
7 challenged in court, and thank God
8 we had this precedent of this -- of
9 the beverage tax lawsuit, and we
10 know how we won.

11 So no one could say that we
12 were in violation of Sterling Act or
13 we were in violation of the
14 Uniformity Clause because of the way
15 we wrote the language. And it does
16 say a dollar tax on -- in essence,
17 on a rider and the consumer. But I
18 want you to view that as our
19 technical way of being able to
20 introduce the legislation and
21 generate the revenue so that we know
22 we don't get sued and that we can
23 generate the revenue.

24 But let me tell you what I

1 know is a choice. We didn't have a
2 choice in the language that we use
3 in the way the amendment and the
4 legislation is drafted. I just told
5 you why. But let me tell you about
6 who has a choice. Those multi-
7 billion-dollar companies have a
8 choice. We've got to write the
9 legislation the way we have to write
10 it so the city of Philadelphia
11 doesn't get sued and we're not in
12 violation of Sterling and/or
13 Uniformity Clause. But if those
14 billion-dollar corporations who
15 benefit from doing business in our
16 city -- this is the frustration
17 about having been around.

18 Mr. President, I left in
19 January of 2016. For two and a half
20 years we had debated TNCs,
21 transportation networking companies,
22 that's what we called them during
23 that time. And our cab companies
24 were rumbling heavily.

1 It was a State
2 Representative named Rosita
3 Youngblood who fought really, really
4 hard. Black cabs -- I think they
5 were called Germantown Cab or Philly
6 Cab. They were headquartered in her
7 area, and people had spent \$100,000
8 a year, I know I sound like a great
9 grandmother now, buying something
10 called the medallion. A medallion
11 was what you needed in order to own
12 the cab and you were regulated by
13 the parking authority.

14 But the cab companies were
15 saying to us, you know, if you let
16 these TNCs become legalized and
17 regulated here in the Commonwealth,
18 you're going to throw the cab -- the
19 cab industry, we're no longer going
20 to be, you know, in business. And I
21 remember like feeling sorry, but I
22 remember when the people, the Ubers,
23 the Lyfts, the -- all of the folks
24 were coming up and they were giving

1 us demonstrations about what they
2 could do. I remember like right
3 before I was leaving, and it went --
4 and Governor Wolf was the governor
5 during that time, he was the
6 governor who got it done.

7 I remember saying to those
8 people, let me tell you something,
9 you can't stop innovation in the
10 private sector. This technology is
11 here. Cab companies, cab industry,
12 you all have to find a way to
13 compete because I'm telling you this
14 kind of personalized convenience, it
15 matters. It is what people desire,
16 it is helpful. And by the time we
17 got here, I think it was that
18 September or October, the ride share
19 was passed in Harrisburg.

20 Let me say this to you,
21 Mr. President. These multi-billion-
22 dollar companies, they don't have to
23 make the choice to pass it on. It
24 is no different than the beverage

1 industry. And I don't want you to
2 take my word -- or I also just gave
3 you the U.S. Census Bureau's data.
4 I want you to think about New York
5 labor economist James Parrott. And
6 I do want to get this on the record.
7 Councilmember Driscoll and
8 Mr. President, he comes from a place
9 called the New School.

10 We've worked -- I've worked
11 with the New School and I know
12 Councilmember O'Rourke and probably
13 Councilmember Brooks, I know you are
14 familiar with the New School because
15 a great deal of what is referred to
16 as progressive -- well, when I was
17 in Harrisburg, they said liberal; a
18 great deal of liberal policies have
19 come out of the New School.

20 Mr. President and
21 Councilmember Driscoll, that's who
22 did the research when we worked on
23 the effort of retirement security.
24 Alan Butkovitz was the controller.

1 We were working on it here. We kept
2 running into ERISA laws, but we
3 called on the New School, and it was
4 a professor there by the name of
5 Teresa Ghilarducci, who was the
6 person from the New School who did
7 our research.

8 So, Mr. President, when we
9 get that letter from the New School
10 and this labor economist, and he
11 submits testimony to this body, I
12 want to affirm that that is not the
13 first time that the New School has
14 ever had any kind of engagement with
15 the City Council of Philadelphia.
16 They guided my research and my work
17 when I was trying to provide
18 retirement security for the private
19 sector.

20 And when you listen to that
21 testimony, guess what he said? He
22 stated that it does not seem too
23 much. This is not me, this is the
24 labor economist, the professor from

1 the New School who says, "It does
2 not seem too much to ask these giant
3 tech companies to absorb the
4 proposed \$1 per trip tax rather than
5 further enrich their shareholders."
6 Not my words, his. "Or pass on the
7 tax to their Philadelphia
8 passengers."

9 So for those multi-billion-
10 dollar companies, Philadelphia, this
11 is a choice and they don't have to
12 make it. They could choose to
13 invest in the city where they are
14 fortunate and have the privilege and
15 honor of doing business in our city.
16 They benefit from business in our
17 city. Are they job creators here in
18 our city? Yes, they are. And we
19 want them. We're open for business.
20 We want them to continue doing
21 business, but there's also what we
22 usually chalk up as a cost to doing
23 business.

24 And you talk to anybody

1 who's successful -- Councilmember
2 Jones, you were at PCDC, you know
3 what that means. It is a cost to
4 doing business. So I know how we
5 technically -- Councilmember
6 O'Rourke, Councilmember Young, I
7 know how we technically had the law
8 department say, based on the soda
9 tax legislation and the court
10 ruling, we wrote the -- we wrote
11 amendment and the language the way
12 we had to so that we complied with
13 legal court precedent.

14 But the choice about what
15 you do, that's not us. That's not
16 this Council. That's for that --
17 those billion-dollar companies to
18 decide, and they can choose to make
19 this investment in our city where
20 they benefit from doing business.

21 Before I leave,
22 Mr. President, I want to discuss
23 another major issue facing our
24 district. And I know this one is on

1 everyone's mind in this room. After
2 decades of underfunding in the
3 school district facilities, and we
4 know that this has been an issue.

5 I'm a product of the School
6 District of Philadelphia. And I
7 love every school I attended: Rowan
8 Elementary, Austin Meehan Middle,
9 and the Parkway Program High School.
10 And if Ms. Gwen Ragsdale is
11 watching, I just saw her in
12 Fairmount Park this week, my first-
13 grade teacher.

14 And immediately,
15 Mr. President, I wanted to sit at a
16 desk and fold my hands. It was the
17 first time I'd seen her since
18 elementary school. Still that kind
19 of impact and respect and reverence
20 that you -- that you have for the
21 teachers and the people who were a
22 part of your personal village.

23 And each and every one of
24 us who grew up here in Philadelphia

1 and went to school in the school
2 district, I know you can remember
3 the people who were a part of your
4 journey.

5 The simple fact is that
6 when we think about those schools,
7 we have to remember that to renovate
8 or repair every public school, the
9 cost -- this is the price tag that
10 we've been given, my team has been
11 given, was \$7 billion. That's what
12 we would need in order to renovate
13 or rebuild every school here in the
14 city of Philadelphia.

15 Philadelphia school
16 facilities are on average more than
17 70 years old. They lack modern
18 equipment and layout that's needed
19 to educate students in the 21st
20 century global economy, because it
21 is no longer are we competing
22 against each other, it is a global
23 economy. We're competing with
24 people now all across the world,

1 especially when you can do business
2 sitting at a computer.

3 The world has changed.

4 Many of these schools are operating
5 far below capacity with thousands of
6 empty seats across the system.

7 Others are severely overcrowded.

8 And I know members of council talked
9 about that.

10 Wait a minute, there's some
11 disparity. I know one region of the
12 city in the Northeast, I've gone by,
13 I've seen the trailers, I've had to
14 talk to the parents too, where
15 they're bursting from the seams. And
16 they're saying, you know, the demand
17 is here, why haven't you built more?
18 And then you go to another region of
19 the city and you walk into a
20 building.

21 I spoke with a former
22 legislator earlier today and we were
23 talking about this. He said, I can
24 remember a day when 1,200 students

1 were in this one particular
2 building. 1,200 students used to be
3 in that building. He said, you
4 know, how many I remember in there?
5 I said, what? He said, the last
6 time I checked it was about 200 or
7 250. That part I know we all agree
8 on. I haven't heard a member of
9 Council -- because this is a tough
10 issue.

11 I haven't heard a member of
12 Council push back on acknowledging
13 that there was a time when our
14 school district had a larger
15 population. What are we at? About
16 198,000 students right now. But
17 when you think about when we had 2.6
18 million people living in the city of
19 Philadelphia, our city has changed.
20 The makeup of the district has
21 changed. The population has
22 changed.

23 And so when we are thinking
24 about Governor Shapiro, and this is

1 why I really wanted to raise this,
2 and I don't want you to -- please
3 just don't take my word. I'm hoping
4 that somebody will ask -- call
5 Governor Shapiro, call any of our
6 legislative leaders on the
7 Democratic side or the Republican
8 side in Harrisburg.

9 I don't care who you talk
10 to. Every time they go sit down to
11 have a conversation about
12 negotiating a budget along with
13 public education, especially when it
14 comes to Philadelphia,
15 Councilmembers Driscoll, President,
16 you were there. You know what I'm
17 affirming.

18 Budget conversations start
19 this way. The majority caucus now
20 in the House, the majority caucus in
21 the Senate, that means Leader
22 Bradford, Speaker McClinton,
23 Appropriations Chairman Harris.

24 They will meet with the

1 Republican leaders in the Senate,
2 because on the legislative side, the
3 two majority parties, they're the
4 ones who begin the conversation and
5 they work in partnership with the
6 governor's office. Eventually the
7 table becomes a five-seat table, the
8 executive branch leading the table.
9 And you have representation from
10 each caucus and each chamber. And
11 you figure out a way to get to yes.

12 Guess what question they
13 are going to have to answer. And
14 this is why I view what we're doing
15 here right now in every way
16 imaginable as us finding a way to
17 help our legislative leaders to help
18 us.

19 First question they're
20 going to ask is, what is
21 Philadelphia doing? The City of
22 Philadelphia proper, us, what are we
23 doing to invest in our public
24 schools?

1 I'm talking about the new
2 revenue right now. Yes, we should
3 also be proud that for the first
4 time, and I don't know how long, we,
5 you know, increased the portion of
6 the millage dedicated to public
7 education here in the city. We
8 didn't need a campaign or anything
9 to tell us to do that. We came in
10 the door with that. We committed
11 from 55 to go to 58. Chairman, we
12 are at 1.5 -- right now we've got
13 1.5 to go. So we're already doing
14 that part. More of our property tax
15 is dedicated.

16 But here with the ride
17 share tax, now ride share tax, tower
18 tax, when they go to the table, we
19 will empower them with the ability
20 to say, don't tell us Philadelphia
21 didn't already make tough decisions
22 to address this \$300 million
23 structural deficit in the School
24 District of Philadelphia. Because

1 it has already done the hard work
2 and we've generated the revenue.
3 That's the one question.

4 The second question they're
5 going to ask, and, Mr. President,
6 you know this, what has the School
7 District of Philadelphia done to
8 work through right-sizing the School
9 District of Philadelphia in
10 accordance with the student
11 population and with a strategic plan
12 that will allow you to build new
13 schools, modernize schools,
14 co-locate schools together?

15 I mean, I can't remember
16 the school, but Drexel,
17 Mr. President, now we -- you have to
18 be creative, because \$7 billion -- I
19 don't know anybody thinks \$7 billion
20 -- our budget is -- our whole budget
21 for the city of Philadelphia is
22 basically \$7 billion. I don't have
23 a way to get to \$7 billion, but I do
24 want us to be able to say that we've

1 done our homework and we haven't
2 asked anybody to simply, you know,
3 come and address something that
4 we've ignored.

5 We've contributed our fair
6 share. This is a shared sacrifice
7 in supporting public education, and
8 we've done it. They're going to ask
9 us about right-sizing and they're
10 going to ask whether or not the
11 School District of Philadelphia had
12 the courage, and if we as leaders
13 were able to work together to
14 support them making these very, very
15 tough decisions.

16 And, Mr. President, I know
17 we're not trying to build the
18 education system for the past.
19 We're working on our children's
20 future. Right now, we are
21 maintaining square footage as it
22 crumbles instead of investing in
23 opportunities our students actually
24 need. Yes, this means making

1 difficult but responsible decisions.

2 And that's what the district has
3 worked through in the facilities
4 plan.

5 Mr. President, this is not
6 like it was when we were going
7 through 13 and 14. You want me to
8 tell you how? First things first,
9 we were under the SRC, the School
10 Reform Commission. Chairman Thomas,
11 I wasn't at every meeting, but I
12 think there were about two years.

13 For two years there were
14 discussions and activities and
15 conversations about all of this.
16 That didn't happen when we went
17 through this knee-jerk reaction
18 years ago, because I didn't like it
19 then. I didn't think it was well
20 coordinated. The same issues,
21 Chairman Thomas, that you raised
22 about making sure that we are
23 communicating with the public. You
24 and I, we share that sentiment. And

1 I think we saw Dr. Watlington and
2 the board attempt to do that.

3 In addition, I also know
4 this, Mr. President, nothing is more
5 frustrating in government when
6 somebody tries to make a decision
7 and they draw a line in the sand and
8 say, this is it. What do I mean?
9 Chairman Thomas and Council
10 President, you know that the school
11 district now, the plan doesn't look
12 like it did when they initially
13 introduced it because they listened
14 to members in this body.

15 They've listened to
16 parents, they've listened to
17 legislators, and I know they are not
18 where they started. I know we're
19 not finished with this process and I
20 know we're still going through it.
21 My ask is that we not exhibit what
22 you'll hear me refer to as reflexive
23 opposition, but that we want -- we
24 acknowledge the facts that I put on

1 the record. Not my emotions, just
2 the facts about issues that we have
3 to deal with here in the district.

4 I don't think any of us
5 refute that. All we have to do as
6 leaders is figure out a way,
7 Mr. President, to get there, so that
8 when our team in Harrisburg goes to
9 the table, we answered the revenue
10 question. We've started working on
11 the right-size question. We've
12 started being creative.

13 And I'm not sure of the
14 name of the school that's near
15 Drexel, but Drexel has done
16 something amazing in partnering with
17 the school. I don't know, it's
18 Solace? I can't remember what the
19 name of the school is, but it is
20 amazing. And people talk about what
21 Drexel University has done. I
22 thought about what would happen if
23 we were creative enough to say,
24 Dr. Watlington and President

1 Streater and members of the board --
2 because I don't manage the school
3 board, and I don't try to micro
4 manage their work because they're
5 the educational experts.

6 But I wonder with some of
7 our challenges, that we -- that we
8 do acknowledge, what if the
9 University of Pennsylvania became a
10 potential partner in trying to help
11 when we talk about co-location and
12 partnership and just being creative
13 and thinking outside of the box.

14 What if Temple University
15 with the amazing John Fry --
16 Councilmember Young, in your
17 district, because they've been
18 having a lot of conversations about
19 place-based learning in the area.
20 What if Temple was able to come up
21 with the strategy? Members of the
22 City Council of Philadelphia, I
23 don't know if that is possible.

24 I don't know if those

1 conversations are moving as swiftly
2 as we would like. But for me, you
3 know, I don't think it is over until
4 it is over, and we can't get it
5 done. I'm -- Mr. President, I'm
6 here giving this address. I'm doing
7 what we would call -- Councilmember
8 Majority Leader Gilmore-Richardson,
9 leaning on the shield today, saying
10 that we can't get this done alone.

11 The School District of
12 Philadelphia can't move without you.
13 It is this legislative body, not
14 that school board, that has the
15 power to generate the revenue that
16 the School District of Philadelphia
17 needs. We're not like the other
18 school districts in our region.

19 It is this Council that's
20 been the leader to save public
21 education in the city of
22 Philadelphia. And I'm the Mayor.
23 And I acknowledge in Philadelphia, I
24 affirm. As mayor, I can't get

1 anything done. A budget can't get
2 passed. The school district can't
3 get funded. We can't do anything to
4 move our city forward if we are not
5 all working together. I say it to
6 you privately, I say it to you
7 publicly. We have to work together
8 in order to get it done.

9 And I want us to figure out
10 a way to get to yes. Why,
11 Mr. President? Right-sizing
12 buildings is not about abandoning
13 communities. It is about
14 strengthening them. If Chairman
15 Harris takes me to that location on
16 Broad Street, there's a recreation
17 center, there is CHOP -- is it a
18 library? It is a recreation center,
19 CHOP, and the library, all
20 co-located in one place.

21 He says, listen, that's the
22 model we need to be working on if
23 we're thinking outside of the box to
24 leverage these resources. But let

1 us get there and let Harrisburg know
2 that we are making real and tangible
3 changes. Middle school students
4 will have access to Algebra 1
5 instead of slightly over half
6 students. More students will have
7 access to art, music, and physical
8 education. And the share of the
9 schools offering five or more AP
10 classes will grow from 38 percent to
11 58 percent.

12 And the share of incoming
13 kindergartners with access to pre-K
14 will double from 25 percent to 50
15 percent. But we have to be willing
16 to work together in order to make it
17 happen.

18 No matter what anyone says,
19 Council President and members of
20 Council, I know it is good theater
21 for people to see what they consider
22 to be our going to war, the
23 administration versus the Council,
24 the legislative branch versus the

1 executive branch, in opposition with
2 the school board, in opposition with
3 the school superintendent.

4 Let me tell you something,
5 Councilmember Thomas, what we have
6 on the table, we've never been here
7 with this opportunity before.

8 Persistently vacant properties in
9 the School District of Philadelphia
10 that have been vacant from three,
11 some up to 30 years. We now have a
12 plan to incentivize the building of
13 affordable and workforce housing.

14 And that's one box, and it shouldn't
15 be -- we compartmentalize things.

16 Because all of this stuff is not
17 interconnected. We got a box there
18 and we have the ability to do that.
19 Then we've got a process to figure
20 out how do we right-size the
21 district. But we have to do it
22 thoughtfully.

23 And, Mr. President, I'm
24 with you. It doesn't look the way

1 it did, sir, I know when it was
2 first introduced, but we've got to
3 continue working through it and
4 having conversations. And I'm
5 asking us, sir, to please make sure
6 that we do that. So that's
7 facilities here.

8 And then we've got the
9 other bucket, let's help Governor
10 Shapiro, Speaker McClinton, Leader
11 Bradford, Appropriations Chairman
12 Harris, Appropriations Chairman
13 Hughes, Leader Costa, Senator
14 Williams, along with Senator Picozzi
15 in the Northeast, the lone
16 Republican state senator
17 representing the city of
18 Philadelphia, along with President
19 Pro Tempore Ward and Pittman.

20 Let's generate the revenue
21 that we need so that when they go to
22 the table to negotiate that budget,
23 shared sacrifice and One Philly and
24 us doing the best we can with the

1 tools we have, they know that we've
2 tried.

3 We couldn't deliver \$300
4 million, but we do have the ability,
5 Mr. President, to get to \$50.4
6 million. And if we come together to
7 do it and make those billion-dollar
8 corporations understand that there's
9 a cost to do business in the city of
10 Philadelphia and the dollar won't
11 put them out of business, we can
12 make sure we deliver for our
13 students.

14 Mr. President, I thank you
15 so very much. I want you to know,
16 we're not -- this is a unique time.
17 This is a unique time,
18 Mr. President. 2013, '14, 1994,
19 Liquor by the Drink; 2013, sales;
20 2014, cigarette, and 28 million from
21 the tax fairness package. We
22 haven't delivered new revenue as a
23 city for public education since
24 2014. I want you to just -- this is

1 just me, do your own search. Type
2 in 2014 to 2026, Bucks, Chester,
3 Delaware, and Mont Co.

4 And remember, we can't
5 afford to increase property taxes at
6 the rate that those counties do
7 because we -- our people just don't
8 have it. We don't have that kind of
9 disposable income. They can't carry
10 it. And we have a Uniformity
11 Clause. So our revenue-generating
12 capacity, we're handcuffed. We
13 can't do it.

14 Please, let's help the
15 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania help
16 us. I want to work with you. I
17 want to do whatever we can.
18 Councilmember Young, Councilmember
19 Ahmad, Councilmember Lozada,
20 Councilmember Bass, Councilmember
21 Squilla, Councilmember Landau,
22 Councilmember Jones, Councilmember
23 Driscoll, Councilmember O'Rourke,
24 and Harrity, and Brooks, and Anthony

1 Phillips -- not Danton or Young,
2 Phillips, Katherine Gilmore-
3 Richardson, Councilmember Gauthier,
4 and Chairman Thomas, and
5 Mr. President. I can't do it
6 without you. Humbly, I say to each
7 of you, I'm asking you, whatever
8 meetings need to take place, one-on-
9 one conversations.

10 It won't be perfect for
11 anybody. We can't. But everybody
12 acknowledges that we can't keep
13 doing the same thing and expecting a
14 different outcome and expecting them
15 to respond when they ask us, are we
16 willing to do the hard work? I want
17 to work with each of you. Please,
18 let's find a way to get it done.
19 And whatever homework you give me, I
20 want to say to each of you, you all
21 look so convinced, and you like, you
22 really believe me, right? Give me
23 homework. Whatever homework it is,
24 if I can get the homework done,

1 Mr. President, 1,001 percent I will.

2 Thank you so very much.

3 Thank you. And always -- were there
4 any questions, Mr. President?

5 Anything I should do before I leave?

6 Anything, Mr. President? I'm sorry,
7 I don't want to leave without --

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

9 Any questions from members of the
10 Committee? Hearing none.

11 MAYOR PARKER: This is --
12 Mr. President, it is straight. It
13 is not BS. Everything I just said
14 on the record, Mr. President, if you
15 just go do the homework, the facts
16 are the facts. We haven't generated
17 revenue since 1994 from Liquor by
18 the Drink, 13 for sales, 14 for
19 cigarettes, and what we did with our
20 tax fairness package. The leader of
21 the New School is one of the most
22 reputable economic and research
23 institutions of higher learning in
24 the nation.

1 And if you were to talk to
2 people about their work, they would
3 tell you again, they're liberal, not
4 -- they're progressive, they used to
5 -- that's what we -- that was our
6 language. Don't -- not just me. It
7 is not. And please don't -- please
8 take what I just said in the spirit
9 that I was given. Thank you so
10 much.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 Thank you, Madam Mayor.

13 (Recess taken.)

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 We will now resume the committee of
16 the whole. Ms. Loughhead, please
17 call the next panel.

18 THE CLERK: Reginald
19 Streater, President Philadelphia
20 Board of Education, and Dr. Tony B.
21 Watlington, Superintendent for the
22 School District of Philadelphia.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 Good morning. Actually, good

1 afternoon now. Welcome back. And
2 before you begin, just state your
3 name officially for the record and
4 get started.

5 PRESIDENT STREATER: Sorry,
6 Council President.

7 VICE PRESIDENT ANDREWS:
8 Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

9 PRESIDENT STREATER: Is it
10 safe to eat that? Thank you.

11 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you
12 so much. Thank you so much.

13 PRESIDENT STREATER: Thank
14 you. Council President, my name is
15 -- I know, I was -- you know, I was
16 told I was going to find out
17 something yesterday, so I don't know
18 if I should eat. Anyway, I'm
19 joking. But my name is Reginald
20 Streater and I'm the President of
21 the Philadelphia Board of Education.

22 VICE PRESIDENT ANDREWS: My
23 name is Sarah Ashley Andrews. I'm
24 the Vice President of the Board of

1 Education.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: Tony
3 Watlington, Superintendent, School
4 District of Philadelphia.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
6 The floor is yours to begin your
7 testimony.

8 PRESIDENT STREATER: And
9 thank you. Today I am prepared.
10 I'm in a suit, so we get suit Reggie
11 today. So thank you for allowing me
12 to come back today, as well, being
13 able to be in the room and know the
14 temperature. So I'm going to be a
15 little more brief than I normally am
16 to get to City Council's questions
17 as well. But good morning,
18 everybody.

19 President Johnson, to the
20 leadership of this great esteemed
21 house, thank you for allowing us to
22 be in your home and we will act
23 accordingly. Thank you for inviting
24 the Board of Education, the School

1 District of Philadelphia, to share
2 some key updates on our work since
3 the last time we were together in
4 November. I was joined by Vice
5 President Sarah Ashley Andrews and
6 Board Members Joan Stern was here,
7 and she may come back as well.

8 We appreciate your
9 partnership, Council President, your
10 ongoing commitment to Philadelphia
11 students and families. I think our
12 mayor put it best, City Council
13 continues to step up and take tough
14 votes for us. And we understand
15 that we are in a time right now
16 where serious conversations have to
17 be had, and we're happy to do our
18 homework as well and do the work as
19 well. Next slide, please.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Thank you very much.

22 PRESIDENT STREATER: I
23 won't go into all of the things that
24 we're going to discuss today, but

1 they are on the screen. But we do
2 have some quasi-agenda of what we
3 would like to give updates on. Next
4 slide, please.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
6 How many slides are we doing today?

7 PRESIDENT STREATER: Not
8 too many for us, good brother. I
9 think Dr. Watlington's going to also
10 pivot as well with this
11 presentation. So every time -- and
12 I believe it is important to ground
13 the conversation at this, and I
14 believe if you can just kind of
15 believe us that all of our work that
16 we do is grounded in our vision and
17 mission.

18 I began my comments with
19 our mission and vision. The board's
20 vision is to prepare every student,
21 Council President, to imagine and
22 realize any future they desire. It
23 speaks to the limitless potential of
24 our young people and our

1 responsibility to help them reach
2 it.

3 And as you can see in our
4 mission, it is rooted in our belief
5 that all sectors of public education
6 in Philadelphia must work together
7 to ensure every student has access
8 to opportunities they need to
9 achieve life outcomes. These guide
10 our work. Next slide, please.

11 So again, yesterday I
12 mentioned something called goals and
13 guardrails. And people may not
14 believe us, but we have a board
15 policy in our -- in our
16 administrative procedures of our
17 operating guidelines that directs
18 the board to think about governing
19 through a student outcomes lens.
20 And we do it by way of the goals and
21 guardrails. This framework defines
22 clear expectations of what students
23 should know.

24 Board members such as Vice

1 President Andrews, myself, Cheryl
2 Harper, and others, once a month we
3 engage with our superintendent and
4 ask the question, how are the
5 children? But we like to use data
6 and other things to determine how
7 they're doing in a way that supports
8 our mission.

9 Since reporting to you in
10 November, some key highlights I want
11 to -- I want to elevate to you that
12 we've monitored here: college,
13 career, and technical education
14 outcomes continue to strengthen,
15 with 59.7 percent of students
16 scoring proficient or advanced on
17 the NOCTI exam in school year
18 2024-2025.

19 Early literacy and math
20 instruction are showing great
21 improvements with a clear
22 correlation between consistent
23 attendance and student attendance.
24 Students in Grades 3 through 8 who

1 have attended school more than 90
2 percent of the time were more likely
3 to be reading benchmarks. Math
4 proficiency for students in grades 3
5 through 8 is at its highest rate in
6 nine years. Early learners are
7 demonstrating meaningful gains too,
8 City Council President. Next slide,
9 please.

10 Leave it. One more slide.
11 So I definitely want to discuss the
12 Accelerating Opportunity, the school
13 district's Facilities Master Plan.
14 I understand there's going to be a
15 lot of other questions on this. But
16 I first want to acknowledge that the
17 board fully comprehends the gravity
18 and seriousness of this work.

19 We have been actively
20 listening and engaging with
21 communities, understanding that
22 these recommendations bring forward
23 a range of mixed and strong
24 emotions. We heard them here, we

1 hear them here, we heard them in our
2 action meetings, and we also hear
3 them when we do school visits and
4 individually as board members. But
5 we know what it means to be shaped
6 by great schools in this city. And
7 we have lived the reality of what
8 our schools can provide. That's why
9 I believe for all of us, this
10 conversation about school facilities
11 is not just about buildings. It is
12 about protecting a launch path for
13 the next generation.

14 What you have before you is
15 the -- is a summary of the
16 resolution of what the board will
17 consider. And I think it is
18 important to also communicate what
19 actually is the board voting on,
20 Council President. The board acts
21 through resolution, much like City
22 Council does as well.

23 Our resolutions can be
24 about an action item for a vendor,

1 but it also could be about giving
2 clear direction to the
3 superintendent in a way that's
4 transparent. So the village knows
5 where the district and the board is
6 headed based upon what we know now
7 and what we think we know in the
8 future.

9 So I think it is important
10 for us to understand what the
11 resolution does and what it does not
12 do. It adopts the recommendations
13 that will be attached to the
14 resolution. I know you all have
15 your technical staffs. I would ask
16 you all to have your staff take a
17 look at the resolution, read it as
18 well.

19 And I think you will see
20 that there are many points in time
21 that we will all have many more
22 conversations about the facilities
23 plan. And it doesn't all start and
24 end at the day the board votes on

1 the resolution.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Can you say that again? It doesn't

4 --

5 PRESIDENT STREATER: Yes,

6 sir.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

8 -- start and end on the day that the

9 board votes on the resolution?

10 PRESIDENT STREATER: Yes.

11 The resolution is not designed to,

12 for example, approve all capital

13 investments, for example, right? We

14 do that in May. What it does is it

15 is saying, Dr. Watlington, your

16 thinking is on point. And this is a

17 direction that we are headed in.

18 And it -- but it does not -- it does

19 not displace legal obligations that

20 also have to happen on a yearly

21 basis publicly, that's going to

22 require public comment, that's going

23 to require public board deliberation

24 and things like that. So that's

1 what I mean by the resolution
2 itself.

3 And I'll be brief, but I
4 want to read three portions of the
5 resolution just to kind of give you
6 all exactly what I'm talking about.
7 So there's a final whereas calls:
8 implementation of Accelerating
9 Opportunity will require future
10 board actions and a sustained
11 commitment to student achievement,
12 financial and facilities alignment
13 shared by the board, the district,
14 public, and philanthropic partners
15 and holders of the district's
16 obligation.

17 But these two paragraphs
18 are very important. The board
19 hereby adopts, if it adopts,
20 Accelerating Opportunity, as
21 attached to align facilities
22 enrollment, programming, and fiscal
23 sustainability in service to improve
24 student outcomes.

1 This adoption does not
2 substitute for legally required
3 processes or board actions related
4 to school closures, capital project
5 expenditures, or declarations
6 regarding future property. Because
7 Accelerating Opportunity represents
8 a living plan -- a living plan based
9 on currently available data and
10 reasonable assumptions regarding
11 enrollment trends, population
12 movement, Council President,
13 programming needs, City Council, and
14 fiscal conditions, which will evolve
15 based on factors over which the
16 board and the district possess
17 and/or lack control.

18 The board retains the
19 authority to require modification of
20 sequencing, timing, scope, and
21 prioritization of recommendations
22 determined to be necessary after
23 consultation with the
24 superintendent. Just to put some

1 meat on the bone as to what exactly
2 is the board voting on and what that
3 vote is designed to do. Next slide,
4 please.

5 So briefly, I would like to
6 just speak about some other board
7 updates. I think, Vice President,
8 it is you.

9 VICE PRESIDENT ANDREWS:

10 Good morning again. Thank you,
11 President Streater, and good morning
12 to all.

13 Next, I want to share a few
14 updates on the board's non-voting
15 student board representatives and
16 our Parent and Community Advisory
17 Council.

18 We are excited to share
19 that in January 2026, we appointed
20 three new non-voting student board
21 representatives for the 2026 term.
22 They are Brianni Carter, an 11th
23 Grade student at the Philadelphia
24 High School for Girls; Ramisha

1 Karim, an 11th Grade student at
2 Northeast High School; and Semira
3 Reyes, an 11th Grade student at the
4 Creative and Performing Arts High
5 School.

6 These incredible young
7 ladies have joined the board at an
8 exciting time and have quickly
9 engaged in our work sharing insight
10 on the student experience, including
11 how board policy shaped their
12 day-to-day school experience and the
13 perspectives of their peers.

14 They also participate in
15 the Superintendent's Advisory
16 Council, ensuring that student voice
17 is consistently present in our
18 discussions and helping to bring
19 student perspectives directly to the
20 board's decision-making process.

21 Thank you. Next slide, please.

22 Likewise, the board's
23 Parent and Community Advisory
24 Council continue to actively

1 strengthen our connection to
2 families and neighborhoods across
3 Philadelphia. Currently, the
4 advisory council is composed of 14
5 individuals who are committed to
6 attending community meetings,
7 engaging at local events, listening
8 to residents, and evaluating
9 community voices to inform board
10 decisions and student-centered
11 decision making. We actually have
12 one of our PCAC members here today,
13 Ms. Ann Doen, if you could raise
14 your hand. Thank you.

15 They bring feedback
16 directly to the board, helping
17 ensure we understand the community
18 perspectives and incorporate -- and
19 can incorporate that into our
20 decision making. They have been
21 critical in supporting us with
22 pushing out key messages,
23 opportunities for engagement around
24 the facilities plan and policy

1 review.

2 Our advisory council serves
3 as a vital link for the board with
4 the community, elevating needs and
5 ideas that guide us in making the
6 best possible decisions for our
7 students. Next slide, please.

8 Throughout the year, the
9 board has the privilege of visiting
10 both district and charter schools
11 across our city. These visits are
12 among the most meaningful and
13 exciting parts of our work, allowing
14 us to experience firsthand the
15 teaching, learning, and innovation
16 happening across our schools.
17 School visits help ground us in the
18 work that we do and serve as a
19 powerful -- as a powerful reminder
20 of the important work happening
21 every day in our classrooms. Next
22 slide, please.

23 As we begin our charter
24 school update, I want to reaffirm

1 that the Board of Education is
2 committed to a system of public
3 education where every public-school
4 option in Philadelphia, district or
5 charter, prepares students to
6 imagine and realize any future they
7 choose, with a continued focus on
8 access to high-quality opportunities
9 that help students thrive.

10 With more than 64,000
11 students in our charter schools,
12 Project RiSE reflects our shared
13 commitment to strengthening
14 accountability and improving
15 outcomes -- and improving outcomes
16 in our city. As a reminder, the
17 Charter School Office, at the
18 direction of the Board of Education,
19 launched Project RiSE in 2024 to
20 revise and reimagine the Charter
21 School Performance Framework. Next
22 slide, please.

23 Okay. Through Project
24 RiSE, we are committed to reviewing

1 our authorizing standards and
2 continue our commitment to
3 transparency and accountability for
4 all charter schools in Philadelphia.
5 We are currently in Phase 2 of 3,
6 where the Charter School Office, at
7 the direction of the board,
8 continues to work directly with
9 school leaders, charter school board
10 members, and colleagues throughout
11 the city to review and update
12 specific metrics within the
13 framework.

14 Importantly, the focus of
15 RISE is no different than the Board
16 of Education; student achievement.
17 In the spirit of -- in that spirit,
18 RiSE builds on our existing
19 framework by strengthening
20 transparency, improving data and
21 communication, equipping families
22 with clearer information, all in
23 service of improving student
24 achievement and ensuring alignment

1 with board goals and vision for all
2 students across our city. I'm going
3 to turn it back over to you,
4 President Streater.

5 PRESIDENT STREATER: Next
6 slide, please. So in closing, I had
7 a prepared closing but I want to
8 pivot and shift and read the room.
9 Look, I think the Mayor said it all
10 -- said it all. We all need each
11 other, and I believe that we all in
12 this room have had the ability to
13 compromise, engage in meaningful
14 conversations, understand the
15 pressure points of each other, but
16 find a pathway forward.

17 I do want to also share
18 something in this room as well.
19 While some have said they believe
20 the Mayor has been heavy-handed or
21 maybe the hand behind the cloak of
22 the board, one, that is not true.
23 But what I can say is the Mayor has
24 requested Dr. Watlington and I and

1 the board, and strongly, you know,
2 stated that we should do everything
3 we can to work with Council, and
4 understanding that the work
5 continues post whatever vote, when
6 that might happen.

7 I do believe that there's
8 enough goodwill here, evidence and
9 moments in time and actual
10 deliverables that show that
11 Dr. Watlington and this board has
12 listened. And with that being said,
13 I understand that listening
14 continues. So I hope that we can
15 have a conversation today that talks
16 about a pathway forward, but one
17 that also honors all the hard work
18 that we've all done. I don't think
19 it is worth -- it is good for us to
20 focus only on the now and not think
21 about the past and the future.

22 So I look forward to having
23 a more responsive answer to
24 questions that are going to be

1 asked. I saw some head shakes just
2 now, but I look forward to talking
3 with you and continuing with this
4 conversation. But this work is
5 hard.

6 And one thing I want to say
7 which hasn't been said enough, the
8 Board of Education empathizes with
9 families who are right now caught in
10 purgatory, who are waiting for us to
11 do something. And I don't want -- I
12 don't want that to be remiss -- to
13 be remiss for the communities that
14 are waiting for investments, to the
15 communities that are like mine,
16 who've lost schools like Germantown
17 High School. The board is well
18 aware of this, and I think that is
19 what's driving us as well.

20 So, please, I know that you
21 all have your work to do, but we are
22 also listening as well. So thank
23 you.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Thank you very much.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: Good
3 afternoon, President Johnson and
4 Majority Leader Gilmore-Richardson,
5 Chair Thomas, and members of
6 Council. I'll be very brief,
7 Mr. President, as I know we're late
8 in the afternoon and you have a
9 hearing here as well. Next slide,
10 please.

11 First of all, I just want
12 to say thank you to you,
13 Mr. President, and to all the
14 members of Council. As Mayor Parker
15 noted, we very much appreciate your
16 historic role in funding the school
17 district.

18 And I want to give you just
19 some very brief updates on the
20 results and return on investment for
21 the dollars and the support that
22 you're providing to the School
23 District of Philadelphia. Slide,
24 please. I want to begin by just

1 giving you an update on the three
2 major district focus areas, and if
3 we'll go to the next slide.

4 It is no different than
5 last year. We are consistently
6 focused on accelerating academic
7 achievement, improving outcomes for
8 all of our young people, improving
9 customer service, which has been a
10 hallmark for the past four years.
11 And we're laser focused also on
12 partnering with our families, not
13 just as engaged adults, but as equal
14 partners as we educate all of our
15 young people. Slide.

16 I won't review this in
17 detail because the Mayor talked
18 about it at length. Only to say in
19 one sentence that we are pleased
20 that enrollment is up by 783
21 students over the past decade.
22 Student and teacher attendance is
23 up. Test scores are up across a
24 number of areas, especially on the

1 math side of the house. Graduation
2 rates are up and the dropout rates
3 are down. We're pleased that we're
4 getting better, not by kicking the
5 least of these out of school or
6 letting the least of these just kind
7 of drop themselves out or just
8 disappear from our schools.

9 On the next slide, with
10 regard to improving customer
11 service, we launched a two-way
12 communication system a few years
13 ago, Mr. President. Just wanted to
14 note that it is working and here's
15 the data: Between July 1 of last
16 year and April 15th, just last week,
17 we've received over 66,000 inquiries
18 from our parents, families,
19 community, and other folks in the
20 community.

21 Our response time in
22 business days has been 1.4 business
23 days, and the customer feedback
24 score that we've received in the

1 aggregate is 8.2. We will continue
2 to focus on improving customer
3 service in the school district.

4 On the next slide, the
5 third big focus area is around
6 partnering with our families as
7 equal partners. This year we
8 relaunched Parent and Family
9 University. I want to commend our
10 Chief of Communications and Customer
11 Service, Alex Cop, and our Deputy
12 Chief of Parent and Family
13 University, Ms. Jenna Monley. We
14 are providing free programming,
15 resources, supports to families all
16 over the city of Philadelphia.

17 And we know if we want to
18 support kids, we've got to invest in
19 their parents and their families as
20 well, to improve student attendance,
21 to improve civic engagement. We're
22 also focusing through the Parent and
23 Family University on financial
24 literacy. Some very fantastic work

1 going on there, and we look forward
2 to keeping you updated as time goes
3 forward.

4 Very quickly, let me just
5 say a few words about the Facilities
6 Master Plan on the next slide. I'm
7 just going to sum it up,
8 Mr. President, given the need to
9 keep this moving, because I don't
10 want you to have to ask me how many
11 more slides I got. I want to be
12 able to tell you I just got three or
13 four more and we're going to be
14 ready to take questions.

15 On the next slide, I'm
16 going to sum up the Facilities
17 Master Plan. In January and
18 February, we told you about a
19 10-year plan costing \$2.8 billion.
20 You have noticed that we've marked
21 out the 2.8 and it is now \$3 billion
22 -- \$3.045 billion. Originally, we
23 told you that we would maintain 116
24 campuses -- I mean, 124 campuses.

1 That number has changed to 116.
2 Originally, we told you we would
3 modernize -- we proposed to
4 modernize 159 campuses or parts of
5 campuses. That number has increased
6 to 169.

7 We consistently are
8 recommending to President Streater
9 and his Board of Education, and Vice
10 President Andrews, that we -- and
11 the board, that we maintain six
12 co-locations. There are 10 close --
13 recommendations to close and
14 repurpose for some kind of district
15 use.

16 And then there are
17 additional seven closures that we've
18 recommended that -- in lieu of --
19 instead of recommending that these
20 properties be conveyed to the city,
21 we've pulled back on that
22 recommendation at this time and just
23 recommending that those properties
24 remain in the school district.

1 On the slide -- next slide.

2 The next two slides, Mr. President,
3 just list those 12 major changes. I
4 won't read them to you, but they
5 range from everything from removing
6 the recommendations to close Conwell
7 and Motivation High Schools. We've
8 changed the merger recommendations
9 for Robeson and Lankenau High
10 Schools, as you'll see here.

11 Number 5, we have removed
12 Ludlow School from closure. You can
13 see items number 6 and 7 relate to
14 both Moffett and Hackett schools.
15 You'll see that we are now no longer
16 recommending that the Lankenau
17 property, which is located adjacent
18 to the Schuylkill Environmental
19 Center, be conveyed. We -- those
20 properties will now stay in the
21 School District of Philadelphia.
22 And we're proposing to -- that
23 become an environmental education
24 center for use of -- for all the

1 children across the City of
2 Philadelphia.

3 You'll also see that we
4 have pulled back on the
5 recommendation to convey the Robeson
6 property. And now as the Mayor
7 mentioned in partnership with
8 Councilmember Gauthier and others in
9 that district to retain that
10 property and look at how we work
11 with the community to identify a
12 partnership opportunity given --
13 including perhaps University of
14 Pennsylvania, given how significant
15 and close that property is to one of
16 the greatest most significant
17 science and innovation hubs in the
18 United States of America, which is
19 right here in Philadelphia. And you
20 can see the other items.

21 I do want to note also that
22 we've increased the investments in
23 Council District 3 from the February
24 17th briefing from \$205 million to

1 \$331 million; Councilmember
2 Gauthier's District. And we've
3 increased planned investments in
4 Council District 5; Councilmember
5 Young's District.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 Can I get a quick point of
8 information?

9 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Number 11.

12 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
14 In the 5th Councilmanic District,
15 how is that the only Philadelphia
16 Promise Zone in North Philly?

17 DR. WATLINGTON: This is
18 part of the -- this is a part of
19 having developed two or reconverting
20 two, not just extended day, extended
21 year, but year-round schools where
22 we want these two schools to be --

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 In North Philly?

1 DR. WATLINGTON: In North
2 Philadelphia, yes, sir.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 5th Councilmanic District, any way
5 we can spread --

6 DR. WATLINGTON: I'm sorry
7 --

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 -- to South Philly and anyway that
10 that same initiative can go to South
11 Philly and Southwest?

12 DR. WATLINGTON: It is the
13 -- it is the hope of the district,
14 certainly, that these schools, two
15 schools, will be demonstration
16 schools where we drive faster
17 performance and so that they can be
18 replicated in other parts of the
19 city.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Please proceed, sir.

22 DR. WATLINGTON: And we are
23 withdrawn the recommendation again
24 at this time to convey schools to

1 the -- currently occupied schools to
2 the city. We originally recommended
3 to convey 10 schools, even though
4 that number is down to seven we are
5 recommending to the board not move
6 in that direction to provide the
7 board with more time to consider
8 policy and legal implications.

9 Very quickly,
10 Mr. President, next slide. This is
11 the original investments by Council
12 -- the 10 Council districts, the
13 original list of modernization
14 co-locations and closure
15 recommendations. And you can see on
16 the far right how many closures
17 occurred in 2012. Then if you go to
18 the next slide, you can see the
19 updated recommendations in
20 investments.

21 The reason the
22 administration changed the --
23 increased the recommended
24 investments in Council District 3

1 and Council District 5;
2 Councilmember Gauthier's district
3 and Councilmember Young's district,
4 is because you can see on the record
5 that those two districts had the
6 largest number of closures and -- in
7 2012 2013. And so again, as the
8 Mayor said, we have made some
9 significant adjustments to the
10 recommendations. And as we go to
11 the last slide, I just want to say
12 personally -- oh, oh, I'm sorry.

13 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

14 Can you --

15 DR. WATLINGTON: Last two
16 slides.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

18 -- go back to the 9th Council
19 District?

20 DR. WATLINGTON: I'm sorry,
21 sir?

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 I was just looking at the 9th
24 Councilmanic District. Okay.

1 Please proceed, sir. That
2 is --

3 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

5 That is 469? Middle neighborhood.

6 Thank you, sir.

7 DR. WATLINGTON: All right.

8 Yes, sir. Let me find -- conclude,
9 Mr. President, by giving you a quick
10 update on the budget as it is being
11 developed. Really quick, there is a
12 \$300 million structural deficit.

13 I just want to remind you,
14 test scores are going up, graduation
15 rates are going up, dropout rates
16 going down. This is not about
17 mismanagement. We have the best
18 investment grade credit rating that
19 we've had in 40 years in the school
20 district.

21 Every year for the past
22 three years, we've had some upgrade
23 in that rating, either by Moody's
24 Services or Fitch Financial

1 Services. We're being good stewards
2 of the budget, of the dollars.
3 We've had clean year-over-year
4 audits with no material witnesses by
5 our external auditors. Want to be
6 sure to get that in the record,
7 please, Mr. President.

8 The deficit is driven by
9 the fact that: one, we've had
10 historic underfunding; two, as the
11 Mayor said very well, the \$1.8
12 billion that we received in COVID
13 funding, allocated by Congress from
14 2021 to 2024, all those dollars are
15 gone; they sunsetted in September of
16 2024; three, rising salaries. We
17 have got to pay -- continue to pay
18 our employees a competitive wage,
19 and they deserve to be paid more;
20 four, charter payments are
21 increasing -- charter school
22 payments are increasing.

23 And five, in this order,
24 we're experiencing rising healthcare

1 costs, just like the city, just like
2 the private sector. What are we
3 doing about it? Next slide.

4 This administration is
5 committed to bring in President
6 Streater and Vice President Andrews
7 and the board of recommendation a
8 plan on the table, not just to cut
9 our deficit, but to reduce it and to
10 eliminate it once and for all by
11 fiscal year 2029-2030, and after
12 2029-'30, we are committed to the
13 school district operating within its
14 annually allocated budget.

15 And we can retire
16 structural deficits once and for
17 all. That is our plan, barring any
18 strange unforeseen circumstances.
19 How are we going to cut this -- how
20 are we proposing to cut this \$300
21 million structural deficit and live
22 within our means forevermore, and to
23 continue to advocate for
24 constitutional funding?

1 Number one, we're reducing
2 central office costs by some \$30
3 million. This includes some 130
4 positions. Mr. President, we have
5 those positions ready to submit for
6 the record per your request.

7 Number two, we are
8 eliminating -- and by the way, this
9 is a very lean central office.
10 Given that we're around the eighth
11 largest school district in the
12 country, we have one of the smallest
13 leanest central offices, but we're
14 still going to make the cuts because
15 we've got to do it. We are going to
16 eliminate programs and contracts
17 that show low return on investment.

18 By that we mean if the
19 contract doesn't have a clear
20 through line to improving reading
21 and math performance, increasing
22 graduation rates, or decreasing
23 dropout rates, we are going to take
24 a hard look at how we can trim back.

1 We are enhancing our budget
2 and planning projections. We're
3 doing things like discontinuing to
4 rent the Pennsylvania Convention
5 Center during all of our principal
6 meetings and professional
7 development, Mr. President, in the
8 -- at Strawberry Mansion High
9 School, which we've turned into our
10 professional development center.
11 We're curtailing staff travel,
12 including the superintendent.

13 Instead of sending forward
14 reading teachers to a conference, we
15 may just send one or we may send
16 none and bring professional
17 developers to the City of
18 Philadelphia. And a lot of other
19 things that CFO Herbstman can walk
20 you through. We are making some
21 changes to -- at the school base
22 level, to the \$256 million.

23 As you know, there are 340
24 positions that we're proposing to

1 cut and to reassign to other schools
2 if the \$52 million does not come
3 through to us as a result of the
4 rideshare tax and the cell phone
5 tower opportunity.

6 You may ask, well, why are
7 you cutting and moving people to
8 other places, which is very
9 disruptive? Some of our schools are
10 very large and over-enrolled, and
11 we've got just the opposite; some
12 schools that are very small and
13 under-enrolled. And so we've got to
14 right-size the formula for how we
15 push resources out to the schools.

16 And so that is why we
17 continue to not maintain the FTEs,
18 the staff positions, in all the
19 schools at present. So we've
20 projected the vacancies that we
21 have. I don't want the Council to
22 be alarmed by the fact that we can
23 fill -- we can transfer people to
24 the tune of 340 people through

1 vacancies in other schools.

2 Remember, the School District of
3 Philadelphia has 20,000 employees,
4 and every year there is some
5 attrition and turnover. So we
6 factor that in.

7 Our goal is to have
8 everyone who is in the house to stay
9 in the house. And we have -- so to
10 that \$225 million in budget
11 reductions in fiscal year '26 to '27
12 is reflective of that.

13 The next slide just shows
14 you a graphic of what our financials
15 look like over the next five years
16 if we do nothing. If we kick the
17 can down the road, we don't get more
18 revenue, we don't cut anybody. And
19 again, this is -- and reassigned to
20 other jobs.

21 This is totally, absolutely
22 100 percent separate from the
23 facilities plan. This is just
24 operating budget -- operating budget

1 for the school district over the
2 next five years. You can see the
3 green line represents our annual
4 surplus or deficit, and the yellow
5 line shows our fund balance. We're
6 at the point where we would deplete
7 it in the next year. And that is
8 why I no longer recommend to
9 President Streater and Vice
10 President Andrews and board members
11 to dip into the fund balance.

12 We must get more revenue or
13 we must make significant cuts. Even
14 with the additional revenue, we are
15 going to make some cuts to the
16 district office and to contracts
17 because we could choose to carry a
18 structural deficit for the next 10
19 years.

20 It is no secret that the
21 district has had structural deficits
22 going back to the days of David
23 Hornbeck, Paul Valles, Dr. Arlene
24 Ackerman. By '29 to '30, we're

1 proposing to the board to completely
2 eradicate structural deficits,
3 hopefully never to return.

4 On the next slide,
5 Mr. President, you'll see this is
6 what the fund balance line and our
7 deficit line looks like, if we take
8 these measures. Again, this is
9 completely and totally separate from
10 the facilities plan process. The
11 facilities plan process is
12 completely separate.

13 And if you'll give me just
14 one second to say, the reason I can
15 show you that it is separate is,
16 even if the Board of Education
17 approves a plan to close some
18 schools, we are not laying off the
19 teachers and principals. We are
20 reabsorbing all of those individuals
21 right back in the district. That is
22 what is different between 2012 and
23 2011, 2013 closures and now.

24 Those employees will be

1 reabsorbed back into the district.
2 And kids who need more teachers,
3 more administrative personnel, more
4 safety support because -- and
5 they're underperforming, under-
6 resourced, we're going to push more
7 resources into those schools. And
8 we'll do it more efficiently because
9 we're going to right-size these
10 really large and really small,
11 really over-enrolled, really under-
12 enrolled schools.

13 Final slide, Mr. President.
14 Timeline, as you well know, the
15 Board of Education, President
16 Streater, Vice President Andrews and
17 the board members have their meeting
18 -- budget hearing tomorrow. And
19 then on May 29th, we'll be expecting
20 the Board of Education, if it be
21 that President Streater and Vice
22 President Andrews, will to adopt
23 their budget. And you can see that
24 we look forward to hearing the

1 outcome of potential additional
2 revenue in June based on actions the
3 City Council and the Mayor take.

4 We are certain -- while I'm
5 agnostic to how we get the revenue,
6 I feel like my job is to make the
7 case to President Streater and Vice
8 President Andrews to Council. Here
9 is the revenue we need; we
10 desperately need revenue in June.
11 If we get it in June, the 340
12 positions that are on the table will
13 not be cut and reassigned to other
14 schools.

15 If we do not get the
16 revenue, we absolutely will have no
17 choice but to cut and reassign 340
18 hardworking employees to other
19 places in the school district. I
20 thank you for the opportunity to
21 present today, Mr. President,
22 members of Council, happy to join
23 President Streater and Vice
24 President Andrews in any questions.

1 Thank you so much.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Thank you very much. Chair
4 recognizes Councilmember Curtis
5 Jones, Jr., the Majority Leader
6 Katherine Gilmore-Richardson, Jamie
7 Gauthier, Nicholas O'Rourke.

8 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Thank
9 you, Mr. President. And I want to
10 thank you and officially apologize
11 for some of the angst yesterday. I
12 brought you some candy to try to
13 make up and to say to you that I
14 should always lead with the things
15 -- and I was glad that mayor did
16 lead with positive things; test
17 scores are up, dropout rates are
18 down, truancy; we're working on.

19 I mean, there are a lot of
20 good things to the direction of the
21 school board and the
22 Superintendent's team. I appreciate
23 what you've done for my, overall.
24 I'm going to say it on the record

1 that when alma mater you start to
2 think about schools that lose
3 attendance, it was one of them. The
4 co-merger is helping to keep that
5 facility alive. That does not go
6 wasted on me. And so, for the
7 record, you know, I appreciate it.

8 However, and nevertheless,
9 some of the things -- there is a
10 difference between math adding up
11 and decisions that kind of don't
12 make sense to me. Lankenau has a
13 100 percent graduation rate. A lot
14 of those kids go on, like other
15 schools, to some of the finer
16 institutions, are working on
17 environmental things.

18 I thank my colleagues,
19 particularly Chairman Thomas, for
20 coming up and leading our delegation
21 of members to a -- to a room full of
22 young people fraught with promise
23 that look forward to their life.
24 And to -- so the question becomes,

1 what do you save towards that \$300
2 deficit by closing Lamberton? And
3 what does the -- what is the
4 intended use of that facility if it
5 is -- if it is a professional
6 enrichment? You could do that at
7 Lankenau, Lamberton in West Philly,
8 because the high school part is
9 closed. You can move right in and
10 it won't affect anybody.

11 But this school is located
12 on about 17 acres of bucolic space.
13 They have feral coyotes and deers,
14 and really have water temperature
15 tested. They're right near the
16 Schuylkill Environmental Center.
17 That doesn't add up to me.

18 The second school is
19 Overbrook Elementary, which has a
20 similar graduation rate. And what
21 I'm hearing is that those kids are
22 going to be relocated so that you
23 can do professional advancement. We
24 could do that at 404. We could do

1 that at Lambertson. There are spaces
2 that we have that can accommodate
3 those kinds of things. We'll find a
4 way to get you a jacuzzi down there,
5 but you don't need to take those
6 facilities just for those purposes.

7 I have -- and I take a
8 little bit of offense to you, the
9 3rd District, you've accommodated,
10 the 5th District, you've
11 accommodated, and I'm not jealous,
12 I'm not hating. But I was here for
13 every one of those except for the
14 liquor-by-the-drink tax that I voted
15 for. My face was on milk cartons to
16 improve, you know, preschool. I
17 took those hits. I had to knock on
18 doors and say, hey, I raised your
19 taxes, millage rates, but you know,
20 it is for the kids, right?

21 And so those things that,
22 you know, that I care about, not
23 being accommodated because I took
24 the tough votes, lets me know maybe,

1 you know, should I have taken them?
2 And I answer yes because it is for
3 the kids. So I say to you that I
4 hope that we are sincere about it
5 is, you know, we're still
6 communicating and still negotiating
7 because I want to be with you.

8 I want to continue my track
9 record of being supportive of you
10 and then public education. But it
11 is difficult for me to knock on a
12 door and say, oh, by the way, I'm
13 raising your taxes. Although to
14 find explanation of the percentage
15 of people that are under \$50,000
16 that do. But in my district, there
17 are a lot of people who make over
18 50,000 that depend on that service
19 that I have to knock on their doors
20 and say, "By the way, I'm raising
21 your taxes and I'm closing your
22 kids' school." Make that make sense
23 for me.

24 DR. WATLINGTON: May I

1 answer that?

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Yes, sir.

4 DR. WATLINGTON: I'll be
5 very succinct. Thank you,
6 Councilmember Jones. I hear you
7 loud and clear. In a full spirit of
8 this ethos that we really do care
9 and don't want to be tone deaf at
10 all. Certainly, the rationale
11 behind Lankenau's merger with W.B.
12 Saul is that at the high school
13 level we see a need to increase
14 school size, but not too big. We
15 don't want to go back to the days of
16 -- when schools like Overbrook High
17 School had 4,000 or 5,000 young
18 people in them.

19 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: It
20 was 1,200.

21 DR. WATLINGTON: We are --
22 we're not trying to get that big.

23 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
24 1,200.

1 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

2 But our academic progress, we're
3 growing faster in grades 3 through
4 8. We're making significantly
5 faster improvement in 3rd through
6 8th grade reading and math than we
7 are in the high school -- high
8 school keystone test in biology,
9 algebra, and english language arts.

10 And part of the problem at
11 our high schools is, when we have
12 such small schools on one end and
13 really large schools in the
14 Northeast, the quality of their
15 academic resources we can push in to
16 improve academic performance are
17 very disparate.

18 And so, while we've tried
19 to put on the table a way to improve
20 high -- increase high school size,
21 we also know that that Lankenau
22 property and the 17 acres you
23 referenced is really important. And
24 so we no longer are recommending to

1 part -- that the board part ways
2 with that property, but to make it
3 available certainly for Lankenau
4 students who would be at Saul could
5 still have field trip opportunities
6 and utilize those resources as well
7 as the other high schools and K-8
8 schools in the city.

9 So we think that is a
10 win-win. With the Overbrook
11 Elementary School, it -- the
12 building score is poor. It does
13 require some significant investment
14 in addition to a number of other
15 schools. And so, but your point is
16 well taken.

17 COUNCILMEMBER JONES:
18 Mr. President, my final point is
19 that when the fine institution of
20 University City closed, they moved
21 all of those students to Overbrook.
22 Tell me whom, in your staff, made
23 that decision and did not take into
24 account historical neighborhood

1 differences; gangs. And the quality
2 of the education and environment
3 changed because there was friction.
4 So tell me who now is plotting,
5 calculating those differences so
6 that our babies are safe.

7 DR. WATLINGTON: The team
8 is -- has taken a look and can --
9 has continued to take -- is
10 continuing to take a look at all the
11 references you -- all the points you
12 just referenced, Councilmember
13 Jones. I want to assure you of
14 that.

15 The team is continuing to
16 look at and planning about things
17 like safety and recognizing that
18 even folks like me who are not from
19 Philadelphia originally and just
20 been here four years, this
21 phenomenon of city of neighborhoods
22 and will be very thoughtful about
23 how young people interact with each
24 other. We're taking a hard look at

1 everything from -- that includes
2 transportation, how far children
3 have to move or walk to get to
4 school, and those kinds of things,
5 for students who don't use public
6 transportation.

7 The fact that we've not
8 been able to deliver a perfect
9 solution on everything, it certainly
10 doesn't suggest that we're not
11 considering all those factors.

12 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: So my
13 senator was a part of these
14 negotiations and said, tell me what
15 he has to raise at the state level
16 to cover some of those deficits.
17 Because no one has told me what you
18 save by closing these endeavors. I
19 haven't got -- I asked that question
20 yesterday --

21 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

22 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: --
23 never got the answer. And he made a
24 suggestion that, tell him where he

1 has to go to raise the money to make
2 the difference so that those babies
3 aren't put at risk and --

4 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

5 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: --
6 deprived of education. When good
7 kids get traumatized by doing the
8 right thing, what are we -- what are
9 we doing? And so I would like you
10 to consider that. You asked me the
11 question, were we -- were we --
12 whether we were still going to be
13 friends? The answer is yes.

14 But I'm a -- look, I'm
15 going to side-eye you a bit if these
16 things aren't -- last point, I have
17 gone down to your -- you treat me
18 good when I testify, me and Chairman
19 Thomas. You let us testify upfront.
20 You give me a nice little water and
21 you not in the appropriate places
22 and don't do nothing that we ask.
23 And, you know, I feel kind -- I feel
24 kind of abused. You know what I

1 mean? They say thank you for
2 coming, and we're going to do what
3 we're going to do anyway. Just
4 once.

5 DR. WATLINGTON:
6 Councilmember Jones, Mr. President,
7 if you'll just lend me 10 seconds.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Brief response. Yes, sir.

10 DR. WATLINGTON: In
11 2012/13, the lion's share of savings
12 came from laying off employees;
13 teachers, principals, climate
14 managers. We're not doing that this
15 time. So we don't -- we won't have
16 significant savings because we're
17 pushing those resources into other
18 schools. We are reinvesting in
19 under-resourced, underperforming
20 parts of the city and the schools.
21 Thank you.

22 COUNCILMEMBER JONES: Thank
23 you, Mr. Chairman. I hope -- I
24 please go heard, because we are

1 begging you on behalf of those
2 students.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 Thank you very much, Member Jones.
5 Majority Leader Kathrine Gilmore-
6 Richardson, then Councilmember Jamie
7 Gauthier.

8 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

9 RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you
10 very much, Mr. President. And thank
11 you to Board Chair Streater, as well
12 as Dr. Watlington. I wanted to give
13 kudos also to Dr. Dawson who will be
14 departing for Baltimore. Laurel,
15 thank you very much for all of your
16 coordination.

17 I saw Laurel over here
18 somewhere, but thank you very, very
19 much for your work, Laurel. Also,
20 Edwin Santana, thank you very much.
21 Ansil --

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Want to get D9 Brothers?

24 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

1 RICHARDSON: Oh, yes. Shout out to
2 the men of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity
3 Incorporated. But thank you very,
4 very much. And to all the members
5 of the board as well as everyone in
6 the school district who worked on
7 the CTE Teacher Tuition Assistance
8 Program, that would include Michelle
9 Armstrong, Tim McKenna, Nick Gasis,
10 Samuel Ewen, John Fallows, Meredith
11 Mehra, and everyone involved from
12 the PFT side, Commerce, and PIDC to
13 help us get that program off the
14 ground. So thank you very, very
15 much for all of your work. And also
16 want to thank Melody as well. She
17 has just been wonderful, wonderful
18 to work with.

19 I wanted to go back to
20 where I started yesterday.
21 Yesterday I talked about the
22 contribution starting in FY21. I
23 want to go back today to FY18 to
24 FY26. The City of Philadelphia has

1 increased its annual contribution to
2 the School District of Philadelphia,
3 and this is '18 to '26, by \$686
4 million. This includes increasing
5 our direct contribution from \$104.3
6 million in fiscal year '18 to \$284
7 million in fiscal year '26, which is
8 an increase of \$179.7 million in
9 eight years. Local tax revenue has
10 increased by \$480 million since FY
11 '18.

12 And while the state has
13 increased this contribution by \$936
14 million over that time period, the
15 city has contributed more money to
16 the district overall by a figure of
17 \$359,156,246. So I wanted to make
18 sure I got that on the record from
19 the charts that you all have
20 provided to us.

21 And in that vein, I wanted
22 to go back, and I recognize that I
23 did make an error yesterday in the
24 original request because of the

1 date. I don't even know what day it
2 is at this point. But for the
3 record, yesterday I was asking the
4 district to move the vote from 4/23,
5 which is this Thursday, this week,
6 to Thursday, May 28th. I know that
7 we spoke about that yesterday, so I
8 wanted to start there.

9 In addition to that, for
10 the record, if you could just
11 provide us a list of all the
12 positions that are slated to be
13 eliminated, if you could break it
14 down by school, without the
15 additional funding and also with the
16 additional funding, because I think
17 I have some relative confusion
18 there. Because I have received a
19 ton of outreach from teachers from a
20 variety of schools asking
21 specifically about their positions.

22 And so if you could just
23 provide us with the list by school
24 if you receive -- if you do not

1 receive the additional funding. And
2 then also, could you provide a list
3 of where each staff person would be
4 moved and what role they will fill
5 after their current position is
6 eliminated.

7 Now, also if you could just
8 explain to us in writing, because
9 this will help me as well. If you
10 received the funding, would you have
11 to move any teachers at all?
12 Because that is the part that I'm
13 just a little confused about, based
14 on the outreach that I have
15 received.

16 And then I also had a
17 question relative to the structural
18 deficit, I need to know whether or
19 not you all use ARPA dollars to fund
20 any positions, because I think --
21 and this part was a little jarring
22 for me, is that -- and we all knew
23 the ARPA dollars would go away.
24 That wasn't something that we

1 anticipated would be backfilled or
2 filled on the back end.

3 So did you all use -- and I
4 had this question already prepared
5 in advance, I just want to be real
6 clear about that. Did you all use
7 ARPA dollars to fund any of the
8 positions that we're referring to?
9 And the question is, because we all
10 know that the ARPA dollars would
11 expire, that it is the same
12 situation that we are in from a city
13 perspective.

14 And then also, does the
15 school district's revised five-year
16 plan that shows closing the
17 structural deficit by fiscal year 30
18 assume the facilities plan moves
19 forward as proposed or as you all
20 have updated and indicated here?
21 And does it also assume that you
22 receive the additional public and
23 philanthropic funds that you need to
24 fully implement the facilities plan?

1 And if you could just also
2 provide a list of the \$225 million
3 in savings, the district is
4 proposing in the revised five-year
5 plan. And I'll start there.

6 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you,
7 Majority Leader Gilmore-Richardson.

8 Number one, relative to the
9 340 positions that we have proposed
10 to cut and to reassign to other
11 vacant positions for next school
12 year, yes, we can give you the list
13 today of all those positions. It is
14 broken down by Council District as
15 well, in addition to school.

16 I may not be able to tell
17 you just yet exactly where every
18 person will go, partly because those
19 are decisions that we make in
20 partnership with the union
21 presidents per the collective
22 bargaining agreements with the
23 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers,
24 with President Steinberg; with CASA,

1 with President Dr. Robin Cooper, et
2 cetera. But we can get through that
3 today and we can submit it for the
4 record.

5 Number two, the second
6 question was about COVID or the ARPA
7 funding --

8 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

9 RICHARDSON: I'm sorry,
10 Dr. Watlington, for the
11 interruption, but may I go back to
12 that?

13 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

14 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

15 RICHARDSON: My question as well is,
16 outside of the 340 positions, will
17 we see any additional reductions in
18 teaching positions or eliminating
19 any additional teaching positions?
20 And I'm only confused because --

21 DR. WATLINGTON: Sure.

22 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

23 RICHARDSON: -- I received outreach,
24 and I don't understand if we're just

1 talking about the 340 with the
2 funding, and then there is
3 additional positions as well where
4 folks are going to be moved.

5 DR. WATLINGTON: The
6 superintendent is not recommending
7 additional cuts. At the same time,
8 some of the confusion may be that
9 principals do have some autonomy
10 about how to use their budgets. So
11 it is not inconsistent that a
12 principal might say, "In my school,
13 I'm going to have one less teacher
14 of this, I want to increase
15 resources here based on student
16 needs."

17 So that might be, but I
18 will double check that. But the
19 Superintendent is not recommending
20 additional cuts from the district
21 beyond those 340.

22 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
23 RICHARDSON: I see what you're
24 saying. Because their budgets may

1 change. Is this going back to the
2 enrollment conversation?

3 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

4 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

5 RICHARDSON: Okay. Because I
6 received outreach from several
7 schools and I even saw a message in
8 a forum for parents, I'll just say
9 that, from my son's new school. And
10 I said, well, wait a minute, outside
11 of the 340, what else is happening
12 here?

13 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

14 RICHARDSON: So that could be a
15 school-based decision based on a
16 budgeting --

17 DR. WATLINGTON: It could
18 --

19 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

20 RICHARDSON: -- anticipated budget.

21 DR. WATLINGTON: It could
22 be two things.

23 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

24 RICHARDSON: Okay.

1 DR. WATLINGTON: One,
2 principals have some discretion over
3 their budgets. And number two, it
4 could be because their annual
5 projections are down. Let's say my
6 school had 500 kids this year --

7 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
8 RICHARDSON: Okay.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: -- and the
10 projections show that my numbers
11 were dropped to 400, rather than
12 monkey around with moving people the
13 first 10, 20, 30 days of schools, we
14 get that right-sized before school
15 -- students come back.

16 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
17 RICHARDSON: Got you. Okay. So
18 could you all also give us the
19 information, relative to each
20 school, how much their budget has
21 changed year over year? And I know
22 you may not be able to provide us
23 with specific information relative
24 to how that will impact what the

1 principal has planned relative to
2 the teaching and staffing positions,
3 but can we also get a list of every
4 school that is anticipated to have a
5 decrease in enrollment, thus they
6 would have a decrease in their
7 budgeted amount for teaching and
8 staff positions?

9 Because I -- this week, I
10 have been inundated with
11 communication and emails from
12 teachers who I'm trying to figure
13 out, are they outside of this 340?
14 You know what I mean?

15 DR. WATLINGTON: Sure.

16 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
17 RICHARDSON: Okay. All right.

18 DR. WATLINGTON: The short
19 answer is yes, Madam Majority
20 Leader. I'll just remind Council
21 that our annual budget book is on
22 the district website through last
23 year. So all that archival data is
24 there. It is just this long. But

1 we'll be glad to summarize, and we
2 can give you -- I think the spirit
3 of what you want to know is, how are
4 projections and potential budgets
5 changing this year?

6 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

7 RICHARDSON: Just the folks that are
8 decreasing.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

10 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

11 RICHARDSON: Okay? Just decreasing
12 folks.

13 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, we'll
14 do that.

15 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

16 RICHARDSON: Okay. I'm sorry.

17 DR. WATLINGTON: The second
18 question, and I'll be brief, was
19 related to the COVID ARPA dollars.
20 Did we put the short-term dollars
21 into staff positions? The answer is
22 yes. The industry standard across
23 K-12 education is if you have short-
24 term funding, whether it is from

1 federal sources, grants,
2 philanthropy, et cetera, the
3 industry standard is generally don't
4 put those dollars into long-term
5 positions because boards of
6 education are unable to sustain
7 those positions over time. And it
8 puts a strain on the budget, backs
9 folks in the corner.

10 And No. 2, when Congress
11 appropriated those dollars, they
12 were for purposes of addressing
13 learning loss since all the schools
14 across the country were closed.
15 Congress also said these dollars can
16 be used for air quality mitigation
17 in case there was another pandemic
18 or some kind of health-borne
19 illness.

20 The School District of
21 Philadelphia was in a place, under
22 the previous administration -- and I
23 try not to Monday morning
24 quarterback -- but was in a place

1 where the district couldn't just
2 take the dollars and do the extra
3 stuff because we had so many holes
4 in the budget already because of
5 historical underfunding.

6 So this district took the
7 position that it would hire 127
8 assistant principals with these
9 COVID dollars, which I absolutely
10 don't -- can't recommend a cut from
11 the school district, and some other
12 much needed positions around
13 climate, et cetera. We decided we
14 wouldn't cut any of those positions
15 over the past three years because we
16 would ride the wave with the federal
17 money. This was a once-in-lifetime
18 opportunity with the \$1.8 billion
19 that we received in COVID dollars.
20 And it shows that if you give a
21 school district, an urban school
22 district, more money with a
23 strategic plan, and the districts
24 focuses on the research, uses the

1 data, and hold ourselves
2 accountable, we can get better. And
3 so I think the district, in
4 hindsight, did the right thing.

5 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

6 RICHARDSON: Can I just say there?
7 What was the plan to fund the
8 positions once the ARPA money ran
9 out? So meaning we knew that this
10 money would run out, so we knew that
11 this would be a hole that we would
12 have to plug. And I -- we aren't
13 Monday morning quarterbacking you
14 all either, right? Because the city
15 had to do the same thing and plug
16 the holes. But you're saying 127
17 assistant principals, climate
18 positions. We knew the ARPA money
19 would run out.

20 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

21 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

22 RICHARDSON: We knew after that
23 money was gone, that that was it.
24 And so at that point, what was the

1 plan for those 127 assistant
2 principals and climate positions?

3 DR. WATLINGTON: Once I
4 came aboard in 2022, it was my
5 thinking, the decision, that we
6 would delay those cuts until we
7 absolutely had to make them. Now
8 when people were hired, I was not
9 here. So I don't know exactly what
10 conversations were or were not held
11 with these individuals. But I can
12 tell you they've been doing some
13 fantastic work, and we sure want to
14 keep every one of them.

15 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
16 RICHARDSON: No, no, I understand
17 that. But you understand the
18 question?

19 DR. WATLINGTON: I
20 understand.

21 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
22 RICHARDSON: And, like, and I get
23 where you are because it wasn't a
24 decision that you made, and you

1 weren't here. But what was the plan
2 to ensure that we could fund those
3 physicians after the money ran out?
4 Meaning we knew we would be in this
5 circumstance. I don't want it to be
6 a situation where we thought that
7 after the ARPA money ran out, that
8 we were going to get some kind of
9 additional federal infusion just for
10 this circumstance. That was not --
11 never going to be the case, right?

12 PRESIDENT STREATER: I
13 believe one of your questions were
14 for me, but I want to piggyback off
15 of this question, Majority Leader.
16 The board had to make a decision,
17 and I was here when Dr. Hite
18 presented to the board and said, we
19 have a choice here. And this was a
20 nationwide coordinated effort with
21 the Council for Great City schools.
22 Where there was lobbying going on in
23 D.C. and there was real guidance,
24 factual guidance, bona fide

1 guidance, that if we -- if we also
2 invest in people and show that
3 public education, even through the
4 hell that the pandemic was for our
5 babies, we can hold the line. They
6 can get better.

7 This is a strategy to
8 compel D.C to increase reoccurring
9 firms -- funds to the school
10 district. So as opposed to the
11 smidgen in our budget that it is
12 now, it could be something that can
13 help accelerate student achievement.

14 We took that shot because
15 we thought our babies at that time
16 were worth it, and they're still
17 worth it. And I'm also thinking
18 about, yes, the -- those positions
19 may not -- may not be reoccurring as
20 it relates to funding, but I'm
21 hoping that when I'm, you know, done
22 with this role and I'm in the
23 supermarket, and there is a child
24 who went through the pandemic and

1 they were able to still go to
2 college, be where they wanted to be,
3 that those dollars were for them.
4 And that is what the board's
5 thinking was. And I believe the
6 strategy worked.

7 As a byproduct, I think we
8 also have to understand there are
9 some who believe that it couldn't be
10 done. We now have evidence, bona
11 fide evidence, in Philadelphia, no
12 matter who the child is, where they
13 are, we can accelerate student
14 achievement. If you fund us, if we
15 focus on why we exist, and we're
16 strategic and how we do it.

17 So I think that is kind of
18 the context I want to give you. I
19 know people might say, well, that is
20 bad business sense, but you got to
21 remember also, the board also built
22 a massive fund balance because of
23 the COVID dollars, which delayed
24 this conversation for five years.

1 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

2 RICHARDSON: Until now. Okay.

3 PRESIDENT STREATER: So it

4 was -- it was a balanced and

5 strategic and pragmatic approach.

6 I'm willing to bet on our children

7 every day, and I'm willing to bet on

8 our great educators every day

9 understanding that. So I just want

10 to that on the record.

11 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

12 RICHARDSON: No, I received that.

13 If you could just let us know how

14 much, I'm thinking Class 100, but

15 that is not the way you all budget,

16 but how much it is for the 127

17 assistant principals and the climate

18 positions? Just so we have a

19 picture just for those positions.

20 DR. WATLINGTON: We'll ask

21 Chief Herbstman, absolutely, to

22 gather that information together.

23 I'm going to answer these last two

24 questions you raised very quickly.

1 Let me just say I'm so glad
2 President Streater and the Board of
3 Education took that position. I was
4 one of the people who represented
5 school districts and went to
6 Washington years ago at the onset of
7 the pandemic and lobby congressional
8 leaders to put this money out.

9 And I remember going from
10 office to office and people telling
11 -- and I knew which offices I would
12 go to, and people would say, "Nope,
13 don't even come here. We're not
14 given school districts." And I
15 wasn't in a large urban school
16 district, but I remember hearing,
17 especially the big urban districts,
18 because you give them more money and
19 they get worse, and they come back
20 and ask for more, we don't think
21 more money will make a difference.

22 I'm so pleased that here,
23 those dollars were well --- were
24 used well, to prove just the

1 opposite; we can get better with the
2 resources. Does the five-year plan
3 assume any connections to the --
4 about the Facilities Master Plan
5 being approved? No. The five-year
6 plan, as we've presented it, is
7 completely separate.

8 So even if there were not a
9 Facilities Master Plan, we would
10 still be taking these steps to
11 reduce our expenditures. And if and
12 when the Facilities Master Plan and
13 whatever fine iteration is approved
14 by the Board of Education, it won't
15 resort -- result in significant
16 savings, compared to the last time
17 that schools closed, because we're
18 reinvesting those dollars back into
19 the most under-resourced schools and
20 most underperforming children as a
21 strategy to improve academic
22 performance.

23 Final question --

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Excuse me, Dr. Watlington.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: You asked
3 for it.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 Excuse me one second. I have a
6 point of information from Member,
7 Dr. Anthony Phillips.

8 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS: I
9 want to thank the majority leader
10 for raising a very important
11 question around the recurring
12 dollars for COVID which raises my
13 point of information. If that was
14 -- President Streater, as you
15 mentioned, if that was something
16 that you wanted to essentially take
17 a chance on, right?

18 Knowing that the funds were
19 -- would dry up at some point, and
20 -- but you wanted to show the world
21 that if you invest through staff and
22 teachers, that we will be able to
23 increase performance at our schools.
24 Is there data that shows that that

1 investment worked?

2 If so, are -- can you
3 please share that with us here today
4 and also in writing, because that is
5 important to know. Because if we're
6 going to take another chance, again,
7 we need to know that it is just --
8 it is going to work very, very well,
9 and not just somewhat well.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Dr. Watlington?

12 DR. WATLINGTON:

13 Councilmember Dr. Phillips, one of
14 the reasons, key drivers, not the
15 only driver, but a big reason why
16 test scores are up, graduation rates
17 are up, and the dropout rate is
18 down, it is not just because folks
19 who work in the school district just
20 came to work one day and said, "You
21 know what? We're going to work
22 harder."

23 They had a once in a
24 lifetime opportunity to get funding

1 that schools and classrooms
2 desperately need. So the first set
3 of data I would put out there is
4 rising test scores, rising
5 graduation rates, and declining
6 dropout rates. And a good factoid
7 is in the eighth -- in the nation's
8 report card.

9 Our students in
10 Philadelphia had the best
11 improvement in 8th grade math in the
12 nation's report card than any big
13 city in the country except Los
14 Angeles. Better than New York,
15 Chicago, Atlanta, you go on through
16 the list.

17 And the \$1.8 billion
18 investing in people as President
19 Streater said, that is a testament
20 to that. And since the Commonwealth
21 Court ruling said that the district
22 is underfunded by 1.8 billion, it is
23 just ironic that the district got
24 \$1.8 billion from Congress.

1 Fast forward to 2023, the
2 Commonwealth Court says the district
3 is underfunded by 1.8 billion. I
4 think it is 1.8, Chief Herbstman.
5 And it just shows, if we've got the
6 constitutional finding, this proves
7 that the district can be the fastest
8 improving, and our kids can get
9 better.

10 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
11 Thank you, Council President. I
12 just hope that if you also, with the
13 -- in writing, if you can show that
14 in correlation to the staff.

15 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

16 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
17 And then also what you project now,
18 with the positions remaining, the
19 growth to be. Because that is -- it
20 is important for us to have that
21 return on investment as well.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
23 Thank you very much. Majority
24 Leader --

1 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

2 RICHARDSON: Wrap up, yeah.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 Yes, go ahead.

5 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

6 RICHARDSON: Thank you. Thank you,
7 Council President. Just to wrap up,
8 thank you very much. I will submit
9 my additional questions for the
10 record, including the amount of the
11 debt service on the \$1 billion
12 borrowing; how much that impacts
13 your plan as well. But if we could
14 go back to board Streater -- Board
15 President Streater, relative to my
16 request regarding moving the vote
17 from April 23rd to May 28th. They
18 give us an opportunity to fully --
19 more fully deliberate.

20 PRESIDENT STREATER: Before
21 I answer that question, I think
22 sometimes the board, we live with
23 this stuff, and I think sometimes we
24 forget that everybody doesn't live

1 with it the way we do. So there is
2 a sense of urgency, I think, that
3 could be perceived as rush, rush,
4 rush. But for us, I have been
5 living with this since I got on the
6 board five years ago.

7 And, yeah, you know,
8 sometimes I lawyer it up, and I
9 point that we had it here. We set
10 it here, we set it here, resolution
11 connects to this resolution,
12 resolution X connects to that
13 resolution. But that doesn't change
14 the fact that your reality might be
15 a little different as Councilmembers
16 as well, when you have to take tough
17 votes as well.

18 So with that, I'll say,
19 again, I'm still at a space to be
20 quite honest, where I have to take
21 this back to the board as well. And
22 I'm at a space now where the board
23 has to consider other things that
24 may not be in -- that is -- that we

1 have to live with, such as our
2 capital budget, such as our ability
3 to lock in rates, such as our
4 ability for Dr. Watlington to get to
5 okay to start moving the ship of the
6 School District of Philadelphia in a
7 such large, fast way. But also so
8 that we can get back to focusing on
9 student achievement.

10 So with all that being
11 said, also downloading everything
12 that I heard today and that I heard
13 yesterday, I'm going to continue
14 having that conversation where I can
15 do that for you. But as of right
16 now, let me just take that back to
17 the board again, and I will get back
18 to you.

19 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

20 RICHARDSON: Thank you --

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

22 You-all had a welcome talk last
23 night?

24 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

1 RICHARDSON: Yeah, my -- yeah, my --

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 I'm just asking.

4 PRESIDENT STREATER: Look,

5 I mean --

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

7 I'm not --

8 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

9 RICHARDSON: Could we have one day?

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Let's be good.

12 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-

13 RICHARDSON: We -- no, and I thank
14 you Council President and I need to
15 wrap up to respect colleagues, but
16 tomorrow is the scheduled action
17 meeting for the district. And the
18 next scheduled action meeting is
19 Thursday, May 28th. And I think,
20 you know, we have been presented
21 with so much new information as
22 notated by Mayor Parker, but also
23 new information relative to this
24 vote even being scheduled this week.

1 We just found out this week.

2 So we are obviously in the
3 middle of our process, and I know
4 you all have to be finished before
5 we are, right? I get that because
6 certain things need to happen. Even
7 when you do a borrow, when you got
8 to go to market, you got to shop
9 around. Things have to occur on the
10 back end in order for you to proceed
11 with the work that you need to do.

12 However, we are at a
13 convergence of this facilities plan
14 as well as being asked to fill in a
15 budget deficit and a budget
16 challenge that you all are asking us
17 to deliberate. And we will need
18 time in order to do that with all
19 the new information that is just
20 being presented that we have not had
21 an opportunity to digest.

22 And so I'm just
23 respectfully requesting, because we
24 have to, you know, work together and

1 work in partnership, and we -- and
2 we have to carry the lion's share of
3 this in this body to ensure that you
4 all receive the funding necessary to
5 move forward that if you could,
6 before tomorrow, because we would
7 then have to make the appropriate
8 accommodation here.

9 And tomorrow is our stated
10 meeting day as well. That if you
11 all could postpone that action
12 meeting relative to the facilities
13 plan until Thursday, May 28th, that
14 would be greatly appreciated based
15 on the work that we have to do as
16 well.

17 PRESIDENT STREATER: Thank
18 you.

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 I thought you-all was going to get
21 together last night, come up with a
22 game plan, come back today, so --

23 PRESIDENT STREATER: Well,
24 Council President, this is a very

1 complex --

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 I know.

4 PRESIDENT STREATER: --

5 heavy thing for us.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

7 Complex for all of us.

8 PRESIDENT STREATER: I

9 understand.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 And I'm not even starting the drama

12 today. I'm just saying it is

13 complex for you-all. It is complex

14 for us. We're trying to work as a

15 partnership and everybody got to do

16 a little bit of give and take. That

17 is all --

18 PRESIDENT STREATER: I

19 understand.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

21 On behalf of the students and the

22 children of the City of

23 Philadelphia, I just wanted to put

24 that out there.

1 PRESIDENT STREATER: I

2 Understand, Council President.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 The Chair recognizes Councilmember

5 Jamie Gauthier, then Councilman

6 Nicholas O'Rourke is back.

7 Councilmember Nicholas O'Rourke and

8 then Councilmember Jim Harrity.

9 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

10 Thank you, Council President. Good

11 afternoon, Dr. Watlington, Board

12 President Streater and Vice Chair

13 Andrews. Thank you for joining us

14 today for this important

15 conversation. Board President

16 Streater, I appreciated your

17 sentiments and the mayor's around

18 Council and the administration and

19 the school district needing each

20 other.

21 And your expression that

22 you want to continue working with

23 Council in true partnership towards

24 the benefit of our kids. But I do

1 want to be clear that what that
2 looks like in practice would be
3 Dr. Watlington moving off of the
4 position that what has been put
5 before us is a final, final version.

6 And what that would look
7 like in practice is honoring the
8 majority leader's request that we
9 have more time. Anything less than
10 that standard is just kind of a
11 pretty sentiment as opposed to a
12 genuine effort to engage with
13 Council around very difficult
14 decisions.

15 I also appreciate you all
16 being here yesterday. And as I have
17 said several times, I appreciate the
18 changes that you've made to the
19 facilities plan proposal including
20 putting or recommending more
21 investment for facilities in the 3rd
22 District and keeping our school
23 properties in school district
24 ownership as opposed to moving them

1 to developers for some type of
2 non-school development.

3 I think that those are
4 important moral changes that brought
5 more equity to this plan. But I
6 also do want to be clear that the
7 proposal that is on the table,
8 particularly for the 3rd District,
9 would still cause great harm to my
10 community.

11 And so I'm pushing for you
12 to go further, and I hope that we
13 can get there. And, you know, I
14 appreciated the conversation
15 yesterday, it was very spirited, but
16 unfortunately, I come today with
17 some of the same questions because
18 as spirited as our discussions have
19 been, I have left with few specific
20 answers.

21 And so today I'm going to
22 be revisiting several of the
23 questions that I have been asking,
24 because I'm looking for answers that

1 are specific and that are rooted in
2 facts and data. Earlier this week,
3 you amended your recommendation for
4 Paul Robeson to keep the building
5 and maybe, theoretically, someday
6 create a new STEM high school. But
7 you are still recommending that we
8 close the existing Paul Robeson High
9 School.

10 If the Board of Education
11 votes to approve this closure, you
12 will be eliminating the last public
13 high school in the heart of
14 University City, a place where our
15 kids are stone's throw away from
16 some of the world's finest
17 scientific and innovation
18 institutions.

19 And this is not something
20 that can be replaced at Motivation
21 or at Sayre or anywhere else that is
22 not in University City. The
23 community welcomes transforming
24 Robeson to meet this moment, to

1 maximize the advantages and
2 opportunities that come with being
3 surrounded by global STEM leaders.
4 And we know that the building is in
5 poor condition. And -- but we are
6 willing to work with you to get a
7 facility for Robeson to where it
8 needs to be.

9 But that is not the
10 proposal that is on the table today
11 in front of the board. And to our
12 community, the proposal that you are
13 putting before the board is
14 reminiscent of one of the most
15 shameful decisions that government
16 has ever made in West Philly when we
17 raise the black bottom to make way
18 for what is now University City.

19 And so we should be clear
20 that if the Board of Education
21 closes Robeson and uses their campus
22 to possibly, maybe, one day make a
23 new STEM school, but that school
24 will not be called Robeson High, it

1 will not be rooted in our community.
2 It will not be rooted in our
3 community's history. You'll be
4 continuing the same shameful legacy
5 of displacement and erasure that has
6 happened in the past in West
7 Philadelphia.

8 So I'm going to repeat the
9 questions that I still haven't
10 received specific answers for, for
11 the benefit of my constituents
12 because they need to know. What
13 does it cost to keep Paul Robeson
14 high open? What does it cost to
15 move Paul Robeson High? What is the
16 cost difference between co-locating
17 Paul Robeson with Motivation and
18 merging the two schools?

19 And also, do you quantify
20 the cost, or how do you quantify the
21 cost of erasing black legacy in West
22 Philadelphia? And how do you all --
23 how would you all feel to be the
24 leaders to continue the legacy of

1 institutional erasure of black
2 people in University City? Because
3 from my vantage point, that is what
4 the proposal looks like.

5 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you,
6 Councilmember Gauthier. Certainly,
7 I want to -- I want to begin by
8 saying that without speaking out of
9 turn, that I'm sure both Board
10 President Streater and myself, have
11 great regard for our dear fraternity
12 brother; the great Paul Robeson, the
13 great statesman and Philadelphian --

14 PRESIDENT STREATER: And
15 lawyer.

16 DR. WATLINGTON: -- and
17 lawyer and prolific speaker. Let me
18 say that the Paul Robeson building
19 has a poor building score, and it is
20 underutilized in terms of
21 enrollment; No. 1.

22 Two, we -- I proposed to
23 move Paul Robeson and absolutely
24 preserve that name. We would never

1 ever provide a recommendation to
2 discard that great legacy of Paul
3 Robeson. So as we moved that --
4 merge -- recommend to merge that
5 school with Motivation High School,
6 we would go through a naming process
7 in partnership with both communities
8 -- I already started doing some
9 thinking about that -- that
10 appropriately recognizes and
11 preserves that name.

12 And we certainly can get
13 you the cost of - it is outlined on
14 our website. If not, we'll get it
15 to you. What it would it cost if we
16 were to have to -- we do it.

17 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I
18 have not seen those costs. I have
19 asked you this question since the
20 very start of this process. And I
21 should say that the PFT was able to
22 get me these costs. They think that
23 the prospect of closing this
24 proposed school, this beloved school

1 in West Philadelphia, is so serious
2 that they were able to answer my
3 questions.

4 And so PFT got me today
5 information that says that the cost
6 for essential repairs at Robeson
7 High would be 4.3 million. The cost
8 for all repairs at Paul Robeson High
9 would be 9.6 million, and the cost
10 of total replacement of the building
11 would be 27.1 million.

12 So thank you to the PFT for
13 honoring this information request
14 that I have put before the district
15 since the beginning of this process.
16 That is how serious the prospect of
17 closing a school that the community
18 loves is.

19 DR. WATLINGTON: So,
20 Councilmember Gauthier, if I may
21 just say two things, and I certainly
22 respect the Council member's points.
23 Since last summer, we have placed a
24 plethora of data on our website. I

1 cannot run through all that in my
2 head, but I do want to note for the
3 record --

4 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I
5 gave you a very specific information
6 request.

7 DR. WATLINGTON: Okay.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 I just got a point of information.
10 Just real quick, sir. What she is
11 saying is, see, when you respond and
12 say it is on the website, we are
13 professionals.

14 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.
15 Duly noted. Duly noted.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 I would just -- I would just prefer
18 you to say that the experts, so I
19 know Laurel is very competent in
20 getting us information in our hand,
21 as opposed to directing the member
22 to the website or saying the
23 information is on the website. That
24 -- just want to --

1 DR. WATLINGTON: Okay.

2 Duly noted.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 -- give the time back to Member
5 Gauthier.

6 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

7 Thank you so much.

8 DR. WATLINGTON: Duly
9 noted, Mr. President. I'll direct
10 the team, our last Chief of Staff
11 Galbally to make sure to get -- that
12 we get a communication to you to
13 fact check and verify exactly what
14 you've heard from President
15 Steinberg, so that you've heard from
16 us on the record. We'll be sure to
17 copy you, Mr. President, today.

18 Second, may I just also say
19 the real spirit of what we are
20 trying to do under our five-year
21 strategic plan; accelerate Philly,
22 is address how to take our limited
23 resources, invest more in children,
24 and take the improvement that we are

1 making in the school district, and
2 multiply it by 20.

3 And here is what that looks
4 like in your district, Councilmember
5 Gauthier; I know -- I really believe
6 we can provide a better education at
7 Paul Robeson. I think last year I
8 looked at the numbers and their
9 proficiency rate on state math
10 Keystone testing was less than three
11 percent.

12 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I
13 want to --

14 DR. WATLINGTON: We can do
15 better.

16 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
17 I'm sorry --

18 DR. WATLINGTON: And so
19 we're trying to push those resources
20 in. And the way to do it is we've
21 got to -- we've got to drive faster
22 improvement at the high schools.
23 We're getting better at the K-8, but
24 in the high schools, we've got to

1 pull those limited resources. We've
2 got to adjust those sizes of
3 schools. Not too big, but we just
4 can't quite get the --

5 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: If
6 I could --

7 DR. WATLINGTON: --
8 resources there if they're too
9 small.

10 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: If
11 I could pause you for a second. I
12 have heard your vision for the plan.
13 So I think that I am not
14 misunderstanding that this is your
15 vision for the plan. I do want to
16 get a couple specific questions
17 answered before my time is up.

18 My first question would be
19 if you are going to retain the land
20 for school district use and go
21 through a process with the community
22 about what should be there. And
23 I'll say the community has expressed
24 loudly and clearly what they want to

1 be there; they want Robeson High to
2 be there. It is not a mystery.

3 So if you're going to keep
4 the land in district hands, if you
5 are going to add a \$100 plus million
6 more in investment, why can we not
7 rebuild or renovate to have a new
8 Robeson High in the same spot?
9 Especially with these numbers that
10 came from the great folks at PFT who
11 thought it was a good idea to honor
12 my information request. So if we
13 know we're not talking about
14 prohibitive amounts of money, why
15 can you not do that?

16 DR. WATLINGTON: Do you
17 want me to answer, Mr. President?

18 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:
19 Yes.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 The floor is yours, sir.

22 DR. WATLINGTON: In the
23 near term, it would not be a
24 financially appropriate investment

1 to invest in a renovation of the
2 school. Even --

3 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

4 And what are the factors that go
5 into that decision?

6 DR. WATLINGTON: It is kind
7 of like when you total-loss of car,
8 when it costs more to repair it than
9 it does to replace it, the better
10 option at Paul Robeson is to replace
11 the building. So to replace the
12 building, you would have to move
13 children or young people anyway. So
14 even if we were going to build a new
15 school, which I think has strong
16 merits there, we would need to --

17 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER: I
18 think that could work -- I think a
19 temporary move could work.

20 DR. WATLINGTON: We would
21 need the children. We would need to
22 move students for a period of time.
23 And so when we move them, I think
24 the other part of what you've asked

1 me before is why not just co-locate
2 the two schools separately versus
3 merge them together, if I understood
4 it correctly.

5 And the reason is we've got
6 to get a slightly larger high school
7 size to be able to push more of our
8 limited resources in to improve the
9 academic performance.

10 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

11 Thank you. Very quick, in closing,
12 I want you all to think about how my
13 community views this, which is the
14 continuation of the displacement of
15 black people in University City from
16 University City.

17 PRESIDENT STREATER: Thank
18 you.

19 COUNCILMEMBER GAUTHIER:

20 And I want to know if you're okay
21 with that being your legacy. Thank
22 you so much.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

24 Thank you. Chair recognizes --

1 Chair recognizes Councilmember
2 Nicholas O'Rourke, Jim Harrity, and
3 Councilmember Cindy Bass.

4 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

5 Thank you, Mr. President. Good
6 afternoon. Testing one, two, there
7 we go. Good afternoon to you.
8 President Streater, Dr. Watlington,
9 thank you for being with us this
10 afternoon. I shared at Lankenau
11 yesterday morning with a few of my
12 colleagues who invited me to come up
13 that I am not a district member and
14 don't have the tight focus that my
15 colleagues who do serve a particular
16 district in the city have.

17 But as an at-large member
18 of this body, I have the great honor
19 of representing the entirety of the
20 city. And I have been invited by
21 families and students to visit some
22 other schools as well. So I want to
23 lift up two schools in particular;
24 Southwark Elementary in Member

1 Squilla's district, as well as
2 Moffett Elementary in Member
3 Lozada's district.

4 Last week, I was invited to
5 view the conditions at Southwark
6 Elementary. And I want to talk just
7 for a minute about the emergency
8 that is happening there. There are
9 a total of just three toilets for
10 600 children to use on two entire
11 floors of the school; the floors
12 that house pre-K through 5th grade.

13 It is not appropriate to
14 force five-year-olds, with their
15 little legs, to travel long
16 distances through a school building
17 where they regularly have to take
18 flights of stairs just to attempt to
19 find an open or working bathroom in
20 the basement, which they are then
21 forced to share with 8th graders.

22 In some cases, they may not
23 be able to go at all. And I heard
24 mention yesterday morning of them --

1 some folks having accidents on
2 themselves as a result of having to
3 wait to find something.

4 If children regularly
5 cannot use a toilet because the
6 school does not have enough of them,
7 or because the plumbing repeatedly
8 fails, it begs the question, at
9 least in my mind, how can the
10 district be proposing a facilities
11 plan that would not give those
12 students new bathrooms until at
13 least 2033? And quite possibly not
14 even then.

15 It begs the question how we
16 can have in front of us a facilities
17 master plan that does not set clear
18 standards to ensure that all
19 children at all schools in all
20 neighborhoods are given the basic
21 facility standards. Children need
22 to learn and to learn with dignity.

23 I think about this and I --
24 and I wonder, you know, is it

1 anywhere in the plan that one could
2 point to that demonstrates that at
3 the end of 10 years, every child
4 will have enough bathrooms, real
5 gyms, full playgrounds, cafeteria
6 kitchens add an HVAC system, an ADA
7 access. Do we know how many schools
8 have major floors with almost no
9 toilets or ratios like one toilet,
10 200 children, in areas that house
11 our youngest children?

12 And the question I think
13 here is, will the district actually
14 commit to auditing and remedying
15 gross deficiencies in bathroom
16 access?

17 PRESIDENT STREATER: If --
18 Dr. Watlington is going to answer,
19 but I think you bring up a really
20 good example of why I believe there
21 is a perceived or a real sense of
22 urgency for the Board of Education
23 to address these issues.
24 Understanding that Southwark, the

1 proposal that Dr. Watlington has
2 brought as it relates to timing, I'm
3 not going to get into that.

4 But the longer that we wait
5 -- and again, this is not to say
6 what is going to happen tomorrow or
7 next week or what have you. But I'm
8 hoping that we can use this as a
9 safe space, we can understand the
10 pressure points for both
11 institutions. Without a supercharge
12 of capital investment, the plan
13 looks the way it looks, because that
14 is our confidence in getting the
15 level of investment we would need at
16 the time that we would need.

17 Two, we are also trying to
18 address the issue of chronic
19 underachievement, which precludes
20 all of our babies in different parts
21 of the city from being able to
22 access the careers that you and I
23 have been able to access and things
24 like that.

1 So for me, when I think of
2 disparate impact, I'm not just
3 thinking about disparate impact in
4 the now, Councilmembers. I'm
5 thinking about disparate impact when
6 they become adults, when a child
7 cannot realize any future that they
8 can desire, because the School
9 District of Philadelphia was
10 unwilling to make tough decisions to
11 reallocate resources so those
12 children who may be in schools that
13 they didn't agree to be in in the
14 beginning, can still look back and
15 say, I had the ability to be a
16 lawyer, a bartender, a doctor, a
17 welder, and things like that.

18 And what I can tell you as
19 the Board President sitting here for
20 five years, four, as the board's
21 president, if we continue operating
22 the district the way we do with
23 small schools, if we continue
24 operating the district the way we do

1 without reimagining our grade bands,
2 access to more pre-K, we're going to
3 have another problem in this city.

4 Children who can't afford
5 to live anywhere, who is going to be
6 told what to do and make the
7 political decisions that I believe
8 some of us have -- some of our
9 students have made -- some of --
10 some of us in Philadelphia have made
11 around national elections and things
12 like that.

13 So it is really about
14 student achievement for us. And if
15 the plan wasn't responsive to Dr. --
16 to the resolution the board passed
17 last year where that was the guiding
18 post, I'll be the first one saying,
19 Dr. Watlington, we got to start over
20 from square one. But I do think
21 that there is enough meat in the
22 plan. Understand there is more work
23 to be done that we can change -- I'm
24 telling you-all, we can

1 fundamentally change the lives of
2 our children in Philadelphia.

3 And I think the Mayor hit
4 it on the head. I think there is
5 enough stars in alignment in
6 different spaces, including this
7 room that is agreed to up our
8 funding in historic amounts to
9 really do that. So I do believe,
10 though, in order to do that, there
11 is going to be pressure and there
12 is, there is going to be pain.

13 And you all have agreed to
14 that. Yes, we know there has to be
15 closures, but it has to make sense.
16 But what I can say is that I wanted
17 to put that, kind of, understanding
18 of why we're even considering these
19 things.

20 So I hate the fact that
21 there are children who don't have
22 bathrooms that operate in there
23 because I have children in the
24 district. It kills me that this

1 happens. I hate the fact that we
2 may have to tell some individuals
3 their school might have to close.
4 But what I would hate even more is
5 that when I'm in the home for
6 bewildered lawyers retired, in my
7 80s, that I can't say that we didn't
8 do something to ensure that these
9 children can learn how to fish.
10 That is what I'm saying.

11 And we have 85 schools that
12 are unsatisfactory right now; pipes
13 bursting during the winter, can't
14 have air conditioning. I -- we have
15 to do something about this, and I'm
16 going to repeat what I said
17 yesterday; if we don't do something
18 about it, somebody is going to do it
19 to us. Whether it is facility right
20 sizing, or whether it is also the
21 budget.

22 And we know what has
23 happened to us before where we lost
24 local control. That is a real

1 concern for the Board of Education.

2 I didn't say --

3 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

4 Mr. President --

5 PRESIDENT STREATER: --

6 didn't provide anything that anyone

7 said, Council President, but I

8 wanted to share that so we can all

9 understand our pain points. So as

10 --

11 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

12 Mr. President --

13 PRESIDENT STREATER: -- we

14 can understand where we're going.

15 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

16 Mr. President Streater, if you don't

17 mind, I don't mean to interrupt your

18 flow. I do resonate with what

19 you're sharing, but I did want to

20 get the question as I asked it on

21 the record --

22 PRESIDENT STREATER: It

23 will be answered. Dr. Watlington.

24 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

1 Will the district commit to -- yes,
2 sir. Yes, sir, I apologize if -- I
3 didn't mean that --

4 DR. WATLINGTON: No
5 worries.

6 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:
7 Please go ahead.

8 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you
9 so much, Councilmember O'Rourke.
10 One, specific to Southwark --
11 Council President wants to get right
12 away into this. Specific to
13 Southwark, we are aware of the low
14 ground plumbing issues; we're aware
15 of the school design. I'm
16 personally knowledgeable of that.
17 And we're working closely with folks
18 to do two things.

19 In the capital budget, to
20 look at how we can expedite some
21 improvements there sooner than
22 planned. Southwark is represented
23 in the Facilities Master Plan to get
24 attention at 2031, '32, I believe at

1 present. We're looking with the
2 capital budget, how we can expedite,
3 because there are some significant
4 plumbing issues there. Let me just
5 also share with you --

6 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

7 Thank you.

8 DR. WATLINGTON: -- Council

9 --

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Can I get a point of information
12 real quick as you answer that
13 question?

14 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

16 Just give me for the record, how
17 many plumbers do we have working for
18 the School District of Philadelphia?

19 DR. WATLINGTON: I don't
20 want to tell you the wrong number.
21 Colonel Hill --

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Because I know you do a lot of work
24 with the district. And so I want to

1 get an idea the plumbing and
2 engineering staff.

3 DR. WATLINGTON: I'll ask
4 Colonel Hill to come to the dais.
5 While he is coming, Councilmember
6 O'Rourke, in this accelerate
7 opportunity Facilities Master Plan,
8 it calls for 60 complete bathroom
9 renovations and 56 ADA improvements
10 across the district. Colonel?

11 MR. HILL: Oz Hill, deputy
12 superintendent for operations School
13 District of Philadelphia.
14 Currently, we are authorized
15 approximately 22 FTE plumbing
16 positions. And at this time, we
17 have eight plumbing positions. We
18 have over 2000 restrooms throughout
19 the School District of Philadelphia.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 So what is our plan to upgrade,
22 increase the level of hiring of
23 plumbers? That is like the most
24 basic need. We not even talking

1 about anything else in the school
2 that, like, the bells and the
3 whistles, just the ability -- I hear
4 it in this building, women say,
5 well, half of the -- they want
6 bathrooms in their own offices
7 because they don't want to deal with
8 some -- that is a different
9 conversation.

10 My point is, it is the most
11 basic -- I'm not even going to call
12 that amenity. It is just the basic
13 right of a kid to get a chance to go
14 to a bathroom that is clean and
15 decent. And if you saying we have
16 -- and I'm not saying it for the
17 clap, see, but I'm just having a
18 basic, just a basic conversation.

19 If you're saying we are
20 authorized the -- we're authorized
21 for 22 and we only have eight, and
22 we have a situation where I'm sure
23 this is not the only school, this is
24 probably one school that is

1 organized, that has the ability to
2 come here and advocate, but I'm sure
3 there is other issues.

4 I just want to know, what
5 is the plan to increase, at a bare
6 bones minimum, the 22 staff, full
7 staff for plumbers? Just -- and it
8 is just a general question based
9 upon the point of information.

10 MR. HILL: Yes, sir. We
11 recognize that having access to
12 functioning restroom facilities are
13 a human function, a human right,
14 that everyone should have, no
15 question about that. And it is a
16 priority for us, sir. To mitigate
17 the shortfall that we have in fully
18 staffed positions, we have general
19 service contractors that we use to
20 offset that challenge.

21 Additionally, as we talk
22 about Southwark in particular, we
23 are working with the building
24 committee to address those

1 challenges. We are looking at
2 deploying and employing mobile
3 restrooms that are fully equipped
4 and making sure that access to those
5 restrooms are enclosed within the
6 school structure. We are working
7 also to address the linear
8 infrastructure associated with the
9 underground piping to support a
10 higher volume --

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

12 Is this --

13 MR. HILL: So all of those
14 things are working, sir.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

16 And this is based upon, because some
17 of the schools are old and so forth,
18 and that is the capital investment
19 that is needed to do the bathrooms
20 over?

21 DR. WATLINGTON:

22 Mr. President, the bigger issue,
23 though, is that the volume of old
24 schools, old plumbing systems simply

1 exceeds our resources. Let me give
2 you an example. The only time
3 typically that I have available for
4 quiet time is about 5:15, when I get
5 up to go to the gym.

6 From 5:15 to 6:30 is my
7 only quiet time, except when Colonel
8 Oz Hill is calling me, or chief of
9 Staff, Sarah Galbally is calling me
10 to tell me we've got to close school
11 A, B, or C today because the
12 plumbing broke overnight, because
13 the HVAC systems malfunctioned
14 overnight, because the heat is no
15 longer working -- it was working
16 when the team checked it before we
17 -- everybody went to sleep, but
18 about three in the morning, these
19 old systems just caved in on us.

20 So even if we give a 100
21 percent very best, we have to
22 address, there are not adequate
23 resources. And 35 percent of our
24 schools are sitting vacant, and

1 we're not using our resources
2 efficiently in Philadelphia, as well
3 as we can.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

5 Understood, sir. Member Nicholas
6 O'Rourke is going to be wrapping up
7 his questioning and then Harrity,
8 Bass, Dr. Nina Ahmad.

9 COUNCILMEMBER O'ROURKE:

10 Yes. Thank you, Mr. President and
11 President Streater, please know I
12 respect you deeply. I just have a
13 lot amount of time and I wanted to
14 get my questions in. I didn't mean
15 to cut up your flow, but respect
16 both of you, Dr. Watlington as well,
17 Dr. Streater, your work and your
18 contributions to the city.

19 Moffett Elementary was
20 another school that invited me to
21 join their community earlier in this
22 planning process. Based on your
23 most recent announcement, and thanks
24 to their advocacy and CM Lozada's

1 leadership in her district, I'm
2 grateful to hear that Moffett will
3 be kept in elementary school, not
4 transitioned into a middle school.

5 But your original plan
6 allocated \$8.1 million to modernized
7 Moffett as a middle school. Will
8 this \$8.1 million still be allotted
9 to the Moffett Elementary School for
10 the needed updates; the bathrooms,
11 electrical panel lighting, et
12 cetera? And if so, what is the
13 timeline? Will it follow the
14 projected timeline as stated in the
15 original plan?

16 And after the district's
17 original plan was announced, only 15
18 families accepted enrollment, out of
19 86 families that had applied. The
20 original plan damaged the school's
21 enrollment, leading to less money
22 per student, and ultimately slashing
23 their budget for the coming year.

24 Can you speak to how the

1 district will remedy that particular
2 challenge? And that is -- those are
3 my questions. Thank you for the
4 time.

5 DR. WATLINGTON:

6 Councilmember O'Rourke, in the
7 interest time, I'll just say as
8 we've moved to transition Moffett
9 Elementary to a K-4 school, and to
10 -- with middle grades proposed to
11 attend Ludlow, it requires to make
12 some investments.

13 I believe we've modified
14 that to make the investments at
15 Hackett in a -- in a -- in a
16 multiple move, kind of, change
17 there, if you will. This will allow
18 us to grow the school through 8th
19 grade, which I think is aligned with
20 what we understand a lot of feedback
21 to be. So we're trying to be
22 responsive as best we can to some,
23 if not all, of the community
24 requests.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Thank you very much, sir --

3 MR. HILL: Mr. --

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

5 Councilmember Jim Harrity, then
6 Member Bass, then Dr. Nina Ahmad,
7 Rue Landau.

8 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

9 Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 I'm just going to ask, and as a part
12 of your statement, for the responses
13 to be just direct summarized and
14 direct as quickly as possible. And
15 then I'm saying to -- for the
16 member, you can just be direct, but
17 also, I know add your level of
18 commentary, but also just being
19 direct so I can get everybody into
20 this round.

21 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: I

22 got you -- got you. Good morning.

23 Being direct, all right. I was

24 actually glad that the Mayor brought

1 up the counties this morning. I get
2 we can't --

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 Member Harrity with that big voice
5 you have, speak into that
6 microphone.

7 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
8 Yes, sir. Here we go. All right.
9 Is that better?

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Yes, sir, Member Harrity.

12 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:
13 Yeah. I feel like a DJ now.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 There you go, sir.

16 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: All
17 right listen, so our mayor, you
18 know, and --

19 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
20 No cursing, Member Harrity.

21 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: No,
22 no, no. I -- come on. It has been
23 a while, man. It has been a while.
24 I'm in a pretty --

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Please proceed, sir.

3 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

4 Thank you, though. You're right,
5 because I am a little upset. So our
6 mayor bought up the counties, and I
7 get it, you know, we don't have the
8 tax base that some of our counties
9 have and, you know, the -- we don't
10 tax the real estate as high.

11 We also don't have real
12 estate that is, you know, like they
13 do. But \$23,000 a year per student,
14 that is the average in Del. Co.,
15 Bucks, Mont Co., and Chester County
16 pays to educate their children. 90
17 percent Mont Co.; Del. Co., 90
18 percent; Bucks, 94 percent. That is
19 their graduation rates.
20 Philadelphia -- what -- remind me,
21 what do we pay about per student to
22 educate our kids? What is the
23 number?

24 DR. WATLINGTON: I'm going

1 to ask Chief Herbstman to come in so
2 we can fact check.

3 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

4 Yeah, I don't need a long number.
5 It is about nine to \$11,000 per
6 student. Doesn't take much to
7 figure out the difference in
8 education between \$23,000 per
9 student and \$11,000 per student on
10 the higher. I have said it numerous
11 times, if our kids got the same as
12 the county kids, they would shock
13 you because they have a reason to
14 work for it.

15 But what I'm saying is, I
16 get it. I get that you guys are
17 doing something, and I get that not
18 all of you have been here when this
19 catastrophe started.

20 Today is Earth Day, right?
21 Happy Earth Day, everybody, right?

22 DR. WATLINGTON: Happy
23 Earth Day.

24 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

1 Happy Earth Day. So I would like to
2 shout out all our little
3 environmentalists over at Lankenau,
4 and just -- yeah, that is right.

5 That is right. That is right, a 100
6 percent graduation rate at Lankenau.

7 But yesterday I kind of tried to
8 give you guys a little bit of a
9 distinction between the difference
10 between an environmental school and
11 a farming and agricultural school.

12 The distinction between
13 environmental schools and
14 agricultural schools lies primarily
15 in the focus of curriculum and
16 objectives. Here is that breakdown.

17 Environmental schools' focus;
18 environmental schools concentrate on
19 study of ecosystems, conserve --
20 conservation, sustainability, and
21 the impact of human activity on the
22 environment. They aim to cultivate
23 awareness, the action regarding
24 environmental issues. Agricultural

1 schools' focus; agricultural schools
2 emphasize the science and practice
3 of farming and food production.

4 The curriculum addresses
5 the techniques and technologies used
6 in agriculture, livestock
7 management, and food systems, right?
8 Key differences: Core subjects;
9 environmental schools focus on
10 ecology and conservation. While
11 agricultural schools focus on
12 farming practices and food
13 production.

14 Clearly two different
15 categories, two different kinds of
16 teaching, two different kinds of
17 curriculum, with definitely two
18 different outcomes for each. I have
19 said it yesterday, sometimes the
20 environmental schools and the
21 agricultural schools are on
22 different sides of an issue. They
23 study different things.

24 So thinking that bringing

1 them over to Saul because it is an
2 environmental -- an agricultural
3 school is going to be close or the
4 same as where they were coming from,
5 an environmental -- no, they were
6 able to concentrate on the
7 environment. When they go to Saul,
8 they are going to have to compete
9 with a program that is already
10 established, that is actually
11 studying, kind of, way different
12 stuff.

13 How are these kids supposed
14 to -- I just want to know, how do
15 you plan on not ending up phasing
16 out Lankenau once they get the Saul?
17 Because we all know that, you know,
18 the precedent of the school is going
19 to take place. Like, you said, the
20 principals have some leniency, but
21 how can we say that one school is --
22 that deals with something completely
23 different than another school are
24 interchangeable? Can you answer me

1 that question.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you,
3 Councilmember Harrity. The best way
4 I'll answer that, and I mean this in
5 all sincerity, sir, that just like
6 Carver Engineering and Science can
7 deliver a strong program, even
8 though it is not located beside the
9 Temple College of Engineering or a
10 major scientific hub, Bodine High
11 School can offer a very fine
12 international relations curriculum,
13 even though it is not located
14 adjacent to City Hall or the United
15 Nations.

16 Lankenau High School can
17 offer a very fine program being
18 merged onto the Saul campus. I
19 don't think it is dependent upon
20 being in that one location. And
21 quite sincerely, I want to note that
22 Lankenau students would still, under
23 this plan, have access to do field
24 trips and other simulations and

1 things on that campus because --

2 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

3 That is not the same --

4 DR. WATLINGTON: -- it will
5 allow us get our class --

6 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: --
7 to be able to go to that --

8 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

9 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY: --
10 campus and turn around and learn.
11 Do you have the environment and the
12 school. It is just perfect there.
13 I just don't get this interchange.
14 We got a school that has a 100
15 percent graduation rate. How many
16 schools in the City of Philadelphia
17 have a 100 percent graduation rate?
18 And I'll end with that. Thank you,
19 Council president.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Thank you, sir.

22 DR. WATLINGTON: Certainly
23 not the lion's share, and we need to
24 do more work to get all schools. I

1 will say that there is some room to
2 make some significant improvement at
3 Lankenau on the -- on the academic.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

5 Thank you, sir. Chair recognizes,
6 Councilmember Cindy Bass and
7 Dr. Nina Ahmad and -- Nina Ahmad.

8 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
9 you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Get my public -- my public school
12 education right. It is Dr. Nina
13 Ahmad. For everybody that calls her
14 Ahmad, it is Ahmad. Go ahead,
15 Member Bass.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Thank
17 you, Mr. President.

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

19 And just for the record, there is
20 four members of my leadership team.
21 I think oftentimes people mention
22 Majority Leader Katherine Gilmore-
23 Richardson and Majority Leader
24 Isaiah Thomas. But there is also

1 Deputy Whip over there, Cindy Bass.

2 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: That
3 is --

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
5 I just want to say for the record.

6 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Oh,
7 thank you, Mr. President.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
9 Please proceed.

10 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Yeah,
11 I don't trip on titles, but thank --
12 I appreciate the recognition, but
13 thank you.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Sure.

16 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: There
17 you go. Good afternoon.

18 DR. WATLINGTON: Good
19 afternoon.

20 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: So I
21 just wanted to make a statement.
22 I'm going to put my questions out
23 there and if you could respond
24 because there is a lot going on

1 here. And let me start by saying
2 that there is not one person on this
3 floor who is a member of City
4 Council that is not a strong
5 supporter of Philadelphia public
6 schools.

7 So I want to -- I just want
8 to make sure we make that plain and
9 that we have that as the lead off
10 for this conversation, because it is
11 often pitted as if you don't do what
12 we say do, then you don't support
13 this, that, or the other thing. And
14 nothing could be further from the
15 truth.

16 There is not one person on
17 this floor that has taken a single
18 vote against any level of funding
19 for the School District of
20 Philadelphia. Every member here has
21 in one way or another, supported
22 funding, not just said that they
23 support, but put that support into
24 action by taking a vote or taking

1 some sort of action to show that
2 support by providing funding for the
3 School District of Philadelphia.

4 So there should be
5 absolutely no question that this
6 body is in full support of public
7 education, and we have the receipts
8 to prove it. So as we have this
9 debate, it is important to recognize
10 the history over the last few years.
11 And as the Mayor stated earlier in
12 her comments, we have always risen
13 to the occasion without question.
14 And we have always met the moment,
15 and we have always also had some of
16 the exact same concerns while
17 meeting that moment. And so it
18 feels disingenuous that, you know,
19 we have these conversations, and we
20 get -- we almost never get the
21 answers that we're asking.

22 And those questions, year
23 after year after year, are almost
24 always the same. The concerns are

1 the same, that Council is not
2 included in the decision making.
3 And yet we bear the brunt of the
4 blame for what happens with schools
5 in the City of Philadelphia. We are
6 not -- I want to just make sure
7 everybody knows, we are not
8 included; we have not been included
9 in these decisions that affect each
10 and every one of us.

11 The community has not felt
12 included. Beyond not including
13 Council, more importantly, the
14 parents, the community members, and
15 the students. I went out to Parkway
16 Northwest, and one of the things
17 that the young folks said is, "why
18 are they not listening to us? Why
19 do they not hear what we have to
20 say? Do they not care?" The other
21 thing that we talk about year after
22 year after year, and still never get
23 a real explanation, is around the
24 allocation of scarce resources. It

1 is always questionable.

2 We just never have a clear
3 understanding as to how resources
4 and decision making is happening in
5 the school district. And yet, as I
6 said, year after year, we support;
7 we always come through, and we want
8 to come through. And at the same
9 time, it almost feels like, you
10 know, we can't keep doing the same
11 thing. It is the definition of
12 insanity, of doing the same thing
13 over and over and over and expecting
14 a different result.

15 And as usual, we are here
16 asking the same questions with
17 limited to no answers. As usual, we
18 are talking about -- we're asking
19 questions, we're not really getting
20 responses that make sense or that
21 compute. As usual, we are hearing
22 about fiscal cliffs and the deficits
23 that are coming. As usual, there is
24 a defense regarding the lack of

1 input and disguising what you all
2 will call, so-called, engagement as
3 real input in decision making.

4 And as usual, you know, we
5 talk about, you know, things that
6 don't make sense laying off up to
7 3000 or 300, but we need 2000. You
8 know, these are the kinds of
9 confusing conversations that really
10 lead to a lack of support and a lack
11 of confidence, I would say, by the
12 general public in the district.

13 So my questions are as
14 follows: why have we not considered
15 other options besides closing? That
16 would include transporting students
17 at overpopulated schools to schools
18 that are far under capacity.

19 Why have we not revisited
20 the changes to the special admit
21 policy that was done by the district
22 that led to these changes?

23 Why should we think we'll
24 get these school modernizations?

1 It reminds me of soda tax,
2 and we took those hard votes
3 because, again, we take hard votes
4 down here, and we expect folks to be
5 able to come through on what they
6 promised. We voted for the soda tax
7 saying that it was going to fund new
8 rec centers, new libraries, new
9 parks, new playgrounds.

10 And the evidence of that is
11 just completely underwhelming to
12 most citizens in the City of
13 Philadelphia. They don't feel it,
14 they don't see it, and they don't
15 believe it.

16 Dr. Watlington, you said
17 that dropping out of school was a
18 life-or-death decision. This is a
19 statistic that you said, you quoted,
20 you said that if you drop out, you
21 don't have the same life expectancy
22 as those who graduate. Now, if we
23 know that closures lead to -- some
24 young people will drop out because

1 they're not going, like Councilman
2 Jones said earlier, University City,
3 the Overbrook. Some kids are going
4 to be like, you know what? I'm just
5 not going, like, I'm not going
6 through all that. I'm not going to
7 get beat up. I'm not going to get
8 -- even worse -- something happening
9 to me. And they'll just say, you
10 know what? I'm just not going. And
11 they will drop out.

12 So what I haven't heard in
13 the conversation is knowing what we
14 know, how are -- how are you as a
15 district going to capture that
16 population of students and protect
17 them? How are we going to make sure
18 that they don't drop out? How are
19 we going to protect them? How are
20 we going to reach out and keep them
21 in the fold?

22 And finally, I want to say
23 that there are too many closures
24 west of Broad Street. If you take a

1 map of the City of Philadelphia and
2 you draw a line straight down the
3 middle of long Broad Street, most of
4 the closures that have happened,
5 whether it was 10 years ago, 12
6 years ago, or now, more than the
7 fair share of those schools are on
8 the -- on the west side of Broad
9 Street.

10 And that is based on
11 population shifts, and we understand
12 that. But what happens when those
13 neighborhoods rebound, and
14 population -- which, you know,
15 trends go all kinds of ways, right?
16 So when those neighborhoods come
17 back around with much more robust
18 population, what happens then? When
19 we put, you know, apartment units in
20 those neighborhoods, in these old
21 buildings that we've now converted
22 to apartment units, where are those
23 kids going to go to school? They're
24 going to go all the way over to the

1 east side of Broad Street too?

2 The fact of the matter is,
3 one half of the city will have a
4 whole lot more educational options
5 than the other half. There is no
6 getting around that. And I believe
7 -- I don't believe you intended it
8 this way, but I believe it is
9 irresponsible planning for our city.

10 In many areas, schools are
11 the only evidence of tax dollars
12 being reinvested and working in our
13 communities, and we just can't take
14 that away. And so there is a lot
15 going on. Philadelphians, under
16 this proposal, will pay more.
17 Undoubtedly, they'll pay more. In
18 some ways, and they'll get less in
19 other ways. There is a lot
20 happening with the closure of
21 schools, the relocation of students
22 by the thousand as proposed, the
23 questionable renovation and
24 remodeling of schools, taxes on

1 deliveries, taxes on rideshares,
2 jobs being preserved, vacancies in
3 the mix, and somehow parking tickets
4 and SEPTA rides are also being the
5 responsibility of the school
6 district. So I'm asking you --

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Member Bass, you want to ask that
9 question?

10 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: I'm
11 sorry.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 You are going to ask him a question?

14 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: Make
15 it all make sense. Make it all make
16 sense. And one last question -- one
17 question. Pickett School
18 investment; you had told me in
19 January or February, Dr. Watlington,
20 that there was going to be a \$12
21 million investment in the Pickett
22 pool. Is that still on the table?
23 And also the Marcus Foster Pool, we
24 still have -- we've been asking for

1 years and haven't gotten a response.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 All the pools being done in the
4 third, Member Bass.

5 DR. WATLINGTON: Since
6 Council President is not going to
7 give me a lot of time to answer
8 this, I'm going to be really quick.
9 I want to --

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Go ahead, sir.

12 DR. WATLINGTON: I'm going
13 to ask Colonel Hill if he'll come
14 back to the desk to speak to the
15 pools at Pickett and the other pool
16 you referenced. The other three
17 questions, I'll answer as succinctly
18 as I can. Number one, relative to
19 dropouts, yes, dropping out of
20 school is a life-or-death issue.

21 And we are going to
22 continue the work that we're doing
23 in the school district right now,
24 that in a city, in a school district

1 that typically has about 4,000 young
2 people who drop out between grades 7
3 through 12 every year, we're going
4 to continue the work that we're
5 doing right now that has resulted in
6 a reduction of 2000 -- about 2,237
7 or so dropouts. We're going to keep
8 our foot on the gas in that regard.

9 Number two, relative to the
10 question about engagement, and are
11 we listening to Philadelphians, you
12 know, relative to the problem of we
13 have a 65 percent building
14 utilization rate across the city,
15 which means that 35 percent of our
16 footprint is sitting vacant or
17 unused. We are very sensitive to
18 any recommendations to -- around
19 closure.

20 At the same time, what I
21 have said on the record, even here,
22 if we don't want us to make this
23 recommendation to close school X in
24 district A, B, or C, when folks on

1 Council say, well, take that off, I
2 have said, please tell me which
3 schools to put on -- put -- to put
4 on if we take another school off.
5 Because the only way we can address
6 that 35 percent non-utilization rate
7 is we've got to do some right sizing
8 somewhere. And I don't say that in
9 any way to be, you know --

10 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: I
11 agree with you. I think you do have
12 to do some right sizing, but the
13 right sizing isn't in closing
14 schools. The right sizing is moving
15 students from schools that are over
16 capacity to schools that are under
17 capacity. This is simple. This
18 doesn't have to be a closure
19 conversation.

20 DR. WATLINGTON: I think --
21 I think we've heard a huge theme
22 across Philadelphia, and I learned
23 that lesson the hard way. When we
24 made a decision when one of the high

1 schools closed and to move that --
2 those high school students, I
3 believe it was Building 21, to
4 Strawberry Mansion.

5 And I faced a firestorm of
6 parents on that Saturday morning and
7 said we're not doing that, and I
8 said, okay. But we're also
9 sensitive to this notion about city
10 of neighborhoods and kids having a
11 crossover. I'm not so sure we want
12 to go down the path of saying, okay,
13 we're going to transfer kids from
14 this neighborhood to other places
15 where there is space. I think that
16 could present some challenges as
17 well. I'm not saying you're wrong,
18 I'm just saying I think it presents
19 some challenges as well.

20 COUNCILMEMBER BASS: There
21 is way to do it. There is a way to
22 do it, but right sizing is more than
23 just closing schools. That is not
24 the only way to right size. Thank

1 you, Mr. President.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Thank you, Member Bass.

4 DR. WATLINGTON: I didn't
5 answer her last question, but I'll
6 pause.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

8 Sure. Answer her last question.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: You asked
10 me, you said there are two schools
11 --

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

13 Just real quick. Point of
14 information, Member Harrity. Brief
15 point of information, please.

16 COUNCILMEMBER HARRITY:

17 Brief. How about we just change the
18 rules and allow the kids? That was
19 one of the biggest complaints we
20 got, is that the rules were changed.
21 Well, change them back, right? The
22 rules were changed so that the kids
23 now don't qualify to get into
24 certain schools. Change the rules

1 back. And there is your problem;
2 the kids will be there.

3 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you.

4 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

5 Thank you, sir. Chair recognizes
6 Councilmember Dr. Nina Ahmad, then
7 Councilmember Rue Landau.

8 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank
9 you, Council President. Good
10 afternoon. It has been a long day
11 and thank you for being here and
12 sometimes facing our wrath, because
13 we all care about the same thing;
14 about our children succeeding. And
15 to the Mayor's point, you know, she
16 talked about us all working
17 together. We have felt sandbagged
18 because we got the decisions just
19 before a vote being taken.

20 So that's where some of our
21 frustration is coming from. But I
22 wanted to just piggyback on what
23 Councilmember Harrity was talking
24 about, celebrating Earth Day today,

1 and really asking the question, do
2 you value environmental science
3 education?

4 Number one, right? And if
5 you do that, then this smushing
6 together of these two schools, which
7 Councilmember Harrity outlined to
8 you how different they are, it
9 compresses these different
10 competencies, different learning
11 environments. It is not sound
12 educational planning and merging
13 this does not preserve Lankenau. It
14 would erase what makes Lankenau
15 distinct. And we've gone over this
16 all yesterday.

17 So I wanted to ask you, you
18 talk about making it an
19 environmental center, bringing
20 everybody there. Why can't you do
21 that now with Lankenau still being
22 there? Because you keep talking
23 about, they're not using their
24 space. So either you help them

1 bring back enrollment, right? You
2 can do that and give them a five-
3 year reprieve to build back
4 enrollment and operate under a
5 serious turnaround and recruitment
6 plan.

7 Two, permit multiple
8 sections of 33 students and
9 establish a clear enrollment target,
10 and then use tier one and tier two
11 criteria to create desirability and
12 stop losing interested families to
13 charter, private, or parochial.

14 We have a solution. We --
15 why are we not considering these
16 solutions? Co-locate, do this, but
17 you are like, nope, we are going to
18 shut it. First, it was merge with
19 Roxborough, didn't know what that
20 meant. Then quickly, within a month
21 you pivoted. So there is very
22 little thought that went into it to
23 such -- shut down a whole program.
24 In one month, you pivoted from one

1 to another.

2 Second, you're talking
3 about doing an environment, that is
4 not a third option; environmental
5 center. First, you're going to sell
6 the land, then you found out you
7 couldn't send the land, now you're
8 like, okay, we'll make an
9 environmental center. We already
10 have an environmental center that
11 has told us that not enough school
12 district schools use it.

13 So we could immediately
14 solve that problem and make sure we
15 have a relationship with the school
16 called Center for Environmental
17 Education and send our schools
18 children there and preserve
19 Lankenau. Every which way we look
20 at it, there are roots to preserve
21 Lankenau because it is unique.
22 There is one environmental science
23 magnet school in Philadelphia. One
24 of two in the entire state. Why

1 would you want to disrupt that when
2 we are giving you options, giving
3 you solutions? I really want an
4 answer to that.

5 DR. WATLINGTON: Good
6 afternoon. Yes, certainly happy to
7 answer the question, Councilmember
8 Ahmad. Yes, do I value
9 environmental science education?
10 Absolutely, without fear of
11 contradiction, yes, I do. As a
12 trained historian and a
13 non-scientist like yourself, I value
14 environmental science education.

15 I have been out to Lankenau
16 more than one occasion and commend
17 the staff and students for some very
18 fine work occurring there. To that
19 point, I have seen some stream work
20 out in one of the rivers. And so I
21 think it is really important hands-
22 on education.

23 I'm also trying to resolve
24 -- thank you so much -- I'm trying

1 to address the real crisis, and I'm
2 not just going to say a problem, I'm
3 going to say a crisis. I have got
4 -- we have a crisis in this city, in
5 the school district with 60,000
6 excess seats. And when we say,
7 okay, we're going to recommend to
8 close this school to make up the
9 gap, to reduce those excess seats.

10 If folks say, well, no,
11 that is not the right one, and we
12 say, okay, tell us what we ought to
13 replace it with? I'm not getting
14 that kind of feedback. Number two,
15 I think that as we said earlier,
16 environmental science education can
17 continue in it. I do not believe
18 that being located in that one
19 building is a deal breaker. I'm not
20 saying that I'm right, I'm just
21 saying that is my -- how I see it.

22 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: I'll
23 answer that now, yes, thank you.

24 DR. WATLINGTON: Look, I'm

1 not a trained scientist.

2 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Yeah,
3 thank you for that. And I will
4 refute you on this point of saying
5 that you can do Lankenau curriculum
6 in Saul. You cannot, because of the
7 way Saul is constructed. You have
8 -- first of all, you have Henry
9 Avenue going through it, bisecting
10 it, and then you have this built
11 environment and animal husbandry
12 going on.

13 All of it is -- doesn't
14 allow for children. This is what
15 they're doing now; they can study
16 migratory birds, participate in seed
17 saving, seed collection, learn
18 forestry, hydrology, conduct
19 wildlife indexing, engage in
20 sustainable crop production in this
21 environment. You cannot do it there
22 because it is not set up for that.
23 You'll have to disrupt it completely
24 and bring it back to its original

1 form before anything was built.

2 That is -- you cannot do -- you do
3 not have the resources to do that.
4 You cannot do it.

5 We gave you a solution. We
6 said to you, increase enrollment and
7 these are the steps to do it. You
8 are not answering that. I said, you
9 can co-locate resources and have
10 children still come from other
11 places. I said, use SCEE more
12 effectively. We are giving you
13 solutions and you seem to just gloss
14 over them because this particular
15 school you seem to have an issue
16 with, and I'm not understanding it.

17 Tell us what it is that is
18 stopping you from saying, we will
19 look at these options. We will look
20 at solutions. We will think about
21 how to address this because of the
22 unique nature. I'm not saying, you
23 know, it is one of 20 and you're
24 just shutting one down. You are

1 not. It is the unique setting.

2 This is the only place in
3 your district that just -- that does
4 GIS training. Only place in the
5 state that does GIS training in high
6 school.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Dr. Watlington --

9 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: You
10 are going to take that away? So
11 please answer --

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Would you --

14 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: --
15 why you do not listen to our
16 solutions.

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 Would you like to briefly respond,
19 sir?

20 DR. WATLINGTON: Very
21 briefly. I love Lankenau. Number
22 two, a few years ago, we met with
23 all the criteria-based school
24 principals. We received their

1 feedback and we worked with them and
2 brought in an external review of our
3 school selection process. And we
4 said we're going to do this, we're
5 going to continue with the school
6 selection process, and we're going
7 to make -- we are going to invite
8 principals to be a part of decision
9 making. Principals were a part of
10 that decision making, including the
11 Lankenau principal. They were able
12 to review their criteria.

13 And I want to say on the
14 record, Mr. President, in the School
15 District of Philadelphia, a number
16 of the schools that are either
17 criteria-based schools or citywide
18 admit schools are not experiencing
19 enrollment declines year over year
20 singularly because of the school
21 selection process.

22 I want to be clear, and on
23 the record, I have reviewed the
24 data, and I strongly dispute this

1 assertion that somehow a lottery,
2 even with all its shortcomings, is
3 the culprit for why we have
4 declining enrollments in some of the
5 criteria-based schools.

6 I think it is patently
7 false, and I'm happy to have more
8 conversation about that, and I think
9 schools have to be very careful
10 about that. I have always thought
11 that I'm -- if I'm leading a school,
12 we're in a competitive market;
13 district schools have to compete and
14 not just cry about charter schools.
15 Criteria-based schools have to
16 compete, they have to make the case,
17 they have to market themselves. And
18 parents fought with their feet, and
19 I fully respect that. So I do -- I
20 do think we have to keep that in
21 mind just as well. President
22 Streater, were you going to answer
23 that, sir?

24 PRESIDENT STREATER: I'm

1 good.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Thank you, sir.

4 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank
5 you, Council President. I will
6 follow up with the detailed letter
7 also refuting what you just said. I
8 just don't want to use up the time,
9 but I will send it to you, to the
10 board, as I have been sending even
11 more details with even more specific
12 examples and actual data.

13 Because for you not to
14 consider doing this means you do not
15 value environmental education and
16 you're willing to make our children
17 suffer and not be part of the global
18 conversation that the Mayor just
19 told us that we need to compete.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

21 Thank you.

22 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: I'll
23 just tell you that is what I'm
24 hearing from you.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Thank you. Chairman recognizes
3 Councilmember Rue Landau. Then we
4 have to take a short break for our
5 stenographer, but we're going to
6 work right through this.

7 Councilmember Rue Landau, you look
8 like --

9 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

10 Thank you. Thank you, Council
11 President, I hear it. Thank you so
12 much for being here again. I'm
13 going to try to go pretty quickly,
14 but I want to just start with the
15 follow up of how the school
16 selection process changes that
17 happened before you got here might
18 -- we don't do a very good job of
19 looking at what the unintended
20 consequences will be to our actions,
21 which is why we're so concerned
22 here.

23 The new lottery took place
24 in 2021, and that was the first

1 centralized lottery. And at the
2 time, it was glaringly apparent that
3 we didn't have algebra in all middle
4 schools in order to enable people to
5 the kids to get to Masterman and
6 also to succeed in the high schools.

7 But still now, we don't
8 have algebra in all the schools that
9 we need, so we're not fixing the
10 problems. Also to -- that we're not
11 fixing the problems that we need in
12 order to make sure that all children
13 have their success.

14 The second thing to say, I
15 think it is a little hard to imagine
16 that you're saying that the school
17 selection process didn't pull kids
18 from their local schools to other
19 schools, which is causing some of
20 the dis-enrollment. It just did.
21 We have to look at the consequences
22 of our actions, and it is incredibly
23 important as we're dealing with
24 deferred maintenance now from years

1 past.

2 I want to go back to
3 Southwark Elementary that I was at
4 the other day as well. We have some
5 wonderful Southwark parents and
6 students here today. The
7 descriptions of the bathroom issues
8 were so outrageous, but I have --
9 I'm going to focus on one piece that
10 we didn't get to yet.

11 Many of the problems at the
12 bathrooms were also just about locks
13 on the doors or doors taken off of
14 the bathroom. How hard can it be to
15 change and to fix a lock in a
16 bathroom that you've got that
17 planned for 2032? Please tell me
18 that.

19 DR. WATLINGTON: Totally
20 agree with you. When a lot needs to
21 be changed, we ought to get to it no
22 matter what -- no matter what the
23 other circumstances are, that ought
24 to be done pretty quickly. I agree

1 with you.

2 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: But
3 when you know that, I'm sorry, we
4 sit here, I tell you every single
5 time we're working with facts and
6 trust, and everybody comes in here
7 and says, trust us, trust us. There
8 is no question here; Southwark has
9 been organized. They've been
10 advocating for this. This isn't new
11 information that you're finding out
12 today. These are simple fixes that
13 can happen.

14 And they need to -- the
15 entire process needs to be looked at
16 to see where the problems are.
17 Including, you said you have 22
18 plumbing positions available and
19 only eight that are filled. Maybe
20 we could take an opportunity now on
21 the record to talk about what other
22 skilled trades you have, what
23 positions you have available, and
24 maybe we could talk to some of our

1 labor union friends and see if they
2 want to fill the jobs.

3 DR. WATLINGTON: There is
4 some funding in the upcoming capital
5 improvement plan to get after some
6 of that quicker, rather than later.
7 But not all of it. Colonel?

8 MR. HILL: Thank you, sir.
9 Yes, ma'am, we have applied for a
10 school improvement grant. I believe
11 the number is approximately \$1.8
12 million. The work, in terms of
13 addressing Southwark restroom needs
14 will begin immediately.

15 Again, we're working with
16 the school community. We are not
17 asking folks; our students, our
18 young students to suffer through not
19 having access to the restroom.
20 Measures are being taken right now
21 to relieve the tension and the
22 frustration and unacceptable
23 conditions regarding restrooms at
24 Southwark. That will happen, and it

1 will be done by the beginning -- you
2 will see the results of it going
3 into the next school year, not in
4 2032.

5 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

6 Thank you. This is one of so many
7 other schools though, so we would
8 like updates on others. Also, could
9 you please submit to the Chair the
10 skilled positions you have in the
11 maintenance department? What is
12 filled and what are vacancies? And
13 I want to get to one other issue
14 which is again, kind of, functions
15 of the world that are causing a
16 lower enrollment and which schools
17 are being affected.

18 So we know that ICE has
19 been out in Philadelphia doing their
20 violent tactics and spreading fear
21 and terrorizing communities.
22 Because of that, there is a -- there
23 are many families where students are
24 scared to go to school. We know

1 that this is causing decreased
2 participation in the schools right
3 now. Not enrollment necessarily,
4 but the kids aren't going to class.

5 And I'm not going to name
6 the schools that have come to me
7 because I don't want anything to
8 happen to them. But there are at
9 least three schools that I know
10 about where they are -- children are
11 not going to school, and because of
12 that, they are being told that they
13 are going to have a decrease in
14 teachers and support staff going
15 forward.

16 We all know with our
17 organizing here in Philadelphia and
18 what is happening around the
19 country; we will get past this. We
20 will get ICE to stop terrorizing our
21 communities. How many schools are
22 being harmed with a decrease in
23 teachers and support staff right now
24 based on ICE activity, keeping

1 enrollment -- keeping student
2 participation down?

3 DR. WATLINGTON: Really
4 quickly, I want to answer two
5 questions. Your last question I
6 didn't get to. Since the lottery
7 has come up multiple times, I do
8 want Council to know, Mr. President,
9 that three-and-a-half years ago, we
10 wanted to instill confidence in
11 Philadelphia, that all the issues
12 that parents and family members
13 brought up about the audit, the
14 lottery would get a full review.
15 Because we wanted a -- the best
16 review possible, we didn't ask our
17 internal research team to do it. We
18 didn't even ask Penn or Temple to do
19 it.

20 We went out to the private
21 marketplace and wanted to get a
22 major auditing firm to come into the
23 School District of Philadelphia,
24 which rarely happens in school

1 districts. We wanted folks like
2 KPMG, Deloitte,
3 PricewaterhouseCoopers. Accenture
4 accepted the work. And every year,
5 subsequent to that first year,
6 Accenture does a review of our
7 lottery, an external review, to ask
8 the question, are we -- is it doing
9 what it is designed to do and what a
10 process improvement that need to
11 occur.

12 So we've made great
13 progress in implementation of the
14 lottery, and I won't go into it for
15 purposes of the time. Also, the
16 decline in -- that we're seeing in
17 school enrollments, which have
18 turned around in the past couple of
19 years by 783 students. But the
20 historic 10-year decline was driven
21 more by -- historically has been
22 driven by declining birth rates.

23 The fact that over a
24 10-year period more students left

1 the district schools to go to
2 charters. That seems to be
3 balancing out and reversing in some
4 -- in some parts of the city.

5 We didn't see a major
6 impact of ICE in school communities
7 last school year because we looked
8 at the data month over month. This
9 year, we're continuing to look at
10 that as things in some places seem
11 to be ratchet up -- ratcheted up in
12 terms of anxiety. If you would be
13 kind enough to share with me
14 offline, any of those schools, I'll
15 personally take a look at it and
16 respond back to you in writing how
17 we will review and support them if
18 indeed that is an impact.

19 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:
20 Thank you. I want -- I think, you
21 know, I'm a huge fan of the public
22 school system. I want to do
23 everything I possibly can, as I know
24 all the colleagues do, to make you

1 guys thrive. But there -- we got to
2 look at the decisions we make now
3 and what we see in the future. And
4 I have now been around long enough
5 that I have seen them.

6 My son was a part of that
7 first lottery class with -- you
8 didn't do it, the racist essay and a
9 variety of other things that got us
10 to this place. There is no longer
11 an essay, I just want you to know,
12 just -- we -- they reverse that
13 immediately. I'm going to put one
14 question on the record and send you
15 a couple of others, but I wanted to
16 know that you have a one-to-one
17 device model, which ensures all
18 students can use Chromebooks at
19 school and at home. Are we making
20 good on this commitment? Is there a
21 Chromebook available to every
22 student? How much of the stock is
23 nearing the end of its useful life?
24 And do we have a plan and the funds

1 to replace them? I don't --

2 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, we're
3 committed to every student having a
4 one-to-one Chromebook ratio, and we
5 have a replacement plan. I can't
6 remember the number of years, but
7 we've been moving forward with the
8 replenishment plan. I'll follow up
9 with more details on the record.

10 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

11 Thank you very much.

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

13 Do one more before we break.

14 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: Yes.

15 Thank you. I wanted to talk about
16 student SEPTA passes. As you -- as
17 you know, I have been working on; I
18 really want to expand these fare
19 passes. They end at 8 o'clock at
20 night. They are only working during
21 -- when school is open. They don't
22 work over the summer. They don't
23 work on the weekends.

24 Can you detail what

1 students are currently eligible for
2 SEPTA student fare cards? What is
3 the structure used to pay for these
4 cards? What would it cost to expand
5 these cards to students who live
6 within 1.5 miles of their school
7 ensuring they have access to all
8 Philadelphia has to offer? And we
9 know that grades are simply not
10 enough to get our students into
11 quality colleges, university, and
12 other programs.

13 What would it cost to
14 expand the hours the cards can be
15 used so we can ensure students
16 always have transportation to work,
17 study, attend events, go to
18 internships, et cetera?

19 DR. WATLINGTON: With
20 President's permission, I would like
21 to ask our chief financial officer,
22 Mike Herbstman, to speak to that.
23 He routinely works with SEPTA and
24 can provide the data -- those

1 numbers.

2 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

3 Thank you.

4 MR. HERBSTMAN: Good
5 afternoon. Mike Herbstman, chief
6 financial officer for the district,
7 for the record. So right now, we've
8 looked at the expansion, if we were
9 going to include all students for
10 weekends and for the summer, if
11 we're just looking at district
12 operated schools, that expansion
13 would cost approximately \$79 million
14 per year.

15 If we also included charter
16 students in that, that amount would
17 raise to about \$136 million. To the
18 other parts, I would have to return
19 in writing exactly what the current
20 criteria is for -- which students
21 currently receive it. Those
22 students I know are high school
23 students, and I think down to 5th
24 grade if they are part of a school

1 that goes up to 8th grade. Was
2 there another part to it as well?

3 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: If
4 you're under age 12, you go for
5 free. 12 or under, you go for free
6 anyway. It is 1.5 miles from the
7 school. It is from 5:30 a.m. to
8 8:00 p.m., and it is only on the
9 days the schools are available.

10 So maybe you and I can work
11 on some good concrete numbers of
12 what it means to expand those hours
13 at night or weekends and weekends
14 and holidays.

15 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes. And
16 just to clarify, the numbers that I
17 gave were just for the students that
18 do not have the free passes. So it
19 would be 5th through 12th grade
20 students that are not currently
21 eligible for the program.

22 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU: So
23 it is students who are not in the
24 1.5 miles?

1 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes.

2 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

3 Okay. \$79 million for students who
4 are not in the 1.5 miles, but also
5 to expand to weekends and summer?

6 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes.

7 COUNCILMEMBER LANDAU:

8 Okay. We'll talk -- we'll tweak
9 that a little. Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Can I get one brief point of
12 information. Member Dr. Anthony
13 Phillips.

14 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:

15 Just a brief point of information on
16 this entire topic. I just wanted to
17 make sure that myself and the public
18 is very clear, Dr. Watlington and
19 Board President, Streater, if you
20 mind just explaining what does
21 modernization mean for most of these
22 schools and what does renovation --
23 I just want further clarity on these
24 classifications you're giving for

1 school improvements, is it just like
2 bathroom improvements, wall -- you
3 know, wall improvements? Have you
4 thought that through? Just on it.

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
6 Smart boards?

7 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.
8 Councilmember Dr. Phillips,
9 modernization means different things
10 in different schools. In some
11 schools, it can mean things like
12 replacing bathrooms. It can mean
13 replacing HVAC systems, heating
14 systems that are old or that are
15 broken down, air conditioning
16 systems. It could mean replacing
17 boilers that are no longer firing or
18 working appropriately.

19 Some are electrical
20 infrastructure so that when they
21 bring in air conditioning units to
22 put in the -- in the windows, they
23 plug them in, they actually work and
24 don't shut off the electrical

1 circuits. Some of it is painting,
2 some of it is lighting. The lion's
3 share of it is not building brand
4 new, complete new schools. There
5 are two or three in this plan, a lot
6 of this is infrastructure that gets
7 us to this outcome. It gets us to
8 the point that we can reduce the
9 number of buildings with
10 unsatisfactory or poor ratings from
11 85 to zero.

12 Not all of the schools
13 would be Taj Mahals brand new, but
14 they would not be in poor or
15 unsatisfactory ratings, and they
16 would look cosmetically much better.
17 Think about Frankford High School,
18 for example, where there was a \$29
19 million refresh. It will give you
20 one example. For the few new
21 schools we built, which will not be
22 most of them, think of T.M. Peirce,
23 Cassidy, AMY at James Martin, et
24 cetera. And you think of -- about

1 schools like, is it Forrest, that
2 got a major renovation?

3 MR. HILL: Yes, sir.
4 Forrest and Pollock.

5 DR. WATLINGTON: Pollock.

6 COUNCILMEMBER PHILLIPS:
7 Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to
8 -- hopefully if you could share out
9 with -- that with the schools once
10 you do that. Because I don't want
11 the expectation that they see
12 themselves on a list, they're about
13 to get this brand new school, or I
14 think that is just very important
15 also for communities to know too.
16 And hopefully you can work with them
17 to talk about what that looks like;
18 modernization, so they get the needs
19 that they want as well.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Thank you very much. Council
22 hearing will be at ease until 2:45.
23 Chair recognizes Councilmember
24 Squilla.

1 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: On
2 the list there?

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
4 You on there.

5 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: All
6 right.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 Yes, sir.

9 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:
10 Could I have one question?

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
12 Before we leave?

13 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:
14 Yes. I know you want to go to
15 lunch, but I appreciate --

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 I don't want to go to lunch, I want
18 to make sure the stenographer gets a
19 chance to get a break at her
20 request.

21 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: All
22 right. I'll wait until we come
23 back.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Thank you.

2 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: All
3 right. thanks.

4 (Lunch recess.)

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

6 It is rock and roll, you-all. We
7 got to push through. We got
8 individuals here who have to come up
9 for public comment. Chair
10 recognizes Councilmember Kendra
11 Brooks, then Councilmember Quetcy
12 Lozada, then Member Isaiah Thomas.
13 Okay.

14 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: It
15 is my turn, you said?

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 I said Councilmember Kendra Brooks.

18 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: Oh,
19 I'm sorry. I'm --

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 Then Councilmember Lozada then
22 Member Isaiah Thomas.

23 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: I
24 got you. I got you. I didn't --

1 I'm --

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 Squilla is in the queue, so when he
4 comes back -- actually, it is his
5 turn, but he is not here now. So go
6 ahead, Member Brooks.

7 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: All
8 right. Thank you. So one thing I'm
9 deeply concerned about is what
10 transitions report is going to look
11 like for parents. This information
12 is a key part of any closure plan,
13 and I have not been able to get
14 direct answers about what this will
15 look like.

16 If you are planning on
17 taking a vote to close schools, this
18 needs to be in place and talked
19 about with parents because they will
20 have questions as soon as any
21 closure is voted on. And I want to
22 know what the portfolio of work
23 would look like from the district?

24 And this includes -- I have

1 a series of questions; who within
2 the school district will be assigned
3 to this work? What support will be
4 given to parents?

5 Will the support be
6 accessible to people who work for a
7 living? What will the district be
8 doing to accommodate families with
9 children who have IEPs? And how
10 will this team work with
11 Councilmembers given our office will
12 be hearing directly from communities
13 about the impact of our constituents
14 -- the impact from our constituents?

15 PRESIDENT STREATER: Just
16 before Dr. Watlington answers, just
17 as a reminder, whenever the
18 resolution comes before the Board of
19 Education, it will not be a
20 resolution to close schools. It'll
21 be a resolution to set off a process
22 mandated by law where there will be
23 school closures at some future
24 juncture, just for information's

1 sake. But Dr. Watlington, please
2 answer the question.

3 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you,
4 President Streater. And
5 Councilmember Brooks, I would say
6 two things, first, the district is
7 already organized into learning
8 networks; geographic learning
9 networks, to push resources closer
10 to parents and families. We did
11 that a couple of years ago.

12 Number two, in addition to
13 assistant superintendents, the
14 people who supervise schools in
15 their -- in their respective
16 learning networks, we are going to
17 staff up a transition office that
18 would report out of my office.
19 Remember unlike 2012, '13, where
20 schools were closed and the savings
21 came, not so much from just closing
22 the schools, but more of the savings
23 came from the personnel costs; the
24 salaries of teachers, principals,

1 counselors, social work, climate
2 managers, et cetera.

3 We are taking some of those
4 resources and moving them with
5 children. And we're taking some of
6 those resources to staff up a
7 dedicated transition office that
8 will be located right out of my
9 office. I will personally be
10 working with that team and the
11 leadership in that team. Once we
12 get some direction from the board of
13 where to go, that staff team will be
14 staffed up pretty quickly.

15 What sorts will -- supports
16 will they provide? It will be a
17 one-stop shop for whatever parents
18 need. They need help with tutoring,
19 transportation, school visits, have
20 -- get -- some get-to-know-you
21 activities, social and emotional and
22 anxiety support and help. Whatever
23 is needed, we will make sure that
24 happens, and that team will make

1 sure that in transition,
2 individualized education plans are
3 followed to the letter.

4 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

5 Okay. So I have a follow up from
6 that question, particularly as it
7 relates to students with
8 disabilities and special needs. One
9 of the things that I feel like needs
10 to be answered is to understand how
11 support staff in schools will be
12 affected by these potential
13 closures? And what will this look
14 like and will they be able to follow
15 their students? And were these
16 trade-offs part of your
17 calculations? And can you speak to
18 the data behind it?

19 DR. WATLINGTON: By federal
20 law, individualized education plans
21 require that resources and supports
22 follow a student. Councilmember
23 Kendra Brooks has a child who leaves
24 from school A to go to school B, and

1 your child has speech language --
2 well, I won't use speech language.
3 I -- well, I'll use speech language,
4 speech language support three days a
5 week for one hour, those supports
6 would travel with you.

7 And this team would help
8 make sure, in addition to the very
9 fine work that our Office of Special
10 Education and Diverse Learners is
11 already doing, there will be an
12 extra layer to make sure nothing
13 falls through the crack.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Can I get a brief point of
16 information on that -- on that line
17 of questioning? I'll be real brief.
18 So the students from Lankenau, and I
19 had no idea you had blind and deaf
20 students that attend that school.
21 So that was new information to me.
22 How would there be a seamless
23 transition to the new school, I
24 guess, what you saw, in terms of

1 accommodating the deaf and blind
2 children?

3 DR. WATLINGTON: I'm sorry,
4 say that -- I didn't quite hear you,
5 Mr. President.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 I thought I was clear. Did anybody
8 else not hear what I was saying?

9 DR. WATLINGTON: I did not
10 hear you. Not that I didn't
11 understand you --

12 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
13 Sorry, sir.

14 DR. WATLINGTON: I can't
15 hear you.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 There are deaf and blind students
18 that attend Lankenau, right?

19 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes.

20 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
21 And they're going to go to Saul,
22 right? It is the same line of
23 questioning; I'm following up with
24 -- in regards to Member Brooks.

1 What has the preliminary work has
2 been done for that seamless
3 transition of deaf and blind
4 students for Saul?

5 DR. WATLINGTON: Number
6 one, we've identified staff, that I
7 will not speak to on the record yet,
8 who will assist me specifically in
9 that transition. Number two, we
10 built into the calendar a full year
11 of planning so that there are no
12 hiccups, missteps, or faux pas, if
13 you will. And No. 3, we've been
14 very intentional for the 17, former
15 20 current 17, schools that are on
16 the current list of recommendations
17 to President Streater and his board.

18 We've mapped out what the
19 student population looks like. The
20 fact that we're not talking about it
21 on the record, we don't want to get
22 ahead of the process.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 Okay. Now just a new perspective.

1 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 But I wasn't expecting regarding
4 that conversation with that
5 particular school in terms of
6 children with disabilities. Briefly
7 wrap up for us when you get a
8 chance, Member Brooks?

9 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS: Yes.

10 Just -- because you may -- so when
11 you talk about the -- there is a
12 plan. So are we taking
13 consideration, and I'm thinking
14 about some of the districts that --
15 some of the -- my council colleagues
16 who have multiple elementary schools
17 that are closing in their district
18 that may have special needs support
19 or special Ed support, and some kind
20 of plan.

21 Are we accounting for where
22 these children are going, so it is
23 not an overflow or influx of certain
24 children with various disabilities

1 in the same classroom? Or like, is
2 it going to be a clear transition
3 path, like, that not to influx
4 certain schools with additional
5 children with special needs support
6 that we aren't able to accommodate.

7 And I'm thinking about
8 children with neuro divergent issues
9 and so many -- behavior issues and
10 all that. I'm like, is there any
11 consideration taken, especially, I
12 want to think about in like, I think
13 the 5th and the 7th District where
14 it is like a high influx of young
15 people, young children in those
16 schools that will be transitioning
17 and moving around. And do we have a
18 plan for that? Because the staffing
19 ratio and the class size and the
20 staffing support is very key. And
21 some of those children need to have
22 the -- they don't work well with
23 transitions.

24 So what is it -- so it

1 can't be an afterthought. That is
2 what I'm saying. It can't be an
3 afterthought when we're moving
4 multiple kids into the same class
5 without the adequate support. And I
6 just don't want us to be moving
7 quickly and then our kids will be
8 lost and stuck.

9 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes,
10 ma'am. Your point is well taken,
11 and you're absolutely correct.
12 Whether it is children with neuro
13 divergent issues, specific language
14 -- specific learning disabled, or
15 children with mobility issues, we
16 are thoughtfully working through how
17 to make sure that balls do not get
18 dropped with children.

19 And in addition to the
20 learning network offices, the office
21 that reports out of my office, has
22 all of those issues related to
23 specific -- specifically related to
24 students with disabilities. We have

1 an eye toward children who qualify
2 for English language learner status.
3 And we're looking in communities
4 that are -- have very high
5 concentrations of poverty, how to
6 have that extra touch and not just
7 leave things to chance for any of
8 our -- any of our children.

9 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS:

10 Okay. Thank you.

11 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

12 Thank you very much. Chair
13 recognizes Councilmember Squilla.
14 I'm going to take a moment of
15 personal privilege just to adjust
16 one small part of public comment.
17 So Member Squilla, you go ahead and
18 you have some constituents that are
19 going to be a part of your line of
20 questioning.

21 And so, Member Streater --
22 Mr. President, and school
23 Superintendent Watlington, could you
24 all -- ask your questions first and

1 then we'll have State Representative
2 Elizabeth Fiedler to come sit on the
3 side of the dais with her students.

4 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

5 Thank you. Thank you,
6 Mr. President. And my questions
7 are, and I first want to thank you
8 for your willingness to meet with
9 the State Rep Fiedler, myself, and
10 Senator Saval's office on the
11 concerns of Southwark and what it
12 means. We have students that are
13 here today; I believe they were
14 sitting upstairs, oh, they are here
15 in the back now.

16 And hearing there's
17 concerns, and I want to thank you
18 for also listening and hearing there
19 is concerns, but please give them a
20 round of applause for coming to join
21 us here. They have shared with us
22 the challenges of going to school,
23 trying to learn in the school that
24 is probably one of the best examples

1 of how diversity can build a great
2 way to educate individuals. And
3 have to feel like they have to hold
4 in going to the bathroom until they
5 get home, because of some of the
6 challenges that were mentioned
7 earlier in our hearing and
8 testimony.

9 And I want to thank you for
10 your willingness to look at
11 reassessing these schools. And I
12 know that President Streater and
13 Dr. Watlington, you agreed to look
14 at the plumbing that really wasn't
15 part of the original assessment to
16 really show what we can do
17 immediately to address that. And we
18 all know that temporary bathrooms is
19 not the answer to have that. It is
20 great that that is a consideration
21 in the meantime.

22 But the other issue is,
23 beside the agreement to reassess the
24 criteria of what Southwark -- the

1 needs are and need based to do, that
2 the modernization plan that comes to
3 2020 -- 2032 and 33. The school is
4 in immediate need of the bathrooms,
5 but also the remediation and the
6 removal of the rodent issue that is
7 in the school.

8 When you have young kids in
9 the classrooms that feel
10 uncomfortable whether eating in the
11 cafeteria or in a classroom doing
12 reading time, and they see a mouse
13 or somebody run -- somebody --
14 something run by them it is really
15 hard to learn. And, you know, I
16 want to give the principal, the
17 teachers, the staff, and everybody
18 at that school for really doing an
19 outstanding job to put up with these
20 challenges and yet still be able to
21 succeed academically.

22 And these kids that have
23 been -- they're brilliant minds, and
24 they're out there now advocating for

1 cleaner places and cleaner bathrooms
2 and active working bathrooms so that
3 they could learn better.

4 What are we doing in the
5 immediate -- and we talked about the
6 summer coming up. What are we doing
7 in the immediate to address the
8 plumbing issues, the bathrooms that
9 go down? I know that it is easier
10 to get new fixtures and toilets,
11 urinals, and doors for these
12 bathrooms. And will this be
13 completed before the beginning of
14 the next school year?

15 DR. WATLINGTON: Two things
16 -- thank you, Councilmember Squilla.
17 I'll say two things, one, we are
18 exploring how quickly we can get
19 significant improvements made at
20 Southwark, in particular through the
21 capital improvement budget ahead of
22 that timeline with the facilities
23 plan.

24 Two, the team is looking at

1 that 2031, 32 date to see what the
2 options for moving that up are. And
3 three, there is a state grant afoot
4 related to how to do this. With the
5 capital improvement plan, we put
6 ourselves on an expedited timeline,
7 not to wait for the third week in
8 May, but somewhere -- sometime
9 within the next week to 10 days, we
10 should be able to have a more -- a
11 clear answer in terms of a timeline
12 about how soon that can be done and
13 whether it can be -- get -- done
14 over or by the summer.

15 The last time I was at
16 Southwark, I believe with principal
17 Luka, I thought Southwark was
18 interesting, and that you have those
19 two big restrooms in the basement.
20 So it is a unique, interesting
21 design. The team has gone in and
22 gone underground to flush out some
23 things. But, you know, when you've
24 got old infrastructure, you flush

1 out one thing, you don't know what
2 you're going to find next.

3 And even when you clean
4 those places really well, when you
5 ring a thing that is just kind of
6 stuck in the floor, you got to rip
7 that stuff out, just like a very old
8 house and just redo it. Please know
9 that we will do everything we can to
10 expedite those problems as quickly
11 as we can. And we'll give you a
12 more definitive timeline. I don't
13 want to sit here and give you an
14 artificial deadline that we've not
15 been able to confirm that we
16 absolutely can do it just yet. But
17 we're moving as quick as we can. I
18 promise you we'll follow up.

19 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: And
20 I know you've committed to working
21 with an advisory committee --

22 DR. WATLINGTON: Correct.

23 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: --
24 set up with the school to discuss

1 that. And hopefully by May 20th,
2 22nd, there is an assessment
3 valuation done that you had said.
4 But also, like this summer, it is
5 really important, and I know that we
6 have talked, and most likely now,
7 there is not going to be any
8 activity within the school to do
9 like a really full cleaning. Clean
10 that school from top to bottom so
11 that when the staffers come in
12 there, they could start at a clean
13 facility instead of trying to catch
14 up on everything that is happening.

15 I know you put a new fire
16 alarm system in there, some
17 electrical work that is going on.
18 But these challenges that the
19 students face, and we all agree, and
20 nobody expects a student to have to
21 go through these things while
22 they're learning.

23 So this also comes from
24 deferred maintenance and challenges

1 that we put off in the past. And so
2 we want to make sure when we're
3 talking about modernization, some of
4 that questions that this is a
5 modernization, this is --

6 DR. WATLINGTON:

7 Absolutely. Absolutely.

8 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: --

9 making the school functional, right?
10 And I know Councilmember O'Rourke,
11 Councilmember Landau, myself along
12 with other Councilmembers are down
13 there with State Rep Fiedler and
14 Senator Saval's office, so this is a
15 united push. And we want to help,
16 like, we're not here just to throw
17 blame and do it, but we want to
18 help, whether the resources, and I
19 know rep Fiedler is going to have
20 some -- a couple things to say.

21 But I think it is really
22 important to know that as they, as
23 they advocate for this, and as the
24 students, the teachers, the parents

1 advocate, the frustration level is
2 so high. So we have to -- we have
3 to expect that when things don't go
4 right and we don't meet these
5 things, we have really nothing to
6 hold the school district to, because
7 we don't have any dates of when
8 these are going to be done. Not
9 yet.

10 But we want to make sure
11 that they have clear signals of
12 what's going to happen from now
13 until the next school year, and then
14 clear signals of what is going to
15 happen as far as modernization.

16 DR. WATLINGTON:

17 Absolutely.

18 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: So
19 I just want to ask one quick
20 question before we bring somebody
21 else on and it is about Hackett.
22 There is just a new decision that
23 came out on Hackett; creating
24 Hackett from K-5 going to K-8. This

1 decision was just proposed Monday,
2 and I understand it is going to be
3 voted on on Thursday.

4 You know, I think the
5 reaction is, is it good or bad or
6 indifferent? There are challenges.
7 We don't know what the plan is. We
8 don't know -- the facility is
9 already full. We have a lot of
10 classrooms that take care of people
11 with different abilities. And we
12 want to make sure that the school
13 could handle this change and the
14 challenges that go along with that.

15 But without a plan, just an
16 announcement without a plan, we're
17 getting inundated with concerns.
18 And we need to make sure that the
19 district and the board understand
20 that and really have to be able to
21 give that plan. You announced it on
22 Monday, possibly voting on the
23 ability to do these things on
24 Thursday, but nobody has any idea of

1 how that would play out.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: Let me
3 just -- I want to make sure that we
4 didn't get something wrong. You
5 wanted -- you were supportive, you
6 wanted us -- wanted us to make some
7 modifications relative to Moffett
8 that related to this? Is --

9 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:
10 Well, no, this was Hackett.

11 DR. WATLINGTON: Correct.

12 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:
13 Hackett School went from -- went to
14 a K-8.

15 DR. WATLINGTON: I think
16 this was part of the desire not to
17 have Moffett as a middle school.
18 Did we get that part?

19 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:
20 Yes.

21 DR. WATLINGTON: Was that
22 -- we were correct in that
23 understanding?

24 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

1 Yes.

2 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: So
3 as you correct something, you create
4 another issue, right?

5 DR. WATLINGTON: Right.
6 Sure.

7 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: And
8 as you create another issue, it may
9 be a solution, but nobody knows what
10 the plan is. Like you fix the one
11 thing, but by fixing one thing and
12 making something else, and nobody
13 understands the process, that is a
14 challenge. So if we could see if
15 what that full plan is; is there
16 money being put into Hackett? Is
17 there going to be an extension? Is
18 there going to -- how are they going
19 to use the rooms that are currently
20 used?

21 DR. WATLINGTON: I want to
22 make sure that you get an answer.
23 If you allow me to bring either
24 Deputy Superintendent Hill or Senior

1 Advisor Landau to the desk, I would
2 -- I would like to them to have at
3 least 45 seconds to just give them a
4 quick high-level answer to that.

5 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: A
6 quick update, and then maybe a
7 meeting or an understanding of a --
8 to -- so we could share that with
9 our constituents that, you know,
10 when I had -- get 50, 60 emails
11 overnight, and we want to be able to
12 at least give them an answer. I
13 could say I could ask the school
14 district, but that is not a good
15 answer.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 And for the record, that is the
18 Appropriations Chairman for City
19 Council.

20 DR. WATLINGTON: Senior
21 Advisor Claire Landau, our senior
22 advisor --

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 Excuse me. We have a point of

1 information. Member Lozada?

2 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

3 Councilmember Squilla, I just want
4 to -- point of information. The
5 Hackett, Moffett, Ludlow,
6 conversation kind of all was going
7 all together with the families and
8 parents of all three of those
9 schools. And so I know -- I make --
10 I want to make sure that I put that
11 on the record because I don't -- I
12 don't want people to think that the
13 school district made that decision
14 overnight on their own.

15 It was a conversation that
16 we have had with community parents
17 of the three schools, because I
18 think all three of them were
19 impacted by the original
20 recommendation that they made. So I
21 just wanted to put that on the
22 record.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

24 Thank you. Please respond.

1 MS. LANDAU: Good
2 afternoon. Claire Landau, senior
3 advisor for Strategic Planning.
4 Thank you for the question,
5 Councilmember Squilla. This is, as
6 you had said, a result of the change
7 in the recommendation regarding
8 Hackett and Moffett. Originally,
9 the recommendation was to merge the
10 catchments of the two schools so
11 that students in the two -- in both
12 schools would go to the Hackett
13 building for K-4, and then Moffett
14 for 5-8. Of course, we had heard
15 strong concern from the Moffett
16 community, but I think as you've
17 seen and had seen, we had received a
18 lot of strong support from the
19 Hackett community.

20 And I think the outreach is
21 in part in, you know, the concern in
22 a change. The recommendation,
23 though, will mean that Hackett will
24 grow to become K-8. We have taken

1 the funding that would have gone for
2 the Moffett, not -- for some
3 portions of the Moffett facilities
4 upgrade to facilitate its transition
5 to a middle school. And
6 re-allocated that to Hackett so that
7 the Hackett facility will have the
8 upgrades necessary to make those
9 changes.

10 And we will certainly be
11 coming out to the community to have
12 meetings and to speak with them
13 about how this will work. It will
14 be happening in partnership with the
15 community. So we'll have a planning
16 year, and then it will grow one year
17 at a time. So it'll be a very slow
18 phase-in that we'll do with the
19 community. Certainly, with you --
20 in partnership with you --

21 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:
22 Would this be done -- would this be
23 done before the vote?

24 MS. LANDAU: The meeting or

1 --

2 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA:

3 Yeah, the meeting.

4 MS. LANDAU: -- what

5 portion?

6 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: --

7 so the students -- so the people

8 understand what the plan is, because

9 that is part of the challenge. The

10 plan was just released on Monday and

11 the voting Thursday, and nobody

12 knows. I didn't even know that the

13 funding was being switched from

14 Moffett to Hackett.

15 PRESIDENT STREATER: In

16 full transparency, again, I think

17 whenever there is a resolution that

18 goes before the board things aren't

19 going to instantaneously happen,

20 right? There is some thought to the

21 ability --

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Can I get a point of information,

24 sir?

1 PRESIDENT STREATER: Happy.

2 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

3 I think what Member --

4 PRESIDENT STREATER: I
5 wanted to put a little more meat on
6 the bone if I could.

7 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
8 -- Squilla is referring to -- I'm
9 going to let you respond. Because
10 we deal with this on a legislative
11 process as well. Like, we'll
12 introduce a bill and then there is a
13 hearing, and then we'll go through
14 the legislative process of getting
15 feedback and so forth and decide if
16 we're going to vote on the
17 initiative or not. So I'm sure you
18 were going into that same direction,
19 meaning just because it is
20 introduced doesn't mean -- go ahead,
21 sir.

22 PRESIDENT STREATER: Yes.
23 So there is a resolution that gives
24 direction from the board to the

1 district, not just to do the plan,
2 but that for there to be schedules
3 and connections with proposed
4 closures, consolidations,
5 relocations, mergers,
6 reconfigurations, openings, and name
7 changes to provide ample time for
8 what needs to happen.

9 So I think there is -- I
10 think -- I understand there is a
11 feeling of we have to, you know,
12 kind of get what we need to get in
13 before this -- the vote before the
14 resolution. But it -- the way this
15 is designed is to really try to lean
16 on the district by way of the board
17 to ensure that these things are
18 thought of before we -- before we
19 move down the -- down the road.

20 And I'm going to be honest
21 about something else too, the
22 Clayton Center is half the size it
23 should be. So Senior Advisor Landau
24 is the one who is the principal, I

1 guess, I'm going to say implementor,
2 around Accelerate Philly.

3 So the longer that we have
4 her, kind of, do this -- which is
5 fine, we -- her ability to focus on
6 student achievement through
7 Accelerate Philly is fall -- so I
8 think one of the tensions that I
9 think as the Board President I feel
10 comfortable saying here is, I think
11 if we have the staff, the time and
12 resources to come up with
13 contingency plans for six or seven,
14 eight iterations of a plan, we would
15 have done it.

16 But I think we're the type
17 of board -- the school district
18 where unfortunately we have to have
19 planning years. And the
20 superintendent needs a direction
21 from the board that before I marshal
22 all of these resources, I need to
23 know what direction I'm going in, in
24 the event that the Board of

1 Education or there is -- or whoever
2 else is unwilling to do it.

3 And I think that is the --
4 that is the elephant in the room
5 that, you know, I'm not happy to
6 talk about because it is a huge
7 weakness of the school district.

8 We've seen it in other
9 ways, right? You know, we'll say,
10 "Hey, we'll work on it, but where
11 are the plans? Where are the
12 plans?" But some of the same people,
13 Dr. Oz -- Chief Superintendent, Oz
14 Hill, has like 60,000 hats on his
15 head right now, right?

16 So often when you ask
17 Dr. Watlington or the staff to do
18 something, they have to, kind of,
19 put aside the work that has to keep
20 going as the mount of the car
21 continues to go a million miles down
22 the field. The best thing that we
23 -- that I could do with this
24 resolution, as the Board President

1 and the board, if it was to approve
2 it, was to put language in it that
3 dictates the type of things that
4 you've raised, that others have
5 raised, to ensure that
6 Dr. Watlington, as we continue on
7 what is in the document, and it says
8 it is "a living plan" is implemented
9 with fidelity.

10 Dr. Watlington has done it
11 with Accelerate Philly, he has done
12 it with other techniques. So I do
13 have the faith and confidence that
14 Dr. Watlington posts a vote on a
15 resolution that triggers a process
16 for things that are yet to occur,
17 will be able to think this thing
18 through.

19 COUNCILMEMBER SQUILLA: I
20 -- and I have faith in
21 Dr. Watlington and the board and,
22 and everybody in the process. It is
23 just when a change happens and
24 nobody knows it, then they see a

1 vote on it, they see that it -- they
2 don't know. And they see that it
3 wasn't done, and they didn't take
4 their input into consideration,
5 right?

6 So it is already voted on,
7 it is already done, and we can say
8 what we want. I mean, people don't
9 believe politicians, to begin with,
10 right? So we tell them things and
11 you're telling them things for a
12 specific reason, right? Just to get
13 past a certain point. But I could
14 say, "Yeah, we voted on it, but
15 we're going to work with you, and
16 we'll change it later." It just
17 doesn't sit well.

18 I trust you, and I believe
19 you're going to do the right thing,
20 but it still -- this challenge is
21 that we need to make sure that the
22 people have the input in the
23 process. They don't have to agree
24 with the final result. And they

1 don't have to agree with what you
2 would finally decide, but they
3 should be part of that process.

4 PRESIDENT STREATER: Yes,
5 sir.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
7 So I'm going to take a moment of
8 personal privilege and ask for State
9 Representative Elizabeth Fiedler to
10 come to the podium. And whatever
11 guest you want to bring with you,
12 Elizabeth Fiedler. It is going to
13 just be yourself?

14 MS. FIEDLER: It is
15 actually the students I have who are
16 speaking; is that okay?

17 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
18 Uh-huh, yes. That is --

19 MS. FIEDLER: All right.
20 So if the three students could
21 please come up. I'll just say
22 briefly, I'm State Rep Elizabeth
23 Fiedler. I would like to thank City
24 Council. I feel a bit like I've

1 been summoned to the principal's
2 office, hearing my name, a bit of
3 nerves.

4 But thank you, Council
5 President Johnson. Thank you so
6 much to Councilman Squilla and to
7 every member of City Council who has
8 heard what these students have had
9 to say about the building conditions
10 in their school. And they are here
11 today just to make their voices
12 heard. So thank you so much for
13 giving them a warm welcome in
14 Philadelphia City Hall.

15 MS. FLORES: Hello. My
16 name is Valerie Flores, and I'm a
17 7th grader at Southwark. I'm here
18 today because of the conditions of
19 our school bathrooms; they suck.
20 Next year will be my last year
21 there, and I have not seen much
22 changes in the seven years I have
23 been there. I'm not going to lie, I
24 like the school teachers, they're

1 nice, some classmates are cool. But
2 what I don't -- what I don't like is
3 that me and my school have to
4 practically beg for better
5 bathrooms.

6 Before I even got here, my
7 classmates even said, "Tell them to
8 fix our bathrooms." I shouldn't be
9 here asking for -- you know, I
10 should be here asking for more
11 things on the school playground or
12 things for the blacktop. But
13 instead, I am here asking for decent
14 bathrooms; bathrooms. I seriously
15 have to go out of school and go all
16 the way here for decent bathrooms.

17 How would you feel if every
18 day you had to worry about the
19 toilet flooding? Having to ask a
20 friend to keep the door closed for
21 you because the doors won't lock? A
22 bathroom that smells repulsive.
23 Worrying there isn't a working soap
24 dispenser. Like I've already said,

1 I should have to be asking for this.
2 You said before the school is
3 overpopulated, so please use those
4 funds to fix our bathrooms. I'm
5 still upset that some things that
6 are going to fix our school are
7 going to come in 2032.

8 At the -- a while ago, we
9 had like a faculty meeting at
10 Southwark and there was a mother
11 with a 4-year-old dog -- with a
12 4-year-old kid, and they said their
13 kid would be in my grade by the time
14 that year comes.

15 I have a petition that 300
16 students signed. Who can I give
17 this to?

18 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
19 Thank you. Just say your name and
20 please begin your testimony.

21 MS. AURORA: Hi. My name
22 is Aurora and I'm a Southwark
23 student. We, students, should be
24 learning, not searching for a clean

1 bathroom, nor fearing insects. I
2 love my school; I enjoy the
3 diversity and the activities.
4 However, today I came to talk about
5 a problem we have been facing; the
6 restrooms and the insects.

7 In one occasion, the drain
8 became clogged and it began to let
9 out dirty water and that section of
10 the restroom flooded. Can you
11 imagine what it is like to have to
12 walk on water fearing that your
13 shoes might get dirty, or that you
14 might fall into the water filled
15 with waste and bacteria? Now
16 imagine how difficult it must be for
17 the little children. No child
18 should ever have to go through that.
19 But you know what? We didn't even
20 have to imagine it because we lived
21 it.

22 On another occasion, the
23 cockroaches weren't just in the
24 bathrooms, but also in the

1 classrooms. To the point my
2 classmates had to lift their feet up
3 because a cockroach was in the
4 classroom and was right underneath
5 them.

6 Today we bring together our
7 small voices to be heard and to
8 bring a great change into our
9 school. Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
11 Thank you. Please say your name and
12 begin.

13 MS. QUARESMA: Hi. My name
14 is Olivia Quaresma and I'm in 5th
15 grade. I love so many things about
16 Southwark; our diversity, the
17 Spanish Immersion Program, my
18 classes, my teachers, and of course
19 my friends. Ironically, Southwark
20 has a really big problem and it is
21 urgent. It has been going on for a
22 while now.

23 There is literal sewage
24 coming up from the floors. We can't

1 cover up the lack of soap, lack of
2 paper towels, broken stall doors,
3 the awful smell, or the amount of
4 lost class time it takes for us to
5 walk around the school just looking
6 for a place to pee. Some of us
7 choose to wait until we get home to
8 use the bathroom. This isn't fair,
9 and it isn't right. The pipes need
10 to be fixed so water sewage doesn't
11 come up from the floors. Please get
12 us doors. Get us soap.

13 I want you to understand
14 that this is really serious. You
15 want us to have good attendance, to
16 do well on our tests, but we also
17 need basic things like clean and
18 working bathrooms that we don't have
19 to walk around up and down the
20 stairs to find. We need a solution
21 for now, not in 2032. Thank you for
22 your time.

23 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
24 You-all aren't asking these kids no

1 questions, are you-all? But we
2 thank you for your leadership.
3 Thank you for being here, for
4 speaking truth to power. Thank you
5 very much.

6 Chair recognizes
7 Councilmember Isaiah -- no, I'm
8 sorry. She pressed the button. It
9 is Lozada, then Isaiah Thomas, then
10 Councilmember Young. Then we are
11 officially out of that first round.

12 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
13 Thank you, Council President. Good
14 afternoon. Thank you for being with
15 us this afternoon. At first --
16 before I begin, I want to shout out
17 Claire Landau and Colonel Oz Hill
18 for their work through the
19 facilities plan and your consistent
20 communication with the parents of
21 all of the schools that were on the
22 closure list in the 7th Council
23 District.

24 But very specifically the

1 Moffett parents who were very, very,
2 very engaged, asked a lot of
3 questions, and really showed up for
4 their children and their community.
5 So thank you very much for your work
6 and for your patience with them.

7 I just have a few
8 questions, and my questions are
9 really based on some of the things
10 that I heard this morning. I guess
11 my first question is, has the -- I
12 understand that you guys are new,
13 and you weren't there when the COVID
14 relief dollars came in and had maybe
15 very little decision making in how
16 it was spent. But when you all
17 arrived and when you were
18 considering -- Dr. Watlington, I
19 guess you, when you were considering
20 the position, President Streater,
21 when you were considering becoming a
22 part of the board.

23 Did anyone ask for, or has
24 the school district done an

1 independent audit of your
2 expenditures? And if so, can you
3 speak to what that audit says? Can
4 you share that audit with Council?
5 And if not, why?

6 DR. WATLINGTON: We have an
7 annual audit of all district
8 expenditures. We do annual audits
9 of school budgets as well. I can
10 tell you that we've had clean audits
11 with no opinions -- modified
12 opinions, which is a good thing.
13 And I believe we post some feedback
14 relative to those -- to those audits
15 every time we take them before the
16 Board of Education annually. So
17 those --

18 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: But
19 it is an audit that is done
20 internally, correct?

21 DR. WATLINGTON: No, no.
22 This is an external audit.

23 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
24 Okay.

1 DR. WATLINGTON: By virtue
2 of audit, it means someone else
3 comes in to look at the books,
4 because we wouldn't want -- we would
5 not want that to be an internal,
6 although the board also has an
7 internal audit function as well. So
8 we have got a dual system going
9 there. We can send, for the record,
10 when those was publicly shared,
11 because we do it in open session.
12 It is a --- it is a public review of
13 the audit annually. And we'll be
14 sure to share that for the record.

15 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: If
16 you could --

17 DR. WATLINGTON: I'll ask
18 Chief Herbstman if he'll get that to
19 the Council.

20 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: If
21 you could share that, that would be
22 awesome. Thank you.

23 DR. WATLINGTON:
24 Absolutely. Happy to.

1 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: And
2 then we --

3 DR. WATLINGTON: We've
4 actually had some commendations from
5 the national auditing firms as well.

6 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:
7 Okay. Thank you. Thank you for
8 that. We talked -- we -- you
9 mentioned earlier the 20 -- the 20
10 vacant buildings that the school
11 district owns or has. Do we -- are
12 they still in your inventory or have
13 you already transitioned them in a
14 disposition process after the board
15 voted?

16 PRESIDENT STREATER: The
17 board passed the resolution that
18 triggered the process for the
19 superintendent to recommend
20 conveyances of those facilities to
21 the city. That process is ongoing.

22 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: Why
23 -- can you tell me why we -- why we
24 didn't consider the sale of these

1 properties? When I looked at --
2 when my staff did some research,
3 there was an estimated value of \$80
4 million for those 20 parcels that
5 could have created an ongoing tax
6 revenue that could have been paid to
7 the -- to the -- to the city, and
8 then in return to the school
9 district. Why did we not consider
10 the sale of those properties through
11 an RFP process?

12 PRESIDENT STREATER: There
13 is no RFP process. It is -- it is
14 recommendations contingent upon
15 Dr. Watlington doing his due
16 diligence. So right now, nothing
17 has been conveyed at this time. But
18 there is a resolution that directs
19 Dr. Watlington to do his due
20 diligence, which includes things
21 that you just -- that you just
22 mentioned as it relates to the, you
23 know, the benefit to the district
24 and other uses of that nature.

1 So we're kind of premature
2 in that space to -- as it relates to
3 what's going to actually happen to
4 them. But it is not just a clean
5 convey. There are some things the
6 board wanted to see first.

7 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: You
8 guys have some vacant properties.
9 It is -- they are -- they are not
10 structures; they are just land. I
11 know one is on Orkney and Dauphin,
12 for instance, that doesn't look like
13 it has moved anywhere. But we have
14 had several people that have
15 expressed interest in that parcel.
16 Are there other spaces that don't
17 have structures that the school
18 district owns that you would
19 consider to sell in order to reduce
20 your deficit?

21 DR. WATLINGTON: Staff
22 doesn't have any additional updates
23 on that at this time. But we're
24 happy to take anything that you want

1 us to look into for homework. But
2 we don't have any new updates at
3 this time -- any particular updates
4 at this time.

5 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

6 Thank you. And then my last
7 question is, President Streater, I
8 know that majority leader asked you
9 yesterday, she asked you today, and
10 I recognize that you a -- you said
11 you needed to go to the board. That
12 is understandable, right? But would
13 you support a motion to hold the
14 vote in order for us to continue to
15 have conversations in good faith and
16 truly demonstrate that we are
17 working in partnership?

18 I asked that question not
19 to put you on the spot, because that
20 is not what I want to do. I asked
21 that question because one of the
22 first questions I was asked after
23 this morning's session was, you
24 know, the administration, the

1 legislative body, and the school
2 district all look like you're
3 fighting against each other. This
4 doesn't look like you are our
5 partners here.

6 And the word partnership
7 and collaboration has been said
8 multiple times throughout the day
9 yesterday as well as in today. And
10 I really believe that we are here to
11 work together in the best interest
12 of the children and families and the
13 communities that we represent. I
14 believe that you guys are there to
15 do good as well, right? I believe
16 your hearts are in the right place.

17 But what people are seeing
18 as they are watching us on 64 or in
19 this space, it looks like we are at
20 odds with each other. And my
21 explanation to them was, this is
22 politics, right? There has to be a
23 give and take. This is a
24 negotiation process. We don't

1 really -- we don't hate each other.

2 No one is angry with anybody in

3 here. Are we frustrated?

4 Absolutely.

5 I think all of us are in

6 our place to be frustrated, but I

7 think that we have to demonstrate

8 that we want to continue to

9 negotiate in good faith. And you as

10 the leader would have to make that

11 decision, right? Would you support

12 the motion to hold the vote

13 tomorrow?

14 PRESIDENT STREATER: What I

15 -- what I can say is, I heard things

16 today that I didn't hear yesterday.

17 I think it helps that I was able to

18 put a suit on today and know I was

19 going to be here today to kind of

20 absorb, and I'm still absorbing.

21 What I can say is I'm willing to do

22 anything to -- for this to be as

23 productive as it can be, while also

24 protecting the interests and the

1 fiduciary role that we have under
2 law as a School District of
3 Philadelphia and the Board of
4 Education.

5 So I hope that gives you
6 some color to where I am right now.
7 But that being said, I respect my
8 board too much to -- in this space
9 with something that is this raw to
10 say that I will support. Because
11 that can also feel like I'm pulling
12 them along, and they don't want to
13 be pulled along as well. I just
14 respect my board too much. But what
15 I can say is --

16 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: And
17 I understand that. I don't want to
18 -- I don't mean to cut you off, I
19 understand that. But I think as the
20 leader, Council President sometimes
21 has to make decisions based on his
22 conversations for this body. And
23 sometimes he doesn't have the
24 opportunity to come to each or to

1 all 17 of us. And while I
2 understand you respect them and your
3 process. You are the leader.

4 PRESIDENT STREATER: Yes, I
5 am.

6 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA: And
7 so we are looking to you to have to
8 make that decision in good faith,
9 right? I think that it is -- it is
10 important to those who are looking
11 in to understand that while Council
12 make -- makes the decision, the
13 final decision on this budget,
14 people have to understand that their
15 government is working for them and
16 in the best interest of them. And
17 that we're not making rash
18 decisions. That we're not making
19 decisions being angry or frustrated
20 with anybody.

21 And I think people looking
22 in right now, see and hear
23 frustration, they see and hear, or
24 they think there is this

1 misunderstanding or lack of
2 communication. And I think as the
3 leader, you have to -- we're looking
4 to you and asking you to make that
5 decision of supporting a motion that
6 not just this legislative body is
7 asking you for, but the public is
8 asking you for. The families, the
9 students are asking you for. Your
10 staff, right? The staff of the
11 school district is asking for you to
12 consider.

13 PRESIDENT STREATER: The
14 best I can do is I'm happy to
15 consider, but I'm sorry, I -- in
16 good faith, I cannot get too far
17 ahead of my board. And there are
18 things that we have to weigh as
19 well. But I think we do have time.
20 I -- we're -- the vote isn't
21 happening right now. And I -- what
22 I can guarantee is that I will
23 convene my board today or soon
24 thereafter. And we won't find out

1 that at the day of the meeting or at
2 the meeting. But I just have --
3 there is so much that we have to
4 weigh. There's so much that we have
5 to weigh.

6 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

7 I will say this just in follow up
8 with Member Lozada then I'm going to
9 turn over to Member Isaiah Thomas.
10 The Mayor, who is the CEO of the
11 City of Philadelphia, really came
12 and gave a passionate speech as to
13 why this partnership and this
14 collaboration will be critically
15 important in terms of this process,
16 even moving forward.

17 And there are some members
18 and Council may say even, not moving
19 forward, just to be quite frank with
20 you in terms of what you are trying
21 to accomplish. And so we understand
22 you have a process, and we have a
23 process, and then hopefully all of
24 that is taken in the top -- in the

1 -- in the context, even though you
2 are an independent body. So -- but
3 I hear you loud and clear. You're
4 saying you have to check with your
5 team and not want to jump out there
6 too quick. So I -- we understand
7 that. Anything else, Member Lozada?

8 COUNCILMEMBER LOZADA:

9 Thank you.

10 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

11 Member Isaiah Thomas.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Good
13 afternoon, Council President. Good
14 afternoon, Board President,
15 Superintendent.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
17 Member Thomas, do you mind doing it
18 from up here?

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
20 sorry, say it again.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Do you mind doing it from up here?

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
24 Apologize. Good afternoon, and

1 thank you Council President. I want
2 to first start by saying thank you
3 to you, Dr. Watlington, as well as
4 you Board President Streater. For
5 those who don't know, we meet on a
6 monthly basis, and you all make
7 yourself available to answer
8 questions and to support the
9 Education Committee.

10 And we do appreciate the
11 time you've spent with us in the
12 past. I also want to take a moment
13 to say thank you to my guy, Colonel
14 Hill. Actually, Colonel Hill and
15 Mike, if you guys both can come join
16 us up here, because I'm going to ask
17 you guys a couple questions. But I
18 also just want to let you both know,
19 because I work with you on a
20 consistent basis, I appreciate you
21 both as it relates to the work that
22 is being done on finance as well as
23 dealing with different operational
24 issues as well.

1 So Colonel Hill to you and
2 your team, when I think about Fiesta
3 Schools and all of the playgrounds
4 that we've rebuilt in the City of
5 Philadelphia and all the great work
6 that has been done in the world of
7 extracurricular activities and
8 things like that, I truly appreciate
9 it.

10 So I wanted to start by
11 saying thank you. Also want to say
12 thank you to the Mayor for the
13 Mayor's remarks earlier. The Mayor
14 definitely showed that this is an
15 issue that we all care about. I
16 don't think anybody can argue there,
17 and you've seen that within the
18 mayor's passion.

19 So with that being said,
20 let me start by -- with the request
21 of the Majority Leader Gilmore-
22 Richardson. Majority Leader
23 Gilmore-Richardson asked that the
24 vote be delayed until May 20th. I'm

1 wondering -- I don't know if there
2 are any other school board members
3 here, but what would you need to
4 hear in order to be convinced that
5 this Thursday is not the time to
6 vote? I heard you say you heard
7 some good stuff here today and I got
8 some good stuff here, but I only
9 have a little bit of time.

10 So I want to try to dig
11 into my magic trick of -- magic box
12 of tricks and pull out the right
13 thing that I think might and can
14 convince you. So what are you
15 weighing and what can be said today
16 that can convince you that this vote
17 needs to be delayed?

18 PRESIDENT STREATER: There
19 are no other board members in the
20 room right now, but what I can say
21 is, the board is a very deliberative
22 -- it is -- we're kind of designed
23 to, kind of, be this way. I know it
24 kind -- it is kind of annoying.

1 We're not, like, not the quick
2 pivots, you have to think about the
3 quick pivots. And I have to honor
4 that and I can't be up here, you
5 know, making edicts or speaking on
6 behalf of nine powerful --

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Yes,
8 so I think what --

9 PRESIDENT STREATER: --
10 individual people.

11 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: We
12 are -- we are trying to just
13 convince you. So we want, like --
14 so this is the thing, when the Mayor
15 comes and talks to me, or the
16 Council President comes and talks to
17 me, or my colleague come and talk to
18 me, I can say, "Hey, Cali, I can
19 tell you where I am, but I can't
20 speak for the other members." So
21 none of us are asking you to speak
22 for the other members.

23 We're trying to convince
24 you, the man that is in front of us

1 right now. What can we say to you
2 to convince you that this is not the
3 right time? What would it that --
4 what it -- what would you need to
5 hear?

6 PRESIDENT STREATER: I
7 approach the role as being on the
8 Board of Education as the president,
9 as an attorney with their client.
10 And sometimes you all are my client
11 and don't know it when I'm in rooms
12 that we all can't fit in. What I
13 can do is I can tell you what the
14 interests of my clients are, the
15 Board of Education, who are my
16 bosses, and those are the type of
17 things that need to be considered.

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: All
19 right. So that is a great
20 comparison. So let us look at it as
21 you are the lawyer, right?

22 PRESIDENT STREATER: Yes.
23 Happy to do so.

24 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: The

1 board members are the client, I want
2 you to advise your clients to delay
3 this process, right? And let me --
4 let me just say why. Let me just
5 say why. I'm going to explain why.
6 I'm going to tell you why, because
7 you don't have the evidence to win
8 the case. Let me tell you how I
9 know you don't have the evidence,
10 I'm going to just give you just a
11 couple examples because I don't have
12 a lot of time and I'm using your
13 comparison.

14 Wagner Middle School --
15 Wagner Middle School, I just said
16 this to Mayor Parker, I've said it
17 multiple times. Wagner Middle
18 School is in my neighborhood. That
19 is my neighborhood middle school.
20 I'm not telling you to keep it open.
21 I'm not telling you to close it.
22 What I'm saying is this, Wagner
23 Middle School, if closed, is
24 supposed to have its students go to

1 the neighborhood schools. One of
2 the schools that you're asking the
3 young people to go to is Ellwood
4 Elementary School.

5 I live -- when I look out
6 my window from the top of my house,
7 I could see Ellwood Elementary
8 School. That is how close I live to
9 Ellwood. And I know everybody don't
10 know every neighborhood in the City
11 of Philadelphia, but I can assure
12 you East Oak Lane is one of the most
13 active communities in the entire
14 city. East Oak Lane has -- we're
15 not going to get all that.

16 So Ellwood right now, K-4
17 goes to the main building. When you
18 get in fifth grade for Ellwood, you
19 have to walk four blocks past
20 Ellwood to the annex that we rent
21 that we don't own. So if Ellwood
22 right now can only hold K-4 and
23 fifth and sixth has to go walk
24 somewhere else, how can we make

1 Ellwood K-8? Can you just answer
2 that for me?

3 PRESIDENT STREATER: When
4 you engage in good -- when you
5 engage in good faith negotiations as
6 an attorney, and if you want to play
7 the role of attorney for the city --
8 for City Council, that is fine. You
9 have to understand the interest of
10 both parties, right?

11 We have a \$300 million
12 deficit, \$7 billion of either
13 replacement or deferred costs. This
14 is a resolution that doesn't close
15 anything tomorrow or whenever it
16 happens. This is a resolution that
17 sets forth for process with a --
18 with a lot -- with an ongoing --
19 with mechanisms built into it, very
20 thoughtful so that you can have
21 multiple bites at the apple.

22 That community can have
23 multiple bites at the apple with the
24 Board of Education will hold the

1 superintendent accountable to
2 implement with fidelity like we know
3 he can. So again, those are the
4 type of things you have to also kind
5 of hit me with too, because --

6 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

7 Sure. Let me --

8 PRESIDENT STREATER: I hear
9 you --

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Let
11 me --

12 PRESIDENT STREATER: I hear
13 you --

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Let
15 me --

16 PRESIDENT STREATER: I hear
17 you --

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Let
19 us go to that then--

20 PRESIDENT STREATER: I --
21 because to me --

22 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

23 Because you're --

24 PRESIDENT STREATER:

1 Because to me --

2 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

3 Board President, you're absolutely
4 right. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

5 PRESIDENT STREATER:

6 Because for me -- for me -- you're
7 -- you're on the -- you're -- you
8 are not talking to me about the act
9 of the thing that we're actually
10 trying to solve for, right? And it
11 is also about chronic
12 underachievement and the ability to
13 redistribute our resources in a way,
14 understanding that no plan is ever
15 going to be perfect. That no plan
16 -- it doesn't matter. We take one
17 school out, and we make this a
18 fungible being kind of which is not
19 what the board wants to do.

20 There's always going to be
21 concerns and things that are going
22 to have to be worked out that will
23 take time, that might take a
24 planning year. So that is the

1 things that we have to consider.
2 And there are other things we have
3 to consider. I'm not -- I'm not Boo
4 Boo the Fool; I understand where we
5 are. I understand where City
6 Council is as well. But in good
7 faith, I am unwilling today to tell
8 you exactly what I am going to tell
9 my board what to do because that is
10 not how it works.

11 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

12 Sure. So I, again --

13 PRESIDENT STREATER: I
14 recommend and we wait -- and we wait
15 facts and we wait evidence.

16 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
17 we are -- we are not -- and so do
18 you believe that what I said about
19 Ellwood is a fact? Or did I just
20 make that up?

21 PRESIDENT STREATER: I
22 believe it is factual, but again,
23 you have to understand we are trying
24 to solve for, I think, two different

1 issues.

2 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: But
3 Board President look, so can we just
4 stick to the line of questioning?

5 PRESIDENT STREATER: It is
6 a fact --

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Is
8 that okay?

9 PRESIDENT STREATER: It is
10 a fact. But the point I'm trying to
11 make is, even though it is a fact, I
12 believe there are other ways that it
13 could be addressed.

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
15 Right. So I agree with you --

16 PRESIDENT STREATER: And
17 that is what the planning year does
18 --

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
20 Don't you think we need to take some
21 time to address it? So --

22 PRESIDENT STREATER: This
23 is not about that.

24 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --

1 we're going to vote on the plan.

2 PRESIDENT STREATER: I'm --

3 I'm --

4 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: so

5 me and you agree. Me and you --

6 just -- can I finish?

7 PRESIDENT STREATER: I'm --

8 I'm not going to do it.

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --

10 you not going to do it? Okay. Me

11 and you agree that Ellwood is a

12 problem in the plan, and I'm just

13 asking you, I'm not even telling you

14 your plan is bad. Let me take a

15 couple steps back and offer some

16 more compliments.

17 PRESIDENT STREATER: I just

18 conceded that. I just conceded

19 that, I said that no matter what

20 plan we have, no -- it could be a

21 plan that takes 30,000 years to

22 create. There's always going to be

23 tension and issues in the plan.

24 Whether you put Ellwood and you put

1 another school in there. That is
2 the point I'm trying to make. The
3 way this --

4 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
5 --

6 PRESIDENT STREATER: The
7 way this resolution is designed is
8 so that these things, irrespective
9 of what the schools are, there will
10 be a year or more to -- for this
11 superintendent who is coming here,
12 and I believe he has done it in
13 other mechanisms and other ways to
14 plan thoughtfully.

15 And for the board to pivot
16 as it has on leveling and as it has
17 on other things. This board will
18 pivot based upon actual things that
19 we know will happen. So --

20 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
21 Board President --

22 PRESIDENT STREATER: So to
23 me, I have to take that into
24 consideration because if we don't do

1 this now, we could be sitting here
2 20, 30 years having a different
3 conversation. So that -- so I hope
4 you understand my client's
5 perspective as well and understand
6 where we're trying to head with this
7 too.

8 I'm not trying to be a
9 hater here, but like, I think it is
10 important that we understand what
11 this is. And remember you said --

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

13 Board President, look --

14 PRESIDENT STREATER: --
15 you're not in my world.

16 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: We
17 do understand, and I'm not trying to
18 say we don't understand. I'm
19 identifying flaws in the plan --

20 PRESIDENT STREATER:
21 Understood.

22 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Let
23 me -- let me go back to compliments,
24 right? I compliment you all for

1 coming up with a plan that doesn't
2 close any of our comprehensive
3 neighborhood high schools. That is
4 one of the most important parts of
5 this plan. And it was one of the
6 most difficult things you had to do.

7 I was scared for Strawberry
8 Mansion, I was scared for Overbrook,
9 right? Oh, I'm sorry, Penn Treaty
10 is the only one; only one. So I --
11 thank you, Councilmember Young. I'm
12 not -- I'm not -- I'm not saying
13 that the plan is completely bad, and
14 I also recognize that at some point,
15 someone is going to be unhappy.
16 What I'm saying is this, right?

17 The plan is here, it is up
18 here and it looks good, but I've
19 identified issues in the structure
20 down here. I'm telling you to your
21 face that Ellwood in your -- in your
22 plan with Ellwood, it doesn't work.
23 And I have more examples, but
24 instead of listening to my example

1 and say, "You know what, maybe we
2 did get Ellwood wrong. Maybe we
3 need to add some capital investment
4 in order to do it." You guys are
5 basically saying, well, we'll figure
6 that out later.

7 DR. WATLINGTON:

8 Mr. Chairman, may I jump in really
9 quick and just say the plan does
10 provide a \$12 million investment
11 into Ellwood. So it is in the plan,
12 and we'll be sure that we get you
13 that copy today. Second --

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

15 Dr. Watlington, we did 44 -- we did
16 43 million for Frankford. I'm
17 telling you that Ellwood has no
18 space for fifth and sixth right now.

19 DR. WATLINGTON:

20 Understood.

21 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
22 you're adding seven through eight.
23 With all due respect, right? How
24 can 12 million do -- I've seen that.

1 How can \$12 million put us in a
2 position to double the size of a
3 school when we spend \$43 million
4 just on renovations at Frankford?

5 DR. WATLINGTON: If you --
6 if you'll let me say these two
7 things: one, we will absolutely
8 receive that and take that as a
9 homework assignment and report back.
10 Second, I do want to come back to
11 the 10,000-foot level and say to
12 President Streater's point, here is
13 the problem we're solving for at
14 Wagner, because I don't want the
15 public to get lost. Wagner has a
16 capacity for 1030 students. Four
17 years ago, there were 444 students.
18 That number reduced in school year
19 22/23 to 366. The next year, the
20 enrollment went down to 304 and the
21 next year to 297. This year, the
22 enrollment has gone down again to
23 294.

24 We ought not to continue to

1 operate as -- I think we can agree
2 that we can't continue to operate
3 schools with -- that are less than
4 half filled. We are willing to go
5 back and take an absolute look at
6 your point. If \$12 million is
7 adequate to expand the capacity at
8 Ellwood, we'll be glad to do that.

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
10 if you listen to what I'm saying,
11 Dr. Watlington, I'm not arguing with
12 you one way or another on Wagner,
13 what I'm trying to tell you, right?
14 My neighbors, where I live on my
15 block, that I'm a 100 percent sure
16 that the capital investment for
17 Ellwood doesn't work. It doesn't
18 fit the plan.

19 When Councilmember Squilla
20 tells you, he just found out on
21 Monday about this new version of the
22 plan. We're -- we're not trying to
23 go back and forth with you guys.
24 What we're telling you is from the

1 seat that we're sitting in, your
2 timeline doesn't work for us.

3 And you're telling us, we
4 kind of got to stick with this
5 timeline, and then in a couple weeks
6 we're going to take a vote. And you
7 guys are asking us to
8 compartmentalize these different
9 topics of discussion. And I think
10 the problem is this, you can't have
11 your cake and eat it too. It just
12 doesn't work that way.

13 So if you're telling us
14 that we have to deal with this
15 facilities plan, this is where we
16 are, there will be no modifications.
17 Just know that we're going to return
18 that same energy. And the reality
19 is most of us will agree we've had a
20 good working relationship. We will
21 -- I think most of us will also
22 agree, we have the same -- we have a
23 similar end goal as it relates to
24 where we want to get to as it

1 relates to the finish line. The
2 problem we're having is the path to
3 get there.

4 And I think the difference
5 between you guys and us is we're
6 held accountable by a different
7 group of people than you are. So
8 certain things you guys could kind
9 of take the hit and turn the other
10 cheek. Whereas though we're not in
11 the position to be able to do that.

12 DR. WATLINGTON: So
13 Mr. Chairman, by way of board
14 President's and the board's
15 resolution, President Streater and
16 the board, through this resolution,
17 directs the superintendent to follow
18 processes that could indeed include
19 some amendments and changes as we go
20 along. That is the beauty of the
21 resolution; it provides for some
22 adjustments and changes. It is no
23 different than when you renovate an
24 old house, and you establish a

1 budget for \$2,000. You get into the
2 drywall and you found you've got
3 some other issues, and you may have
4 to increase that.

5 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
6 think --

7 DR. WATLINGTON: The
8 resolution allows for that.

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So I
10 have to move on. I have to allow
11 Councilmember Young. We have a lot
12 of people here for public comment.
13 The Ellwood example that I gave you,
14 I have about four other examples
15 just like that. I don't have time
16 to go through each one of them.

17 And again, I'm not saying
18 the plan is completely bad. You've
19 heard us talk about Lankenau.
20 Lankenau is a non-starter, so I'm
21 not going to keep going back and
22 forth about that. But Lankenau is
23 an opinion that is Councilmember
24 Ahmad's opinion. It is my opinion.

1 It is Councilmember Jones' opinion,
2 it is Councilmember O'Rourke's
3 opinion. That is an opinion, right?
4 Your opinion is your way. My
5 opinion is my way. Opinions are
6 subjective.

7 Ellwood is a fact. I'm
8 telling you for a fact that the plan
9 doesn't work for the people in the
10 East Oak Lane community. And the
11 feedback that I'm getting is not one
12 that I can go take back to them
13 people.

14 So let me just move on
15 because --

16 DR. WATLINGTON: Duly
17 noted.

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --
19 I'm going keep asking about this
20 5/20, is we're going to keep
21 bringing it back up. We had -- let
22 me close out by saying this, I'm
23 going to send a letter and if
24 members of Council want to sign on,

1 great. If they don't, that is fine.

2 I'm going to send a letter
3 to every member of the school board.

4 And the letter to every member of
5 the school board will be a

6 reflective of exactly what

7 Councilmember Gilmore-Richardson's

8 ask was today, because everybody is

9 not here today. And we want each

10 individual member of the school

11 board to know that we're personally

12 asking for you not to take this vote

13 on Thursday. And we want to put it

14 in writing. And we want members of

15 the school board to know that if you

16 do take the vote on Thursday and you

17 do vote in a way that is not

18 reflective of what, not just the

19 city legislature is asking, but the

20 state legislature, too.

21 We had Rep Fiedler here

22 today. We had Rep Cephas at the

23 press conference the other day. We

24 had Rep Khan at the press conference

1 the other day. And the Mayor sat
2 here and said, give Harrisburg the
3 tools that they need to go get us
4 more money.

5 I talked to Harrisburg, at
6 least the Philly delegation, you
7 know what they need to get us more
8 money? To scrap this facility plan.
9 That is what they said to us. And
10 if you don't believe that, you could
11 ask them yourself.

12 Now, when I say scrap, I
13 don't mean get rid of it completely,
14 but if you talk to the state
15 legislators, they'll tell you Rep
16 Cephas screamed and hollered about
17 Overbrook Elementary School
18 yesterday. She did. That was her
19 own -- that was her own words. Rep
20 Conn, no, I'm sorry, Rep Cephas
21 screamed and hollered about
22 Overbrook. Yeah, Overbrook. Rep Conn
23 screamed and hollered about
24 Lankenau.

1 DR. WATLINGTON:

2 Mr. Chairman, may I just ask a
3 question?

4 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

5 Sure. Please.

6 DR. WATLINGTON: Do you
7 support any school closures at this
8 time?

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Yes,
10 I do. I do think that there are
11 things in your plan that makes
12 sense, right? But I think that
13 there are other things -- I'll give
14 you one for example, Building 21
15 going into Martin Luther King High
16 School. It is not the most popular
17 thing in my neighborhood, but that
18 is something that I can turn the
19 other cheek to. And I could even
20 entertain Wagner. I could entertain
21 it, but you can't entertain it with
22 the plan that you have in place
23 because it doesn't work for the
24 community. And that is what I'm

1 saying.

2 DR. WATLINGTON: May I just
3 say two things can be true at the
4 same time and I'll defer
5 respectfully to the Chairman. On
6 the one hand, we absolutely receive
7 the feedback and we're going to go
8 do that homework today; to take a
9 look at Ellwood.

10 At the same time, as a
11 citizen and as the superintendent, I
12 would not come to Council and ask
13 you, what is your specific budget
14 for filling every pothole in
15 Philadelphia? Show me the exact
16 plan, all the contingencies. At
17 some point I'm going to trust the
18 folks to do the work and hold them
19 accountable to do it.

20 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
21 Dr. Watlington, I think that is a
22 great point. And I understand
23 exactly what you're saying. I think
24 the biggest difference between where

1 we are right now as it relates to
2 the school issues and other issues
3 where we're asking folks to trust
4 the institutions, is that we been
5 down this road before and I know you
6 --

7 DR. WATLINGTON:

8 Understood. Understood.

9 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --

10 might not have been there. We've
11 been down this road before and it
12 was traumatizing, and we got it
13 wrong, right? So when people are
14 asking questions, it is not personal
15 against me as the Education Chair or
16 Councilmember Lozada running the 7th
17 District, or even you as the
18 Superintendent or even Board
19 President Streater. They're asking
20 questions because they're
21 traumatized because we got it wrong
22 last time.

23 So if we had a track record
24 of getting this right, we wouldn't

1 be wasting our time having this
2 conversation. We would just go
3 ahead over there and say, well,
4 you-all got it because you-all have
5 done this before.

6 DR. WATLINGTON: Duly
7 noted. But --

8 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: That
9 is the issue that we had.

10 DR. WATLINGTON: But you do
11 want us to address the 35 --

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: We
13 do.

14 DR. WATLINGTON: -- percent
15 underutilization.

16 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
17 I commend you; I commend Colonel
18 Hill, I commend the entire team for
19 things like modifying Conwell and
20 your stance on Conwell. Things
21 you've done in the 3rd District and
22 other districts. But I'm about to
23 pass it to Councilmember Young,
24 because we're just saying we still

1 have more work to do.

2 We're not saying you're,
3 you're evil or you're gentrifiers or
4 anything like that. We're just
5 saying based on where we are, well,
6 I'm not saying that. I'm sorry.

7 Board President Streater, I'm not
8 calling you that. I'm just saying
9 based on where we are, we've seen
10 some progress, and we still have
11 some more work to do. Let me just
12 --

13 PRESIDENT STREATER: Chair
14 Thomas --

15 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --
16 add one more thing. Mike --

17 PRESIDENT STREATER: Chair
18 Thomas --

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --
20 we have one of my biggest issues --
21 oh, go ahead. I'm sorry, Board
22 President.

23 PRESIDENT STREATER: Look
24 --

1 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
2 just -- we got 40 people for public
3 comment. I got to let Mr. Young go.

4 PRESIDENT STREATER: I'm
5 going to be brief.

6 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Are
7 you-all going to stay for public
8 comment?

9 PRESIDENT STREATER: I'm
10 going to be brief. I'll be brief.
11 I'll be brief, Chair Thomas. I
12 honestly do believe that I have to
13 go back to the board. I am
14 unwilling today, at this moment, put
15 on the spot, to say something that
16 would imperil my credibility with
17 the board when I have to ask them to
18 do tough things as well.

19 So what I can tell you in
20 good faith, as you and I know, I
21 will definitely take this back to
22 the board, and we will have that
23 conversation. But I would hope that
24 our engage -- our exchange, whatever

1 that was, that there is an
2 understanding that we have -- we
3 have some really big fish to fry as
4 well. And we have some material
5 things that only we are accountable
6 to as well.

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: You
8 guys have the toughest volunteer
9 position in the city of
10 Philadelphia.

11 PRESIDENT STREATER: And
12 that -- and that --

13 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
14 Please know, we understand that.
15 We're not saying that that is not
16 the case --

17 PRESIDENT STREATER: But
18 that said, the point has been made.
19 I've heard it over and over again.
20 Whatever heat you-all need to put
21 under me to go and do what I need to
22 do is done.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
24 Okay.

1 PRESIDENT STREATER: But I
2 am unwilling, in this moment right
3 now, to say one way or the other.
4 And you would know -- you would know
5 as soon as I can possibly get that
6 answer for you.

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
8 we'll send it in writing to the
9 other board members --

10 PRESIDENT STREATER: Send
11 whatever you want.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --
13 just so folks know. And hopefully
14 we'll hear back from you so we know
15 before we go into Council on
16 Thursday. And we will -- we'll be
17 able to go from there. Before I go
18 to Councilmember Young, Mike,
19 procurement numbers; two years ago,
20 local procurement numbers for the
21 school district of Philadelphia as
22 it relates to Philadelphia
23 businesses was below -- was in the
24 teens. It was 15 percent or so or

1 below.

2 Can you communicate where
3 we are as it relates to what
4 percentage of school district
5 contracts go to Philadelphia based
6 businesses and what direction you
7 feel like we're going in?

8 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes. Thank
9 you for your leadership in this area
10 as well as other members of council
11 and the board. We have gone from
12 the teens in 2023 to 32 percent in
13 the current year in terms of local
14 suppliers. And we believe that
15 we're on the correct trajectory to
16 continue down that path.

17 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Let
18 us make sure that we continue to
19 look at those big contracts, right?
20 The substitute teaching contract,
21 we're going to keep pushing that.
22 We think that there are local firms
23 who can do that. The cleaning
24 contract; I know that there are

1 people in Philadelphia that can
2 clean, and there are a few other
3 contracts that we talked about.

4 I just want to put that on
5 the record and say thank you, Mike,
6 and the entire team on the fiscal
7 side for the School District of
8 Philadelphia. As well as you,
9 Dr. Watlington, for your vision as
10 it relates to some of the decisions
11 that you've made to put us in this
12 position. Go ahead, Dr. Watlington.

13 DR. WATLINGTON:

14 Mr. Chairman, pursuant to
15 Councilmember Lozada's question,
16 would you permit CFO Herbstman to
17 tell you, in 20 seconds or less,
18 which national groups have provided
19 the school district with
20 commendations in its budgeting and
21 annual year over year audits?

22 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

23 Yeah, please go ahead, do that.
24 Because I think it is important, and

1 I think this is important, while you
2 pull it out. I think it is
3 important because we don't want
4 people in Harrisburg to feel like
5 the problem that we're dealing with
6 is a mismanagement of money or bad
7 decisions, right? Like, that is not
8 -- that is not at all what I'm
9 saying. Just like you're not going
10 to agree with every contract and
11 every spending and everything that
12 we've done on the Council side, or
13 I've done in my office, I don't want
14 to accuse you of that specifically
15 Dr. Watlington, because I've met
16 with you every quarter since you've
17 been here, and I'm aware of the
18 position, the things you've done as
19 it relates to not hiring staff and
20 allowing positions in 440 to be
21 downsized.

22 So I know sometimes we
23 don't give out enough compliments,
24 but part of why we're not doing that

1 today is because of the facilities
2 issue. And if we didn't have to
3 spend four hours arguing about
4 facilities, we probably could have
5 spent another hour or two giving out
6 compliments for the great work that
7 is being done. Go ahead, Mike. I'm
8 sorry.

9 MR. HERBSTMAN: Yes, thank
10 you. So as Dr. Watlington said
11 earlier, we have -- for more than a
12 decade consecutively, we have had
13 unmodified our clean audits on our
14 annual financial statements as well
15 as our federal single audit. And
16 for the financial statements, the
17 awards that we've won are from the
18 Government Finance Officers
19 Association and ASBO International
20 or the Association of School
21 Business Officials International.

22 DR. WATLINGTON: Which is
23 really, really significant.

24 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

1 Yeah, no, congratulations. I
2 understand the importance of that.
3 And it puts us in a position to be
4 able to do some of the balling that
5 we know we're going to need to do to
6 be able to invest in new facilities
7 and things of that capacity. So we
8 truly appreciate that. Thank you
9 for the work that you're doing.
10 Apologize if folks are taking this
11 personal, but we have some -- this
12 is a legacy moment.

13 And Board President
14 Streater, I think more than almost
15 anybody in the room, you understand
16 that because you're a graduate of
17 Germantown High School, and you
18 know, firsthand how these decisions
19 we make will impact schools,
20 neighborhoods, and people. So
21 please don't take it personal.

22 Chair recognizes
23 Councilmember young.

24 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Thank

1 you, Mr. Chair. I think that just
2 -- there are -- first I want to say
3 thank you for the work that you all
4 do. I -- it is -- as member Thomas
5 said, it is -- it is a very, very
6 thankless job what you do, you know,
7 and we all -- we all care. Like,
8 there is no one -- it is not -- it
9 is not personal at all, but like, we
10 all live here, we all have families,
11 kids, everything, right?

12 So it is, you know, we want
13 to make sure that this gets done
14 right, because you know, last time
15 it wasn't, as a -- as a
16 Councilmember alluded to. Just like
17 -- I just want to mention between --
18 I want to say thank you, right, for
19 increasing the amount of funding to
20 the 5th Council District, right?
21 Because you recognize the impact
22 that these two school closings have
23 had on that -- on our district.

24 But just to put some

1 numbers around it for -- in the last
2 school -- proposed school closing,
3 and this one facilities plan is 42
4 acres of land, right? As a real
5 estate attorney, that is how I
6 think, right? I manage that. I
7 look at those things and look at
8 what the impact is. 42 acres of
9 land in the 5th Council District
10 between the last two school
11 closings, right? So let us think
12 about that. That is a lot.

13 And so our issues and our
14 concerns are with the process, like,
15 what went into the plan. We know
16 that school district has to right-
17 size; we understand that. But when
18 we look at, you know, I just heard
19 Dr. Watlington say that, you know,
20 we can't keep schools that are half
21 filled open.

22 But then I look at a school
23 like Strawberry Mansion, right? Who
24 has an enrollment of what? 200

1 students or so. A 100 show up every
2 day and of a capacity about 1500.
3 That is severely underutilized. And
4 I understand that there was, you
5 know, a plan to try to not touch
6 some of the comprehensive high
7 schools, right? And that could be a
8 reason why that, that school wasn't
9 even thought of or looked at.

10 But when you look at your
11 own metrics, that one, that one fits
12 every, you know, whatever
13 classification that you -- that you
14 -- that you were going by when
15 you're deciding what facilities need
16 to be closed or not. So let us just
17 keep that in mind, because that is a
18 fact, right? As the councilman
19 alluded to that, that is a fact.
20 That is not something that we are
21 just making up here.

22 When you're looking at the
23 over utilization of schools, I look
24 at Bache-Martin in my district that

1 has a -- the capacity score of 158,
2 that is severely overcrowded. But
3 yet you want to merge -- you want to
4 take students from two other schools
5 and place them in a severely
6 overcrowded school, right? Leaving
7 that school with years of proposed
8 renovations, where the AHERA reports
9 already say that asbestos is
10 rampant, right? So as you're going
11 to -- going through the renovation
12 process you're going to -- if you're
13 going to find things unexpectedly,
14 it is just what happens in
15 construction.

16 And so that is a fact. We
17 -- the community has put forward a
18 -- an alternative plan for that
19 neighborhood where you're closing
20 Waring to create a Masterman Middle
21 School at Waring, where we have
22 already a school that is severely
23 overcrowded. We are emerging that
24 catchment area. Why can't we just

1 merge that -- those schools and
2 create two separate schools? Create
3 a separate elementary school for the
4 community, a separate middle school
5 for the community, right? Because
6 Master -- we already know where and
7 can be a middle school because you
8 want to put Masterman Middle School
9 there, right? So it already has the
10 capacity to be a middle school, why
11 can't it be a middle school for that
12 community, right? When we already
13 have a school that is a -- that is
14 already overcrowded, you're going to
15 make it even more severely
16 overcrowded.

17 So we're not saying that
18 the plan, you know, things don't
19 need to change, but some of the
20 things that you have in the plan
21 doesn't work for the communities.
22 We are held accountable to the
23 communities, like, we are. I mean,
24 man, I know you guys are insulated

1 from it because they don't choose
2 you.

3 Only the Mayor chooses you,
4 only the Mayor could get rid of you,
5 right? So what we are -- we're not
6 insulated from the community and
7 from the people. So we're just
8 asking you to take -- if you're --
9 it is a partnership -- if this is a
10 true partnership that has been
11 mentioned over and over again today,
12 like it seems like you're not really
13 taking our feedback seriously. That
14 is -- that is what it feels like.

15 And, you know, we just
16 think that there is other ways to go
17 about it when we know you need to
18 right size. And that is -- we
19 understand that completely, but
20 we're just asking to be included in
21 that process as you are right sizing
22 what the district looks like.
23 Because again, we know the
24 communities, we -- they -- those

1 people elect us to represent them.

2 So we have a different understanding
3 of the communities than maybe some
4 of you all have.

5 And we are -- we are just
6 asking to kind of slow this process
7 down to think about the other
8 impacts that it -- that it has. And
9 when it comes to, as I mentioned,
10 just to my district specifically,
11 you know, thank you Ludlow, right?
12 You have listened to the community,
13 understood that Ludlow, you -- if
14 you remove Ludlow, you remove a
15 school from the entire neighborhood.
16 So that neighborhood would have no
17 school, right? So thank you for
18 that.

19 But you're doing that in
20 other places as well, throughout the
21 -- throughout the city. And we're
22 just asking to take that step back
23 to really take a look at what makes
24 sense for the people that are there.

1 We are not -- it doesn't have to
2 make sense for the district; what
3 makes sense for the people, because
4 that is who you serve, right?
5 Ultimately, that is your
6 constituents; the students, the
7 people, the families, right? You
8 mentioned that they families have
9 the opportunity to move.

10 People are going to not
11 choose Fairmount because their
12 school is going to have 900 kids in
13 the elementary school. They're
14 going to not choose that
15 neighborhood. What elementary
16 schools have 900 kids Pre-K-8?
17 Like, that is -- that is a real
18 fact. That is a fact.

19 So just want to put that on
20 a record because like, if it is
21 about community, if we -- if we
22 understand that families have the
23 ability to, you know, vote with
24 their feet, like let us keep them

1 from doing that, but this plan,
2 certain parts of this plan will
3 cause that. And we're asking you to
4 take a step back to understand that
5 and to really analyze, right? Or to
6 really share what went into the
7 sauce to make the plan --

8 DR. WATLINGTON: Sure. May
9 I --

10 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:
11 Because again, there is so many
12 contradictions just in the 5th
13 District alone when it comes to some
14 of the ideas and goals of the plan.
15 So I that is it. I don't -- I am
16 done been beating this for the past
17 couple of months.

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
19 want to -- I want to give the
20 superintendent an opportunity.

21 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you,
22 Councilmember Young. Again, I want
23 to be really clear on the record
24 that we are -- we've been listening

1 for a long, long time, and we're
2 going to continue to listen. I do
3 want to just note for a school like
4 Waring, I want to answer that
5 question very factually on the
6 record, because I think the public
7 really needs to know what is -- what
8 we're doing here. Waring is a
9 school that we're not recommending
10 to turn into a merged middle school
11 on that site. There are 10 students
12 in the first grade at Waring. It is
13 not a sound -- there are -- there
14 are 23 --

15 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:

16 Dr. Watlington, before I cut you
17 off, we know the numbers at Waring.
18 That is not what we're saying. We
19 know that Waring is a underutilized
20 school. We get that. What I am
21 saying is that we can merge the
22 schools that -- the lines are
23 merging anyway; the catchments lines
24 are emerging.

1 So Waring students are
2 going to go to Bache-Martin, what I
3 am saying is create a separate
4 elementary school K-5 and then a
5 separate middle school where Waring
6 is so that community can have a
7 separate elementary school and a
8 separate middle school, right?
9 Because you -- we are already
10 changing Waring into a middle school
11 for a Masterman. That is a part of
12 your plan. So we know the building
13 can be a middle school. Why can't
14 it be a middle school for that
15 community?

16 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Hey,
17 Dr. Watlington, before you respond
18 to that, let me take a step back to
19 my 5/20 request with Board President
20 Streater.

21 PRESIDENT STREATER: Yes,
22 sir.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Let
24 me give you a good example of why we

1 need the delay this vote. Member
2 Young is a very intelligent member
3 of City Council. We -- as we've
4 heard multiple times here today,
5 right? And so Member Young clearly
6 doesn't know -- he is not a member
7 of the Education Committee -- that
8 you all have a philosophy of moving
9 away from the middle school model.
10 Just listening to the example he
11 gave, he doesn't know that.

12 These are the type of
13 conversations that we need to take
14 the time to have so that you and
15 Member Young can brainstorm, Okay,
16 if we are going to move away from
17 the middle school model and we don't
18 like the recommendation that is on
19 the board right now, how can we come
20 together with the district council
21 person, state legislator, community,
22 and school leaders to figure out
23 what is the best mechanism based on
24 the foundation you have.

1 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: But
2 Member Thomas, they're turning that
3 building into a middle school.

4 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
5 know what you're saying --

6 DR. WATLINGTON: Based on
7 demand.

8 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
9 I'm not --

10 DR. WATLINGTON: Based on
11 demand.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: The
13 irony that is stark, but go ahead,
14 Dr. Watlington.

15 DR. WATLINGTON: Let --
16 your point is well taken. I --

17 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Based
18 on demand, but the demand in that
19 community, specifically when you
20 have Bache-Martin that is -- you're
21 going to have 900 kids. The demand
22 for that community for a school is
23 there. The demand for a public
24 traditional catchment school in that

1 neighborhood is there. So that you
2 could put Masterman on Mars and the
3 demand that is going to be there.

4 DR. WATLINGTON: No, it is
5 not, Mr. Chairman -- Councilmember
6 Young. That is patently not true.
7 There are not 10 kids in the 1st
8 grade, nine in the 3rd grade, 19 in
9 the 8th grade.

10 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: Okay.

11 DR. WATLINGTON: The demand
12 to turn that into a neighborhood
13 middle school is, from my review of
14 the data, it is not there.

15 Councilmember Young --

16 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: What
17 --

18 DR. WATLINGTON: -- do you
19 want me to recommend --

20 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: What
21 -- where what community? We had to
22 tell -- we had a meeting. We had
23 community members there. That was a
24 great idea to those members of that

1 community because --

2 DR. WATLINGTON: May I --

3 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: -- it
4 keeps their community -- it keeps
5 the class sizes and their elementary
6 school smaller and gives them the
7 still ability to have a neighborhood
8 middle school where those middle
9 schoolers can thrive and have their
10 own space.

11 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
12 Dr. Watlington, have you and Colonel
13 Hill and your team met with Member
14 Young as it relates to these
15 concerns?

16 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes. I've
17 met with Councilmember Young. We've
18 met --

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Can
20 we -- can we --

21 DR. WATLINGTON: Came to
22 his office.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
24 Because I don't see how we resolve

1 this right now. And we have a lot
2 of people in the general public.

3 DR. WATLINGTON: May I just
4 ask one other question?

5 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Yes,
6 sir.

7 DR. WATLINGTON: Just
8 because I want to make sure we take
9 the homework away --

10 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: I
11 just wanted to be able to put that
12 on the record. We're not going to
13 be able to resolve that right now,
14 right? I understand that, but I
15 just wanted to put that on a record
16 for people in those communities
17 who've -- and I want to thank your
18 team. Thank that came out to this
19 -- to community meeting --

20 DR. WATLINGTON: I receive
21 it.

22 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: -- to
23 hear, to talk to us about, you know,
24 what that merger looks like and what

1 that, you know, the facilities plan
2 as it relates to Fairmount in
3 Francisville and Spring Garden, what
4 that looks like. But it doesn't get
5 to the fact -- it doesn't answer
6 those concerns that those people
7 have where there's going to be 900
8 kids from Pre-K-8 and one -- on one
9 block.

10 DR. WATLINGTON: We've made
11 a note -- we've made a note. May I
12 just ask one question? Because I
13 want to make sure that in the spirit
14 of listening that we take the
15 appropriate feedback. Councilmember
16 Young --

17 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
18 then -- and then after this we have
19 to move on to public comment.

20 DR. WATLINGTON: 10
21 seconds. Councilmember Young, we
22 are using Strawberry Mansion as a
23 professional learning center. We've
24 figured out different uses. Are you

1 saying to me that you would like me
2 to recommend a close Strawberry
3 Mansion High School?

4 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: What
5 I'm saying --

6 DR. WATLINGTON: Recommend
7 to the board --

8 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: --
9 saying to you is --

10 DR. WATLINGTON: -- to
11 close Strawberry Mansion?

12 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG: --
13 saying what -- I'm not saying you --
14 I'm not recommending the closure of
15 any school. Like that is, that is
16 your job and it is our job to have
17 to figure out if we're going to
18 support that or not. What I'm
19 saying is that based on your own, I
20 guess, numbers on what you decide to
21 do and how would you decide to use
22 to close a school, right? That fits
23 the criteria.

24 So we're just trying to

1 figure out why do some schools fit
2 the criteria and others don't. I
3 think that is what we're trying to
4 figure out. But if you want to get
5 to that point where, you know, that
6 is the -- it is a -- it is a, it is
7 a school that is underutilized,
8 severely underutilized, right?

9 So what goes into making
10 that decision to close one severely
11 underutilized school, but not
12 another severely underutilized
13 schools? That is the question that
14 we're trying to get to.

15 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you,
16 Mr. Chairman.

17 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
18 --

19 COUNCILMEMBER YOUNG:
20 Trying to get me on a record to say
21 closed sharp mansion. Like how dare
22 you, man? Like, that is crazy.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
24 Superintendent, what I -- what I

1 think should happen, and I got my
2 dates wrong, I kept saying 5/20.
3 The date is actually 5/28. I think
4 what we -- I think the exchange
5 between you and Member Young just
6 kind of shows the entire city that
7 we're just not ready for this yet.
8 I listened to the Mayor talk about
9 the importance of us having a united
10 front.

11 So when we go to
12 Harrisburg, we have every tool that
13 is possible. You might have heard
14 of a lot of emotion and a lot of
15 frustration today, but -- and let me
16 just ask this one last question. If
17 we are to adopt the plan and we see
18 the reduction in staff, there is one
19 thing that I didn't get on the
20 record and I know this is important.

21 The climate staff that work
22 in the school district right now, if
23 they were to see a reduction in
24 their hours, they would go from

1 full-time to part-time and they
2 would lose their benefits. I'm
3 talking about the UNITE HERE folks.
4 Is that true? Would UNITE HERE
5 people use their -- lose their
6 benefits?

7 DR. WATLINGTON: I am not
8 aware of any plans on the table for
9 people to lose benefits. I think --

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Can
11 we -- can we -- can we get that back
12 as a part of the -- as a part of our
13 follow up when we do -- when you
14 guys get -- answer the questions in
15 writing?

16 DR. WATLINGTON:
17 Absolutely.

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: It
19 is really important that --

20 DR. WATLINGTON: Yes, sir.

21 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: --
22 the UNITE HERE workers, the people
23 who work in our schools, what
24 happens with their full-time, part-

1 time benefits and things like that.
2 But again, these are dynamics that
3 just say we just need a little more
4 time to cross some T's, dot some
5 I's, modify a few things and put us
6 in a position to be able to have
7 something that we're all comfortable
8 with instead of us saying, they did
9 that, not us. That is no good.
10 Thank you all for being here.

11 DR. WATLINGTON: Thank you.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: We
13 truly appreciate it. Very quickly,
14 Councilmember Ahmad.

15 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Very
16 quickly, I didn't get it in last
17 time. Thank you again, all of you.
18 I got some information and we're
19 talking about efficiencies and
20 carving out money here, there, and
21 everywhere. That the Office of
22 School Safety is currently spending
23 over \$8 million on new uniforms for
24 the SSOs, and also that money has

1 been allocated to re-brand district
2 vehicles. Is that correct? And do
3 we have other \$8 million tucked away
4 within our school district budget
5 that would really help alleviate
6 many of the problems we're talking
7 about?

8 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
9 Superintendent quickly. Colonel
10 quickly.

11 MR. HILL: Thank you very
12 much. Would -- I challenge the \$8
13 million as a result of the most
14 recent collective bargaining
15 agreement, we have increased the
16 allocation of tans and shirts for
17 our school safety officers and for
18 their protection --

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
20 Colonel Hill, collective bargaining
21 agreement with who?

22 MR. HILL: That is the
23 collective bargaining agreement with
24 the -- with SPAP?

1 MR. HILL: The School

2 Police --

3 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

4 SPAP, The School Police Association,
5 uh-huh.

6 MR. HILL: -- Officers
7 Association. Additionally for their
8 wellbeing, we have also provided
9 them with vest as a result of the
10 hazards that they have -- that they
11 face in their duties. I am
12 absolutely certain that those
13 expenditures do not amount to \$8
14 million.

15 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
16 Thank you.

17 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: This
18 was just -- this was reported to me,
19 that is why I'm asking.

20 MR. HILL: Yes, ma'am.

21 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: And I
22 would like to verification of this;
23 money spent on reforms --

24 DR. WATLINGTON: We'll take

1 it as --

2 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

3 Councilwoman --

4 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: --

5 and he district council vehicles.

6 Last question, did all the board
7 members visit the 20 schools, and
8 now 18 schools, that are being
9 impacted by this?

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

11 Board President, do you know the
12 answer if all of the board members
13 visited the schools, that is
14 impacted?

15 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Thank
16 you.

17 PRESIDENT STREATER: I
18 don't have the answer right now.

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
20 Okay. So Board President, will you
21 let us know whether or not things --
22 will you give us an update? Can
23 that be one of the questions --

24 PRESIDENT STREATER: What I

1 can say is the Board of Education
2 sojourn to visit all of our schools,
3 understanding that we're volunteers
4 and there are so many schools in the
5 school district and charter schools.
6 I will -- I believe they've been to
7 some, but I can't answer that
8 question right now. But we do visit
9 --

10 COUNCILMEMBER AHMAD: Would
11 like to get an to see if you have
12 visited the schools you're
13 impacting.

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
15 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you
16 all for being here today. I want to
17 swiftly move into public comment
18 because the constituents of
19 Philadelphia have been waiting
20 patiently. Hopefully there is
21 representation from the admin as
22 well as the school district who are
23 going to sit here and listen to
24 public comment.

1 With that being said,
2 Mr. Clerk, would you please call the
3 first person for public comment?

4 THE CLERK: Arthur
5 Steinberg, Jerrett Johnson, Kimberly
6 Nelson. Nefertiti Rainer.

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
8 Colleagues, I apologize for rushing
9 you through, but we have over 40
10 people who signed up for public
11 comment, and we want to make sure
12 that we try to hear from as many
13 people as possible.

14 Mr. Steinberg, thank you
15 for the work that you do, sir.
16 Please state your name for the
17 record and you may begin with your
18 testimony. Before Mr. Steinberg
19 begins, excuse me. Can we get
20 everybody quiet please?

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet
22 please.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
24 Thank you, sir.

1 MR. STEINBERG: Okay.
2 Thank you, Chair Thomas. Good
3 afternoon to you and the members of
4 the Committee of the Whole. As you
5 stated, my name is Arthur Steinberg.
6 I'm the president of the
7 Philadelphia Federation of Teachers,
8 which represents more than 14,000
9 educators in the -- who work in the
10 School District of Philadelphia.

11 I want to thank this body
12 for once again holding the district
13 accountable on its plan to close 17
14 schools and massively disrupt school
15 communities across the city by
16 moving, merging, and co-locating
17 dozens of school programs. It is
18 shocking, frankly, that the
19 disrespect the district has shown to
20 us throughout this process, on too
21 many occasions that -- today been
22 shown to you, one of their primary
23 funders.

24 We have put up with that

1 throughout this process trying to
2 obtain information and data and it
3 was kind of surprising to see you
4 treated the same way.

5 The Board of Education, as
6 you all have stated so far, must not
7 vote on the Facilities Master Plan
8 until the district clearly shows
9 really what Councilmember Young was
10 just asking for; how they arrived at
11 decisions about the fates of
12 individual schools that have failed
13 to do so since publicizing the plan
14 in January. Let us see if they're
15 sufficiently motivated to do so by
16 Thursday, May 23rd -- May 28th, if
17 in fact they move it there.

18 Your activism on behalf of
19 school communities you represent
20 helps save the Motivation High
21 School in the 3rd Council District,
22 Ludlow Elementary School in the 5th
23 Council District, and Conwell Middle
24 Magnus School in the 7th Council

1 District.

2 There are more schools
3 targeted for closure for reasons
4 that are totally obscure to those of
5 us outside of 440 North Broad. The
6 district can and must do far better
7 in earning community buy-in and
8 trust before the board holds a vote.

9 Educators and students and
10 communities need to know what
11 conditions they'll be working,
12 learning, and in -- so they can plan
13 accordingly. For our members not
14 having any reliable way to know
15 where they'll be working with two or
16 three -- within two or three years
17 creates anxiety and stress, which
18 they can easily escape by moving to
19 another school system right outside
20 the city. Because for the first
21 time in decades, the suburbs are
22 experiencing that shortage as well.

23 In addition to that, this
24 will then accelerate the departure

1 of many of the students from the
2 schools, which will in turn create a
3 loss of funding. As you might
4 recall from our union's recent
5 contract campaign, and I'm going to
6 get into shameless plug here, we
7 were able to win historic raises and
8 benefits, including paid parental
9 leave and accelerating the ability
10 of educators to move up the pay
11 scale so that we can remain
12 competitive without -- with the --
13 with our suburban counterparts.

14 And we were able to do this
15 without having to walk off the job
16 for a couple reasons. Number one,
17 we really did not want to impose a
18 hardship on the community and the
19 district then recognized the worth
20 of our people, and they realized
21 that -- damn well that our folks
22 would work out if they didn't
23 accommodate us.

24 It is -- the City of

1 Philadelphia cannot afford to make
2 more missteps to drive educators and
3 families outside the city. It is
4 going to be difficult for us to
5 mobilize educators at Lankenau, AMY
6 Northwest, Parkway Northwest,
7 Waring, and I can go on and on, to
8 lift a finger to secure the badly
9 needed funding from this general
10 assembly and this Council when the
11 district gives no justification for
12 closing in the unique and precious
13 learning environment they've built.

14 Elementary school students
15 shouldn't have to protest for lack
16 of working toilets in their school
17 or come to City Council to beg for
18 plumbing to be fixed. Some of you
19 were there in solidarity. I don't
20 want to mention your names because
21 I'm afraid I'll miss a few and I
22 don't want to insult anybody. If
23 the district truly cared about
24 community buy-in to its facilities

1 plan, they would demonstrate their
2 ability to make those urgent repairs
3 and provide the relevant information
4 on school closures.

5 Now, please force them,
6 continue to force them to show their
7 work, disclose the why behind their
8 proposals, and establish detailed
9 timelines of what will be done to
10 each affected school, and when.
11 Thank you.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
13 Thank you. Thank you for your
14 testimony. Truly appreciate you,
15 sir. I'm sure members don't have
16 questions for Mr. Steinberg. Great.
17 Thank you, sir. We appreciate you.

18 MR. STEINBERG: Thank you.

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
20 sorry and I apologize for not
21 framing this. But moving forward,
22 when you come up to testify, you
23 have to start by stating your name
24 for the public record. After you

1 state your name, you may begin with
2 your testimony. When you hear the
3 bell, that means we're asking you to
4 begin to wrap your testimony up and
5 summarize it. When you hear the
6 second bell, that means that your
7 time is up.

8 Okay. You may proceed.

9 I'm sorry. John. Please state your
10 name for the record. Are you okay?

11 MS. RAINER: Yeah.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Are
13 you okay?

14 MS. RAINER: I'm fine.

15 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
16 You're sure you're okay to testify
17 still?

18 MS. RAINER: I sure am.

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
20 Okay. Go ahead. Please state your
21 name for the record and you may
22 begin your testimony.

23 MS. RAINER: Okay. Hello
24 everyone. My name is Nefititi

1 Rainer. Thank you for the
2 opportunity to come up here after
3 long, what, seven hours that we've
4 all been here. So basically, I had
5 a written testimony, but we've been
6 here too long, so I'm going to try
7 to keep it short and sweet.

8 Basically, the problem that
9 I see with the school district is
10 that we don't have enough proper
11 data analysis. It is kind of just
12 surface level. We saying that
13 people are graduating on time and we
14 have less people dropping out, but
15 that is actually not a 100 accurate.
16 It is taking people longer to
17 actually graduate on time. The
18 numbers don't add up. Still one out
19 of four children do not graduate
20 when they're supposed to.

21 As you can see, the
22 children come up and they're saying
23 that they're not -- they don't have
24 public -- they don't have proper

1 resources in their schools to
2 actually feel comfortable. And this
3 actually affects their mental
4 health, their emotional health and
5 how they function in schools.

6 And I'm not far from this;
7 I'm only 24 years old. I graduated
8 class of 2020, so I've seen all of
9 this firsthand, experienced it, went
10 to school with bars on the windows,
11 dirty bathrooms, and all of that.
12 So it just shows how inadequate the
13 schools are and people have to
14 practically beg for hours and hours.

15 We can't come to a
16 resolution and people do not have
17 trust. The school district -- the
18 school board is being honest, but it
19 is no transparency. You're not
20 being honest about the details. We
21 need way more stuff for the
22 children, the schools, even the
23 teachers to properly teach the kids
24 of the community. Is that it?

1 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

2 Thank you for your testimony. And I
3 apologize. I apologize as well.
4 Okay.

5 MS. NELSON: Good
6 afternoon. My name is Kimberly
7 Nelson, and this is my daughter,
8 Kennedy Nelson. I'm here to this
9 morning -- this afternoon about the
10 conditions of the schools that have
11 been ignored for decades for ADA
12 accessibility. Tier one is one of
13 the -- tier one for special
14 education, they receive \$28,200 --
15 \$28,200 per year for a child. A
16 child with a disability or special
17 needs --

18 FEMALE VOICE: -- per
19 child.

20 MS. NELSON: They -- per
21 child. They receive \$56,400 per
22 year per special Ed child. Tier
23 III, they receive \$85,000 and up per
24 child.

1 In September of 2025, my
2 daughter was strong and healthy to
3 go to our neighborhood catchment
4 school, and that is Overbrook High
5 School.

6 My daughter passed out a
7 few weeks ago because of the
8 conditions of the school; the
9 classroom was hot. She was put into
10 the hospital because she was
11 dehydrated and she was -- she can't
12 use the bathroom. The bathroom is
13 not a ADA accessible. It doesn't
14 have any railings. It sits 15
15 inches from the floor. The bathroom
16 still does not work.

17 Inside of the learning
18 class, the life support skill class,
19 all of the cabinets inside of the
20 kitchen where the deplorable and
21 they were all falling apart inside
22 of -- okay.

23 All right. I just want --
24 the ADA accessibility inside of our

1 schools are not in compliance. And
2 I have put in several and sent out
3 emails to several entities inside of
4 our city. And it is unfair that I
5 have to worry about my child being
6 safe inside of a school that does
7 not have the necessary needs to be
8 able to educate her.

9 And for the amount of money
10 that they receive from our children,
11 it is not acceptable. We should
12 have better choice. Yes.

13 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
14 want to say thank you because
15 honestly, I'm looking around, I
16 don't have any staff here, but if I
17 can get one of my colleagues at
18 large to volunteer to get staff --
19 this sister has been coming down to
20 City Council saying this for some
21 time.

22 This isn't her first time
23 down here. This isn't her first
24 time testifying. It is not the

1 first time hearing stories about her
2 daughter and she has been polite and
3 respectful in her advocacy and she's
4 seen no change. I don't have staff
5 here right now, but can we -- thank
6 you, Councilmember Brooks. Can we
7 connect with them -- with the sister
8 so we can do something about this?

9 MS. NELSON: Thank you.

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
11 Ma'am, thank you for waiting six
12 hours to come tell your story again,
13 and I'm sorry for what you had to
14 experience as well too. Thank you.

15 All right. Next person,
16 Mr. Clerk.

17 THE CLERK: Thank you.
18 Anne Dorn, Sabrina Rung, Amy
19 Szymanski and Brianna Blackwood.
20 Anne Dorn, Sabrina Rung, Amy
21 Szymanski, and Brianna Blackwood.

22 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
23 Please state your name for the --
24 for the record and you may begin

1 with your testimony.

2 MS. DORN: My name is Anne
3 Dorn. I'm a member of PCAC, the
4 advisory council that talks to
5 stakeholders all over the city,
6 finds out what is important to
7 people and then tries to put
8 together some advice for the board.

9 And the first thing I
10 wanted to talk about today,
11 President Johnson actually already
12 brought it up, about how -- there
13 was an article in the Inquirer
14 September 16th, about how the
15 district has a budget for 22
16 plumbers, but only eight on staff.

17 And again, this was an
18 article that appeared last
19 September. The same issue was
20 brought up today. Deputy
21 Superintendent Hill had a lot of
22 things to explain about how they're
23 patching the broken plumbing, but
24 these plumbers have still not been

1 hired. And I think this really
2 points to a larger issue with the
3 district.

4 There are a lot of -- there
5 have been a lot of questions today
6 about why is the school selection
7 process not going well? And the
8 person who designed the school
9 selection process was let go two
10 years ago. But the school selection
11 process itself is still here.

12 And I think this is a
13 really a pattern with the district
14 that when a mistake is made, a
15 person may be held responsible, but
16 the mistake is never fixed. And
17 that prevents mistakes from getting
18 fixed because nobody can ever admit
19 that anything is wrong, because
20 rather than fixing what is wrong, a
21 person is blamed; a person is let
22 go.

23 So I would just really ask
24 if we want to do better with

1 plumbing or absolutely anything
2 else, we just need a system where
3 people who make mistakes are allowed
4 to fix them.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank
6 you.

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
8 Thank you for your testimony and
9 thank you for your patience.

10 Please state your name for
11 the record and begin with your
12 testimony.

13 MS. BLACKWOOD: Good
14 afternoon, Council President
15 Johnson, and members of City
16 Council.

17 My name is Brianna
18 Blackwood and I'm a first year SSC,
19 Student Success Coach, with City of
20 Philadelphia. Serving at Finletter
21 Elementary School at Councilmember
22 Phillips' District.

23 Today I serve with City
24 Year because it has been meaningful

1 -- it has been a meaningful part of
2 my life for as long as I can
3 remember.

4 In middle school, I had a
5 SSC, Ms. Jordan, who inspired me to
6 push myself and believe in my
7 potential. It motivated me to
8 pursue this role so I can provide
9 the same to encourage others. We at
10 City Year SSC serve across 12
11 partner schools in Philadelphia,
12 working alongside teachers to
13 support students academically and
14 emotionally.

15 At Finletter and all our
16 partner schools, we provide targeted
17 instructions, individualized
18 support, and consistent progress
19 monitoring. We also help build a
20 positive school climate by forming
21 strong relationships and supporting
22 students' emotional growth. Each
23 SSC has a focus list of 18 students
24 who we support in small groups;

1 individual, academic, and mentoring
2 sessions. And that is just one part
3 of our service year. We also
4 support whole classrooms, contribute
5 to school-wide attendance, and
6 cultural initiatives and help run
7 afterschool programs, giving
8 students a safe structured space to
9 learn and connect.

10 We motivate students by
11 setting clear goals, celebrating
12 small wins, and making sure every
13 student feels seen, heard, and
14 capable of success. I'm proud to
15 share that I'll be returning for a
16 second year of service with City
17 Year.

18 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
19 Thank you. And thank you to the
20 folks at City Year for your service.
21 One of my favorite special education
22 teachers, please state your name for
23 the record and begin with your
24 testimony.

1 MS. SZYMANSKI: My name is
2 Amy Szymanski. I am from Lankenau
3 Environmental Science High School.
4 I'm here speaking today on behalf of
5 the students and parents of Lankenau
6 High School who can't continue to
7 leave class and leave work to speak
8 on behalf of their school closing.
9 I understand the advocacy that
10 you've all done already, so I know
11 I'm here preaching to the choir.

12 But I do want to highlight
13 that the most current reiteration of
14 the plan keeps the school building
15 open while still disrupting the
16 education of the students who are
17 there. The consistency that is
18 required for students with autism
19 and students with visual impairments
20 will be disrupted while the school
21 building is used for -- as an
22 environmental science education hub
23 for other students around the school
24 district.

1 While our current incoming
2 -- our current 9th graders, our
3 current 10th graders, and our
4 incoming 8th graders, going to be
5 9th graders next year, will not be
6 able to finish their high school
7 career at the same school with the
8 same level of safety and trust and
9 consistency. That has already been
10 established. So like everybody
11 else, I'm hoping that they do not
12 vote tomorrow and they continue to
13 redraft the plan. Thank you.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank
15 you.

16 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Come
17 back real quick, I'm sorry. You
18 come on back. Please Come on back.
19 Mr. Clerk, while I'm asking this
20 question, can you call the next
21 group of people to come on up.
22 While these folks are coming up, I
23 got a question for you.

24 THE CLERK: Julie Krug,

1 Dudd Bay, Ben Scheinfeld and Marissa
2 Amos.

3 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

4 You-all start making your way up.
5 Question for you, and I just want
6 the other members of Council to hear
7 this because this is really
8 important. How many special -- what
9 percentage of the population at
10 Lankenau are actually special needs
11 children?

12 MS. SZYMANSKI: Students
13 with IEPs is about 24 percent total.

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
15 that is important, colleagues; 24
16 percent of the students at Lankenau
17 are special needs. And colleagues,
18 look, when we say special needs,
19 we're not talking about like just an
20 IEP, right? Can you give us an
21 example of some of the special needs
22 children you deal with?

23 MS. SZYMANSKI: About 10
24 years ago, Lankenau was designed to

1 be the receiving school from
2 students from Overbook Elementary --
3 Overbrook Education Center, I'm
4 sorry -- in order to make sure that
5 there was a seamless transition for
6 students that had co-disability of
7 intellectual disability and visual
8 impairment and/or blindness. So
9 those students are a large
10 percentage of our special education
11 population.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So
13 tell them what type of needs are we
14 talking about? Blind, what else?

15 MS. SZYMANSKI: Blind
16 students with intellectual
17 disability, that is your typical
18 student who would be in a life skill
19 support class. Similar to what the
20 family of that mom was just talking
21 about, I think they left.

22 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
23 Okay. That is --

24 MS. SZYMANSKI: Yeah.

1 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
2 just wanted my colleagues to know.
3 Thank you. We appreciate it.
4 Please state your name for the
5 record and you may begin with your
6 testimony.

7 MS. LILY: Should I go
8 first? Hi. My name is Lily with
9 Lift Every Voice Philly. I'll be
10 reading testimony on behalf of Julie
11 Krug, who -- a parent member, who
12 could not stay as it got later. "My
13 name is Julie Krug and I live in the
14 2nd District. I'm here today to
15 speak on behalf of the education
16 budget.

17 I'm speaking as a member of
18 Lift Every Voice Philly, a Black led
19 parent membership organization.
20 Currently we have members
21 representing 18 schools across the
22 city. I want to first thank City
23 Council for all of your work
24 standing up for Philly students, and

1 also share that LEV supports
2 delaying the vote on the school
3 facilities plan this Thursday.

4 Right now we are here
5 speaking about the dreams and
6 nightmares budget facing us and
7 calling on you to step up. Every
8 person on this Council has an
9 opportunity to be a hero by
10 protecting the children and workers
11 in our school.

12 We cannot accept a city
13 with the largest fund balance in a
14 generation while our schools face a
15 \$300 million deficit. In just a
16 number of weeks, my daughter will be
17 graduating. When I was a first-time
18 kindergarten parent in 2013, our
19 schools faced awful budget cuts.

20 My daughter's school at the
21 time had overcrowded classrooms and
22 no aides. Across the river, a child
23 who had attended a school without a
24 nurse died after suffering an asthma

1 attack. That was the result of the
2 disinvestment. How could our city
3 have let that happen?

4 Now it is happening again.
5 My daughter's school was devastated
6 last year after losing three
7 teachers. The school currently has
8 two beloved building subs. At my
9 son's high school this year, staff
10 worked together to provide fights on
11 least two occasions. Those critical
12 moments of deescalation don't happen
13 without enough adults in the
14 building. We are asking you to use
15 every tool at your disposal to reach
16 70 million -- \$75 million to fully
17 protect our school-based staff.

18 While the Mayor's proposed
19 50 million is a welcome step, it is
20 not enough. It leaves more than 200
21 positions still at risk and schools
22 facing real disruption. Our kids
23 cannot afford another cycle of cuts.
24 They need to know that the adults in

1 the city will provide for them
2 first." Thank you.

3 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

4 Thank you for your testimony.
5 Please state your name for the
6 record and you may begin with your
7 testimony.

8 MR. SCHEINFELD: My name is
9 Ben Scheinfeld and I live in the 3rd
10 District. I'm here today as a
11 member of Lift Every Voice Philly.
12 We're a black led, parent membership
13 organization, united across class,
14 race and neighborhoods to demand
15 action on our schools.

16 I want to recognize the
17 Council for making our wellness
18 policy a reality and their support
19 with that. Right now, we're
20 speaking on that \$300 million
21 funding void that is looming for our
22 schools this season. It is
23 indefensible to let this nightmare
24 loom while the city sits on the

1 largest fund balance in the
2 generation.

3 I have a first grader at
4 Lea, a K-8 school in West Philly. I
5 feel incredibly fortunate that he
6 can walk to school with his
7 neighborhood and be part of a
8 community that has endured for over
9 a century.

10 To send your child to
11 school is an act of trust. To some
12 extent, you're putting your trust in
13 the institution, the facilities, the
14 curriculum. Really though, you're
15 putting your trust in the people who
16 make up your school; teachers,
17 counselors, facilities and climate
18 staff who take care of our kids
19 every day.

20 At Lea, we have Ms. C. She
21 is one of hundreds of climate
22 staffers who are members of UNITE
23 HERE, Local 634 and at risk of being
24 torn away from their school

1 communities. On paper, she is
2 responsible for something like
3 lunchroom management. In practice,
4 she manages many different
5 responsibilities every day on top of
6 the truly critical work of getting
7 dozens of high energy kids to
8 actually eat lunch in a confined
9 space. That is impressive, but that
10 is not what makes trust or the
11 lunchroom work.

12 What makes it work is
13 hearing Ms. C describe your kids'
14 behavior, emotions, and even their
15 eyelashes, realizing that she hasn't
16 just learned their names, but reads
17 their faces. Whole lunchrooms of
18 individual kids that she truly
19 knows. Support when they need --
20 boundaries when they need. Trust
21 that makes schools work is being
22 able to tell your tiny 6-year-old,
23 "If you need help, find Ms. C. I
24 trust her, and she'll have your

1 back."

2 There are hundreds of
3 Ms. Cs across the district who need
4 your action now. Often they have
5 years of service at their schools.
6 They make up the bedrock of trust in
7 public education. They cannot be
8 cut or shuffled around without
9 eroding Philly parents' confidence
10 that our schools can work.

11 The Mayor's 50 million
12 proposal is a welcome step forward,
13 it still leaves more than 200
14 positions at risk. Our proposed \$75
15 million investment would protect
16 more than 500 essential staff
17 members, including building subs,
18 climate staff, and teachers --

19 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Sir,
20 I'm going to have to ask you to
21 summarize because I want everybody
22 to get an opportunity.

23 MR. SCHEINFELD: All right,
24 last sentence. This is a legacy

1 moment as you mentioned. Continue
2 to reverse precedent. Keep
3 rebuilding trust in schools,
4 starting with funding these
5 positions.

6 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

7 Thank you for your testimony. Thank
8 you for your patience too. And
9 please know your voice matters. We
10 appreciate it. If you could call
11 the next set of folks to testify,
12 then you can go if that is okay.

13 THE CLERK: Marissa Amos,
14 Nikia Rosado, Eden MacDougall, David
15 Alexander Jenkins.

16 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

17 Please state your name for the
18 record. You may begin with your
19 testimony.

20 MS. ROBBINS: My name is
21 Judy Robbins with Lift Every Voice
22 Philly. I am reading on behalf of
23 our parent member Marissa Amos, who
24 could not stay as well as many of

1 our parent members who had to leave
2 today. LEV also supports delaying
3 the vote at the district.

4 "My name is Marissa Amos,
5 and I live in District 4, Councilman
6 Jones' District. My child is a
7 third grader at Powel Elementary.
8 I'm speaking as a member of Lift
9 Every Voice, a Black led parent
10 membership organization.

11 We are united across class,
12 race and neighborhoods to demand
13 urgent action in our schools. We
14 see it as our duty as parents, as
15 voters, and community leaders to
16 push for systems' change by leading
17 together. Currently, we have
18 members representing 18 schools
19 across the city.

20 Standing behind me are our
21 members and supporters who are
22 resolute in our commitment to
23 fundamentally change our schools. I
24 want to thank City Council for

1 standing with us on the Joy campaign
2 and our fight for silent -- for no
3 silent lunches and guaranteed daily
4 access to recess.

5 In Philadelphia, we know
6 this line, "Seen my dreams unfold,
7 nightmares come true" Right now that
8 contradiction is playing out in real
9 time. The city holds over \$1
10 billion in reserves while public
11 schools are being forced to cut the
12 very people and programs our kids
13 rely on every day. While other
14 others debate new taxes or rush to
15 vote on closing our schools, we know
16 the \$1.2 billion in reserves is the
17 immediate solution to keep our staff
18 in place.

19 We thank the Councilmembers
20 standing up against these rush
21 decisions, and we urge you to use
22 that rainy day fund now to give our
23 families the stability we deserve.

24 And for me, this isn't just

1 about numbers; this is personal. My
2 child is kind, curious, courageous,
3 but also anxious and still finding
4 her confidence. Because of that,
5 the people in her school building
6 matter deeply. It matters that when
7 her teacher is absent, Ms. Hamilton,
8 a building substitute she has known
9 since kindergarten, is there.
10 Someone she trusts and feels safe
11 with.

12 It matters that Ms. Statin,
13 one of only two climate support
14 specialists, greets her with a hug
15 in the morning. Not just my child,
16 but so many children who need that
17 sense of belonging to start their
18 day. And when my daughter faced
19 bullying in kindergarten, Ms. Statin
20 was there for her and for me,
21 helping us navigate that moment of
22 care --

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
24 Ma'am, I'm sorry. I hate to do

1 this, but I need you to summarize.

2 Yeah.

3 MS. ROBBINS: Sure.

4 Without full funding, schools will
5 face real disruption, larger class
6 sizes, fewer supports, and fewer
7 trusted adults. A \$75 million
8 investment would protect more than
9 500 essential staff building
10 substitutes, climate staff, and
11 teachers; the people our kids rely
12 on every day.

13 We call on you to use every
14 tool at your disposal to reach \$75
15 million to fully protect school-
16 based staff and prevent cuts across
17 all school -- schools. As well as
18 require the district to release
19 preliminary budgets so that school,
20 communities, and elected officials
21 understand what is -- what is at
22 stake --

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

24 Okay. So --

1 MS. ROBBINS: We know City
2 Council has stood with parents
3 before, and we're ready to stand
4 with you again to get this done.
5 Thank you.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank
7 you.

8 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Is
9 there anyone else here from Lift
10 Every Voice that came to testify?

11 MS. ROBBINS: One.

12 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: How
13 many more people from Lift Every --
14 come on up, let them. David, I got
15 you. Come on up. Let us get Lift
16 Every Voice -- all the Lift Every
17 Voice folks now. State your name
18 for the -- state your -- state your
19 name first then start.

20 MR. SPENCE: My name is
21 Aaron Spence, but I'm reading on
22 behalf of a member Siani Bolling --

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Oh,
24 hold on. I'm sorry, say it again.

1 MR. SPENCE: Aaron Spence.

2 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: You
3 may begin with your testimony.

4 MR. SPENCE: Hello. My
5 name is Siani Bolling. I am from
6 West Philly. A founding member of
7 Lift Every Voice Philly, and a proud
8 parent of a Philadelphia public
9 school student. I'm speaking today
10 on the budget cuts. Right now, we
11 are facing a dreams and nightmare
12 budget. On one side, the city is
13 holding over a billion dollars in
14 reserves. On the other, our schools
15 are once again being asked to do
16 more with even less.

17 We thank you for your
18 leadership to slow down the
19 facilities plan as we work together
20 to plug this budget hole. The
21 threat of 17 school closures being
22 rushed through this Thursday is a
23 distraction we can't afford, and
24 neither -- and neither is waiting

1 for a new tax to pass. The solution
2 is already in the bank. That \$1.2
3 billion in reserves should be the
4 first tool we use to keep our staff
5 in place.

6 The cuts that are being
7 proposed directly affect essential
8 workers such as climate staff and
9 building substitute teachers that
10 help keep schools running day to
11 day. Without building substitutes
12 when a class permanent teacher is
13 absent, there will -- there will be
14 no one to cover classes. That means
15 lost learning time, larger combined
16 classes, and more chaos in the
17 building.

18 Our climate staff are also
19 -- are also essential keeping our
20 children safe. They are the adults
21 who make sure students can safely go
22 to the bathroom, who supervise our
23 hallways, lunch, and recess, and who
24 step in to support classrooms when

1 needed.

2 Our schools would fall
3 apart without these essential class
4 -- without these essential workers.
5 As a childcare worker, I see every
6 day that you need enough adults in a
7 building to safely support children
8 so they can continue to thrive in
9 their learning environment --

10 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Sir,
11 we need you to summarize.

12 MR. SPENCE: The city has
13 the resources right now to prevent
14 the chaos. The mayor's proposal
15 only covers 60 percent of the school
16 budget cuts, leaving more than 200
17 positions at risk. We need you to
18 use every tool at your disposal to
19 reach 75 million to fully protect
20 school-based staff.

21 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
22 Thank you, sir.

23 MR. SPENCE: I'll end
24 there.

1 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: And
2 can we give all the people from Lift
3 Every Voice round of applause.
4 We've truly appreciate the work
5 you've done. We want to thank you
6 for your advocacy around bringing
7 joy to the school district. We
8 appreciate you, you're an important
9 advocacy arm, and we love what
10 you're doing to fight for our
11 children. So thank you all for
12 being here, and thank you for your
13 patience. We appreciate it.

14 Please state your name for
15 the record, and you are -- and you
16 may begin with your testimony. Are
17 you next? Excuse me, are you next?
18 Are you on a list? Did you sign up?

19 MS. MACDOUGALL: I did sign
20 up.

21 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:
22 Okay.

23 MS. MACDOUGALL: I wasn't
24 sure of the order.

1 MR. JENKINS: Member
2 Thomas, David Alexander Jenkins.
3 You know, I came in and sat here for
4 six hours because I'm a concerned
5 citizen who lives in Rittenhouse
6 Square, who always sees the white
7 elephant in the room.

8 And it said that if I want
9 to buy a home, you guys will give me
10 a 10-year tax abatement for which I
11 can put marble floors down and look
12 at a -- at a beautiful view of the
13 park, and then take from the city
14 almost \$130 million out of the
15 budget every single year. And while
16 children starve, try to figure out
17 how their parents are going to go to
18 work, they can't get to school.

19 I get to have a fabulous
20 view and a wonderful martini from my
21 bathtub while people can't be
22 educated in Philadelphia today. So
23 I want to thank you guys for the
24 work that you do tirelessly because

1 you're handed a lemon and you have
2 to make juice out of it. But I
3 think I would like to say, please
4 tax me, please tax my neighbors.

5 Please ask us who you give
6 the benefits to, to do our job in
7 the City of Philadelphia, to put
8 money back into the system which
9 pays us so that the people that we
10 educate and graduate who then work
11 for our companies we've actually
12 paid for in the first place. So
13 that is all I wanted to say.

14 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I
15 don't know if I could have said it
16 better. Thank you, sir. We
17 appreciate your testimony means a
18 lot more coming from you than us.
19 State your name for the record, and
20 you may begin with your testimony.

21 MS. MACDOUGALL: My name is
22 Eden MacDougall.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Hold
24 on, say it again.

1 MS. MACDOUGALL: My name is
2 Eden MacDougall. I'm reading a
3 comment on behalf of a family friend
4 who works for the district. Her
5 name is Lydia. She couldn't be here
6 today. She is saying, "We're trying
7 to send the message to our students
8 that learning doesn't stop when they
9 step off the school campus. That
10 opportunities for growth can happen
11 anywhere and at any time.

12 The current student fare
13 restrictions fly in the face of that
14 message and further exacerbate the
15 economic inequity that Philadelphia
16 children are forced to live in. If
17 your family has the means to pay for
18 your commute, the sky is the limit
19 for you. If not, good luck getting
20 on your last ride by 8:00 p.m., and
21 that is only if you happen to live
22 past an arbitrary cutoff radius from
23 your school." Thank you.

24 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

1 Thank you for your testimony. You
2 are -- has that -- everybody here
3 signed up?

4 MS. SANDOVAL: Yes.

5 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

6 Amazing. Please state -- let me --
7 before we keep going, I just want to
8 take a moment to commend the people
9 from the Mayor's administration who
10 are in the back, that are still
11 listening to all of the public
12 comments. So know that it is not
13 just City Council listening to
14 everything that you're saying and
15 are sitting here waiting. We also
16 have members of the administration
17 that is listening to everything that
18 is being said. Please state your
19 name for the record, and you may
20 begin with your testimony.

21 MS. SANDOVAL: Anna
22 Victoria Sandoval. Good afternoon,
23 everyone. Thank you for having the
24 time to voice my opinion as well.

1 Just like many of us in this room, I
2 have a lot of hats that I wear, but
3 today I'm here as a parent and an
4 alumni from the district.

5 And seeing the closure of
6 the schools happening, like for
7 example, Bache, but also the lack of
8 movement that has been seen in the
9 school of Southwark. I, myself, am
10 a mother of three kids at Southwark
11 currently, and I just want to voice
12 that I'm also a parent from the SAC
13 leadership today.

14 And just as we all have
15 seen, the crowd has gotten less and
16 shorter because of time. All I
17 would like to say is that we really
18 need you guys to answer your
19 questions and give us --

20 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: I'm
21 sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

22 MS. SANDOVAL: Yeah.

23 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: Just

24 --

1 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet
2 please.

3 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: No,
4 it is not -- that is not it. What
5 -- I'm -- I'm sorry. Just -- we
6 going to pause for one second. All
7 right? Just one second.

8 All right. I'm sorry. I'm
9 sorry. If everybody -- I know
10 everybody is a little anxious and it
11 is not -- it is beyond any of our
12 control. So if we could just --
13 we're going to try to expedite this
14 a little quicker than what we would
15 normally do. All right folks? And
16 I'm apologizing for that. All
17 right? But we do got to expedite
18 this a lot faster. All right. Go
19 ahead.

20 MS. SANDOVAL: I would just
21 like to ask for the folks here today
22 to give us actual answers instead of
23 giving us a roundabouts on, like,
24 what is the -- what is the time

1 limit for when we are actually going
2 to get a yes or no for the fixing or
3 for Southwark to be approved to get
4 an annex.

5 For approving, to get the
6 funding for fixing our bathrooms. We
7 keep hearing you guys talking about
8 how our future, our future, our
9 future. Our kids' future is right
10 now. And we want answers now. So
11 we thank you for your time.

12 And I'm also going to be
13 interpreting in Spanish -- in
14 English for one of our parents that
15 we have from Southwark. So they can
16 also give you their points and
17 opinion on what's going on. And I'm
18 sorry if I'm rambling, it is just
19 that there's so much things that
20 were happening today that, you know
21 what? It gives that mind of
22 openness of like, there is so much
23 that needs to be fixed.

24 And we, from Southwark, are

1 focusing on mice. And as we saw
2 today, there are mice here too. So
3 like, what are we doing? What are
4 we doing? Where's our money going?
5 And yeah --

6 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS: So I
7 was trying not to say that on the
8 record, but since you already said
9 it on the record, anybody who is
10 uncomfortable, please know that you
11 could submit your testimony in
12 writing to us. If you do not want
13 to stay, if you're uncomfortable
14 with anything that is happening, you
15 can submit your testimony in
16 writing.

17 We promise you we'll read
18 it and it will be the equivalence of
19 if you testified here in person. So
20 thank you for going ahead and
21 putting it out there. The elephant
22 in the room -- the elephant in the
23 room. Oh, Lord.

24 Please state your name for

1 the record if be given your
2 testimony.

3 MS: LUCAS: Sorry, I am
4 here since morning, so yeah. Good
5 afternoon. My name is Tiana Leon
6 Lucas, and I'm a mother of two
7 students at Southwark Elementary
8 School. My daughters are in sixth
9 grade and third grade, and they're
10 in the bilingual program. I'm here
11 to speak out for my children.

12 Our students deserve to
13 have a safe and decent school where
14 they don't have to run home just to
15 use the bathroom and have good
16 conditions of the bathroom. They
17 have told me time again -- time and
18 time again that they have to wait in
19 long lines in the bathroom just to
20 see if they can go to the bathroom.
21 And in occasions, they have
22 accidents while waiting.

23 In reality, the situation
24 is much worse than what I'm

1 speaking. For example, my daughters
2 have told me that they have had to
3 endure the smell of dead rats in
4 their classrooms, and also having to
5 see running rodents from one side of
6 the classroom to the other. And
7 they have slipped in the bathrooms
8 with the floor flooding of toilet
9 water. I have a few questions.

10 Do you think it is right
11 for our children to have to be
12 exposed and shamed with fear and
13 anxiety and being humiliated with
14 these things happening?

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
16 I'm sorry, we need you to summarize.
17 I'm sorry.

18 MS. LUCAS: Okay. I'm
19 going to finish with this. We are
20 here -- we are here demanding
21 solutions, quick ones, and real
22 ones. I did not think that I would
23 have to come here and have to ask
24 for basic necessities of sanitary

1 here in the United States.

2 We demand that the upcoming
3 budget be increased for pest
4 control, for a better future, for
5 our kids in the city and for
6 diversifying our bathrooms and
7 having an annex. Thank you so much.

8 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

9 Thank you. I just want to
10 acknowledge the work of City Year of
11 Philadelphia. I'm a former member
12 of City Year of Philadelphia. I
13 served two years as a project
14 manager when they first came to the
15 City of Philadelphia, so continue to
16 keep up the good work.

17 MR. STRASSBURGER: Hello.
18 My name is Zach Strassburger. I am
19 the parent of three children who
20 have attended or will attend
21 Southwark School. Southwark is a
22 community school that stays open
23 longer for working parents as part
24 of the Mayor's extended day extended

1 year program.

2 But you've heard about our
3 bathrooms where sewage water drips
4 through ceiling tiles onto students.
5 Where there's no real cafeteria or
6 kitchen where students eat in a
7 basement next to the largest
8 bathroom in the building where the
9 air smells like sewage and makes the
10 kids sick. Where students see
11 rodents so often, they name them
12 Mickey and Minnie.

13 My youngest child is
14 supposed to start at Southwark this
15 fall, but they have autism. They
16 use the bathroom independently, but
17 they aren't going to be able to wait
18 10 minutes for an open kindergarten
19 stall or wander the halls looking
20 for an open toilet.

21 My kid won't be able to
22 leave the building to go use the
23 proposed modular toilet behind the
24 school. Does this mean my child

1 can't attend Southwark because of
2 the bathrooms? Where in the IEP do
3 I say, improve skills at recognizing
4 unsafe bathrooms as measured by
5 sewage coming out of the floor.
6 These problems aren't new.

7 My fourth grader doesn't
8 understand why I'm here today
9 because he says the conditions have
10 been bad for so long, and he doesn't
11 expect better. But I asked him what
12 his little siblings should do
13 entering kindergarten, and he said
14 we should spend the summer teaching
15 the youngest to avoid puddles on the
16 floor. That is not acceptable for
17 either kid. My fourth grader
18 shouldn't feel that nothing will
19 change, and he should feel worthy of
20 working bathrooms. Please help.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
22 Thank you very much.

23 MS. WALTON: Good
24 afternoon.

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Please begin your testimony.

3 MS. WALTON: Good

4 afternoon, Council President Johnson
5 and city Councilmembers. My name is
6 Davia White Walton. Council
7 President, you might know me as the
8 Fresh Princess.

9 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

10 I thought that was you.

11 MS. WALTON: I'm a -- I'm a
12 City Year Student success coach at
13 Harding Middle School, which is in
14 Councilmember Quetcy Lozada's
15 District. I also reside in West
16 Philly and Councilmember Gauthier's
17 District. I support Ms. Theresa
18 Carr's eighth grade English
19 classroom every day. She would have
20 loved to be here in person, but
21 she's currently supporting in the
22 school house during the PSSAs that
23 reflects the kind of teacher that
24 she is. I'm grateful to have the

1 chance to share her words with you
2 all. Thank you.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 Thank you.

5 MS. WALTON: "My name is
6 Theresa Carr, and I teach 8th grade
7 English at Harding Middle School.
8 My journey in education began when I
9 served as a City Year Philadelphia
10 core member at Roxborough High
11 School in 2023. That year
12 introduced me to this city and
13 showed me how meaningful it is to
14 share my love of literacy with
15 Philadelphia's creative and
16 thoughtful young people.

17 This is my second year
18 teaching at Harding, but the first
19 year I have welcomed a City Year
20 core member, student success coach
21 Davi, and to my classroom. As a
22 former core member, I knew City Year
23 was valuable, but even I have been
24 struck by the difference her

1 presence makes. Coach Davi occupies
2 a role that teachers cannot
3 replicate. Students see her as a
4 mentor and guide.

5 While I lead instructions,
6 she moves through the room helping
7 students navigate hurdles, offering
8 different ways to engage with the
9 lesson, and giving encouragement
10 that feels personal and motivating.

11 Because of the trust she
12 builds, her support accelerates
13 students' learning in ways that are
14 both immediate and lasting. At
15 Harding and across the school
16 district, we need all hands on deck
17 to support student achievement.
18 City Year members are not extra,
19 they are essential partners in
20 building strong and consistent
21 relationships that help students
22 thrive academically and emotionally.

23 Now that I'm a teacher, I
24 see even more clearly how City Year

1 strengthens school communities,
2 support students' wellbeing, and
3 introduces young adults to the
4 possibility of a career in education
5 right here in Philadelphia."

6 That concludes my testimony
7 from my partner teacher, and I place
8 my Davia hat on again to say that
9 I'm happy to announce that I will be
10 returning to City Year for a second
11 year, and I plan, for my long-term
12 goal, to be a guidance counselor in
13 Philadelphia. Thank you.

14 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:
15 Keep up the good work. What about
16 your rap career? You going to
17 continue, right? Aren't you Fresh
18 Princess? What -- you --

19 MS. WALTON: It is funny,
20 my kids just found out that I rap,
21 so they've been beating on desks and
22 I've been following those beats, so
23 I'm still going.

24 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

1 Keep up the good work.

2 MS. WALTON: Thank you.

3 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

4 Mama Gail, are you coming up now?

5 Is Kendra Brooks here? You know

6 Tosha Taylor from South Philly,

7 right? Yeah. Wilson Park. That is

8 -- she is a nice -- I see a nice

9 tale now out there being a super

10 activist as she is. Yeah, he is

11 from downtown. Oh, nice. Come on

12 up, sir.

13 THE CLERK: John McKay,

14 Sheree Lewis, Ronaldo De'Jesus,

15 Ashley Redfern.

16 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

17 Keep calling them up there. Keep

18 going.

19 THE CLERK: Horace Clouden,

20 Leah Clouden, Mama Gail Clouden.

21 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

22 Swimming pools.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Okay.

24 You have two minutes. State your

1 name for the record.

2 MS. LEWIS: Hi. I'm Sheree
3 Lewis, a West Philadelphia resident.
4 Thank you for the opportunity to
5 speak. I'm just here as a resident,
6 as a parent.

7 I am -- I'm currently
8 employed at the IRS and I'm also a
9 disabled veteran. I'm saying that
10 on the record to say that if anybody
11 understands budget allocation and
12 things of that sort, it would be me.
13 With that, I had a speech here, but
14 like, after taking in the hours that
15 we've been sitting here, like it is
16 kind of derailed, so I'll just, kind
17 of, run through it.

18 I just find it very -- I'm
19 trying to find a word to, like, to
20 -- I find it very hard to hear when
21 they were asked about financial
22 reports, and then it was just said,
23 well, it is on the -- online. It is
24 on the website. But not to be

1 disrespectful, but just to talk
2 grounded here, there were reports
3 that 50 percent of Philadelphia --
4 adults in Philadelphia were
5 functionally illiterate.

6 So if individuals are
7 functionally illiterate, that means
8 they're not able to comprehend what
9 it is they're reading. So if
10 they're not able to just comprehend
11 words, let alone numbers, none of
12 that type of stuff is going to
13 resonate with them.

14 Also, education lies in a
15 layered ecosystem where primary
16 funding be from state, federal, and
17 local. I just -- as a numbers
18 person, it is just not making sense.
19 I need to see the full scope, and
20 I'm not like putting blame on
21 anyone, I'm saying that as is -- as
22 a -- with a numbers background, what
23 I'm seeing doesn't add up. And it
24 may not be a funding issue, but a

1 structural and prioritization issue.

2 So I'm asking that we see
3 all, like, a full reconciliation
4 before we make anything, what we
5 need right here before we make any,
6 like, new plans, new tax, any --
7 anything before we go forward. We
8 need everything before we can
9 accurately assess what we're doing.
10 Philadelphia is no longer in the
11 space of doing things blindly. We
12 need to know what we are doing, how
13 it works for us, and how we're going
14 to move forward.

15 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

16 Thank you very much.

17 Please say your name and
18 begin your testimony. How are you
19 doing, sir?

20 MR. CLOUDEN: Hey. Good
21 evening. Good evening.

22 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

23 Always good to see you.

24 MR. CLOUDEN: Thank you.

1 My name is Horace Clouden. You
2 know, for those who have the papers
3 and other people who have the paper,
4 there is a rush for this plan
5 because the first planning year,
6 there is a billion dollars on the
7 table, a half a million -- 500
8 million for design work, and 500
9 million for no description of work.

10 So that is what is on the
11 table. That is why they want to
12 hurry up and sign this thing. You
13 know, we have solutions. We've been
14 at the board for years with
15 solutions. The solution is to move
16 the children. You know, but we say
17 bring back junior high school,
18 seventh, eighth, and ninth. These
19 K-8's are failing track schools
20 because there's too many grades to
21 manage, and they are in elementary
22 schools. We say, bring back the
23 five closed swimming pools. No need
24 to create a new location at the tune

1 of \$70 million, what they would call
2 the super site.

3 Don't invest in -- don't
4 invest \$50 million for two schools
5 over a hundred years old with low
6 enrollment and poor test scores.
7 There are other neighborhood schools
8 nearby. Stop creating swing spaces
9 because the staff doesn't want to
10 travel to another location, at the
11 tune of \$40 million.

12 Don't build four additions
13 to improve capacity. K-5, 35
14 million; K-4, 35 million; K-8, 59
15 million, and K-5, 27 million. Bring
16 back the building trade South Broad
17 Street, Barra, Overbrook, Sayre,
18 MLK, and Roxborough. There's a lot
19 more to say, but I want to say, the
20 next 10 years, they're neglecting
21 half of the city. That is what this
22 10-year plan is all about.

23 So you have the data and
24 just think this is -- the district

1 -- the board doesn't want to
2 micromanage the district, but
3 somebody has to micromanage the
4 district. So with that --

5 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

6 Thank you.

7 MS. CLOUDEN: Mama Gail.

8 My legal name is Gail Clouden. But
9 I'm sitting here for the ancestors
10 because to sit here and hear what we
11 are hearing, this is like the 60s;
12 1960, 1965. I am not going to talk
13 about 1920, but to hear and know
14 that our children can't read, write,
15 do math, tell time, write -- sign
16 their name in 2026? And we're
17 talking about what? 2032? That is
18 a problem.

19 Strawberry Mansion High
20 School does have other students in
21 the building. For everybody's
22 information, there is two other
23 groups upstairs in the building. We
24 have to do a better job. I want to

1 bring the elephant in the room, and
2 not because I'm racist, but I'm a
3 realist and our ancestors won't let
4 me sit here and be quiet.

5 My husband loves doing
6 data, and the data says that our
7 children are doing worse than
8 anybody else's children. I don't
9 care what setting this is. We got
10 to talk about the schools in the
11 Northeast, because when we were
12 younger, people were trying to go to
13 the Northeast to get a better
14 education.

15 And so here we have
16 everybody going, or many going over
17 there. We've been saying for years,
18 bring our children back home. This
19 should be about equity at this
20 point. This should be about
21 equality. And it is not that. When
22 they just built a building over a
23 100, what? 100 -- what was it? 129
24 -- 129, 000?

1 COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON:

2 Million.

3 MS. CLOUDEN: Excuse me,
4 129 million. They just built that
5 building. They are getting ready to
6 build another building in the
7 Northeast. You keep saying, we got
8 too many children in one school and
9 not enough in the other. I mean,
10 you-all are smart. I mean, come on,
11 stuff doesn't make sense. Bring our
12 children home and make sure
13 everything is equitable. K-8
14 schools have not been working for
15 our children. Our older children
16 are slowing down.

17 And I'll say it this way,
18 the large students stand in lines
19 like babies in 7th and 8th grade.
20 They're too big for the schools that
21 they're in. And when they get to
22 high school, they're in the halls
23 because they don't fit. A nine --
24 what is it? How many -- is it

1 92-minute class or 90?

2 MS. LEAH-CLOUDEN:

3 90-minute.

4 MS. CLOUDEN: A 90-minute
5 class for some child who has been in
6 elementary school from K-8 is too
7 much. Please hold people
8 accountable on every level. Please
9 do that for us. And for the
10 ancestors, I'm always going to speak
11 on your behalf; heal our families,
12 you-all. Heal our children, heal
13 our land. We built it. But guess
14 what? When you go up and downtown
15 and in the neighborhoods and you see
16 who's building, where are we?

17 Bring back Vocational Ed so
18 we can be part of this again. We
19 know how to do everything. Bring
20 people here that know how to teach
21 us. But you don't know many of you
22 is that many of the people that are
23 in the class -- many of the people
24 that are in the class are not

1 teachers. They're not educators.
2 They're people on certified
3 emergency certification. If they're
4 not teachers, how do they teach?

5 And we see how they teach
6 by the data. We got to get some
7 real people in there that know how
8 to teach. Peace and love, family.

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank
10 you.

11 MS. LEAH-CLOUDEN: Leah
12 Clouden. My question to the City
13 Council and to all of us; when do
14 you stop being polite in a
15 disrespect? You know, my opinion,
16 this is the land grab and
17 warehousing. Data have shown since
18 2010 or 2013, whenever they closed
19 the schools down all the way up
20 until now, we already saw that it
21 was a failing system.

22 We already know that you
23 can't have confidence in a school
24 district because they don't -- they

1 are not people of their word. When
2 they closed the schools down, they
3 were supposed to send resources to
4 the schools. Never happened. They
5 phased out school. They've been in
6 the practice of phasing out school.

7 So if you're looking at --
8 if you're wondering why schools are
9 underpopulated, more than likely
10 they were phased out, just like
11 Strawberry Mansion. They were
12 supposed to send the children back
13 into the school, but it didn't
14 happen.

15 Just -- I'm just tired of
16 just the lies, the disrespect. You
17 already know, you've already seen
18 that they can't be trusted. You
19 already seen that the super -- I
20 mean, not the superintendent, but
21 you already see that the Board
22 President is fixed in his decision.

23 So my thing is to City
24 Council, what are you-all going to

1 do about it? Because they're not
2 going to change. You have to force
3 their hand because this is -- this
4 is insulting to all of us. They
5 decimated the communities. We see
6 the children, they can't -- they
7 can't do basic math, read, write,
8 you know, sign their names, just
9 basic phonics, just all of it. We
10 see it. We see it when we go to the
11 stores. I'm just tired of it.

12 And if you're talking about
13 taxing, we got corner stores that
14 are having many casinos in it. What
15 are you-all doing about that? Go
16 get the money from them. We see it
17 in a gas station. Figure it out.
18 Go tax them. Charge them a casino
19 license, whatever you got to do.
20 But you know where their money --
21 the money is.

22 If you're talking about
23 safety, even with the cars that are
24 tinted windows, they look like

1 little tanks. Like where's the
2 safety in everything? Where's the
3 accountability and everything?
4 Enforce the laws. Then maybe you
5 don't have to worry about the taxing
6 the people. And also figure out a
7 way to hold the school district
8 accountable, if you're going to give
9 them money. Stop just -- because
10 they're not even holding their own
11 people accountable.

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank
13 you.

14 MS. LEAH-CLOUDEN: So that
15 is it.

16 THE CLERK: Steven Bilski,
17 Markia McClinton, Daniel Pioy, and
18 Deanna Ramsey.

19 MS. POUNCEY: Since
20 protocol has already been
21 established, my name is Rhemar
22 Pouncey, and I represent Overbrook
23 Elementary School. I have been to
24 every board member -- board meeting

1 with the School District of
2 Philadelphia since the inception of
3 this facilities plan.

4 The last time I stood
5 before them, I produced to them an
6 alternative to closing Overbrook
7 Elementary School, which would have
8 saved the school district \$2.6
9 million. I sent the proposal to
10 each board member, including
11 President Streater, as well as
12 Dr. Watlington, and did not hear
13 back from them.

14 I stood there in front of
15 them and told them that my team of
16 architects, developers, would be
17 willing to look over the facilities
18 plan because the math is not
19 mathing.

20 The school district needs
21 to be held accountable. And I'm
22 stating before City Council and the
23 members that are in chambers, and
24 I'm putting it on the record, an

1 audit needs to occur. As Jerry
2 Maguire would say, "Show me the
3 money." Because I'm not seeing where
4 the money that we have already given
5 them over the decades has gone.

6 The schools have been in
7 poor condition for the last 40
8 years. I mean, I'm a graduate, so,
9 40 years. We're still doing the
10 same thing over and over and over
11 again, and putting a band aid on
12 something that can be totally fixed.
13 Thank you.

14 MS. TAYLOR: Hello,
15 everyone. My name is Tasha Taylor
16 and I'm the Home and School
17 President of Edward T. Steel
18 Elementary School. And I sit on a
19 lot of different organizations.

20 I wanted to bring up a
21 couple of things that have not been
22 addressed tonight. Like for one,
23 I'm a parent of 10 and I have a
24 grandparent of 20. 35 percent of

1 grandparents are raising the school
2 age children that we are speaking
3 about. But no one is putting them
4 on the forefront.

5 Where is the budget for
6 parent involvement? Why is there
7 only one percent of Title-1 funding
8 going into parent involvement, and
9 the school makes a decision on the
10 part of the budget that the parents
11 should be speaking to. So we have
12 to look at that.

13 We also have to look at the
14 special education. Special
15 education needs to be at the
16 forefront of a lot of what is going
17 on and happening in the schools.
18 They are right now, not talking
19 about it, but I've been in some of
20 the meetings for the year where they
21 are phasing out.

22 A lot of you don't know,
23 they're phasing out emotional
24 support. They are integrating those

1 students into regular classrooms.

2 And you haven't heard about it. I
3 know because I'm there and I'm in
4 the schools, which goes against
5 mandates.

6 Also, when we speak to the
7 bathrooms, we need to speak about
8 staff bathrooms as well. I'm in a
9 school now that toilet hasn't
10 flushed in two months, okay? So we
11 need to look at the whole dynamic.

12 And also bring the parents
13 to the table. I'm hearing everyone
14 speak, but I don't hear no one
15 bringing us parents to the table.
16 Everyone is lying about bringing the
17 parents to the table. Bring us to
18 the table. We are talking about our
19 children and everyone with children
20 in here who has a child, has a
21 niece, has a nephew.

22 Let us talk about all the
23 children and bring the parents to
24 the table. Stop making these

1 decisions without us. Everyone,
2 stop making these decisions without
3 us. The school district, stop
4 making these decisions without us
5 because these are our children.
6 Thank you.

7 MR. BUNDRIGE: Good
8 afternoon. My name is Darryl
9 Bundrige. I would like to begin by
10 thanking you all City Councilmembers
11 for your continued support of City
12 Year, our students, and our
13 communities. Especially for today
14 -- like today, we're particularly
15 grateful also for Council President
16 Johnson being an ardent supporter.

17 And City Year has been in
18 Philadelphia for the past 28 years
19 as a partner, helping our students
20 succeed and strengthening our
21 pipeline of educators, civic
22 leaders. I want to be clear, we see
23 ourselves as well aligned with the
24 priorities for the One Philly One

1 Future One Plan. And we address
2 that in the space of public safety
3 and education and workforce
4 development.

5 We are providing
6 mentorship, academic support,
7 keeping our students connected to
8 schools, increasing engagement, and
9 saving learning environments. We
10 know this because of the 120
11 students we have serving 7,500
12 students and 12 schools. 56 percent
13 of those maintain 90 percent
14 attendance or better. 70 percent of
15 those showed improvement in grade or
16 math assessments and literacy and
17 math. 88 percent of our students
18 believe City Year -- or our staff
19 believe City Year has positively
20 improved the environment. This, of
21 course, we are doing with diverse
22 support.

23 However, our federal
24 dollars, as you heard about last

1 year, still are not keeping up pace
2 with our level of support. So we're
3 asking for your continued support in
4 investing in us through our million
5 dollars that you have provided for
6 us to close the gap, stay in our
7 schools, and continue to provide
8 teachers to the pipeline and
9 civically engaged professionals.

10 Thank you for your time and
11 consideration.

12 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE-
13 RICHARDSON:

14 Thank you. Thank you very
15 much for your testimony. I'm sure
16 if Council President Johnson were
17 here, he would say, shout out to
18 City Year. So thank you very, very
19 much. Is there anyone else here to
20 testify whose name has not been
21 called? Okay.

22 Seeing none, the Chair now
23 recognizes our Education Chair,
24 Councilmember Isaiah Thomas, for a

1 motion that the public hearing and
2 meeting on the bills and resolution
3 before the Committee today stand in
4 recess until Tuesday, April 28th,
5 2026, at 10:00 a.m. in Room 400 City
6 Hall.

7 COUNCILMEMBER THOMAS:

8 Madam Leader, I move that the
9 Committee of the Whole stand
10 adjourned until Tuesday, April 28th,
11 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

12 COUNCILMEMBERS: Second.

13 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

14 RICHARDSON: It has been moved and
15 properly seconded that the public
16 hearing and meeting on the bills and
17 resolution before the Committee
18 today stand in recess until Tuesday,
19 April 28th, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. in
20 Room 400 City Hall. All those in
21 favor of the motion will indicate by
22 stating, "aye."

23 COUNCILMEMBERS: Aye.

24 COUNCILMEMBER GILMORE -

1
2 RICHARDSON: Those opposed? The
3 ayes have it, and the motion
4 carries.

5 This Committee will stand
6 in recess until Tuesday, April 28th,
7 2026, 10:00 a.m. at which time we
8 will reconvene in room 400 City
9 Hall. Thank you very much for being
10 here.

11 (Committee of the Whole meeting concluded at 5:35 p.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me of the above case, and this copy is a correct transcript of the same.

Samanda J. Rios

Samanda J. Rios

Court Reporter
Notary Public of PA & DE

(The foregoing certification of this transcript does not apply to any reproduction of the same by any means unless under the direct control and/or supervision of the certifying reporter.)

\$	\$30 131:2	1
\$0.20 42:22 43:2,24 44:2	\$300 30:20 31:7,18 32:6 40:21,23 41:9 43:16 50:18 78:22 90:3 128:12 130:20 141:1 344:11 425:15 427:20	1 87:4 118:15 191:21
\$1 42:6,22 43:4 44:3,16 49:20 70:4 178:11 433:9	\$331 124:1	1,001 93:1
\$1.2 433:16 438:2	\$359,156,246 153:17	1,200 74:24 75:2 144:20, 24
\$1.25 38:16	\$40 463:11	1.4 118:22
\$1.8 129:11 165:18 176:17,24 263:11	\$43 354:3	1.5 78:12,13 271:6 273:6, 24 274:4
\$100 198:5	\$48 44:18	1.8 176:22 177:3,4
\$100,000 66:7	\$480 153:10	10 24:4 121:12 126:3,12 135:18 150:7 161:13 204:3 239:5 296:9 384:11 388:7 391:20 422:23 452:18 463:20 473:23
\$104.3 153:5	\$5.4 60:22	10,000-foot 354:11
\$11,000 224:5,9	\$50 44:8 48:9 463:4	10-year 120:19 267:20,24 441:10 463:22
\$12 241:20 353:10 354:1 355:6	\$50,000 57:14 143:15	100 134:22 140:13 171:14 217:20 225:5 229:14,17 355:15 377:1 409:15 465:23
\$120 34:3,11,18 36:2 44:13	\$50.4 48:6,11 50:12 90:5	1030 354:16
\$130 441:14	\$52 133:2	10:00 479:5,11,19
\$136 272:17	\$56,400 411:21	10th 421:3
\$179.7 153:8	\$686 153:3	11 124:11
\$2 63:1	\$7 73:11 79:18,19,22,23 344:12	116 120:23 121:1
\$2,000 358:1	\$70 463:1	119 41:15
\$2.6 472:8	\$75 426:16 430:14 435:7, 14	11th 107:22 108:1,3
\$2.8 120:19	\$79 272:13 274:3	12 29:9 30:6 122:3 239:5 243:3 273:4,5 353:24 418:10 477:12
\$205 123:24	\$8 396:23 397:3,12 398:13	120 35:3 477:10
\$225 134:10 157:2	\$8.1 219:6,8	124 120:24
\$23,000 223:13 224:8	\$80 327:3	127 165:7 166:16 167:1 171:16
\$256 132:22	\$83 35:6 36:3 44:11	129 465:23,24 466:4
\$28 35:22	\$85,000 411:23	
\$28,200 411:14,15	\$936 153:13	
\$284 153:6	0	
\$29 276:18	000 465:24	
\$3 120:21		
\$3.045 120:22		

12th 43:7 273:19		2027 5:9,12,15 8:11 9:18, 21
13 81:7 93:18 282:19	2	2029-'30 130:12
130 131:3	2 112:5 164:10	2029-2030 130:11
14 35:6 81:7 90:18 93:18 109:4	2,237 243:6	2031 8:12 211:24 296:1
14,000 402:8	2.6 75:17	2032 5:16 9:21 261:17 264:4 294:3 318:7 321:21 464:17
149 41:14	2.8 120:21	2033 203:13
15 219:17 369:24 412:14	20 161:13 196:2 254:23 287:15 326:9 327:4 351:2 371:17 399:7 473:24	206 41:17
1500 377:2	20,000 134:3	20th 298:1 338:24
158 378:1	200 46:2 75:6 204:10 376:24 426:20 430:13 439:16	21 245:3 362:14
159 121:4	2000 213:18 236:7 243:6	21st 73:19
15th 118:16	2010 468:18	22 213:15 214:21 215:6 262:17 415:15
169 121:6	2011 136:23	22/23 354:19
16th 415:14	2012 126:17 127:7 136:22 282:19	22nd 298:2
17 141:12 145:22 287:14, 15 333:1 402:13 437:21	2012/13 150:11	23 41:14 384:14
17th 123:24	2013 12:16 15:14 35:15 90:18,19 127:7 136:23 425:18 468:18	23rd 178:17 403:16
18 153:3,6,11 399:8 418:23 424:21 432:18	2014 15:14 44:12 90:20,24 91:2	24 410:7 422:13,15
181014 2:16 8:21	2016 55:14 65:19	240 44:21 46:3,18 47:15
19 7:21 388:8	2020 19:14 54:2 294:3 410:8	25 87:14
19-1800 7:8	2021 129:14 259:24	250 75:7
19-1806 6:17	2022 167:4	26 134:11 153:3,7
19-1808 7:11	2023 177:1 370:12 455:11	260199 2:13 5:7
19-2400 5:18	2024 111:19 129:14,16	260200 2:13 5:10
19-4800 7:24	2024-2025 100:18	260201 2:13 5:13
1920 464:13	2025 412:1	260202 2:13 5:17
1932 59:18 60:3	2026 8:13 54:2 91:2 107:19,21 464:16 479:5, 11,19	260203 2:14 5:24
1960 464:12		260204 2:14 6:10
1965 464:12		260205 2:14 6:16
198,000 11:24 75:16		260206 2:14 7:1
1994 13:18 35:10 90:18 93:17		260208 2:15 7:7
1st 33:9 388:7		260209 2:15 7:20

260227 2:16 8:6	187:8 365:21 388:8	56 213:9 477:12
27 134:11 463:15	403:21 427:9	58 78:11 87:11
27.1 193:11	4	59 463:14
28 90:20 476:18		59.7 100:15
28th 154:6 178:17 181:19	4 432:5	5:15 217:4,6
183:13 403:16 479:4,10, 19	4,000 144:17 243:1	5:30 273:7
29 135:24	4-year-old 318:11,12	5th 124:14 125:4 142:10
294 354:23	4.3 193:7	202:12 272:23 273:19
297 354:21	4/23 154:4	289:13 320:14 375:20
29th 137:19	40 128:19 367:2 401:9	376:9 383:12 403:22
2:45 277:22	473:7,9	6
2nd 424:14	400 161:11 479:5,20	6 122:13
3	404 141:24	6-600 7:2
	42 376:3,8	6-year-old 429:22
3 6:11 100:24 101:4 112:5	43 353:16	60 213:8 304:10 439:15
123:23 126:24 145:3	44 353:15	60,000 252:5 312:14
287:13	440 372:20 404:5	600 202:10
30 88:11 135:24 156:17	444 354:17	60s 464:11
161:13 351:2	45 304:3	634 428:23
30,000 63:3 349:21	469 128:5	64 330:18
300 236:7 318:15	5	64,000 111:10
3000 236:7		65 243:13
304 354:20	5 122:11 124:4 127:1	66,000 118:17
32 211:24 296:1 370:12	5,000 144:17	6:30 217:6
33 249:8 294:3	5-8 306:14	7
340 41:11 43:13 44:22	5/20 359:20 385:19 394:2	7 122:13 243:2
46:4,16,18 132:23 133:24	5/28 394:3	7,500 477:11
138:11,17 157:9 158:16	50 87:14 304:10 426:19	70 73:17 426:16 477:14
159:1,21 160:11 162:13	430:11 460:3	75 439:19
35 217:23 243:15 244:6	50,000 143:18	78 21:18
365:11 463:13,14 473:24	500 161:6 430:16 435:9	783 117:20 267:19
366 354:19	462:7,8	7th 289:13 316:17 322:22
38 87:10	51 53:8	364:16 403:24 466:19
38,000 27:20	55 78:11	
3rd 142:9 145:5 186:21		

8 8 100:24 101:5 145:4 270:19 8.2 119:1 80s 209:7 82 21:21 85 209:11 276:11 86 219:19 88 477:17 8:00 273:8 443:20 8th 145:6 176:11 202:21 220:18 273:1 388:9 421:4 455:6 466:19	abilities 301:11 ability 35:18 62:7 78:19 88:18 90:4 113:12 180:2, 4 206:15 214:3 215:1 301:23 308:21 311:5 346:12 382:23 389:7 405:9 407:2 aboard 167:4 absent 434:7 438:13 absolute 355:5 absolutely 134:21 138:16 165:9 167:7 171:21 191:23 233:5 251:10 290:11 297:16 299:7 300:17 325:24 331:4 346:3 354:7 363:6 395:17 398:12 417:1	access 15:2 24:16 25:17 26:19 87:4,7,13 99:7 111:8 204:7,16 205:22,23 207:2 215:11 216:4 228:23 263:19 271:7 433:4 accessibility 411:12 412:24 accessible 281:6 412:13 accidents 203:1 449:22 accommodate 142:2 281:8 289:6 405:23 accommodated 142:9,11, 23 accommodating 286:1 accommodation 183:8
9 9.6 193:9 90 101:1 223:16,17 467:1 477:13 90-minute 467:3,4 900 382:12,16 387:21 391:7 92 21:9 92-minute 467:1 94 223:18 95 21:6 97 21:1 9th 127:18,23 421:2,5	absorb 70:3 331:20 absorbing 331:20 abused 149:24 academic 23:4,12,23 42:12 52:20 117:6 145:2, 15,16 173:21 200:9 230:3 419:1 477:6 academically 294:21 418:13 456:22 academics 24:1 26:11 Academy 25:23 accelerate 169:13 170:13 195:21 213:6 311:2,7 313:11 404:24 accelerates 456:12	accomplish 48:13 335:21 accordance 79:10 account 146:24 accountability 111:14 112:3 471:3 accountable 166:2 345:1 357:6 363:19 368:5 379:22 402:13 467:8 471:8,11 472:21
A A.k.a 2:5 a.m. 273:7 479:5,11,19 Aaron 436:21 437:1 abandoning 86:12 abatement 441:10	accelerating 101:12 105:8,20 106:7 117:6 405:9 Accenture 267:3,6 accept 425:12 acceptable 413:11 453:16 accepted 219:18 267:4	accounting 288:21 accurate 58:5 64:4 409:15 accurately 461:9 accuse 372:14 achieve 99:9 achievement 105:11 112:16,24 117:7 169:13 170:14 180:9 207:14 311:6 456:17 Ackelsberg 46:10 Ackerman 135:24 acknowledge 10:11 16:16 19:3 82:24 84:8 85:23 101:16 451:10

acknowledged 38:17	additional 5:21 24:17 29:18 34:1 45:10,14,17 121:17 135:14 138:1 154:15,16 155:1 156:22 158:17,19 159:3,7,20 168:9 178:9 289:4 328:22	adopt 5:11,14 9:5 137:22 394:17
acknowledges 92:12		adopting 5:7
acknowledging 75:12		adoption 106:1
acres 141:12 145:22 376:4,8	Additionally 9:22 215:21 398:7	adopts 103:12 105:19
act 45:13 59:18,19,24 60:10,16 61:2 63:22 64:12 96:22 346:8 428:11	additions 463:12	adults 41:23 117:13 206:6 426:13,24 435:7 438:20 439:6 457:3 460:4
acted 31:5	address 43:2,23 78:22 80:3 85:6 195:22 204:23 205:18 215:24 216:7 217:22 244:5 252:1 254:21 293:17 295:7 348:21 365:11 477:1	advance 156:5
action 45:20 102:2,24 181:16,18 183:11 225:23 232:24 233:1 427:15 430:4 432:13	addressed 47:15 49:10 348:13 473:22	advanced 100:16
actions 27:16 105:10 106:3 138:2 259:20 260:22	addresses 226:4	advancement 141:23
active 295:2 343:13	addressing 164:12 263:13	advantages 189:1
actively 101:19 108:24	adequacy 40:5	advice 415:8
activism 403:18	adequate 217:22 290:5 355:7	advise 342:2
activist 458:10	adjacent 122:17 228:14	advisor 304:1,21,22 306:3 310:23
activities 9:6 81:14 283:21 319:3 338:7	adjourned 479:10	advisory 107:16 108:15, 23 109:4 110:2 297:21 415:4
activity 225:21 265:24 298:8	adjust 197:2 291:15	advocacy 20:8 40:11 218:24 414:3 420:9 440:6,9
acts 60:3 102:20	adjustment 6:6 49:22	advocate 130:23 215:2 299:23 300:1
actual 114:9 258:12 350:18 446:22	adjustments 45:22 127:9 357:22	advocates 44:24 46:6 47:7
ADA 204:6 213:9 411:11 412:13,24	admin 400:21	advocating 19:5,23 262:10 294:24
add 7:10,23 50:10 141:17 198:5 204:6 221:17 353:3 366:16 409:18 460:23	administration 9:3 10:2 28:5,14 49:18 87:23 126:22 130:4 164:22 185:18 329:24 444:9,16	affect 141:10 234:9 438:7
adding 6:5 7:4 140:10 353:22	administrative 6:2 41:16 99:16 137:3	affected 264:17 284:12 407:10
addition 55:5 58:20 82:3 146:14 154:9 157:15 282:12 285:8 290:19 404:23	admiration 11:13	affects 410:3
	admit 236:20 256:18 416:18	affirm 32:9 36:5 49:17 57:18 63:11 69:12 85:24
		affirmed 18:24
		affirming 76:17
		affirms 29:7

afford 39:3,6 91:5 207:4 406:1 426:23 437:23 affordability 39:11 62:21 affordable 88:13 afoot 296:3 afraid 406:21 afternoon 10:9 95:1 116:3,8 185:11 201:6,7, 10 231:17,19 247:10 251:6 272:5 306:2 322:14,15 336:13,14,24 402:3 411:6,9 417:14 444:22 449:5 453:24 454:4 476:8 afterschool 419:7 afterthought 290:1,3 age 273:4 474:2 aggregate 119:1 agnostic 138:5 agree 37:17 75:7 206:13 244:11 261:20,24 298:19 314:23 315:1 348:15 349:5,11 355:1 356:19,22 372:10 agreed 38:12 208:7,13 293:13 agreement 8:19 293:23 397:15,21,23 agreements 157:22 agricultural 225:11,14,24 226:1,11,21 227:2 agriculture 226:6 ahead 178:4 211:7 230:14 242:11 280:6 287:22 291:17 295:21 309:20 334:17 346:4 365:3 366:21 371:12,23 373:7 387:13 408:20 446:19 448:20	AHERA 378:8 Ahmad 4:9,10 91:19 218:8 221:6 230:7,13,14 247:6,8 251:8 252:22 253:2 255:9,14 258:4,22 396:14,15 398:17,21 399:4,15 400:10 Ahmad's 358:24 aid 51:5 473:11 aides 425:22 aim 225:22 air 6:12 164:16 209:14 275:15,21 452:9 Alan 68:24 alarm 298:16 alarmed 133:22 Alex 119:11 Alexander 431:15 441:2 algebra 87:4 145:9 260:3, 8 align 105:21 aligned 28:7,16 220:19 476:23 alignment 105:12 112:24 208:5 alive 59:20 140:5 alleviate 397:5 allocated 129:13 130:14 219:6 397:1 allocation 234:24 397:16 allotted 219:8 allowed 417:3 allowing 96:11,21 110:13 372:20 alluded 375:16 377:19 alma 140:1	alongside 418:12 alternative 378:18 472:6 alumni 445:4 amazing 17:23 83:16,20 84:15 444:6 Ambassador 13:13 14:1 ambitious 18:12,18 Ambrose-smith 20:5 amended 188:3 amending 5:18 6:1,11,17 7:2,8,21 amendment 65:3 71:11 amendments 49:19 357:19 amenity 214:12 America 123:18 Amos 422:2 431:13,23 432:4 amount 19:10,13 43:24 44:10 162:7 178:10 218:13 272:16 321:3 375:19 398:13 413:9 amounts 6:14 198:14 208:8 ample 310:7 Amy 276:23 406:5 414:18, 20 420:2 analysis 409:11 analyze 383:5 ancestors 464:9 465:3 467:10 and/or 65:12 106:17 423:8 Anderson 26:13 Andrews 16:18 95:7,22, 23 97:5 100:1 107:9 121:10 130:6 135:10 137:16,22 138:8,24 185:13
---	---	---

Angeles 176:14	407:20 411:3	arguing 355:11 373:3
angry 33:5 331:2 333:19	apologizing 446:16	argument 59:16
angst 139:11	apparent 260:2	Arlene 135:23
animal 253:11	appeared 415:18	arm 440:9
Ann 109:13	applause 292:20 440:3	ARMS 458:23
Anna 444:21	apple 344:21,23	Armstrong 152:9
Anne 414:18,20 415:2	applied 219:19 263:9	ARPA 30:20 32:7 155:19, 23 156:7,10 158:6 163:19 166:8,18 168:7
annex 343:20 447:4 451:7	appointed 17:8 107:19	arrived 323:17 403:10
announce 457:9	appreciated 183:14 185:16 187:14	art 20:2 46:7 87:7
announced 43:19 219:17 301:21	approach 171:5 341:7	Arthur 401:4 402:5
announcement 218:23 301:16	appropriated 164:11	article 415:13,18
annoying 339:24	appropriately 192:10 275:18	artificial 297:14
annual 48:11 135:3 153:1 161:4 162:21 324:7,8 371:21 373:14	Appropriations 40:1 76:23 89:11,12 304:18	arts 23:20 108:4 145:9
annually 130:14 324:16 325:13	approval 8:7	asbestos 7:3 378:9
Ansil 151:21	approve 52:16 104:12 188:11 313:1	ASBO 373:19
answering 254:8	approved 173:5,13 447:3	Ashanti 2:5
answers 187:20,24 190:10 233:21 235:17 280:14 281:16 446:22 447:10	approves 136:17	Ashley 16:18 95:23 97:5 458:15
Anthony 10:23 91:24 174:7 274:12	approving 447:5	assembly 38:13,16 406:10
anticipated 156:1 160:20 162:4	approximately 29:9 213:15 263:11 272:13	assertion 257:1
anxiety 268:12 283:22 404:17 450:13	April 118:16 178:17 479:4,10,19	assess 461:9
anxious 434:3 446:10	arbitrary 443:22	assessment 293:15 298:2
anymore 41:3	architects 472:16	assessments 477:16
AP 87:9	archival 162:23	assigned 281:2
apartment 239:19,22	Arden 26:16,22	assignment 354:9
apologize 139:10 211:2 336:24 374:10 401:8	ardent 476:16	assist 287:8
	area 66:7 84:19 119:5 370:9 378:24	assistance 22:24 152:7
	areas 39:1 50:6 117:2,24 204:10 240:10	assistant 165:8 166:17 167:1 171:17 282:13
	argue 338:16	Association 373:19,20 398:4,7
		assume 156:18,21 173:3

assumptions 106:10	authorize 7:13	349:15 351:23 354:9,10
assure 147:13 343:11	authorized 213:14 214:20	355:5,23 358:21 359:12, 21 367:13,21 369:14
asthma 425:24	authorizing 112:1	381:22 383:4 385:18
at-large 201:17	autism 420:18 452:15	395:11 421:17,18 430:1
Atlanta 176:15	autonomy 159:9	442:8 444:10 462:17,22
attached 103:13 105:21	Avenue 25:10 253:9	463:16 465:18 467:17
attack 426:1	average 21:23 73:16 223:14	469:12 472:13
attempt 82:2 202:18	avoid 453:15	back-to-back 34:23
attempted 27:17	awards 373:17	backfilled 156:1
attend 220:11 271:17 285:20 286:18 451:20 453:1	aware 115:18 211:13,14 372:17 395:8	background 460:22
attendance 2:18 20:16 21:19,21 100:23 117:22 119:20 140:3 321:15 419:5 477:14	awareness 225:23	backs 15:18 164:8
attended 21:15 72:7 101:1 425:23 451:20	awesome 325:22	bacteria 319:15
attending 109:6	awful 321:3 425:19	bad 170:20 301:5 349:14 352:13 358:18 372:6 453:10
attention 50:3 211:24	aye 479:22,23	badly 406:8
attorney 341:9 344:6,7 376:5	B	balance 14:15 52:6 135:5, 11 136:6 170:22 425:13 428:1
attrition 134:5	babies 147:6 149:2 169:5, 15 205:20 466:19	balanced 171:4
audit 266:13 324:1,3,4,7, 19,22 325:2,7,13 373:15 473:1	Bache 445:7	balancing 268:3
auditing 204:14 266:22 326:5	Bache-martin 377:24 385:2 387:20	balling 374:4
auditors 129:5	back 13:12,17 29:16 30:12,13 42:20 44:12,20 46:3,23 48:1 59:7 75:12 95:1 96:12 97:7 113:3 121:21 123:4 127:18 131:24 135:22 136:21 137:1 144:15 152:19,23 153:22 156:2 158:11 160:1 161:15 172:19 173:18 178:14 179:21 180:8,16,17 182:10 183:22 185:6 195:4 206:14 239:17 242:14 246:21 247:1 249:1,3 253:24 261:2 268:16 278:23 280:4 292:15	balls 290:17
audits 129:4 324:8,10,14 371:21 373:13		Baltimore 18:5 54:19,20 151:14
Aurora 318:21,22		band 51:5 473:11
Austin 72:8		bands 207:1
authority 8:17,20 12:18 17:11,17 51:3 60:6 62:3 66:13 106:19		bank 438:2
Authorization 6:19 7:10, 12		bare 215:5
		bargaining 157:22 397:14,20,23
		Barra 463:17
		barring 130:17
		bars 14:14,24 410:10
		bartender 206:16
		base 14:14 132:21 223:8

based 47:18 71:8 103:6
106:8,15 138:2 155:13
159:15 160:15 183:14
215:8 216:16 218:22
239:10 265:24 294:1
323:9 332:21 350:18
366:5,9 370:5 386:23
387:6,10,17 392:19
435:16

basement 202:20 296:19
452:7

basic 203:20 213:24
214:11,12,18 321:17
450:24 470:7,9

basically 32:12 79:22
353:5 409:4,8

basis 10:5 45:12 57:16
59:8 61:6 104:21 337:6,
20

Bass 3:16,17 91:20 201:3
218:8 221:6 230:6,8,15,
16 231:1,2,6,10,16,20
241:8,10,14 242:4 244:10
245:20 246:3

bathroom 202:19 204:15
213:8 214:14 261:7,14,16
275:2 293:4 317:22 319:1
321:8 412:12,15 438:22
449:15,16,19,20 452:8,16

bathrooms 203:12 204:4
208:22 214:6 216:19
219:10 261:12 275:12
293:18 294:4 295:1,2,8,
12 316:19 317:5,8,14,16
318:4 319:24 321:18
410:11 447:6 450:7 451:6
452:3 453:2,4,20 475:7,8

bathtub 441:21

Bay 422:1

bear 234:3

beat 23:15 238:7

beating 383:16 457:21

beats 457:22

beautiful 441:12

beauty 357:20

bedrock 430:6

beg 317:4 406:17 410:14

began 98:18 319:8 455:8

begging 151:1

begin 11:4 35:7 77:4 95:2
96:6 110:23 116:24 191:7
263:14 314:9 318:20
320:12 322:16 401:17
408:1,4,22 414:24 417:11
419:23 424:5 427:6
431:18 437:3 440:16
442:20 444:20 454:2
461:18 476:9

beginning 193:15 206:14
264:1 295:13

begins 401:19

begs 203:8,15

behalf 151:1 184:21 340:6
403:18 420:4,8 424:10,15
431:22 436:22 443:3
467:11

behavior 289:9 429:14

belief 99:4

bell 408:3,6

bells 214:2

belonging 434:17

beloved 192:24 426:8

Ben 422:1 427:9

benchmarks 101:3

benefit 9:9 28:22 56:22
65:15 70:16 71:20 185:24
190:11 327:23

benefits 395:2,6,9 396:1
405:8 442:6

Bernadette 20:5

bet 171:6,7

beverage 61:7 64:9 67:24

bewildered 209:6

bi-annual 10:5

big 27:1 119:5 144:14,22
172:17 175:15 176:12
197:3 222:4 296:19
320:20 368:3 370:19
466:20

bigger 216:22

biggest 246:19 363:24
366:20

bilingual 449:10

bill 2:12 5:6,10,13,17,24
6:10,16 7:1,7,20 33:7,8
309:12

billion 38:16 60:22 63:2
73:11 79:18,19,22,23
120:19,21,22 129:12
165:18 176:17,22,24
177:3 178:11 344:12
433:10,16 437:13 438:3
462:6

billion-dollar 53:22 65:7,
14 71:17 90:7

bills 5:4 9:15 479:2,16

Bilski 471:16

biology 145:8

birds 253:16

birth 267:22

bisecting 253:9

bit 34:8 52:9 142:8 149:15
184:16 225:8 315:24
316:2 339:9

bites 344:21,23

black 55:24 56:10,12,16
66:4 189:17 190:21 191:1
200:15 424:18 427:12
432:9

blacktop 317:12	346:3,19 347:9 348:3	boundaries 429:20
Blackwood 414:19,21 417:13,18	350:15,17,21 351:13	box 84:13 86:23 88:14,17 339:11
blame 234:4 299:17 460:20	357:13,16 360:3,5,11,15	Bradford 40:2 76:22 89:11
blamed 416:21	364:18 366:7,21 367:13, 17,22 369:9 370:11	brainstorm 386:15
blind 285:19 286:1,17 287:3 423:14,15	374:13 385:19 386:19	branch 15:20 16:12 77:8 87:24 88:1
blindly 461:11	392:7 399:6,11,12,20	brand 276:3,13 277:13
blindness 423:8	400:1 403:5 404:8 410:18	break 154:13 259:4 270:13 278:19
block 355:15 391:9	415:8 462:14 464:1	breakdown 225:16
blocks 343:19	469:21 471:24 472:10	breaker 252:19
board 6:6 7:13 9:7 16:16, 19 17:7,8,10 23:14,19	board's 32:1 98:19 107:14 108:20,22 170:4 206:20 357:14	breath 52:9
28:6,15 46:24 48:2 82:2	boards 164:5 275:6	Brianna 414:19,21 417:17
84:1,3 85:14 88:2 94:20	Bodine 228:10	Brianni 107:22
95:21,24 96:24 97:6	body 11:14 12:7 13:4,10	briefing 123:24
99:14,18,24 101:17	15:19 16:11 17:14 30:23	briefly 107:5 255:18,21 288:6 315:22
102:4,16,19,20 103:5,24	37:8 45:6,7,8 49:7 55:13	brilliant 294:23
104:9,23 105:10,13,18	69:11 82:14 85:13 183:3	bring 101:22 108:18 109:15 130:5 132:16
106:3,16,18 107:2,6,15, 20 108:7,11 109:9,16	201:18 233:6 330:1	204:19 249:1 253:24
110:3,9 111:1,18 112:7,9, 15 113:1,22 114:1,11	332:22 334:6 336:2 402:11	275:21 300:20 303:23
115:8,17 121:9,11 126:5, 7 130:7 135:10 136:1,16	boilers 275:17	315:11 320:6,8 462:17,22
137:15,17,20 139:21	Bolling 436:22 437:5	463:15 465:1,18 466:11
146:1 151:11 152:5	bona 168:24 170:10	467:17,19 473:20 475:12, 17,23
168:16,18 170:21 172:2	bone 107:1 309:6	bringing 226:24 248:19 359:21 440:6 475:15,16
173:14 178:14,22 179:6, 21,22 180:17 185:11,15	bones 215:6	Broad 86:16 238:24 239:3,8 240:1 404:5 463:16
188:10 189:11,13,20	Boo 347:3,4	broke 217:12
191:9 204:22 206:19	book 162:21	broken 157:14 275:15 321:2 415:23
207:16 210:1 258:10	books 325:3	Brooks 4:17 68:13 91:24 279:11,14,17,18,23 280:6,7 282:5 284:4,23
274:19 281:18 283:12	boring 60:2	
287:17 301:19 308:18	born 33:17	
309:24 310:16 311:9,17, 21,24 312:24 313:1,21	borrow 182:7	
323:22 324:16 325:6	borrowing 178:12	
326:14,17 328:6 329:11	bosses 341:16	
332:3,8,14 334:17,23	bothered 58:21	
336:14 337:4 339:2,19,21	bottom 189:17 298:10	
341:8,15 342:1 344:24	bought 223:6	

286:24 288:8,9 291:9 414:6 458:5 brother 98:8 191:12 Brothers 151:23 brought 139:12 187:4 205:2 221:24 256:2 266:13 415:12,20 Brown 55:24 56:10,13,17 brunt 234:3 BS 93:13 bucket 35:23 89:9 Bucks 17:1 19:9,12 22:12 25:12 30:1 36:8 38:21 91:2 223:15,18 bucolic 141:12 budget 5:8,12 43:1,9,23 47:1 48:19 49:1,15 52:6 60:20 63:14 76:18 79:20 86:1 89:22 128:10 129:2 130:14 132:1 134:10,24 137:18,23 160:20 161:20 162:21 164:8 169:11 171:15 180:2 182:15 209:21 211:19 212:2 219:23 295:21 333:13 358:1 363:13 397:4 415:15 424:16 425:6,19 437:10,12,20 439:16 441:15 451:3 474:5,10 budget allocation 459:11 budget along 76:12 budget already 165:4 budgeted 162:7 budgeting 160:16 371:20 budgets 159:10,24 161:3 163:4 324:9 435:19 build 21:12 22:23 23:3 79:12 80:17 199:14 249:3 293:1 418:19 463:12 466:6	building 6:4 43:21 74:20 75:2,3 88:12 146:12 188:4 189:4 191:18,19 193:10 199:11,12 202:16 214:4 215:23 243:13 245:3 252:19 276:3 306:13 316:9 343:17 362:14 385:12 387:3 420:14,21 426:8,14 430:17 434:5,8 435:9 438:9,11,17 439:7 452:8, 22 456:20 463:16 464:21, 23 465:22 466:5,6 467:16 buildings 86:12 102:11 239:21 276:9 326:10 builds 112:18 456:12 built 74:17 170:21 253:10 254:1 276:21 287:10 344:19 406:13 465:22 466:4 467:13 bullying 434:19 Bundrige 476:7,9 Bureau's 68:3 bursting 74:15 209:13 business 51:12 54:5,8 65:15 66:20 70:15,16,19, 21,23 71:4,20 74:1 90:9, 11 118:22 170:20 373:21 businesses 369:23 370:6 Butkovitz 68:24 button 322:8 buy 56:17 441:9 buy-in 404:7 406:24 buying 28:19 66:9 buys 52:8 byproduct 170:7 C cab 65:23 66:5,6,12,14,	18,19 67:11 cabinets 412:19 cabs 66:4 cafeteria 204:5 294:11 452:5 cake 356:11 calculating 147:5 calculations 284:17 calendar 287:10 Cali 340:18 call 10:16 76:4,5 85:7 94:17 214:11 236:2 401:2 421:20 431:10 435:13 463:1 called 5:1 13:24 14:12 16:11 33:18 40:5 51:4 61:23 65:22 66:5,10 68:9 69:3 99:12 189:24 250:16 478:21 calling 4:24 8:22 217:8,9 366:8 425:7 458:17 calls 105:7 213:8 230:13 campaign 78:8 405:5 433:1 campus 189:21 228:18 229:1,10 443:9 campuses 120:24 121:4,5 candy 139:12 capable 419:14 capacity 74:5 91:12 236:18 244:16,17 354:16 355:7 374:7 377:2 378:1 379:10 463:13 capital 5:12,14 9:17,19,20 104:12 106:4 180:2 205:12 211:19 212:2 216:18 263:4 295:21 296:5 353:3 355:16
---	--	---

Capitol 33:1	catchment 378:24 387:24 412:3	322:6 364:15 366:13,17 367:11 374:22 375:1 402:2 478:22,23
capture 238:15	catchments 306:10 384:23	chairing 32:17
car 199:7 312:20	categories 226:15	Chairman 11:19 24:5 28:24 29:2 33:2 37:6 40:1,12,17 44:11 46:1 50:17 51:23 52:15 58:15 61:1 76:23 78:11 81:10, 21 82:9 86:14 89:11,12 92:4 140:19 149:18 150:23 259:2 304:18 353:8 357:13 362:2 363:5 371:14 388:5 393:16
card 176:8,12	caucus 76:19,20 77:10	chalk 70:22
cards 271:2,4,5,14	caught 40:17 115:9	challenge 39:11 182:16 215:20 220:2 303:14 308:9 314:20 397:12
care 20:9 26:24 28:18 51:16 76:9 142:22 144:8 234:20 247:13 301:10 338:15 375:7 428:18 434:22 465:9	causing 260:19 264:15 265:1	challenged 59:14 64:7
cared 406:23	caved 217:19	challenges 84:7 216:1 245:16,19 292:22 293:6 294:20 298:18,24 301:6, 14
career 100:13 421:7 457:4,16	ceiling 452:4	challenging 58:6
careers 205:22	celebrating 247:24 419:11	chamber 34:17 77:10
careful 257:9	cell 6:23 49:23 50:8,9 133:4	chambers 472:23
caregivers 21:8	Census 57:6,8,11 58:17 68:3	chance 174:17 175:6 214:13 278:19 288:8 291:7 455:1
Carr 455:6	center 37:18,19 46:11 86:17,18 122:19,24 132:5,10 141:16 248:19 250:5,9,10,16 310:22 391:23 423:3	change 160:1 179:13 207:23 208:1 220:16 246:17,21,24 261:15 301:13 306:6,22 313:23 314:16 320:8 379:19 414:4 432:16,23 453:19 470:2
Carr's 454:18	centers 38:8 237:8	changed 74:3 75:19,21,22 121:1 122:8 126:22 147:3 161:21 246:20,22 261:21
carrier 50:9	central 31:16 131:2,9,13	changing 163:5 385:10
carry 91:9 135:17 183:2	centralized 260:1	chaos 28:23 438:16
cars 470:23	century 73:20 428:9	
Carter 107:22	CEO 335:10	
cartons 142:15	Cephas 360:22 361:16,20	
Carver 228:6	certification 468:3	
carving 396:20	certified 58:24 468:2	
CASA 20:3 46:9 157:24	cetera 158:2 164:2 165:13 219:12 271:18 276:24 283:2	
case 138:7 164:17 168:11 257:16 342:8 368:16	CFO 132:19 371:16	
cases 202:22	Chair 10:21 116:5 139:3 151:11 185:4,12 200:24 201:1 230:5 247:5 264:9 277:23 279:9 291:12	
cash 51:7,11,22 52:5		
casino 470:18		
casinos 470:14		
Cassidy 276:23		
catastrophe 224:19		
catch 298:13		

439:14 Chapter 5:18 7:2,8,24 charge 62:8,12,14,16 470:18 charter 9:2 10:1 12:2 110:10,23 111:5,11,17,20 112:4,6,9 129:20,21 249:13 257:14 272:15 400:5 charters 268:2 charts 153:19 check 159:18 195:13 224:2 336:4 checked 75:6 217:16 cheek 357:10 362:19 Cherelle 10:18 11:8 Cheryl 23:16 100:1 Chester 17:1 19:9,12 22:13 25:12 30:2 36:9 38:21 91:2 223:15 Chicago 53:13 54:14,17 176:15 chief 119:10,12 171:21 177:4 195:10 217:8 224:1 271:21 272:5 312:13 325:18 child 24:17 25:2,3 27:23 169:23 170:12 204:3 206:6 284:23 285:1 319:17 411:15,16,19,21, 22,24 413:5 425:22 428:10 432:6 434:2,15 452:13,24 467:5 475:20 childcare 439:5 children 22:14 25:17 26:18 28:2 46:10 100:5 123:1 148:2 171:6 173:20 184:22 195:23 199:13,21 202:10 203:4,19,21 204:10,11 206:12 207:4 208:2,21,23 209:9 223:16	247:14 250:18 253:14 254:10 258:16 260:12 265:10 281:9 283:5 286:2 288:6,22,24 289:5,8,15, 21 290:12,15,18 291:1,8 319:17 323:4 330:12 409:19,22 410:22 413:10 422:11,22 425:10 434:16 438:20 439:7 440:11 441:16 443:16 449:11 450:11 451:19 462:16 464:14 465:7,8,18 466:8, 12,15 467:12 469:12 470:6 474:2 475:19,23 476:5 children's 80:19 choice 65:1,2,6,8 67:23 70:11 71:14 138:17 168:19 413:12 choir 420:11 choose 70:12 71:18 111:7 135:17 321:7 380:1 382:11,14 chooses 380:3 CHOP 86:17,19 chosen 58:7 Chromebook 269:21 270:4 Chromebooks 269:18 chronic 40:15 41:4 205:18 346:11 cigarette 32:23 35:4,5 36:4 44:13 90:20 cigarettes 37:22 93:19 Cindy 201:3 230:6 231:1 circuits 276:1 circumstance 168:5,10 circumstances 30:8 130:18 261:23 cities 61:19 62:7,12	citizen 363:11 441:5 citizens 237:12 city 2:8 8:8,10,19 9:8 11:9,11 12:5,9 13:2,4 14:21 15:3,10 17:6,19 18:8 28:16 29:24 30:5,15 35:13,20 39:2 41:1,20 42:1 43:9 49:15 50:10 53:6 54:22,23 58:10 60:6, 19,20,23 62:1 63:3 65:10, 16 69:15 70:13,15,17,18 71:19 73:14 74:12,19 75:18,19 77:21 78:7 79:21 84:22 85:21 86:4 89:17 90:9,23 96:16 97:12 101:8 102:6,21 106:13 110:11 111:16 112:11 113:2 119:16 121:20 123:1 125:19 126:2 130:1 132:17 138:3 146:8,20 147:21 150:20 152:24 153:15 156:12 166:14 168:21 176:13 184:22 188:14,22 189:18 191:2 200:15,16 201:16, 20 205:21 207:3 218:18 228:14 229:16 232:3 234:5 237:12 238:2 239:1 240:3,9 242:24 243:14 245:9 252:4 268:4 304:18 315:23 316:7,14 326:21 327:7 335:11 338:4 343:10,14 344:7,8 347:5 360:19 368:9 381:21 386:3 394:6 402:15 404:20 405:24 406:3,17 413:4,20 415:5 417:15, 19,23 418:10 419:16,20 424:22 425:12 426:2 427:1,24 432:19,24 433:9 436:1 437:12 439:12 441:13 442:7 444:13 451:5,10,12,15 454:5,12 455:9,12,19,22 456:18,24 457:10 463:21 468:12 469:23 472:22 476:10,11,
---	---	---

17 477:18,19 478:18 479:5,20 citywide 256:17 civic 119:21 476:21 civically 478:9 civil 34:8,24 claiming 37:24 Claire 304:21 306:2 322:17 clap 214:17 clarify 6:20 273:16 clarity 274:23 Clarke 32:20 34:22 class 42:11 52:21 171:14 229:5 265:4 269:7 289:19 290:4 321:4 389:5 410:8 412:18 420:7 423:19 427:13 432:11 435:5 438:12 439:3 467:1,5,23, 24 classes 62:9 87:10 320:18 438:14,16 classification 377:13 classifications 274:24 classmates 317:1,7 320:2 classroom 289:1 294:11 320:4 412:9 450:6 454:19 455:21 classrooms 110:21 176:1 294:9 301:10 320:1 419:4 425:21 438:24 450:4 475:1 Clause 61:24 63:7,21 64:14 65:13 91:11 Clayton 310:22 clean 18:14 129:3 214:14 297:3 298:9,12 318:24 321:17 324:10 328:4 371:2 373:13	cleaner 295:1 cleaning 298:9 370:23 clear 41:13 47:6 99:22 100:21 103:2 131:19 144:7 156:6 186:1 187:6 189:19 203:17 235:2 249:9 256:22 274:18 286:7 289:2 296:11 300:11,14 336:3 383:23 419:11 476:22 clearer 112:22 clerk 2:19,23 3:3,7,11,15, 19,24 4:4,8,12,16,20 5:6 9:16 10:18 94:18 401:2,4 414:16,17 421:19,24 431:13 458:13,19 471:16 clicks 28:11 client 341:9,10 342:1 client's 351:4 clients 341:14 342:2 cliffs 235:22 climate 41:15 150:13 165:13 166:17 167:2 171:17 283:1 394:21 418:20 428:17,21 430:18 434:13 435:10 438:8,18 cloak 113:21 clogged 319:8 close 54:20 121:12,13 122:6 123:15 136:17 188:8 209:3 217:10 227:3 243:23 252:8 280:17 281:20 342:21 343:8 344:14 352:2 359:22 392:2,11,22 393:10 402:13 478:6 closed 16:9 141:9 146:20 164:14 173:17 245:1 282:20 317:20 342:23 377:16 393:21 462:23 468:18 469:2	closely 211:17 closer 282:9 closes 189:21 closing 113:6,7 141:2 143:21 148:18 156:16 192:23 193:17 200:11 236:15 244:13 245:23 282:21 288:17 376:2 378:19 406:12 420:8 433:15 472:6 closings 375:22 376:11 closure 122:12 126:14 188:11 240:20 243:19 244:18 280:12,21 322:22 392:14 404:3 445:5 closures 106:4 121:17 126:16 127:6 136:23 208:15 237:23 238:23 239:4 281:23 284:13 310:4 362:7 407:4 437:21 Clouden 458:19,20 461:20,24 462:1 464:7,8 466:3 467:4 468:12 CM 218:24 co-disability 423:6 co-locate 79:14 200:1 249:16 254:9 co-located 86:20 co-locating 190:16 402:16 co-location 84:11 co-locations 121:12 126:14 co-merger 140:4 coach 417:19 454:12 455:20 456:1 cockroach 320:3 cockroaches 319:23 code 5:19 6:2,3,5,12,13,
--	--	---

18 7:3,9,22 26:8	commercial 62:15	20 123:11 187:10 188:23
Cohen 13:14 14:2	Commission 81:10	189:12 190:1 193:17
collaboration 330:7 335:14	commit 204:14 211:1	197:21,23 200:13 218:21
Collaborative 25:24 26:2	commitment 28:17 97:10 105:11 111:13 112:2 269:20 432:22	220:23 234:11,14 263:16
colleague 340:17	committed 78:10 109:5 111:2,24 130:5,12 270:3 297:20	305:16 306:16,19 307:11, 15,19 323:4 344:22
colleagues 112:10 140:18 181:15 201:12,15 268:24 288:15 401:8 413:17 422:15,17 424:2	committee 2:11 4:24 8:22 9:14 11:19 93:10 94:15 215:24 297:21 337:9 386:7 402:4 479:3,9,17	359:10 362:24 378:17
collect 60:7,19 61:18	common 53:7	379:4,5,12 380:6 381:12
collection 253:17	Commonwealth 13:9 27:16 29:22 37:17 38:12 39:19 40:8 41:5 66:17 91:15 176:20 177:2	382:21 385:6,15 386:21
Collections 7:23	Commonwealth's 29:20 39:21	387:19,22 388:21,23
collective 157:21 397:14, 20,23	communicate 102:18 370:2	389:1,4 390:19 404:7
college 100:12 170:2 228:9	communicating 81:23 143:6	405:18 406:24 410:24 428:8 432:15 451:22
colleges 271:11	communication 16:8 112:21 118:12 162:11 195:12 322:20 334:2	community's 190:3
Colonel 212:21 213:4,10 217:7 242:13 263:7 322:17 337:13,14 338:1 365:17 389:12 397:9,20	Communications 119:10	commute 443:18
color 332:6	communities 14:20 49:11 56:1,11,13 86:13 101:21 115:13,15 192:7 240:13 264:21 265:21 268:6 277:15 281:12 291:3 330:13 343:13 379:21,23 380:24 381:3 390:16 402:15 403:19 404:10 429:1 435:20 457:1 470:5 476:13	companies 53:22 65:7,21, 23 66:14 67:11,22 70:3, 10 71:17 442:11
combined 49:21 438:15	community 19:4,5,22 20:9 54:7 107:16 108:23 109:6,9,17 110:4 118:19,	company 7:16
comfortable 311:10 396:7 410:2		compared 173:16
commend 119:9 251:16 365:17,18 444:8		comparison 341:20 342:13
commendations 326:4 371:20		compartmentalize 88:15 356:8
comment 104:22 279:9 291:16 358:12 367:3,8 391:19 400:17,24 401:3, 11 443:3		compel 169:8
commentary 221:18		compete 67:13 227:8 257:13,16 258:19
comments 12:14 98:18 233:12 444:12		competencies 248:10
Commerce 152:12		competent 194:19
		competing 73:21,23
		competitive 129:18 257:12 405:12
		complaints 246:19
		complete 213:8 276:4
		completed 295:13
		completely 136:1,9,12 173:7 227:22 237:11 253:23 352:13 358:18 361:13 380:19

complex 184:1,7,13	conduct 253:18	consistency 420:17 421:9
compliance 413:1	conference 132:14 360:23,24	consistent 100:22 322:19 337:20 418:18 456:20
complied 71:12	confidence 205:14 236:11 266:10 313:13 430:9 434:4 468:23	consistently 108:17 117:5 121:7
compliment 351:24	confined 26:7 429:8	consolidations 310:4
compliments 349:16 351:23 372:23 373:6	confirm 297:15	constituency 33:21 56:19
composed 109:4	confused 155:13 158:20	constituents 190:11 281:13,14 291:18 304:9 382:6 400:18
comprehend 460:8,10	confusing 236:9	constitute 9:16
comprehends 101:17	confusion 28:23 154:17 159:8	constitutional 130:24 177:6
comprehensive 352:2 377:6	congratulations 374:1	constructed 253:7
compresses 248:9	Congress 129:13 164:10, 15 176:24	construction 6:4 378:15
compromise 113:13	congressional 172:7	consultation 106:23
compute 235:21	Congressman 33:8,12	consumer 8:3 64:17
computer 74:2	Conn 361:20,22	consumers 56:13,20
computers 49:4	connect 414:7 419:9	contend 61:20
conceded 349:18	connected 23:8 477:7	context 170:18 336:1
concentrate 225:18 227:6	connection 109:1	contingencies 363:16
concentrations 291:5	connections 21:13 173:3 310:3	contingency 311:13
concern 210:1 306:15,21	connects 179:11,12	contingent 327:14
concerned 55:8 259:21 280:9 441:4	conquer 28:9	continuation 200:14
concerns 233:16,24 292:11,17,19 301:17 346:21 376:14 389:15 391:6	consecutively 373:12	continue 31:22 70:20 89:3 100:14 108:24 112:2 119:1 129:17 130:23 133:17 143:8 180:13 185:22 190:24 206:21,23 242:22 243:4 252:17 256:5 313:6 329:14 331:8 354:24 355:2 370:16,18 384:2 407:6 420:6 421:12 431:1 439:8 451:15 457:17 478:7
conclude 128:8	consequences 259:20 260:21	continued 111:7 147:9 476:11 478:3
concludes 457:6	conservation 225:20 226:10	continues 97:13 112:8 114:5,14 312:21
concrete 273:11	conserve 225:19	
condition 189:5 473:7	consideration 43:10 288:13 289:11 293:20 314:4 350:24 478:11	
conditioning 209:14 275:15,21	considered 236:14 341:17	
conditions 5:23 6:9,15,24 7:6,19 8:5 106:14 202:5 263:23 316:9,18 404:11 411:10 412:8 449:16 453:9		

continuing 27:4 115:3 147:10,15 190:4 268:9 contract 131:19 370:20, 24 372:10 405:5 contractors 215:19 contracts 131:16 135:16 370:5,19 371:3 contradiction 251:11 433:8 contradictions 383:12 contraptions 50:5 contribute 419:4 contributed 80:5 153:15 contribution 152:22 153:1,5,13 contributions 15:16 218:18 control 30:9 106:17 209:24 446:12 451:4 controller 68:24 convene 8:23 334:23 convenience 67:14 Convention 132:4 convergence 182:13 conversation 76:11 77:4 98:13 102:10 114:15 115:4 160:2 170:24 180:14 185:15 187:14 214:9,18 232:10 238:13 244:19 257:8 258:18 288:4 305:6,15 351:3 365:2 367:23 conversations 13:23 33:14 76:18 81:15 84:18 85:1 89:4 92:9 97:16 103:22 113:14 167:10 233:19 236:9 329:15 332:22 386:13 converted 239:21	convey 123:5 125:24 126:3 328:5 conveyances 326:20 conveyed 121:20 122:19 327:17 convince 339:14,16 340:13,23 341:2 convinced 92:21 339:4 Conwell 122:6 365:19,20 403:23 cool 317:1 Cooper 20:3 46:8,9 158:1 cooperation 8:16,18 coordinate 9:6 coordinated 81:20 168:20 coordination 151:16 Cop 119:11 copy 195:17 353:13 core 55:6 226:8 455:10, 20,22 corner 164:9 470:13 corporations 65:14 90:8 correct 290:11 297:22 302:11,22 303:3 324:20 370:15 397:2 correctly 200:4 correlation 100:22 177:14 cosmetically 276:16 cost 70:22 71:3 73:9 90:9 190:13,14,16,20,21 192:13,15 193:5,7,9 271:4,13 272:13 Costa 40:13 89:13 costing 120:19 costs 130:1 131:2 192:18, 22 199:8 282:23 344:13	council 2:2,8 4:20,22 8:8, 22 9:8,11 10:20 11:10,11, 20 12:5 15:3,24 28:6,16 32:20 34:21 42:11,19 43:9 50:23 52:16 69:15 71:16 74:8 75:9,12 82:9 84:22 85:19 87:19,20,23 93:8 94:11,14,23 95:6,14 96:5 97:9,12,20 98:5,21 101:8 102:20,22 104:2,7 106:12,13 107:17 108:16, 24 109:4 110:2 114:3 115:24 116:6,14 123:23 124:4,6,10,13,23 125:3,8, 20 126:11,12,24 127:1, 13,17,18,22 128:4 133:21 138:3,8,22 139:2 144:2 150:8 151:3,22 157:14 162:20 168:21 173:24 174:4 175:10 177:11,22 178:3,7 180:21 181:2,6, 10,14 183:19,24 184:2,6, 10,20 185:2,3,10,18,23 186:13 193:22 194:8,16 195:3 198:20 200:23 210:7 211:11 212:8,10, 15,22 213:20 216:11,15 218:4 221:1,4,10 222:3, 10,14,19 223:1 229:19,20 230:4,10,18 231:4,8,14 232:4 234:1,13 241:7,12 242:2,6,10 244:1 246:2,7, 12 247:4,9 255:7,12,17 258:2,5,20 259:1,10 266:8 270:12 274:10 275:5 277:20,21 278:3,7, 11,16,24 279:5,16,20 280:2 285:14 286:6,12, 16,20 287:23 288:2,15 291:11 304:16,19,23 305:23 308:22 309:2,7 315:6,17,24 316:4,7 318:18 320:10 321:23 322:13,22 324:4 325:19 332:20 333:11 335:6,18 336:10,13,16,21 337:1 340:16 344:8 347:6
--	---	--

359:24 363:12 369:15
 370:10 372:12 375:20
 376:9 386:3,20 399:5
 403:21,23,24 406:10,17
 413:20 415:4 417:14,16
 422:6 424:23 425:8
 427:17 432:24 436:2
 444:13 450:15 451:8
 453:21 454:1,4,6,9 455:3
 457:14,24 458:3,16,21
 461:15,22 464:5 466:1
 468:13 469:24 472:22
 476:15 478:16

council's 31:24 96:16

councilman 10:23,24
 185:5 238:1 316:6 377:18
 432:5

Councilmanic 124:14
 125:4 127:24

Councilmember 2:19,20,
 21,23 3:1,3,5,7,9,11,13,
 15,17,19,20,21,22,24 4:2,
 4,6,8,10,12,14,16,17,18
 55:21 56:3 59:14 68:7,12,
 13,21 71:1,5,6 84:16 85:7
 88:5 91:18,19,20,21,22,
 23 92:3 123:8 124:1,4
 127:2,3 139:4,8 144:6,19,
 23 146:17 147:12 148:12,
 22 149:5 150:6,22 151:6,
 8,24 158:8,14,22 159:22
 160:4,13,19,23 161:7,16
 162:16 163:6,10,15
 166:5,21 167:15,21
 171:1,11 174:8 175:13
 177:10,16 178:1,5
 180:19,24 181:8,12
 185:4,7,8,9 191:6 192:17
 193:20 194:4 195:6
 196:4,12,16 197:5,10
 198:18 199:3,17 200:10,
 19 201:1,3,4 210:3,11,15,
 24 211:6,9 212:6 213:5
 218:9 220:6 221:5,8,21
 222:7,12,16,21 223:3
 224:3,24 228:3 229:2,6,9

230:6,8,16 231:2,6,10,16,
 20 241:10,14 244:10
 245:20 246:16 247:6,7,8,
 23 248:7 251:7 252:22
 253:2 255:9,14 258:4,22
 259:3,7,9 262:2 264:5
 268:19 270:10,14 272:2
 273:3,22 274:2,7,14
 275:8 277:6,23 278:1,5,9,
 13,21 279:2,10,11,14,17,
 18,21,23 280:7 282:5
 284:4,22 288:9 291:9,13
 292:4 295:16 297:19,23
 299:8,10,11 300:18
 302:9,12,19,24 303:2,7
 304:5 305:2,3 306:5
 307:21 308:2,6 313:19
 322:7,10,12 324:18,23
 325:15,20 326:1,6,22
 328:7 329:5 332:16 333:6
 336:8,12,19,23 340:7,11
 341:18,24 345:6,10,14,
 18,22 346:2 347:11,16
 348:2,7,14,19,24 349:4,9
 350:4,20 351:12,16,22
 352:11 353:14,21 355:9,
 19 358:5,9,11,23 359:1,2,
 18 360:7 362:4,9 363:20
 364:9,16 365:8,12,16,23
 366:15,19 367:1,6 368:7,
 13,23 369:7,12,18 370:17
 371:15,22 373:24 374:23,
 24 375:16 383:10,18,22
 384:15 385:16,23 387:1,
 4,8,12,17 388:5,10,15,16,
 20 389:3,11,17,19,23
 390:5,10,22 391:15,17,21
 392:4,8,12 393:17,19,23
 395:10,18,21 396:12,14,
 15 397:8,19 398:3,15,17,
 21 399:2,4,10,15,19
 400:10,14 401:7,23 403:9
 407:12,19 408:12,15,19
 411:1 413:13 414:6,10,22
 417:7,21 419:18 421:16
 422:3,14 423:12,22 424:1
 427:3 430:19 431:6,16

434:23 435:23 436:8,12,
 23 437:2 439:10,21
 440:1,21 442:14,23
 443:24 444:5 445:20,23
 446:3 448:6 454:14,16
 478:12,24 479:7,13,24

Councilmembers 12:3
 61:10 76:15 179:15 206:4
 281:11 299:12 433:19
 454:5 476:10 479:12,23

Councilwoman 399:3

counselor 457:12

counselors 41:15 283:1
 428:17

count 35:8 52:12

counterparts 405:13

counties 17:3 19:19 91:6
 222:1 223:6,8

country 18:20 131:12
 164:14 176:13 265:19

county 223:15 224:12

couple 197:16 267:18
 269:15 282:11 299:20
 337:17 342:11 349:15
 356:5 383:17 405:16
 473:21

courage 80:12

courageous 434:2

court 37:17 38:9,12 64:7
 71:9,13 176:21 177:2

court's 38:14 39:20

courts 15:21

cover 148:16 321:1
 438:14

covering 8:11

covers 439:15

COVID 129:12 158:6
 163:19 165:9,19 170:23
 174:12 323:13

coyotes 141:13 crack 285:13 crazy 393:22 create 63:2 188:6 249:11 303:3,8 349:22 378:20 379:2 385:3 405:2 462:24 created 31:7 327:5 creates 404:17 creating 300:23 463:8 creative 79:18 83:12,23 84:12 108:4 455:15 creators 70:17 credibility 367:16 credit 128:18 crisis 27:9,14 29:14 30:7 32:10 52:11 62:22 252:1, 3,4 criteria 249:11 256:12 272:20 293:24 392:23 393:2 criteria-based 255:23 256:17 257:5,15 critical 41:8 109:21 426:11 429:6 critically 11:23 335:14 crop 253:20 cross 396:4 crossed 31:14 crossover 245:11 crowd 445:15 crumbles 80:22 cry 257:14 Cs 430:3 CTE 152:7 culprit 257:3 cultivate 225:22	cultural 419:6 culture 23:21 curious 434:2 current 155:5 272:19 287:15,16 370:13 420:13 421:1,2,3 443:12 curriculum 225:15 226:4, 17 228:12 253:5 428:14 cursing 222:20 curtailing 132:11 Curtis 139:4 customer 117:9 118:10, 23 119:2,10 cut 130:8,19,20 133:1 134:18 138:13,17 157:10 165:10,14 218:15 332:18 384:16 430:8 433:11 cutoff 443:22 cuts 31:16 41:11,13 46:17,19 47:10,18 48:4 131:14 135:13,15 159:7, 20 167:6 425:19 426:23 435:16 437:10 438:6 439:16 cutting 133:7 cycle 426:23	Daniel 471:17 Danton 92:1 dare 393:21 Darryl 32:20 34:22 476:8 data 29:7 57:6,8 58:17 68:3 100:5 106:9 112:20 118:15 162:23 166:1 174:24 176:3 188:2 193:24 256:24 258:12 268:8 271:24 284:18 388:14 403:2 409:11 463:23 465:6 468:6,17 date 37:3 154:1 296:1 394:3 dates 300:7 394:2 daughter 411:7 412:2,6 414:2 425:16 434:18 daughter's 425:20 426:5 daughters 449:8 450:1 Dauphin 328:11 Davi 455:21 456:1 Davia 454:6 457:8 David 13:13 14:2 135:22 431:14 436:14 441:2 Dawson 151:13 day 19:6 20:21 21:11,15, 16,17 22:6 23:1,2 57:23 74:24 103:24 104:8 110:21 124:20 154:1 171:7,8 175:20 181:9 183:10 189:22 224:20,21, 23 225:1 247:10,24 261:4 317:18 330:8 335:1 360:23 361:1 377:2 428:19 429:5 433:13,22 434:18 435:12 438:10,11 439:6 451:24 454:19 day-to-day 108:12 daylights 52:19
D		
D's 33:2 D.c 169:8 D.C. 53:13 168:23 D9 151:23 daily 45:12 57:16 433:3 dais 213:4 292:3 damaged 219:20 damn 405:21 Dan 46:10		

days 21:20 118:22,23 135:22 144:15 161:13 273:9 285:4 296:9 De'jesus 458:14 dead 450:3 deadline 297:14 deaf 144:9 285:19 286:1, 17 287:3 deal 16:7 27:1 43:16 52:24 68:15,18 83:3 214:7 252:19 309:10 356:14 422:22 dealing 39:10 260:23 337:23 372:5 deals 227:22 Deanna 471:18 dear 191:11 debate 59:19 233:9 433:14 debated 65:20 debating 58:14 debt 40:8 41:6 178:11 decade 117:21 373:12 decades 72:2 404:21 411:11 473:5 decent 214:15 317:13,16 449:13 decide 71:18 309:15 315:2 392:20,21 decided 54:4 165:13 deciding 377:15 decimated 470:5 decision 45:11 82:6 109:11,20 146:23 160:15 167:5,24 168:16 199:5 234:2 235:4 236:3 237:18 244:24 256:8,10 300:22 301:1 305:13 323:15 331:11 333:8,12,13 334:5	393:10 469:22 474:9 decision-making 108:20 decisions 78:21 80:15 81:1 109:10 110:6 140:11 157:19 186:14 189:15 206:10 207:7 234:9 247:18 269:2 332:21 333:18,19 371:10 372:7 374:18 403:11 433:21 476:1,2,4 deck 456:16 declarations 106:5 decline 267:16,20 declines 256:19 declining 176:5 257:4 267:22 decrease 162:5,6 265:13, 22 decreased 265:1 decreasing 20:18 131:22 163:8,11 dedicated 16:21 19:15 78:6,15 283:7 deep 13:22 deeply 218:12 280:9 434:6 deers 141:13 deescalation 426:12 defense 235:24 defer 17:16 363:4 deferred 260:24 298:24 344:13 deficiencies 204:15 deficit 31:8 41:10 43:17 78:23 128:12 129:8 130:9,21 135:4,18 136:7 141:2 155:18 156:17 182:15 328:20 344:12 425:15	deficits 130:16 135:21 136:2 148:16 235:22 defines 99:21 definition 235:11 definitive 297:12 dehydrated 412:11 Del 223:14,17 Delaware 17:1 19:9,12 22:13 25:12 30:2 36:9 38:22 91:3 delay 167:6 342:2 386:1 delayed 170:23 338:24 339:17 delaying 425:2 432:2 delegation 32:18 39:24 140:20 361:6 deliberate 178:19 182:17 deliberation 104:23 deliberative 339:21 delinquent 35:19 deliver 90:3,12 148:8 228:7 deliverables 114:10 delivered 90:22 deliveries 241:1 delivering 20:22 delivery 8:1,2 Deloitte 267:2 demand 74:16 387:7,11, 18,21,23 388:3,11 427:14 432:12 451:2 demanding 450:20 Democratic 76:7 demonstrate 329:16 331:7 407:1 demonstrates 204:2
---	---	---

demonstrating 101:7	desperately 138:10 176:2	23 370:6
demonstration 125:15	detail 117:17 270:24	directly 108:19 109:16 112:8 281:12 438:7
demonstrations 67:1	detailed 258:6 407:8	director 46:24 47:1
departing 151:14	details 258:11 270:9 410:20	directs 99:17 327:18 357:17
department 47:3 48:16 63:14,16 71:8 264:11	determine 100:6	dirty 319:9,13 410:11
departure 404:24	determined 106:22	dis-enrollment 260:20
depend 143:18	devastated 426:5	disabilities 284:8 288:6, 24 290:24
dependent 228:19	developed 124:19 128:11	disability 411:16 423:7,17
deplete 135:6	developers 132:17 187:1 472:16	disabled 290:14 459:9
deplorable 412:20	development 132:7,10 187:2 477:4	disappear 118:8
deploying 216:2	device 269:17	discard 192:2
Depression 60:4	dictates 313:3	disclose 407:7
depressor 32:24	died 425:24	discontinuing 132:3
deprived 149:6	difference 140:10 149:2 172:21 190:16 224:7 225:9 357:4 363:24 455:24	discretion 161:2
deputy 119:11 213:11 231:1 303:24 415:20	differences 147:1,5 226:8	discuss 71:22 97:24 101:11 297:24
derailed 459:16	difficult 63:1 81:1 143:11 186:13 319:16 352:6 406:4	discussion 17:5 27:10 52:24 356:9
Dermody 33:4	dig 339:10	discussions 81:14 108:18 187:18
describe 429:13	digest 182:21	disguising 236:1
description 462:9	dignity 203:22	disingenuous 233:18
descriptions 261:7	diligence 327:16,20	disinvestment 426:2
deserve 22:14 129:19 433:23 449:12	dip 135:11	disparate 145:17 206:2,3, 5
design 211:15 296:21 462:8	direct 153:5 195:9 221:13, 14,16,19,23 280:14	disparity 74:11
designed 104:11 107:3 267:9 310:15 339:22 350:7 416:8 422:24	directed 34:18 35:13	dispenser 317:24
desirability 249:11	directing 194:21	displace 104:19
desire 67:15 98:22 206:8 302:16	direction 21:24 47:5 103:2 104:17 111:18 112:7 126:6 139:20 283:12 309:18,24 311:20,	displacement 190:5 200:14
desires 49:8		disposable 91:9
desk 72:16 242:14 304:1		disposal 426:15 435:14 439:18
desks 457:21		

disposition 326:14	159:20 162:22 164:20	diverse 285:10 477:21
disproportionately 55:23 56:9	165:1,6,11,21,22 166:3 169:10 172:16 175:19 176:21,23 177:2,7 180:6 181:17 185:19 186:22,23 187:8 193:14 196:1,4 197:20 198:4 201:13,16 202:1,3 203:10 204:13 206:9,22,24 208:24 211:1 212:18,24 213:10,13,19 219:1 220:1 232:19 233:3 235:5 236:12,21 238:15 241:6 242:23,24 243:24 250:12 252:5 255:3 256:15 257:13 266:23 268:1 272:6,11 280:23 281:2,7 282:6 288:17 289:13 300:6 301:19 304:14 305:13 310:1,16 311:17 312:7 322:23 323:24 324:7 326:11 327:9,23 328:18 330:2 332:2 334:11 364:17 365:21 369:21 370:4 371:7,19 375:20,23 376:9,16 377:24 380:22 381:10 382:2 383:13 386:20 394:22 397:1,4 399:5 400:5,22 402:10, 12,19 403:8,21,23 404:1, 6 405:19 406:11,23 409:9 410:17 415:15 416:3,13 417:22 420:24 424:14 427:10 430:3 432:3,5,6 435:18 440:7 443:4 445:4 454:15,17 456:16 463:24 464:2,4 468:24 471:7 472:1,8,20 476:3	diversifying 451:6
dispute 256:24		diversity 293:1 319:3 320:16
disrespect 402:19 468:15 469:16		divide 28:9
disrespectful 460:1		DJ 222:13
disrupt 251:1 253:23 402:14		Doc 18:3
disrupted 420:20		doctor 206:16
disrupting 420:15		document 313:7
disruption 426:22 435:5		Doen 109:13
disruptive 133:9		dog 318:11
distances 202:16		dollar 44:5 64:3,5,16 67:22 70:10 90:10
distinct 248:15		dollars 29:21,23 34:4 56:23 116:21 129:2,14 155:19,23 156:7,10 163:19,20 164:4,11,15 165:2,9,19 170:3,23 172:23 173:18 174:12 240:11 323:14 437:13 462:6 477:24 478:5
distinction 225:9,12		Donna 46:9
distraction 437:23		door 78:10 143:12 317:20
distributed 27:20		doors 16:9 142:18 143:19 261:13 295:11 317:21 321:2,12
district 7:14 9:5 10:4,7 12:1 13:7 15:12 16:23 18:5,20 19:23 20:13 21:22 25:16 26:3 28:5,15 29:12 30:4 31:9,13,20 32:6 34:5 37:14 40:4 41:2,9 43:12 44:20 47:4 48:14 50:13,20 51:18 71:24 72:3,6 73:2 75:14, 20 78:24 79:7,9 80:11 81:2 82:11 83:3 84:17 85:11,16 86:2 88:9,21 94:22 96:4 97:1 103:5 105:13 106:16 110:10 111:4 116:17,23 117:2 119:3 121:14,24 122:21 123:9,23 124:2,4,5,14 125:4,13 126:24 127:1,2, 3,19,24 128:20 130:13 131:11 134:2 135:1,16,21 136:21 137:1 138:19 142:9,10 143:16 152:6 153:2,16 154:4 157:3,14	district's 101:13 105:15 156:15 219:16	Dorn 414:18,20 415:2,3
	districts 19:18 36:12 48:24 52:12 85:18 126:12 127:5 165:23 172:5,14,17 267:1 288:14 365:22	dot 396:4
	divergent 289:8 290:13	dotted 31:15
		double 87:14 159:18 354:2
		downloading 180:11
		downsized 372:21
		downtown 458:11 467:14
		dozens 402:17 429:7
		drafted 65:4
		drain 319:7

drama 184:11 draw 82:7 239:2 drawing 46:23 48:2 dream 44:9 dreams 425:5 433:6 437:11 Drexel 79:16 83:15,21 Drink 14:1,4,19 15:5 35:9 90:19 93:18 drips 452:3 Driscoll 3:8,9 59:15 61:10 68:7,21 76:15 91:23 drive 125:16 196:21 406:2 driven 40:3 129:8 267:20, 22 driver 175:15 drivers 175:14 driving 115:19 drop 35:23 57:24 118:7 237:20,24 238:11,18 243:2 dropout 20:18 118:2 128:15 131:23 139:17 175:17 176:6 dropouts 242:19 243:7 dropped 161:11 290:18 dropping 237:17 242:19 409:14 dry 174:19 drywall 358:2 dual 325:8 Dubow 47:1 Dudd 422:1 due 12:6 30:8 327:15,19 353:23 Duly 194:15 195:2,8 359:16 365:6	duties 398:11 duty 432:14 dynamic 475:11 dynamics 396:2 E earlier 25:7 74:22 188:2 218:21 233:11 238:2 252:15 293:7 326:9 338:13 373:11 Early 100:19 101:6 earn 51:19 earning 57:14 404:7 Earth 224:20,21,23 225:1 247:24 ease 277:22 easier 62:6 295:9 easily 404:18 east 240:1 343:12,14 359:10 eat 95:10,18 356:11 429:8 452:6 eating 294:10 ecology 226:10 economic 18:14 20:24 93:22 443:15 economist 68:5 69:10,24 economy 73:20,23 ecosystem 460:15 ecosystems 225:19 Ed 288:19 411:22 467:17 Eden 431:14 442:22 443:2 edicts 340:5 educate 73:19 117:14 223:16,22 293:2 413:8 442:10	educated 12:1 441:22 education 9:7,10 11:18 12:9 13:1 15:16 16:2,19 17:19 19:4,21 27:24 28:17 35:14 36:10,11,15 37:2,18 38:1 39:18 44:24 51:24 76:13 78:7 80:7,18 85:21 87:8 90:23 94:20 95:21 96:1,24 99:5 100:13 111:1,3,18 112:16 115:8 121:9 122:23 136:16 137:15,20 143:10 147:2 149:6 163:23 164:6 169:3 172:3 173:14 188:10 189:20 196:6 204:22 210:1 224:8 230:12 233:7 248:3 250:17 251:9,14,22 252:16 258:15 281:19 284:2,20 285:10 312:1 324:16 332:4 337:9 341:8,15 344:24 364:15 386:7 400:1 403:5 411:14 419:21 420:16,22 423:3, 10 424:15 430:7 455:8 457:4 460:14 465:14 474:14,15 477:3 478:23 educational 9:1,24 22:15 38:7 84:5 240:4 248:12 educators 171:8 402:9 404:9 405:10 406:2,5 468:1 476:21 Edward 473:17 Edwin 151:20 eerie 32:11 effectively 254:12 efficiencies 396:19 efficiently 137:8 218:2 effort 68:23 168:20 186:12 efforts 62:24 eighth 131:10 176:7
---	--	--

454:18 462:18	emotion 394:14	367:24 456:8
elect 381:1	emotional 283:21 410:4 418:22 474:23	engaged 108:9 117:13 323:2 478:9
elected 17:7,10 435:20	emotionally 418:14 456:22	engagement 69:14 109:23 119:21 236:2 243:10 477:8
elections 207:11	emotions 83:1 101:24 429:14	engaging 101:20 109:7
electrical 219:11 275:19, 24 298:17	empathizes 115:8	engineering 213:2 228:6, 9
elementary 21:23 72:8,18 141:19 146:11 201:24 202:2,6 218:19 219:3,9 220:9 261:3 288:16 343:4,7 361:17 379:3 382:13,15 385:4,7 389:5 403:22 406:14 417:21 423:2 432:7 449:7 462:21 467:6 471:23 472:7 473:18	emphasize 226:2	english 59:1 145:9 291:2 447:14 454:18 455:7
elephant 312:4 441:7 448:21,22 465:1	employ 58:8	enhancing 132:1
elevate 100:11	employed 459:8	enjoy 319:2
elevating 110:4	employees 129:18 134:3 136:24 138:18 150:12	enormous 41:14
eligible 271:1 273:21	employing 216:2	enrich 70:5
eliminate 43:13 59:23 130:10 131:16	empower 78:19	enrichment 22:15 23:4 26:5 141:6
eliminated 46:5 154:13 155:6	empty 74:6	enrolled 25:6 137:12
eliminating 46:2 131:8 158:18 188:12	enable 260:4	enrollment 105:22 106:11 117:20 160:2 162:5 191:21 219:18,21 249:1, 4,9 254:6 256:19 264:16 265:3 266:1 354:20,22 376:24 463:6
Elizabeth 10:14 292:2 315:9,12,22	enabled 61:1	enrollments 257:4 267:17
Ellwood 343:3,7,9,16,18, 20,21 344:1 347:19 349:11,24 352:21,22 353:2,11,17 355:8,17 358:13 359:7 363:9	enabling 12:18 60:5	ensure 19:6 40:7 99:7 109:17 168:2 183:3 203:18 209:8 271:15 310:17 313:5
else's 465:8	enclosed 216:5	ensures 269:17
emails 162:11 304:10 413:3	encourage 418:9	ensuring 108:16 112:24 271:7
emergency 202:7 468:3	encouraged 12:21	entering 453:13
emerging 378:23 384:24	encouragement 456:9	entertain 362:20,21
	end 103:24 104:8 145:12 156:2 182:10 204:3 229:18 269:23 270:19 356:23 439:23	entire 202:10 250:24 262:15 274:16 343:13 365:18 371:6 381:15 394:6
	endeavors 148:18	
	ending 227:15	
	ends 58:11,12	
	endure 450:3	
	endured 428:8	
	energy 356:18 429:7	
	Enforce 471:4	
	engage 100:3 113:13 186:12 253:19 344:4,5	

entirety 201:19	essence 29:8 32:5 64:16	excise 5:21
entities 413:3	essential 24:2 193:6 430:16 435:9 438:7,19 439:3,4 456:19	excited 107:18
entitled 5:19 6:12,18 7:9, 11,22,24	essentially 174:16	exciting 108:8 110:13
entity 17:18	establish 8:1 49:20 249:9 357:24 407:8	excuse 174:1,5 304:24 401:19 440:17 466:3
environment 147:2 225:22 227:7 229:11 250:3 253:11,21 406:13 439:9 477:20	established 227:10 421:10 471:21	executive 15:20 16:12 77:8 88:1
environmental 122:18,23 140:17 141:16 225:10,13, 17,18,24 226:9,20 227:2, 5 248:2,19 250:4,9,10,16, 22 251:9,14 252:16 258:15 420:3,22	estate 6:22 223:10,12 376:5	exhibit 82:21
environmentalists 225:3	esteemed 96:20	exist 170:15
environmets 248:11 477:9	estimated 327:3	existed 25:9
equal 117:13 119:7	ethos 144:8	existing 112:18 188:8
equality 465:21	evaluating 109:8	expand 270:18 271:4,14 273:12 274:5 355:7
equally 42:18	evening 43:10 461:21	expanding 26:4
equipment 73:18	event 311:24	expansion 272:8,12
equipped 216:3	events 109:7 271:17	expect 16:3 237:4 300:3 453:11
equipping 112:21	Eventually 77:6	expectancy 237:21
equitable 466:13	everybody's 464:21	expectation 277:11
equity 187:5 465:19	everyone's 72:1	expectations 99:22
equivalence 448:18	evidence 114:8 170:10,11 237:10 240:11 342:7,9 347:15	expecting 92:13,14 137:19 235:13 288:3
eradicate 136:2	evil 366:3	expects 298:20
erase 248:14	evolve 106:14	expedite 211:20 212:2 297:10 446:13,17
erasing 190:21	Ewen 152:10	expedited 296:6
erasure 190:5 191:1	exacerbate 443:14	expenditures 106:5 173:11 324:2,8 398:13
ERISA 69:2	exact 32:16 233:16 363:15	experience 26:15 108:10, 12 110:14 414:14
eroding 430:9	exam 100:17	experienced 410:9
error 153:23	examples 258:12 292:24 342:11 352:23 358:14	experiencing 129:24 256:18 404:22
escape 404:18	exceeds 217:1	experts 84:5 194:18
essay 269:8,11	excess 252:6,9	expire 156:11
	exchange 367:24 394:4	expired 30:21

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fear 251:10 264:20 450:12	Fiesta 338:2	finding 77:16 177:6 262:11 434:3
fearing 319:1,12	fight 433:2 440:10	finds 415:6
February 120:18 123:23 241:19	fighting 32:22,23 40:7 61:13 330:3	fine 146:19 173:13 228:11,17 251:18 285:9 311:5 344:8 360:1 408:14
federal 27:15 30:11,17,19 31:2,4,18 32:4 40:22 164:1 165:16 168:9 284:19 373:15 460:16 477:23	fighths 426:10	finer 140:15
Federation 157:23 402:7	figure 28:21 31:21 33:19 36:22 37:1,9 43:4 56:21 77:11 83:6 86:9 88:19 153:16 162:12 224:7 353:5 386:22 392:17 393:1,4 441:16 470:17 471:6	finest 188:16
feedback 50:1 109:15 118:23 220:20 252:14 256:1 309:15 324:13 359:11 363:7 380:13 391:15	figured 391:24	finger 406:8
feel 26:14 41:22 138:6 149:23 190:23 222:13 237:13 284:9 293:3 294:9 311:9 315:24 317:17 332:11 370:7 372:4 410:2 428:5 453:18,19	filed 37:20,24	finish 349:6 357:1 421:6 450:19
feeling 66:21 310:11	fill 133:23 155:4 182:14 263:2	finished 63:18 82:19 182:4
feels 233:18 235:9 380:14 419:13 434:10 456:10	filled 156:2 262:19 264:12 319:14 355:4 376:21	Finletter 417:20 418:15
fees 6:7,14 7:5	filling 363:14	fire 298:15
feet 257:18 320:2 382:24	final 105:7 137:13 146:18 173:23 186:5 314:24 333:13	firestorm 245:5
felt 41:24 234:11 247:17	finally 19:2 238:22 315:2	firing 275:17
FEMALE 411:18	finance 7:22 46:24 47:3 48:16 63:13 337:22 373:18	firm 266:22
feral 141:13	finances 9:4 10:3	firms 169:9 326:5 370:22
fewer 435:6	financial 8:9 29:13 31:15 105:12 119:23 128:24 271:21 272:6 373:14,16 459:21	first- 72:12
fide 168:24 170:11	financially 198:24	first-time 425:17
fidelity 313:9 345:2	financials 134:14	firsthand 110:14 374:18 410:9
fiduciary 332:1	find 24:13 67:12 92:18 95:16 113:16 128:8 142:3 143:14 202:19 203:3 297:2 321:20 334:24 378:13 429:23 459:18,19, 20	fiscal 5:8,11,15 8:11,13 9:18,20,21 105:22 106:14 130:11 134:11 153:6,7 156:17 235:22 371:6
Fiedler 10:14 292:2,9 299:13,19 315:9,12,14, 19,23 360:21		fiscally 61:21
field 26:11 146:5 228:23 312:22		fish 209:9 368:3
		fit 341:12 355:18 393:1 466:23
		Fitch 128:24
		fits 377:11 392:22
		five- 249:2
		five-seat 77:7
		five-year 8:9 156:15 157:4 173:2,5 195:20

five-year-olds 202:14	198:10 203:1 211:17	430:12 461:7,14
fix 32:3 51:9,10 261:15	234:17 237:4 243:24	forward- 9:19
303:10 317:8 318:4,6	252:10 263:17 267:1	Foster 241:23
417:4	363:18 364:3 369:13	fought 66:3 257:18
fixed 321:10 406:18	374:10 395:3 405:21	found 182:1 250:6 355:20
416:16,18 447:23 469:22	419:20 421:22 431:11	358:2 457:20
473:12	436:17 446:15,21	foundation 13:6 23:13
fixes 262:12	follow 219:13 258:6	386:24
fixing 260:9,11 303:11	259:15 270:8 284:5,14,22	founding 437:6
416:20 447:2,6	297:18 335:7 357:17	fourth 453:7,17
fixtures 295:10	395:13	framework 99:21 111:21
flaws 351:19	food 27:21 226:3,7,12	112:13,19
flights 202:18	Fool 347:4	framing 407:21
flooded 319:10	foot 243:8	Francisco 53:15,17,23
flooding 317:19 450:8	footage 80:21	Francisville 391:3
floor 32:13,14 33:10 96:6	footprint 243:16	frank 335:19
198:21 232:3,17 297:6	force 202:14 407:5,6	Frankford 276:17 353:16
412:15 450:8 453:5,16	470:2	354:4
floors 202:11 204:8	forced 202:21 433:11	frankly 13:8 16:3 402:18
320:24 321:11 441:11	443:16	fraternity 152:2 191:11
Flores 316:15,16	forefront 474:4,16	fraught 140:22
flow 210:18 218:15	forestry 253:18	free 21:7 119:14 273:5,18
flush 296:22,24	forevermore 130:22	Fresh 454:8 457:17
flushed 475:10	forget 13:3 59:13 178:24	friction 147:3
fly 443:13	form 254:1	friend 40:2 317:20 443:3
focus 21:8 111:7 112:14	formally 49:18 58:16	friends 149:13 263:1
114:20 117:2 119:2,5	forming 418:20	320:19
170:15 201:14 225:15,17	formula 29:20 133:14	front 61:13 189:11 203:16
226:1,9,11 261:9 311:5	Forrest 277:1,4	340:24 394:10 472:14
418:23	fortunate 34:6 70:14	frustrated 56:7 331:3,6
focused 117:6,11	428:5	333:19
focuses 165:24	forum 160:8	frustrating 82:5
focusing 119:22 180:8	forums 16:10	frustration 65:16 247:21
448:1	forward 29:6 86:4 101:22	263:22 300:1 333:23
fold 72:16 238:21	113:16 114:16,22 115:2	394:15
folks 40:19 47:18 66:23	120:1,3 132:13 137:24	fry 84:15 368:3
118:19 147:18 159:4	140:23 156:19 177:1	
163:7,12 164:9 175:18	183:5 265:15 270:7	
	335:16,19 378:17 407:21	

FTE 213:15 FTES 133:17 full 140:21 144:7 204:5 215:6 233:6 266:14 287:10 298:9 301:9 303:15 308:16 435:4 460:19 461:3 full-time 395:1,24 fully 101:17 156:24 178:18,19 215:17 216:3 257:19 426:16 435:15 439:19 function 31:21 215:13 325:7 410:5 functional 299:9 functionally 460:5,7 functioning 215:12 functions 264:14 fund 34:4,20 60:18 135:5, 11 136:6 155:19 156:7 166:7 168:2 170:14,22 237:7 425:13 428:1 433:22 fundamentally 38:10 208:1 432:23 funded 86:3 fundes 402:23 funding 12:8 13:6 30:11, 20 32:7 38:2 39:17 40:3,6 116:16 129:13 130:24 154:15,16 155:1,10 158:7 159:2 163:24 169:20 175:24 183:4 208:8 232:18,22 233:2 263:4 307:1 308:13 375:19 405:3 406:9 427:21 431:4 435:4 447:6 460:16,24 474:7 funds 31:12 156:23 169:9 174:18 269:24 318:4	fungible 346:18 funny 457:19 future 30:12 43:9 80:20 98:22 103:8 105:9 106:6 111:6 114:21 206:7 269:3 281:23 447:8,9 451:4 477:1 fuzzy 40:18 FY 153:10 FY18 152:23 FY21 152:22 FY26 152:24 FY27 43:8 G Gail 458:4,20 464:7,8 gains 101:7 Galbally 195:11 217:9 game 183:22 gangs 147:1 gap 252:9 478:6 Garden 391:3 gas 243:8 470:17 Gasis 152:9 gather 171:22 Gauthier 2:20,21 92:3 123:8 139:7 151:7 185:5, 9 191:6 192:17 193:20 194:4 195:5,6 196:5,12, 16 197:5,10 198:18 199:3,17 200:10,19 Gauthier's 124:2 127:2 454:16 gave 33:23 43:1 68:2 194:5 254:5 273:17 335:12 358:13 386:11 general 38:13,16 60:18	215:8,18 236:12 390:2 406:9 generally 164:3 generate 15:11 35:22 44:15 47:8 64:21,23 85:15 89:20 generated 29:18,23 35:12 38:3 56:23 79:2 93:16 generating 40:24 generation 102:13 425:14 428:2 gentrifiers 366:3 genuine 186:12 geographic 282:8 geometric 27:10 Germantown 25:10 66:5 115:16 374:17 get all 229:24 343:15 get-to-know-you 283:20 Ghilarducci 69:5 giant 70:2 Gilmore- 3:22 92:2 151:5, 8,24 158:8,14,22 159:22 160:4,13,19,23 161:7,16 162:16 163:6,10,15 166:5,21 167:15,21 171:1,11 178:1,5 180:19, 24 181:8,12 230:22 338:21 478:12 479:13,24 Gilmore-richardson 3:21 11:17 37:7 85:8 116:4 139:6 157:7 338:23 Gilmore-richardson's 360:7 Girls 107:24 GIS 255:4,5 give 34:2 92:19,22 98:3 105:5 116:18 136:13 149:20 151:12 157:12
---	--	--

161:18 163:2 165:20 170:18 172:18 178:18 184:16 195:4 203:11 212:16 217:1,20 225:8 242:7 249:2 276:19 292:19 294:16 297:11,13 301:21 304:3,12 318:16 330:23 342:10 361:2 362:13 372:23 383:19 385:24 399:22 422:20 433:22 440:2 441:9 442:5 445:19 446:22 447:16 471:8 giving 33:11 43:22 66:24 85:6 103:1 117:1 128:9 251:2 254:12 274:24 316:13 373:5 419:7 446:23 456:9 glad 139:15 163:1 172:1 221:24 355:8 glaringly 260:2 global 73:20,22 189:3 258:17 gloss 254:13 goal 18:12,18 47:7 134:7 356:23 457:12 goals 99:12,20 113:1 383:14 419:11 God 64:7 good 2:4,5,6,7 29:1 87:20 94:24 96:17 98:8 107:10, 11 114:19 116:2 129:1 139:20 149:6,18 176:6 181:11 185:10 198:11 201:5,7 204:20 221:22 231:17,18 247:9 251:5 258:1 259:18 269:20 272:4 273:11 301:5 304:14 306:1 321:15 322:13 324:12 329:15 330:15 331:9 333:8 334:16 336:12,13,24 339:7,8 344:4,5 347:6	352:18 356:20 367:20 385:24 396:9 402:2 411:5 417:13 443:19 444:22 449:4,15 451:16 453:23 454:3 457:15 458:1 461:20,21,23 476:7 goods 8:4 goodwill 114:8 Google 36:8 Googled 16:24 governing 99:18 government 30:17,19 31:2,4,18 32:4 40:22 82:5 189:15 333:15 373:18 governor 39:16 67:4,6 75:24 76:5 89:9 governor's 77:6 grab 468:16 grade 72:13 107:23 108:1, 3 128:18 145:6 176:11 202:12 207:1 220:19 272:24 273:1,19 318:13 320:15 343:18 384:12 388:8,9 449:9 454:18 455:6 466:19 477:15 grader 316:17 428:3 432:7 453:7,17 graders 202:21 421:2,3,4, 5 grades 100:24 101:4 145:3 220:10 243:2 271:9 462:20 graduate 237:22 374:16 409:17,19 442:10 473:8 graduated 410:7 graduating 409:13 425:17 graduation 13:21 20:17 118:1 128:14 131:22 140:13 141:20 175:16 176:5 223:19 225:6	229:15,17 grandmother 66:9 grandparent 473:24 grandparents 474:1 grant 263:10 296:3 grants 164:1 graphic 134:14 grateful 19:21 40:10 219:2 454:24 476:15 gravity 101:17 Gray 33:7,8,12 great 16:7 28:10 52:24 66:8 68:15,18 96:20 100:20 102:6 168:21 171:8 187:9 191:11,12,13 192:2 198:10 201:18 267:12 293:1,20 320:8 338:5 341:19 360:1 363:22 373:6 388:24 407:16 greatest 11:12 123:16 greatly 183:14 green 18:14 135:3 greet 434:14 grew 72:24 gross 204:15 ground 98:12 110:17 152:14 211:14 grounded 98:16 460:2 groundwork 13:11 group 357:7 421:21 groups 371:18 418:24 464:23 grow 19:8 20:1 87:10 220:18 306:24 307:16 growing 145:3 growth 177:19 418:22
--	---	--

443:10 guarantee 334:22 guaranteed 433:3 guardrails 99:13,21 guess 15:2 25:10,14 31:5, 6 36:20 37:15 40:16 53:1, 20 60:4,24 63:5 69:21 77:12 285:24 311:1 323:10,19 392:20 467:13 guest 315:11 guidance 63:15 168:23,24 169:1 457:12 guide 99:9 110:5 456:4 guided 69:16 guidelines 99:17 guiding 207:17 gunshot 51:5 guy 337:13 guys 224:16 225:8 269:1 323:12 328:8 330:14 337:15,17 353:4 355:23 356:7 357:5,8 368:8 379:24 395:14 441:9,23 445:18 447:7 Gwen 72:10 gym 217:5 gyms 204:5	hallmark 117:10 halls 452:19 466:22 hallways 438:23 Hamilton 434:7 hand 109:14 113:21 194:20 363:6 470:3 handcuffed 61:22 91:12 handed 442:1 handle 301:13 hands 72:16 198:4 456:16 hands- 251:21 happen 52:18 81:16 83:22 87:17 104:20 114:6 182:6 205:6 262:13 263:24 265:8 300:12,15 308:19 310:8 328:3 350:19 394:1 426:3,12 443:10,21 469:14 happened 190:6 209:23 239:4 259:17 469:4 happening 53:17 110:16, 20 160:11 202:8 235:4 238:8 240:20 265:18 298:14 307:14 334:21 426:4 445:6 447:20 448:14 450:14 474:17 happy 38:4 97:17 138:22 224:21,22 225:1 251:6 257:7 309:1 312:5 325:24 328:24 334:14 341:23 457:9 hard 66:4 79:1 92:16 114:17 115:5 131:24 147:24 237:2,3 244:23 260:15 261:14 294:15 459:20 harder 175:22 Harding 454:13 455:7,18 456:15 hardship 405:18	hardworking 138:18 Harim 2:4 harm 187:9 harmed 265:22 Harper 23:17 100:2 Harris 33:3 40:1 76:23 86:15 89:12 Harrisburg 67:19 68:17 76:8 83:8 87:1 361:2,5 372:4 394:12 Harrity 4:5,6 56:4 91:24 185:8 201:2 218:7 221:5, 8,21 222:4,7,11,12,16,20, 21 223:3 224:3,24 228:3 229:2,6,9 246:14,16 247:23 248:7 hat 457:8 hate 61:9 208:20 209:1,4 331:1 434:24 hater 351:9 hating 142:12 hats 312:14 445:2 hazards 398:10 he'll 242:13 325:18 head 23:15 115:1 194:2 208:4 312:15 351:6 headed 103:6 104:17 headquartered 53:19 66:6 heads 38:19 headwinds 29:3 heal 467:11,12 health 410:4 health-borne 164:18 healthcare 51:20 129:24 healthy 412:2 hear 10:6 43:3 51:24 82:22 102:1,2 144:6
H		
Hackett 122:14 220:15 300:21,23,24 302:10,13 303:16 305:5 306:8,12, 19,23 307:6,7 308:14 half 44:2 65:19 87:5 214:5 240:3,5 310:22 355:4 376:20 462:7 463:21 Hall 228:14 316:14 479:6, 20		

214:3 219:2 234:19 259:11 286:4,8,10,15 331:16 333:22,23 336:3 339:4 341:5 345:8,12,16 369:14 390:23 401:12 408:2,5 422:6 459:20 464:10,13 472:12 475:14 heard 24:6 26:1 30:22 49:24 53:10 54:13 55:17 59:9 75:8,11 101:24 102:1 150:24 180:12 195:14,15 197:12 202:23 238:12 244:21 306:14 316:8,12 320:7 323:10 331:15 339:6 358:19 368:19 376:18 386:4 394:13 419:13 452:2 475:2 477:24 hearing 2:10 5:1 6:8 9:14 10:13 93:10 116:9 137:18,24 141:21 172:16 235:21 258:24 277:22 281:12 292:16,18 293:7 309:13 316:2 414:1 429:13 447:7 464:11 475:13 479:1,16 hearings 8:24 heart 188:13 hearts 330:16 heat 217:14 368:20 heating 275:13 heavily 65:24 heavy 184:5 heavy-handed 113:20 held 167:10 357:6 379:22 416:15 472:21 hell 169:4 helpful 67:16 helping 21:10 108:18 109:16 140:4 434:21 456:6 476:19	helps 21:12 331:17 403:20 Henry 253:8 Herbstman 132:19 171:21 177:4 224:1 271:22 272:4,5 273:15 274:1,6 325:18 370:8 371:16 373:9 hero 425:9 hey 142:18 312:10 340:18 385:16 461:20 hiccups 287:12 high 72:9 107:24 108:2,4 115:17 122:7,9 132:8 141:8 144:12,16 145:7, 11,20 146:7 188:6,8,13 189:24 190:14,15 192:5 193:7,8 196:22,24 198:1, 8 200:6 223:10 228:10,16 244:24 245:2 255:5 260:6 272:22 276:17 289:14 291:4 300:2 352:3 362:15 374:17 377:6 392:3 403:20 412:4 420:3,6 421:6 426:9 429:7 455:10 462:17 464:19 466:22 high-level 304:4 high-quality 111:8 higher 21:22 93:23 216:10 224:10 highest 101:5 highlight 420:12 highlights 100:10 Hill 212:21 213:4,11 215:10 216:13 217:8 221:3 242:13 263:8 277:3 303:24 312:14 322:17 337:14 338:1 365:18 389:13 397:11,20,22 398:1,6,20 415:21 hindsight 166:4	hire 165:7 hired 167:8 416:1 hiring 213:22 372:19 historian 251:12 historic 39:22 62:23 63:1 116:16 129:10 208:8 267:20 405:7 historical 146:24 165:5 historically 12:4 267:21 history 12:23 17:20 29:17 190:3 233:10 hit 30:16,18,21 208:3 345:5 357:9 Hite 168:17 hits 142:17 hold 9:13 166:1 169:5 293:3 300:6 329:13 331:12 343:22 344:24 363:18 436:24 442:23 467:7 471:7 holders 105:15 holding 402:12 437:13 471:10 holds 404:8 433:9 hole 166:11 437:20 holes 165:3 166:16 holidays 273:14 hollered 361:16,21,23 home 9:2 10:1 11:2,7 96:22 209:5 269:19 293:5 321:7 441:9 449:14 465:18 466:12 473:16 homework 80:1 92:19,23, 24 93:15 97:18 329:1 354:9 363:8 390:9 honest 179:20 310:20 410:18,20 honestly 53:1 367:12
---	---	--

413:15	hundreds 428:21 430:2	375:21 376:8
honor 33:11 70:15 198:11 201:18 340:3	Hunt 20:4	impacted 32:5 41:18 45:19 305:19 399:9,14
honoring 186:7 193:13	hurdles 456:7	impacting 56:9 400:13
honors 114:17	hurry 462:12	impacts 178:12 381:8
hope 44:9 114:14 125:13 143:4 150:23 177:12 187:12 332:5 351:3 367:23	hurt 62:20	impairment 423:8
hoping 13:20 36:19,21,22, 24 76:3 169:21 205:8 421:11	husband 465:5	impairments 420:19
Horace 458:19 462:1	husbandry 253:11	imperial 367:16
Hornbeck 135:23	HVAC 204:6 217:13 275:13	implement 156:24 345:2
hospital 412:10	hydrology 253:18	implementation 105:8 267:13
hot 412:9	I	implemented 313:8
hotel 5:20,22	I's 31:15 396:5	implementor 311:1
hour 285:5 373:5	ICE 264:18 265:20,24 268:6	implications 126:8
hours 271:14 273:12 373:3 394:24 409:3 410:14 414:12 441:4 459:14	idea 22:6 198:11 213:1 285:19 301:24 388:24	importance 374:2 394:9
house 32:14 33:11 59:21 76:20 96:21 118:1 134:8, 9 202:12 204:10 297:8 343:6 357:24 454:22	ideas 48:20 110:5 383:14	important 11:23 14:9 17:17 21:5 23:10,22 25:20 26:6 27:8 37:12 39:14 49:16 60:5 98:12 102:18 103:9 105:18 110:20 145:23 174:10 175:5 177:20 185:14 187:4 233:9 251:21 260:23 277:14 298:5 299:22 333:10 335:15 351:10 352:4 371:24 372:1,3 394:20 395:19 415:6 422:8,15 440:8
housing 63:3 88:13	identified 287:6 352:19	importantly 112:14 234:13
hub 228:10 420:22	identify 123:11	impose 405:17
hubs 123:17	identifying 351:19	imposition 6:21
huddled 47:5	IEP 422:20 453:2	impressed 18:6
hug 434:14	IEPS 281:9 422:13	impressive 429:9
huge 244:21 268:21 312:6	III 411:23	improve 105:23 119:20,21 142:16 145:16,19 173:21 200:8 453:3 463:13
Hughes 40:13 89:13	illiterate 460:5,7	improved 477:20
human 215:13 225:21	illness 164:19	
Humbly 92:6	imaginable 77:16	
humiliated 450:13	imagine 52:1 98:21 111:6 260:15 319:11,16,20	
hundred 463:5	immediately 72:14 250:13 263:14 269:13 293:17	
	Immersion 320:17	
	impact 41:14,24 47:17 55:24 72:19 161:24 206:2,3,5 225:21 268:6, 18 281:13,14 374:19	

improvement 9:9 145:5 176:11 195:24 196:22 230:2 263:5,10 267:10 295:21 296:5 477:15 improvements 100:21 211:21 213:9 275:1,2,3 295:19 improving 23:24 111:14, 15 112:20,23 117:7,8 118:10 119:2 131:20 177:8 inadequate 410:12 incentivize 88:12 inception 472:2 inches 412:15 include 152:8 236:16 272:9 357:18 included 234:2,8,12 272:15 380:20 includes 131:3 148:1 153:4 280:24 327:20 including 108:10 123:13 132:12 178:10 186:19 208:6 234:12 256:10 262:17 405:8 430:17 472:10 inclusive 5:16 income 91:9 incoming 87:12 421:1,4 inconsistent 159:11 incorporate 109:18,19 Incorporated 152:3 incorporating 8:12 increase 39:3 91:5 144:13 145:20 153:8 159:14 169:8 174:23 213:22 215:5 254:6 358:4 increased 12:17 78:5 121:5 123:22 124:3	126:23 153:1,10,13 397:15 451:3 increasing 20:17 129:21, 22 131:21 153:4 375:19 477:8 incredible 108:6 incredibly 20:11 260:22 428:5 indefensible 427:23 independent 324:1 336:2 independently 452:16 indexing 253:19 indifferent 301:6 individual 340:10 360:10 403:12 419:1 429:18 individualized 284:2,20 418:17 individually 102:4 individuals 109:5 136:20 167:11 209:2 279:8 293:2 460:6 industrial 62:13 industry 14:6 66:19 67:11 68:1 163:22 164:3 inequity 443:15 infancy 33:18 influx 288:23 289:3,14 inform 109:9 information 45:10,14,18 112:22 124:8 161:19,23 171:22 174:6,13 181:21, 23 182:19 193:5,13 194:5,9,20,23 198:12 212:11 215:9 246:14,15 262:11 274:12,15 280:11 285:16,21 305:1,4 308:23 396:18 403:2 407:3 464:22	information's 281:24 informs 45:11 infrastructure 216:8 275:20 276:6 296:24 infusion 50:17,18 51:6,11, 21 52:4,8 168:9 initially 82:12 initiative 125:10 309:17 initiatives 419:6 innovation 67:9 110:15 123:17 188:17 input 236:1,3 314:4,22 Inquirer 415:13 inquiries 118:17 insanity 235:12 insects 319:1,6 inside 412:17,19,21,24 413:3,6 insight 108:9 inspired 418:5 instance 328:12 instantaneously 308:19 instill 266:10 institution 146:19 428:13 institutional 191:1 institutions 14:23 93:23 140:16 188:18 205:11 364:4 instruction 100:20 instructions 418:17 456:5 insulated 379:24 380:6 insult 406:22 insulting 470:4 integrating 474:24 intellectual 423:7,16
--	--	--

intelligent 386:2	199:1 374:6 463:3,4	349:23 352:19 358:3 364:2 366:20 376:13
intended 141:4 240:7	investing 80:22 176:18 478:4	item 102:24
intentional 287:14	investment 12:24 23:6,7 39:21 71:19 116:20 128:18 131:17 146:13 175:1 177:21 186:21 198:6,24 205:12,15 216:18 241:18,21 353:3, 10 355:16 430:15 435:8	items 122:13 123:20
interact 147:23	investments 27:24 104:13 115:14 123:22 124:3 126:11,20,24 220:12,14	iteration 173:13
interchange 229:13	invite 256:7	iterations 311:14
interchangeable 227:24	invited 201:12,20 202:4 218:20	IV 6:3
interconnected 88:17	inviting 96:23	J
interest 37:19 46:11 220:7 328:15 330:11 333:16 344:9	involved 152:11	jacuzzi 142:4
interested 249:12	involvement 474:6,8	James 68:5 276:23
interesting 296:18,20	ironic 176:23	Jamie 139:6 151:6 185:5
interests 49:8 331:24 341:14	Ironically 320:19	January 65:19 107:19 120:17 241:19 403:14
intergovernmental 8:16, 18	irony 387:13	jarring 155:21
intern 11:9	irrespective 350:8	jealous 142:11
internal 266:17 325:5,7	irresponsible 240:9	Jenkins 431:15 441:1,2
internally 34:8 324:20	IRS 459:8	Jenna 119:13
international 228:12 373:19,21	Isaiah 230:24 279:12,22 322:7,9 335:9 336:11 478:24	jeopardized 52:21
internships 271:18	issue 55:1 56:24 71:23 72:4 75:10 205:18 216:22 226:22 242:20 254:15 264:13 293:22 294:6 303:4,8 338:15 365:9 373:2 415:19 416:2 460:24 461:1	jeopardizing 43:14
interpreting 447:13	issues 49:9 81:20 83:2 204:23 211:14 212:4 215:3 225:24 261:7 266:11 289:8,9 290:13, 15,22 295:8 337:24 348:1	Jerrett 401:5
interrupt 210:17		Jerry 473:1
interruption 158:11		Jim 185:8 201:2 221:5
interview 24:19		Jimmy 14:17
intractable 51:10		Joan 97:6
introduce 11:8 24:20 59:22 64:20 309:12		job 70:17 138:6 259:18 294:19 375:6 392:16 405:15 442:6 464:24
introduced 82:13 89:2 309:20 455:12		jobs 62:5 134:20 241:2 263:2
introduces 457:3		John 84:15 152:10 408:9 458:13
inundated 162:10 301:17		Johnson 2:2 4:21,22 9:11 10:20 61:11 93:8 94:11, 14,23 96:5,19 97:20 98:5 104:2,7 115:24 116:3
inventory 326:12		
invest 70:13 77:23 119:18 169:2 174:21 195:23		

124:6,10,13,23 125:3,8, 20 127:13,17,22 128:4 139:2 144:2 150:8 151:3, 22 173:24 174:4 175:10 177:22 178:3 180:21 181:2,6,10 183:19 184:2, 6,10,20 185:3 194:8,16 195:3 198:20 200:23 212:10,15,22 213:20 216:11,15 218:4 221:1,4, 10 222:3,10,14,19 223:1 229:20 230:4,10,18 231:4,8,14 241:7,12 242:2,10 246:2,7,12 247:4 255:7,12,17 258:2, 20 259:1 270:12 274:10 275:5 277:20 278:3,7,11, 16,24 279:5,16,20 280:2 285:14 286:6,12,16,20 287:23 288:2 291:11 304:16,23 305:23 308:22 309:2,7 315:6,17 316:5 318:18 320:10 321:23 335:6 336:10,16,21 401:5 415:11 417:15 450:15 451:8 453:21 454:1,4,9 455:3 457:14,24 458:3, 16,21 461:15,22 464:5 466:1 476:16 478:16	journey 73:4 455:8 joy 433:1 440:7 Joyful 24:6,7 Jr 139:5 Judy 431:21 juice 442:2 Julie 421:24 424:10,13 July 33:6,9 118:15 jump 336:5 353:8 juncture 281:24 June 138:2,10,11 junior 462:17 jurisdictions 36:13 39:5 justification 406:11	key 97:2 100:10 109:22 175:14 226:8 280:12 289:20 keystone 145:8 196:10 Khan 360:24 kick 134:16 kicking 118:4 kid 214:13 318:12,13 452:21 453:17 kids 22:16,22 119:18 137:2 140:14 141:21 142:20 143:3 149:7 161:6 177:8 185:24 188:15 223:22 224:11,12 227:13 238:3 239:23 245:10,13 246:18,22 247:2 260:5,17 265:4 290:4,7 294:8,22 321:24 375:11 382:12,16 387:21 388:7 391:8 410:23 426:22 428:18 429:7,18 433:12 435:11 445:10 451:5 452:10 457:20 kids' 143:22 429:13 447:9 kills 208:24 Kimberly 401:5 411:6 kind 23:6 25:6 67:14 69:14 72:18 91:8 98:14 105:5 118:6 121:14 140:11 149:23,24 164:18 168:8 170:17 186:10 199:6 208:17 220:16 225:7 227:11 252:14 264:14 268:13 288:19 297:5 305:6 310:12 311:4 312:18 328:1 331:19 339:22,23,24 345:4 346:18 356:4 357:8 381:6 394:6 403:3 409:11 434:2 454:23 459:16 kindergarten 425:18 434:9,19 452:18 453:13
join 138:22 218:21 292:20 337:15 joined 97:4 108:7 joining 10:12,15 185:13 joking 95:19 Jones 2:24 3:1 71:2 91:22 139:5,8 144:6,19,23 146:17 147:13 148:12,22 149:5 150:6,22 151:4 238:2 Jones' 359:1 432:6 Jordan 418:5 Josh 39:16 journal 12:13,16	K K-12 163:23 K-4 220:9 306:13 343:16, 22 463:14 K-5 300:24 385:4 463:13, 15 K-8 146:7 196:23 300:24 302:14 306:24 344:1 428:4 463:14 466:13 467:6 K-8's 462:19 Karim 108:1 Katherine 92:2 139:6 230:22 Kathrine 151:5 keeping 120:2 186:22 265:24 266:1 438:19 477:7 478:1 Kendra 279:10,17 284:23 458:5 Kennedy 411:8	

kindergartners 87:13**kinds** 22:15 142:3 148:4
226:15,16 236:8 239:15**King** 362:15**kitchen** 412:20 452:6**kitchens** 204:6**knee-jerk** 81:17**knew** 13:22 25:9 38:6
155:22 166:9,10,18,22
168:4 172:11 369:4
455:22**knock** 142:17 143:11,19**knowing** 174:18 238:13**knowledgeable** 211:16**KPMG** 267:2**Krug** 421:24 424:11,13**kudos** 151:13**Kumon** 24:9,11,14,22
25:17

L

labor 46:7 68:5 69:10,24
263:1**lack** 73:17 106:17 235:24
236:10 321:1 334:1
406:15 445:7**ladies** 108:7**laid** 13:11**Lamberton** 141:2,7 142:1**land** 197:19 198:4 250:6,7
328:10 376:4,9 467:13
468:16**Landau** 4:13,14 91:21
221:7 247:7 259:3,7,9
262:2 264:5 268:19
270:10,14 272:2 273:3,22
274:2,7 299:11 304:1,21
306:1,2 307:24 308:4

310:23 322:17

Lane 343:12,14 359:10**language** 59:10,11 61:5,
16 63:10,24 64:15 65:2
71:11 94:6 145:9 285:1,2,
3,4 290:13 291:2 313:2**Lankenau** 122:9,16
140:12 141:7 145:21
146:3 201:10 225:3,6
227:16 228:16,22 230:3
248:13,14,21 250:19,21
251:15 253:5 255:21
256:11 285:18 286:18
358:19,20,22 361:24
406:5 420:2,5 422:10,16,
24**Lankenau's** 144:11**large** 18:20 19:22 133:10
137:10 145:13 172:15
180:7 413:18 423:9
466:18**larger** 42:11 52:21 75:14
200:6 416:2 435:5 438:15**largest** 127:6 131:11
425:13 428:1 452:7**laser** 117:11**lasting** 456:14**late** 24:12 116:7**launch** 102:12**launched** 111:19 118:11**Laurel** 151:14,17,19
194:19**law** 37:18,19 46:11 63:15
71:7 281:22 284:20 332:2**laws** 69:2 471:4**lawsuit** 37:20,24 59:5,8
61:7 64:9**lawyer** 58:23 59:2,9 179:8
191:15,17 206:16 341:21**lawyers** 209:6**layer** 285:12**layered** 460:15**laying** 136:18 150:12
236:6**layout** 73:18**Lea** 428:4,20**lead** 139:14,16 232:9
236:10 237:23 456:5**leader** 11:17 12:8 18:4
33:3 34:13,16 37:7 40:2,
13 76:21 85:8,20 89:10,
13 93:20 116:4 139:5
151:5 157:7 162:20
168:15 174:9 177:24
230:22,23 329:8 331:10
332:20 333:3 334:3
338:21,22 479:8**leader's** 186:8**leaders** 44:24 46:7 76:6
77:1,17 80:12 83:6 112:9
172:8 189:3 190:24
386:22 432:15 476:22**leadership** 17:23 18:2
20:15 37:4,6 96:20 219:1
230:20 283:11 322:2
370:9 437:18 445:13**leading** 77:8 140:20
219:21 257:11 432:16**Leah** 458:20 468:11**LEAH-CLOUDEN** 467:2
468:11 471:14**lean** 131:9 310:15**leanest** 131:13**leaning** 85:9**learn** 19:8 20:1 203:22
209:9 229:10 253:17
292:23 294:15 295:3
419:9

learned 27:7 43:11 244:22 429:16	lend 150:7	lift 201:23 320:2 406:8 424:9,18 427:11 431:21 432:8 436:9,13,15,16 437:7 440:2
learner 291:2	length 117:18	lighting 219:11 276:2
learners 101:6 285:10	leniency 227:20	likes 28:12
learning 27:22 84:19 93:23 110:15 164:13 248:10 282:7,8,16 290:14,20 298:22 318:24 391:23 404:12 406:13 412:17 438:15 439:9 443:8 456:13 477:9	lens 99:19	Likewise 108:22
leave 12:11 71:21 93:5,7 101:10 278:12 291:7 405:9 420:7 432:1 452:22	Leon 449:5	Lily 424:7,8
leaves 284:23 426:20 430:13	lesson 244:23 456:9	limit 443:18 447:1
leaving 67:3 378:6 439:16	let alone 460:11	limited 195:22 197:1 200:8 235:17
led 15:4 39:17 236:22 424:18 427:12 432:9	lets 142:24	limitless 98:23
left 47:6 65:18 187:19 267:24 423:21	letter 69:9 258:6 284:3 359:23 360:2,4	Lincoln 13:19
legacy 190:4,21,24 192:2 200:21 374:12 430:24	letting 118:6	linear 216:7
legal 38:7 71:13 104:19 126:8 464:8	LEV 425:1 432:2	lines 384:22,23 449:19 466:18
legalized 66:16	level 132:22 144:13 148:15 205:15 213:22 221:17 232:18 300:1 354:11 409:12 421:8 467:8 478:2	link 110:3
legally 106:2	leveling 350:16	lion's 150:11 183:2 229:23 276:2
legislation 59:23 63:12 64:20 65:4,9 71:9	leverage 86:24	Liquor 13:24 14:4,18 15:5 35:9 90:19 93:17
legislative 11:14 12:16 13:4 15:19 16:11 17:14 45:9,15,20 76:6 77:2,17 85:13 87:24 309:10,14 330:1 334:6	levy 7:14	liquor-by-the-drink 142:14
legislator 74:22 386:21	Lewis 458:14 459:2,3	list 122:3 126:13 154:11, 23 155:2 157:2,12 162:3 176:16 277:12 278:2 287:16 322:22 418:23 440:18
legislators 82:17 361:15	liability 34:19	listed 12:15
legislature 360:19,20	liberal 68:17,18 94:3	listen 23:16 24:3 30:7 36:6 38:20 44:20 58:1 60:21 69:20 86:21 222:17 255:15 355:10 384:2 400:23
legs 202:15	libraries 237:8	listened 44:23 82:13,15, 16 114:12 381:12 394:8
lemon 442:1	library 86:18,19	listening 46:6,15 56:6 101:20 109:7 114:13 115:22 234:18 243:11
	license 6:14 470:19	
	lie 316:23	
	lien 35:18	
	lies 225:14 460:14 469:16	
	lieu 121:18	
	life 58:8 99:9 140:23 237:21 269:23 412:18 418:2 423:18	
	life-or-death 237:18 242:20	
	lifetime 35:11 175:24	

292:18 352:24 383:24 386:10 391:14 444:11,13,17 literacy 100:19 119:24 455:14 477:16 literal 320:23 live 26:20 130:21 178:22,24 180:1 207:5 271:5 343:5,8 355:14 375:10 424:13 427:9 432:5 443:16,21 lived 102:7 319:20 lives 41:23 208:1 441:5 livestock 226:6 living 51:19 75:18 106:8 179:5 281:7 313:8 lobby 172:7 lobbying 168:22 local 30:1,3 36:13 38:20 54:1,6 109:7 153:9 209:24 260:18 369:20 370:13,22 428:23 460:17 localities 53:8 located 53:23 54:7 122:17 141:11 228:8,13 252:18 283:8 location 86:15 228:20 462:24 463:10 lock 180:3 261:15 317:21 locks 261:12 lone 89:15 long 13:17 23:18 25:1 78:4 162:24 202:15 224:4 239:3 247:10 269:4 384:1 409:3,6 418:2 449:19 453:10 long-term 164:4 457:11 longer 40:22 66:19 73:21 122:15 135:8 145:24	205:4 217:15 269:10 275:17 311:3 409:16 451:23 461:10 looked 19:8 196:8 262:15 268:7 272:8 327:1 377:9 loom 427:24 looming 427:21 Lord 448:23 Los 176:13 lose 140:2 395:2,5,9 losing 249:12 426:6 loss 30:10 41:22 164:13 405:3 lost 115:16 209:23 290:8 321:4 354:15 438:15 lot 27:9 49:24 62:6,18 84:18 101:15 132:18 139:19 140:13 143:17 212:23 218:13 220:20 231:24 240:4,14,19 242:7 261:20 276:5 301:9 306:18 323:2 342:12 344:18 358:11 376:12 390:1 394:14 415:21 416:4,5 442:18 445:2 446:18 463:18 473:19 474:16,22 lottery 257:1 259:23 260:1 266:6,14 267:7,14 269:7 loud 144:7 336:3 loudly 197:24 Loughead 2:17 4:23 5:3 9:12 10:15 94:16 love 72:7 255:21 319:2 320:15 440:9 455:14 468:8 loved 454:20 loves 193:18 465:5 low 131:17 211:13 463:5	low-income 55:10 56:1,10 lower 264:16 Lozada 3:12,13 91:19 279:12,21 305:1,2 322:9, 12 324:18,23 325:15,20 326:1,6,22 328:7 329:5 332:16 333:6 335:8 336:7,8 364:16 Lozada's 202:3 218:24 371:15 454:14 Lucas 449:3,6 450:18 luck 443:19 Ludlow 122:12 220:11 305:5 381:11,13,14 403:22 Luka 296:17 lunch 278:15,17 279:4 429:8 438:23 lunches 433:3 lunchroom 429:3,11 lunchrooms 429:17 Luther 362:15 Lydia 443:5 Lyft 53:18 Lyfts 66:23 lying 475:16 M Macdougall 431:14 440:19,23 442:21,22 443:1,2 Madam 11:1 94:12 162:19 479:8 made 12:14 15:4 31:16 62:23 127:8 146:22 148:23 167:24 186:18 189:16 207:9,10 244:24 267:12 295:19 305:13,20
--	--	--

368:18 371:11 391:10,11 416:14	290:17 299:2 300:10 301:12,18 302:3,6 303:22 305:9,10 307:8 314:21 316:11 331:10 332:21 333:8,12 334:4 337:6 343:24 346:17 347:20 348:11 350:2 370:18 374:19 375:13 379:15 382:2 383:7 390:8 391:13 401:11 406:1 407:2 417:3 423:4 428:16 430:6 438:21 442:2 461:4,5 466:11,12	mandates 475:5 mansion 132:8 245:4 352:8 376:23 391:22 392:3,11 393:21 464:19 469:11 mantra 18:21 map 239:1 mapped 287:18 marble 441:11 March 43:7 Marcus 241:23 Marian 26:12 Marissa 422:1 431:13,23 432:4 Mark 10:24 marked 120:20 market 182:8 257:12,17 marketplace 266:21 Markia 471:17 Mars 388:2 marshal 311:21 Martin 276:23 362:15 martini 441:20 massive 170:22 massively 402:14 master 101:13 120:6,17 173:4,9,12 203:17 211:23 213:7 379:6 403:7 Masterman 260:5 378:20 379:8 385:11 388:2 mater 140:1 material 129:4 368:4 math 40:18,20 44:7 47:11, 12,13,14 49:5 50:24 51:1 100:19 101:3 118:1 131:21 140:10 145:6 176:11 196:9 464:15
MAGA 33:17 magic 339:11 magnet 250:23 Magnus 403:24 Maguire 473:2 Mahals 276:13 main 343:17 maintain 120:23 121:11 133:17 477:13 maintaining 80:21 maintenance 260:24 264:11 298:24 major 71:23 117:2 122:3 204:8 228:10 266:22 268:5 277:2 majority 11:17,18 37:7 76:19,20 77:3 85:8 116:4 139:5 151:5 157:7 162:19 168:15 174:9 177:23 186:8 230:22,23 329:8 338:21,22 make 18:18 42:15 45:17, 21 47:9 49:5 50:21 52:6 58:10,12 60:12,17 62:5, 17 67:23 70:12 71:18 78:21 82:6 87:16 89:5 90:7,12 131:14 135:13,15 138:6 139:13 140:12 143:17,22 146:2 149:1 153:17,23 157:19 167:7 168:16 172:21 183:7 189:17,22 195:11 206:10 207:6 208:15 220:11,14 230:2 231:21 232:8 234:6 235:20 236:6 238:17 241:14,15 243:22 250:8, 14 252:8 256:7 257:16 258:16 260:12 268:24 269:2 274:17 278:18 283:23,24 285:8,12	makes 248:14 333:12 362:11 381:23 382:3 429:10,12,21 452:9 456:1 474:9 makeup 75:20 making 20:15 22:1 23:5 45:11 62:1 80:14,24 81:22 87:2 109:11,20 110:5 132:20 145:4 196:1 216:4 234:2 235:4 236:3 248:18 256:9,10 269:19 299:9 303:12 323:15 333:17,18 340:5 377:21 393:9 419:12 422:4 427:17 460:18 475:24 476:2,4 malfunctioned 217:13 Mama 458:4,20 464:7 man 62:10 222:23 340:24 379:24 393:22 manage 57:10 84:2,4 376:6 462:21 management 6:13 9:4 10:3 226:7 429:3 manager 451:14 managers 150:14 283:2 manages 429:4 mandated 281:22	

470:7 472:18 477:16,17 mathing 47:12,13 50:24 51:1 472:19 matter 47:9 49:6 51:17 54:19 62:24 87:18 170:12 240:2 261:22 346:16 349:19 434:6 matters 23:24 67:15 431:9 434:6,12 maximize 189:1 Maynard 47:2 mayor 8:15 9:7 10:18 11:1,6 33:3 46:20 57:5 85:22,24 93:11 94:12 97:12 113:9,20,23 116:14 117:17 123:6 127:8 129:11 138:3 139:15 181:22 208:3 221:24 222:17 223:6 233:11 258:18 335:10 338:12,13 340:14 342:16 361:1 380:3,4 394:8 mayor's 185:17 247:15 338:13,18 426:18 430:11 439:14 444:9 451:24 Mcclinton 39:24 76:22 89:10 471:17 Mckay 458:13 Mckenna 152:9 meaning 166:9 168:4 309:19 meaningful 101:7 110:12 113:13 417:24 418:1 455:13 means 27:22 71:3 76:21 80:24 102:5 130:22 243:15 258:14 273:12 275:9 292:12 325:2 408:3,6 438:14 442:17 443:17 460:7 meant 249:20	meantime 293:21 measure 15:15 42:16 49:21 57:9,10 measured 57:11 453:4 measures 9:18 52:17 136:8 263:20 meat 107:1 207:21 309:5 mechanism 386:23 mechanisms 344:19 350:13 medallion 66:10 Meehan 72:8 meet 58:11,13 76:24 188:24 292:8 300:4 337:5 meeting 2:11 9:22 47:6 54:10 81:11 137:17 181:17,18 183:10,12 233:17 304:7 307:24 308:3 318:9 335:1,2 388:22 390:19 471:24 479:2,16 meetings 8:23 92:8 102:2 109:6 132:6 307:12 474:20 meets 9:23 Mehra 152:11 Melody 152:16 member 11:11 23:14 50:22 55:15 75:8,11 151:4 174:6 194:21 195:4 201:13,17,24 202:2 218:5 221:6,16 222:4,11,20 230:15 232:3,20 241:8 242:4 246:3,14 274:12 279:12,22 280:6 286:24 288:8 291:17,21 305:1 309:3 316:7 335:8,9 336:7,11,17 360:3,4,10 375:4 386:1,2,5,6,15 387:2 389:13 394:5 415:3 424:11,17 427:11 431:23	432:8 436:22 437:6 441:1 451:11 455:10,20,22 471:24 472:10 member's 193:22 members 2:3,7,8 11:20 16:18 18:1 19:3 20:9 23:19 30:23 37:8 42:10, 19 48:22 49:7 50:23 52:16 55:13 74:8 82:14 84:1,21 87:19 93:9 97:6 99:24 102:4 109:12 112:10 116:5,14 135:10 137:17 138:22 140:21 152:4 230:20 234:14 266:12 335:17 339:2,19 340:20,22 342:1 359:24 360:14 369:9 370:10 388:23,24 399:7,12 402:3 404:13 407:15 417:15 422:6 424:20 428:22 430:17 432:1,18,21 444:16 456:18 472:23 membership 424:19 427:12 432:10 men 152:2 mental 410:3 mention 54:13 202:24 230:21 375:17 406:20 mentioned 99:12 123:7 174:15 293:6 326:9 327:22 380:11 381:9 382:8 431:1 mentor 456:4 mentoring 419:1 mentors 13:20 mentorship 477:6 Meredith 152:10 merge 192:4 200:3 249:18 306:9 378:3 379:1 384:21 merged 228:18 384:10 merger 122:8 144:11
--	---	---

390:24 mergers 310:5 merging 190:18 248:12 384:23 402:16 merits 199:16 message 32:16 160:7 443:7,14 messages 109:22 met 233:14 255:22 372:15 389:13,17,18 metrics 112:12 377:11 mice 448:1,2 Michelle 152:8 Mickey 452:12 micro 84:3 micromanage 464:2,3 microphone 222:6 middle 72:8 87:3 128:5 182:3 219:4,7 220:10 239:3 260:3 302:17 307:5 342:14,15,17,19,23 378:20 379:4,7,8,10,11 384:10 385:5,8,10,13,14 386:9,17 387:3 388:13 389:8 403:23 418:4 454:13 455:7 migratory 253:16 Mike 271:22 272:5 337:15 366:16 369:18 371:5 373:7 miles 271:6 273:6,24 274:4 312:21 milk 142:15 millage 78:6 142:19 million 30:20 31:8,19 32:7 34:4,11,18 35:6,22 36:2,4 40:21,23 41:10 43:16 44:8,11,14,19 48:6,9,11 50:12,19 75:18 78:22	90:4,6,20 123:24 124:1 128:12 130:21 131:3 132:22 133:2 134:10 153:4,6,7,8,10,14 157:2 193:7,9,11 198:5 219:6,8 241:21 263:12 272:13,17 274:3 276:19 312:21 327:4 344:11 353:10,16, 24 354:1,3 355:6 396:23 397:3,13 398:14 425:15 426:16,19 427:20 430:11, 15 435:7,15 439:19 441:14 462:7,8,9 463:1,4, 11,14,15 466:2,4 472:9 478:4 mind 15:23 16:14 52:2 72:1 203:9 210:17 257:21 274:20 336:17,22 377:17 447:21 minds 294:23 mine 115:15 minimum 215:6 Minnie 452:12 minute 29:16 74:10 160:10 202:7 minutes 452:18 458:24 mismanagement 31:12 128:17 372:6 mission 98:17,19 99:4 100:8 misspelling 59:1 missteps 287:12 406:2 mistake 416:14,16 mistakes 416:17 417:3 misunderstanding 197:14 334:1 mitigate 215:16 mitigation 164:16 mix 241:3	mixed 101:23 MLK 463:18 mobile 216:2 mobility 20:24 290:15 mobilize 406:5 model 86:22 269:17 386:9,17 modern 73:17 modernization 126:13 274:21 275:9 277:18 294:2 299:3,5 300:15 modernizations 236:24 modernize 79:13 121:3,4 modernized 219:6 modification 106:19 modifications 302:7 356:16 modified 220:13 324:11 modify 6:13 396:5 modifying 365:19 modular 452:23 Moffett 122:14 202:2 218:19 219:2,7,9 220:8 302:7,17 305:5 306:8,13, 15 307:2,3 308:14 323:1 mom 423:20 moment 16:11 188:24 233:14,17 291:14 315:7 337:12 367:14 369:2 374:12 431:1 434:21 444:8 moments 114:9 426:12 Monday 164:23 166:13 301:1,22 308:10 355:21 money 21:10 149:1 153:15 165:17,22 166:8, 10,18,23 168:3,7 172:8, 18,21 198:14 219:21
--	---	---

303:16 361:4,8 372:6 396:20,24 398:23 413:9 442:8 448:4 470:16,20,21 471:9 473:3,4 monitored 100:12 monitoring 418:19 monkey 161:12 Monley 119:13 Mont 17:1 19:9,12 22:13 25:12 30:2 36:9 38:22 40:2 91:3 223:15,17 month 100:2 249:20,24 268:8 monthly 337:6 months 383:17 475:10 Moody's 128:23 moral 187:4 morning 2:5,6,7 10:6 94:24 96:17 107:10,11 164:23 166:13 201:11 202:24 217:18 221:22 222:1 245:6 323:10 411:9 434:15 449:4 morning's 329:23 mortgages 38:23,24 mother 318:10 445:10 449:6 motion 329:13 331:12 334:5 479:1,21 motivate 419:10 motivated 403:15 418:7 motivating 456:10 Motivation 122:7 188:20 190:17 192:5 403:20 mount 312:20 mouse 294:12 move 85:12 86:4 126:5 141:9 148:3 154:4 155:11	183:5 190:15 191:23 199:12,19,22,23 220:16 245:1 310:19 358:10 359:14 382:9 386:16 391:19 400:17 403:17 405:10 461:14 462:15 479:8 moved 146:20 155:4 159:4 192:3 220:8 328:13 479:14 movement 106:12 445:8 moves 156:18 456:6 moving 21:24 29:5 85:1 120:9 133:7 161:12 178:16 180:5 186:3,24 244:14 270:7 283:4 289:17 290:3,6 296:2 297:17 335:16,18 386:8 402:16 404:18 407:21 multi- 65:6 multi-billion- 67:21 70:9 multiple 19:18 220:16 249:7 266:7 288:16 290:4 330:8 342:17 344:21,23 386:4 multiply 196:2 municipal 34:19 Museum 26:13 music 23:21 87:7 mystery 198:2	national 207:11 326:5 371:18 Nations 228:15 nationwide 168:20 nature 254:22 327:24 navigate 434:21 456:7 nearby 463:8 nearing 269:23 necessarily 265:3 necessities 450:24 needed 24:15,17 34:1 35:24 37:13 38:6 47:16 66:11 73:18 165:12 216:19 219:10 283:23 329:11 406:9 439:1 needing 185:19 needles 48:16 Nefertiti 401:6 Nefititi 408:24 neglecting 463:20 negotiate 89:22 331:9 negotiated 34:7,12,16 negotiating 76:12 143:6 negotiation 330:24 negotiations 13:23 148:14 344:5 neighborhood 128:5 146:24 245:14 342:18,19 343:1,10 352:3 362:17 378:19 381:15,16 382:15 388:1,12 389:7 412:3 428:7 463:7 neighborhood- 14:13 neighborhoods 42:1 109:2 147:21 203:20 239:13,16,20 245:10 374:20 427:14 432:12 467:15
N		
named 39:16 66:2 names 406:20 429:16 470:8 naming 192:6 nation 61:19 93:24 nation's 176:7,12		

neighbors 355:14 442:4	Northeast 41:21 74:12 89:15 108:2 145:14 465:11,13 466:7	185:6,7 201:2,4 210:3,11, 15,24 211:6,9 212:6 213:6 218:6,9 220:6 299:10
Nelson 401:6 411:5,7,8,20 414:9	Northwest 234:16 406:6	O'Rourke's 359:2
nephew 475:21	Nos 2:12	Oak 343:12,14 359:10
nerves 316:3	notated 181:22	objectives 225:16
network 7:16 290:20	note 35:9 118:14 123:21 194:2 228:21 384:3 391:11	obligation 105:16
networking 65:21	noted 116:15 194:15 195:2,9 359:17 365:7	obligations 104:19
networks 282:8,9,16	notes 13:15 32:13	obscure 404:4
neuro 289:8 290:12	noticed 120:20	obtain 403:2
newspaper 14:11	notion 245:9	occasion 16:13 233:13 251:16 319:7,22
nice 149:20 317:1 458:8, 11	November 97:4 100:10	occasions 402:21 426:11 449:21
Nicholas 139:7 185:6,7 201:2 218:5	number 43:23 44:2,8,21 48:8 117:24 121:1,5 122:11,13 124:11 126:4 127:6 131:1,7 146:14 157:8 158:5 161:3 212:20 223:23 224:4 242:18 243:9 248:4 252:14 255:21 256:15 263:11 270:6 276:9 282:12 287:5,9 354:18 405:16 425:16	occupancy 6:5,20,22 49:22
Nick 152:9	numbers 2:16 32:11 161:10 196:8 198:9 272:1 273:11,16 369:19,20 376:1 384:17 392:20 409:18 434:1 460:11,17, 22	occupied 126:1
Nicole 20:4	numerous 224:10	occupies 456:1
niece 475:21	nurse 425:24	occur 182:9 267:11 313:16 473:1
night 13:15 14:12,13 16:24 22:12 29:11 59:6 180:23 183:21 270:20 273:13	Nutter 33:3	occurred 27:9,14 126:17
nightmare 427:23 437:11		occurring 26:8 251:18
nightmares 425:6 433:7		October 67:18
Nikia 431:14		odds 330:20
Nina 218:8 221:6 230:7,12 247:6		offense 142:8
ninth 462:18		offer 228:11,17 271:8 349:15
NOCTI 100:17		offering 87:9 456:7
non-resident 60:9		office 31:16 77:6 111:17 112:6 131:2,9 135:16 172:10 281:11 282:17,18 283:7,9 285:9 290:20,21 292:10 299:14 316:2 372:13 389:22 396:21
non-school 187:2		officer 271:21 272:6
non-scientist 251:13		officers 373:18 397:17 398:6
non-starter 358:20		
non-utilization 244:6		
non-voting 107:14,20		
North 41:20 124:16,24 125:1 404:5		

O

O'NEILL 3:20**O'ROURKE** 4:17,18 55:21
68:12 71:6 91:23 139:7

offices 131:13 172:11 214:6 290:20 officially 58:16 95:3 139:10 322:11 officials 373:21 435:20 offline 268:14 offset 215:20 oftentimes 230:21 older 466:15 Olivia 320:14 Omega 152:2 once-in-lifetime 165:17 one-on- 92:8 one-stop 283:17 one-time 51:6,11,21 52:4, 8 one-to-one 269:16 270:4 ongoing 97:10 326:21 327:5 344:18 online 459:23 onset 172:6 open 70:19 190:14 202:19 270:21 325:11 342:20 376:21 420:15 451:22 452:18,20 openings 310:6 openness 447:22 operate 208:22 249:4 355:1,2 operated 272:12 operating 5:8 9:17 74:4 99:17 130:13 134:24 206:21,24 operation 9:4 operational 337:23 operations 10:3 213:12	opinion 29:7 358:23,24 359:1,3,4,5 444:24 447:17 468:15 opinions 324:11,12 359:5 opportunities 80:23 99:8 109:23 111:8 146:5 189:2 443:10 opportunity 11:21 18:15 26:19 88:7 101:12 105:9, 20 106:7 123:12 133:5 138:20 165:18 175:24 178:18 182:21 213:7 262:20 332:24 382:9 383:20 409:2 425:9 430:22 459:4 opposed 169:10 186:11, 24 194:21 opposite 133:11 173:1 opposition 82:23 88:1,2 option 111:4 199:10 250:4 options 236:15 240:4 251:2 254:19 296:2 order 5:2 31:20 46:22 66:11 73:12 86:8 87:16 129:23 182:10,18 208:10 260:4,12 328:19 329:14 339:4 353:4 423:4 440:24 orders 8:2 ordinance 5:7,11,14,18 6:1,11,17 7:2,8,21 organization 424:19 427:13 432:10 organizations 473:19 organized 215:1 262:9 282:7 organizing 265:17 original 126:11,13 153:24 219:5,15,17,20 253:24 293:15 305:19 originally 120:22 121:2	126:2 147:19 306:8 originate 54:3 originates 7:17 originating 44:5,17 Orkney 328:11 outcome 92:14 138:1 276:7 outcomes 99:9,19 100:14 105:24 111:15 117:7 226:18 outlier 54:24 57:19 outlined 192:13 248:7 outrageous 261:8 outreach 154:19 155:14 158:23 160:6 306:20 outstanding 294:19 over-enrolled 133:10 137:11 Overbook 361:22 423:2 Overbrook 141:19 144:16 146:10,21 238:3 352:8 361:17 412:4 423:3 463:17 471:22 472:6 overcrowded 74:7 378:2, 6,23 379:14,16 425:21 overflow 288:23 overnight 217:12,14 304:11 305:14 overpopulated 236:17 318:3 owed 40:9 41:6 owners 35:19 56:20 ownership 186:24 owns 326:11 328:18 Oz 213:11 217:8 312:13 322:17
---	--	---

P	Parker 10:19 11:6,9 57:5 93:11 116:14 181:22 342:16	185:23 192:7 307:14,20 329:17 330:6 335:13 380:9,10
p.m. 273:8 443:20	parking 66:13 241:3	parts 110:13 121:4 125:18
pace 478:1	parks 237:9	150:20 205:20 268:4 272:18 352:4 383:2
package 35:17 90:21 93:20	Parkway 72:9 234:15 406:6	party 24:12 33:19
paid 54:5 129:19 327:6 405:8 442:12	parochial 249:13	pas 287:12
pain 208:12 210:9	Parrott 68:5	pass 55:19 67:23 70:6 365:23 438:1
painting 276:1	part 12:20 15:6 18:16 24:21 34:10 42:3 45:7,16 72:22 73:3 75:7 78:14 124:18 141:8 145:10 146:1 148:13 155:12,21 199:24 221:11 256:8,9 258:17 269:6 272:24 273:2 280:12 284:16 291:16,19 293:15 302:16, 18 306:21 308:9 315:3 323:22 372:24 385:11 395:12 418:1 419:2 428:7 451:23 467:18 474:10	passed 15:6 33:7 37:21 53:8 55:18 67:19 86:2 207:16 326:17 412:6
pandemic 164:17 169:4, 24 172:7	part- 395:24	passenger 7:15
panel 94:17 219:11	part-time 395:1	passengers 70:8
paper 14:17 321:2 429:1 462:3	participate 26:20 108:14 253:16	passes 270:16,19 273:18
papers 462:2	participation 265:2 266:2	passion 338:18
paragraphs 105:17	parties 77:3 344:10	passionate 335:12
parcel 328:15	partisan 33:14	past 80:18 114:21 117:10, 21 128:21 165:15 190:6 261:1 265:19 267:18 299:1 314:13 337:12 343:19 383:16 443:22 476:18
parcels 327:4	partly 157:18	patching 415:23
parent 107:16 108:23 119:8,12,22 424:11,19 425:18 427:12 431:23 432:1,9 437:8 445:3,12 451:19 459:6 473:23 474:6,8	partner 84:10 418:11,16 457:7 476:19	patently 257:6 388:6
parental 405:8	partnering 83:16 117:12 119:6	path 20:24 22:17 102:12 245:12 289:3 357:2 370:16
parents 20:8 21:2,8 24:21 25:1,18 74:14 82:16 118:18 119:19 160:8 234:14 245:6 257:18 261:5 266:12 280:11,19 281:4 282:10 283:17 299:24 305:8,16 322:20 323:1 420:5 432:14 436:2 441:17 447:14 451:23 474:10 475:12,15,17,23	partners 20:8 39:13 105:14 117:14 119:7 330:5 456:19	pathway 113:16 114:16
parents' 430:9	partnership 26:22 77:5 84:12 97:9 123:7,12 157:20 183:1 184:15	patience 323:6 417:9 431:8 440:13
park 72:12 441:13 458:7		patient 56:6
		patiently 400:20
		pattern 58:7 416:13
		patterns 57:7,12 58:19
		Paul 135:23 188:4,8 190:13,15,17 191:12,18, 23 192:2 193:8 196:7

199:10	10 390:2,16 391:6 395:5, 9,22 401:10,13 405:20 409:13,14,16 410:13,16 415:7 417:3 421:21 428:15 433:12 434:5 435:11 436:13 440:2 441:21 442:9 444:8 455:16 462:3 465:12 467:7,20,22,23 468:2,7 469:1 471:6,11	personal 72:22 291:15 315:8 364:14 374:11,21 375:9 434:1 456:10
pause 197:11 246:6 446:6		personalized 67:14
pay 25:18 41:6 50:2 51:15 129:17 223:21 240:16,17 271:3 405:10 443:17		personally 24:15 127:12 211:16 268:15 283:9 360:11
paying 35:19 40:8		personnel 137:3 282:23
payments 129:20,22		perspective 156:13 287:24 351:5
payroll 52:6	perceived 179:3 204:21	perspectives 108:13,19 109:18
pays 223:16 442:9	percent 21:1,6,9,18,21 57:13 87:10,11,14,15 93:1 100:15 101:2 134:22 140:13 196:11 217:21,23 223:17,18 225:6 229:15, 17 243:13,15 244:6 355:15 365:14 369:24 370:12 422:13,16 439:15 460:3 473:24 474:7 477:12,13,14,17	pest 451:3
PCAC 109:12 415:3		petition 318:15
PCDC 71:2		PFT 20:3 46:8 152:12 192:21 193:4,12 198:10
Peace 468:8		Phase 112:5
pee 321:6	percentage 143:14 370:4 422:9 423:10	phase-in 307:18
peers 108:13	perfect 92:10 148:8 229:12 346:15	phased 469:5,10
Peirce 276:22		phasing 227:15 469:6 474:21,23
Penn 266:18 352:9	performance 23:9,12,23 111:21 125:17 131:21 145:16 173:22 174:23 200:9	phenomenon 147:21
Pennsylvania 8:15 12:15 13:9 27:17 39:19 84:9 91:15 123:14 132:4	Performing 108:4	Phi 152:2
pension 34:20	period 153:14 199:22 267:24	Philadelphia 5:19 6:2,3, 12,18 7:3,9,14,18,22 8:3, 8,10 9:2,10 10:1,5,8 11:10,12 12:5,10 13:2,5,7 14:9 15:4,10,12 16:22 17:6,20 18:9,19 20:10,13, 23 25:16 26:4,23 27:3 29:13,24 30:5,15 31:9,14 32:18 34:5 35:13,21 38:14 39:2,23 40:9 41:1, 20,21 44:6,18 47:4 50:14 53:2,6,15 54:16,24 60:7, 23 62:2 63:4 65:10 69:15 70:7,10 72:6,24 73:14,15 75:19 76:14 77:21,22 78:20,24 79:7,9,21 80:11 84:22 85:12,16,22,23 88:9 89:18 90:10 94:19,
people 14:8 28:8,20 35:1 36:19 39:5 45:2 49:24 50:2 53:2 56:17 57:3 58:10 63:9 64:2,3 66:7,22 67:8,15 72:21 73:3,24 75:18 83:20 87:21 91:7 94:2 98:24 99:13 117:8, 15 133:7,23,24 140:22 143:15,17 144:18 147:23 161:12 167:8 169:2 170:19 172:4,10,12 176:18 191:2 199:13 200:15 230:21 237:24 243:2 260:4 281:6 282:14 289:15 301:10 305:12 308:7 312:12 314:8,22 328:14 330:17 333:14,21 340:10 343:3 357:7 358:12 359:9,13 364:13 367:2 371:1 372:4 374:20 380:7 381:1,24 382:3,7,	permanent 438:12	
	permission 271:20	
	permit 6:14 249:7 371:16	
	Persistently 88:8	
	person 10:16 69:6 155:3 157:18 232:2,16 386:21 401:3 414:15 416:8,15,21 425:8 448:19 454:20 460:18	

22 95:21 96:4 97:1,10 99:6 107:23 109:3 111:4 112:4 116:23 119:16 122:21 123:2,19 124:15 125:2 132:18 134:3 147:19 152:24 153:2 157:23 164:21 170:11 176:10 180:6 184:23 190:7,22 193:1 206:9 207:10 208:2 212:18 213:13,19 218:2 223:20 229:16 232:5,20 233:3 234:5 237:13 239:1 244:22 250:23 256:15 264:19 265:17 266:11,23 271:8 316:14 332:3 335:11 338:5 343:11 363:15 368:10 369:21,22 370:5 371:1,8 400:19 402:7,10 406:1 417:20 418:11 433:5 437:8 441:22 442:7 443:15 451:11,12,15 455:9 457:5,13 459:3 460:3,4 461:10 472:2 476:18	philosophy 386:8 phone 13:12 49:23 50:8,9 133:4 phonics 470:9 physical 87:7 physicians 168:3 pick 57:23,24 Pickett 241:17,21 242:15 picking 61:10 Picozzi 89:14 picture 171:19 PIDC 152:12 piece 261:9 piggyback 168:14 247:22 pilot 24:3 26:10 pin 50:15 pins 48:15 Pioy 471:17 pipeline 476:21 478:8 pipes 209:12 321:9 piping 216:9 pitted 232:11 Pittman 89:19 pivot 98:10 113:8 350:15, 18 pivoted 249:21,24 pivots 340:2,3 place 30:13 68:8 86:20 92:8 164:21,24 188:14 227:19 255:2,4 259:23 269:10 280:18 321:6 330:16 331:6 362:22 378:5 433:18 438:5 442:12 457:7 place-based 84:19 places 25:13 133:8	138:19 149:21 245:14 254:11 268:10 295:1 297:4 381:20 plain 232:8 plan 8:10 9:20 48:3 63:2 79:11 81:4 82:11 88:12 101:13 103:23 106:8 109:24 120:6,17,19 130:8,17 134:23 136:10, 11,17 156:16,18,24 157:5 165:23 166:7 167:1 168:1 173:2,4,6,9,12 178:13 182:13 183:13,22 186:19 187:5 195:21 197:12,15 203:11,17 204:1 205:12 207:15,22 211:23 213:7, 21 215:5 219:5,15,17,20 227:15 228:23 249:6 263:5 269:24 270:5,8 276:5 280:12 288:12,20 289:18 294:2 295:23 296:5 301:7,15,16,21 303:10,15 308:8,10 310:1 311:14 313:8 322:19 346:14,15 349:1,12,14, 20,21,23 350:14 351:19 352:1,5,13,17,22 353:9, 11 355:18,22 356:15 358:18 359:8 361:8 362:11,22 363:16 376:3, 15 377:5 378:18 379:18, 20 383:1,2,7,14 385:12 391:1 394:17 402:13 403:7,13 404:12 407:1 420:14 421:13 425:3 437:19 457:11 462:4 463:22 472:3,18 477:1 planned 124:3 162:1 211:22 261:17 planning 43:12 132:2 147:16 218:22 240:9 248:12 280:16 287:11 306:3 307:15 311:19 346:24 348:17 462:5 plans 9:6 284:2,20 311:13
---	---	---

312:11,12 395:8 461:6	policies 68:18	possess 106:16
plant 54:4	policy 38:7 99:15 108:11 109:24 126:8 236:21 427:18	possibility 457:4
play 302:1 344:6	polite 414:2 468:14	possibly 189:22 203:13 268:23 301:22 369:5
playground 317:11	political 207:7	post 114:5 207:18 324:13
playgrounds 204:5 237:9 338:3	politicians 314:9	postpone 183:11
playing 433:8	politics 33:15 330:22	posts 313:14
pleased 28:3 117:19 118:3 172:22	Pollock 277:4,5	pot 40:5,6
plethora 193:24	pool 241:22,23 242:15	potential 84:10 98:23 138:1 163:4 284:12 418:7
plotting 147:4	pools 242:3,15 458:22 462:23	pothole 363:14
plug 166:12,15 275:23 405:6 437:20	poor 146:12 189:5 191:19 276:10,14 463:6 473:7	Pouncey 471:19,22
plumbers 212:17 213:23 215:7 415:16,24	popular 362:16	pounds 27:21
plumbing 203:7 211:14 212:4 213:1,15,17 216:24 217:12 262:18 293:14 295:8 406:18 415:23 417:1	population 75:15,21 79:11 106:11 238:16 239:11,14,18 287:19 422:9 423:11	poverty 291:5
poached 18:3	portfolio 280:22	Powel 432:7
podium 315:10	portion 78:5 308:5	power 17:13 62:3 63:6 85:15 322:4
point 15:9 41:8 104:16 124:7 135:6 146:15,18 149:16 154:2 166:24 174:6,13,19 179:9 191:3 194:9 204:2 212:11 214:10 215:9 246:13,15 247:15 251:19 253:4 274:11,15 276:8 285:15 290:10 304:24 305:4 308:23 314:13 320:1 348:10 350:2 352:14 354:12 355:6 363:17,22 368:18 387:16 393:5 465:20	portions 105:4 307:3	powerful 110:19 340:6
points 103:20 113:15 147:11 193:22 205:10 210:9 416:2 447:16	position 155:5 165:7 172:3 186:4 323:20 354:2 357:11 368:9 371:12 372:18 374:3 396:6	practically 317:4 410:14
Police 20:6 398:2,4	positions 43:14 46:4 47:16 131:4,5 132:24 133:18 138:12 154:12,21 155:20 156:8 157:9,11,13 158:16,18,19 159:3 162:2,8 163:21 164:5,7 165:12,14 166:8,18 167:2 169:18 171:18,19 177:18 213:16,17 215:18 262:18, 23 264:10 372:20 426:21 430:14 431:5 439:17	practice 186:2,7 226:2 429:3 469:6
	positive 139:16 418:20	practices 226:12
	positively 477:19	pragmatic 171:5
		pre-k 87:13 202:12 207:2
		Pre-k-8 382:16 391:8
		pre-maga 33:16
		preaching 420:11
		prearranged 7:17
		precedent 64:8 71:13 227:18 431:2
		precious 406:12
		precludes 205:19
		prefer 194:17
		preliminary 287:1 435:19
		premature 328:1

prepare 98:20	104:2,5,7,10 106:12	337:1,4 339:18 340:9,16
prepared 27:12 30:16 96:9 113:7 156:4	107:7,9,11 113:4,5 115:24 116:3,7,13 118:13 120:8 121:8,10 122:2 124:6,10,13,23 125:3,8, 20 126:10 127:13,17,22 128:4,9 129:7 130:5,6 131:4 132:7 135:9,10 136:5 137:13,15,16,21,22 138:7,8,21,23,24 139:2,9 144:2 146:18 150:6,8 151:3,10,22 157:24 158:1 168:12 171:3 172:2 173:24 174:4,14 175:10 176:18 177:11,22 178:3, 7,15,20 180:21 181:2,4,6, 10,14 183:17,19,23,24 184:2,4,6,8,10,18,20 185:1,2,3,10,12,15 191:10,14 194:8,16 195:3,9,14,17 198:17,20 200:17,23 201:5,8 204:17 206:19,21 210:4,5,7,12, 13,16,22 211:11 212:10, 15,22 213:20 216:11,15, 22 218:4,10,11 221:1,4, 10 222:3,10,14,19 223:1 229:19,20 230:4,10,17,18 231:4,7,8,14 241:7,12 242:2,6,10 246:1,2,7,12 247:4,9 255:7,12,17 256:14 257:21,24 258:2, 5,20 259:1,11 266:8 270:12 274:10,19 275:5 277:20 278:3,7,11,16,24 279:5,16,20 280:2 281:15 282:4 285:14 286:5,6,12, 16,20 287:17,23 288:2 291:11,22 292:6 293:12 304:16,23 305:23 308:15, 22 309:1,2,4,7,22 311:9 312:24 315:4,6,17 316:5 318:18 320:10 321:23 322:13 323:20 326:16 327:12 329:7 331:14 332:20 333:4 334:13 335:6 336:10,13,14,16,21	341:6,8,22 344:3 345:8, 12,16,20,24 346:3,5 347:13,21 348:3,5,9,16, 22 349:2,7,17 350:6,21, 22 351:13,14,20 354:12 357:15 364:19 366:7,13, 17,22,23 367:4,9 368:11, 17 369:1,10 374:13 385:19,21 399:11,17,20, 24 402:6 415:11 417:14 450:15 451:8 453:21 454:1,4,7,9 455:3 457:14, 24 458:3,16,21 461:15,22 464:5 466:1 469:22 472:11 473:17 476:15 478:16 President's 271:20 357:14 presidents 157:21 press 360:23,24 pressed 322:8 pressure 113:15 205:10 208:11 pretty 60:2 186:11 222:24 259:13 261:24 283:14 prevent 435:16 439:13 prevents 416:17 previous 164:22 price 54:6 73:9 Pricewaterhousecoopers 267:3 primarily 225:14 primary 402:22 460:15 Princess 454:8 457:18 principal 132:5 159:12 162:1 256:11 294:16 296:16 310:24 principal's 316:1 principals 20:7 136:19

150:13 159:9 161:2 165:8 166:17 167:2 171:17 227:20 255:24 256:8,9 282:24 priorities 476:24 prioritization 106:21 461:1 priority 215:16 private 67:10 69:18 130:2 249:13 266:20 privately 86:6 privilege 70:14 110:9 291:15 315:8 Pro 89:19 problem 51:10 145:10 207:3 243:12 247:1 250:14 252:2 319:5 320:20 349:12 354:13 356:10 357:2 372:5 409:8 464:18 problems 260:10,11 261:11 262:16 297:10 397:6 453:6 procedures 99:16 proceed 125:21 128:1 182:10 223:2 231:9 408:8 process 45:2,9,16 47:24 49:15 82:19 88:19 108:20 136:10,11 182:3 192:6,20 193:15 197:21 218:22 256:3,6,21 259:16 260:17 262:15 267:10 281:21 287:22 303:13 309:11,14 313:15,22 314:23 315:3 326:14,18,21 327:11,13 330:24 333:3 335:15,22, 23 342:3 344:17 376:14 378:12 380:21 381:6 402:20 403:1 416:7,9,11 processes 106:3 357:18 procurement 369:19,20	Produce 27:6,19 produced 472:5 product 72:5 production 226:3,13 253:20 productive 331:23 professional 132:6,10,16 141:5,23 391:23 professionals 194:13 478:9 professor 69:4,24 proficiency 23:12 101:4 196:9 proficient 100:16 program 5:14 9:19 20:22 22:3 25:7 72:9 152:8,13 227:9 228:7,17 249:23 273:21 320:17 449:10 452:1 programming 21:4,7,12 105:22 106:13 119:14 programs 21:16 22:7,16 24:4 26:10 131:16 271:12 402:17 419:7 433:12 progress 20:12,14 22:1 29:4,5 42:15 43:15 52:20 145:2 267:13 366:10 418:18 progressive 68:16 94:4 prohibitive 198:14 project 27:6,19 106:4 111:12,19,23 177:17 451:13 projected 35:21 133:20 219:14 projections 51:14 132:2 161:5,10 163:4 prolific 191:17	promise 124:16 140:22 297:18 448:17 promised 237:6 proper 13:5 77:22 409:10, 24 properly 410:23 479:15 properties 35:18 62:13, 15,17 88:8 121:20,23 122:20 186:23 327:1,10 328:8 property 35:20 38:23 39:3 62:9 78:14 91:5 106:6 122:17 123:6,10,15 145:22 146:2 proposal 186:19 187:7 189:10,12 191:4 205:1 240:16 430:12 439:14 472:9 proposals 407:8 proposed 9:16 42:7 43:8 44:21 46:19 49:19 60:21 70:4 121:3 156:19 157:9 191:22 192:24 220:10 240:22 301:1 310:3 376:2 378:7 426:18 430:14 438:7 452:23 proposing 45:21 59:13 122:22 130:20 132:24 136:1 157:4 203:10 prospect 192:23 193:16 protect 238:16,19 426:17 430:15 435:8,15 439:19 protecting 102:12 331:24 425:10 protection 397:18 protest 406:15 protocol 471:20 proud 20:11,14 27:13 28:2 78:3 419:14 437:7 prove 172:24 233:8
--	---	---

proves 177:6 provide 69:17 102:8 126:6 154:11,23 155:2 157:2 161:22 192:1 196:6 210:6 271:24 283:16 310:7 353:10 407:3 418:8,16 426:10 427:1 478:7 provided 153:20 371:18 398:8 478:5 providing 5:20 8:7 116:22 119:14 233:2 477:5 provisions 6:7 7:4 Psi 152:2 PSSAS 454:22 public 2:8,10,11 8:23,24 9:9,13 10:9 12:8,24 15:16 16:1,9 27:24 28:17 31:10 35:14 36:10,14 37:2,19 39:18 46:11 73:8 76:13 77:23 78:6 80:7 81:23 85:20 90:23 99:5 104:22, 23 105:14 111:2 143:10 148:5 156:22 169:3 188:12 230:11 232:5 233:6 236:12 268:21 274:17 279:9 291:16 325:12 334:7 354:15 358:12 367:2,7 384:6 387:23 390:2 391:19 400:17,24 401:3,10 407:24 409:24 430:7 433:10 437:8 444:11 477:2 479:1,15 public-school 19:16 111:3 publicizing 403:13 publicly 86:7 104:21 325:10 puddles 453:15 pull 197:1 260:17 339:12 372:2	pulled 121:21 123:4 332:13 pulling 332:11 purgatory 115:10 purposes 142:6 164:12 267:15 pursuant 8:17,24 371:14 pursue 418:8 push 75:12 133:15 137:6 145:15 196:19 200:7 279:7 282:9 299:15 418:6 432:16 pushing 109:22 150:17 187:11 370:21 put 42:8 51:5 82:24 90:11 97:12 106:24 145:19 149:3 163:20 164:4 172:8 176:3 184:23 186:4 193:14 208:17 231:22 232:23 239:19 244:3 269:13 275:22 294:19 296:5 298:15 299:1 303:16 305:10,21 309:5 312:19 313:2 329:19 331:18 349:24 354:1 360:13 367:14 368:20 371:4,11 375:24 378:17 379:8 382:19 388:2 390:11,15 396:5 402:24 412:9 413:2 415:7 441:11 442:7 puts 164:8 374:3 putting 48:18 186:20 189:13 428:12,15 448:21 460:20 472:24 473:11 474:3 Q qualify 246:23 291:1 quality 145:14 147:1 164:16 271:11	quantify 190:19,20 Quaresma 320:13,14 quarter 372:16 quarterback 164:24 quarterbacking 166:13 quasi-agenda 98:2 question 30:14 42:23,24 43:5 47:19 59:10 64:1 77:12,19 79:3,4 83:10,11 100:4 140:24 148:19 149:11 155:17 156:4,9 158:6,15 163:18 167:18 168:15 173:23 174:11 178:21 192:19 197:18 203:8,15 204:12 210:20 212:13 215:8,15 228:1 233:5,13 241:9,13,16,17 243:10 246:5,8 248:1 251:7 262:8 266:5 267:8 269:14 278:10 282:2 284:6 300:20 306:4 323:11 329:7,18,21 362:3 371:15 384:5 390:4 391:12 393:13 394:16 399:6 400:8 421:20,23 422:5 468:12 questionable 235:1 240:23 questioned 47:12 63:9 questioning 40:19 218:7 285:17 286:23 291:20 348:4 questions 93:4,9 96:16 101:15 114:24 120:14 138:24 168:13 171:24 178:9 187:17,23 190:9 193:3 197:16 218:14 220:3 231:22 233:22 235:16,19 236:13 242:17 266:5 280:20 281:1 291:24 292:6 299:4 322:1 323:3,8 329:22 337:8,17 364:14,20 395:14 399:23
---	--	--

407:16 416:5 445:19 450:9	raising 143:13,20 174:10 474:1	reaction 81:17 301:5
Quetcy 279:11 454:14	rambling 447:18	read 5:4 9:15 14:18 17:24 103:17 105:4 113:8 122:4 448:17 464:14 470:7
queue 280:3	Ramisha 107:24	Readers 24:6,7
quick 50:15 51:6,22 124:7 128:9,11 194:10 200:11 212:12 242:8 246:13 297:17 300:19 304:4,6 336:6 340:1,3 353:9 421:17 450:21	rampant 378:10	reading 13:14 101:3 131:20 132:14 145:6 294:12 424:10 431:22 436:21 443:2 460:9
quicker 263:6 446:14	Ramsey 471:18	reads 429:16
quickly 108:8 120:4 126:9 171:24 221:14 249:20 259:13 261:24 266:4 283:14 290:7 295:18 297:10 396:13,16 397:9, 10	ran 166:8 168:3,7	ready 11:3 33:13 120:14 131:5 394:7 436:3 466:5
quiet 217:4,7 401:20,21 446:1 465:4	range 101:23 122:5	reaffirm 110:24
quoted 237:19	rap 457:16,20	real 6:22 20:22 21:5 87:2 156:5 168:23 194:10 195:19 204:4,21 209:24 212:12 223:10,11 234:23 236:3 246:13 252:1 285:17 376:4 382:17 421:17 426:22 433:8 435:5 450:21 452:5 468:7
R		
R's 33:2	rash 333:17	realist 465:3
race 427:14 432:12	ratchet 268:11	reality 102:7 179:14 356:18 427:18 449:23
racist 269:8 465:2	ratcheted 268:11	realize 98:22 111:6 206:7
radius 443:22	rate 21:19,21 39:22 62:13, 14,16 91:6 101:5 140:13 141:20 175:17 196:9 225:6 229:15,17 243:14 244:6	realized 405:20
Ragsdale 72:10	rates 20:17,18 39:4 62:8 118:2 128:15 131:22,23 139:17 142:19 175:16 176:5,6 180:3 223:19 267:22	realizing 429:15
railings 412:14	rating 128:18,23	reallocate 206:11
Rainer 401:6 408:11,14, 18,23 409:1	ratings 276:10,15	Realty 6:19
rainy 433:22	ratio 270:4 289:19	reason 61:3 63:16 126:21 136:14 175:15 200:5 224:13 314:12 377:8
raise 30:3 38:19 44:18 76:1 109:13 148:15 149:1 189:17 272:17	rationale 144:10	reasonable 106:10
raised 15:17 19:11,14 36:10 81:21 142:18 171:24 313:4,5	ratios 204:9	reasons 175:14 404:3 405:16
raises 174:12 405:7	rats 450:3	reassess 293:23
	raw 332:9	reassessing 293:11
	re-allocated 307:6	reassign 133:1 138:17 157:10
	re-brand 397:1	
	reabsorbed 137:1	
	reabsorbing 136:20	
	reach 99:1 238:20 426:15 435:14 439:19	

reassigned 134:19 138:13	192:1 243:23 305:20 306:7,9,22 386:18	redistribute 346:13
rebound 239:13		redo 297:8
rebuild 73:13 198:7	recommendations 101:22 103:12 106:21 121:13 122:6,8 126:15,19 127:10 243:18 287:16 327:14	redraft 421:13
rebuilding 431:3		reduce 130:9 173:11 252:9 276:8 328:19
rebuilt 338:4	recommended 121:18 126:2,23	reduced 354:18
rec 237:8	recommending 121:8,19, 23 122:16 126:5 145:24 159:6,19 186:20 188:7 384:9 392:14	reducing 131:1
recall 405:4	reconciliation 461:3	reduction 243:6 394:18, 23
receipts 233:7	reconfigurations 310:6	reductions 134:11 158:17
receive 154:24 155:1 156:22 183:4 272:21 354:8 363:6 390:20 411:14,21,23 413:10	reconverting 124:19	refer 82:22
received 31:20 118:17,24 129:12 154:18 155:10,15 158:23 160:6 165:19 171:12 190:10 255:24 306:17	record 11:4 12:20 15:7 17:9 36:5 37:12 42:9 53:6,12 57:3 58:17 60:15 68:6 83:1 93:14 95:3 127:4 129:6 131:6 139:24 140:7 143:9 153:18 154:3,10 158:4 171:10 178:10 194:3 195:16 210:21 212:16 230:19 231:5 243:21 256:14,23 262:21 269:14 270:9 272:7 287:7,21 304:17 305:11,22 325:9,14 364:23 371:5 382:20 383:23 384:6 390:12,15 393:20 394:20 401:17 407:24 408:10,21 414:24 417:11 419:23 424:5 427:6 431:18 440:15 442:19 444:19 448:8,9 449:1 459:1,10 472:24	reference 15:9
receiving 423:1	records 12:10	referenced 145:23 147:12 242:16
recent 218:23 397:14 405:4	recreation 86:16,18	references 147:11
recently 17:24 18:3	recruitment 249:5	referred 68:15
recess 94:13 279:4 433:4 438:23 479:4,18	recurring 37:14 48:11 50:12 51:7 52:13 174:11	referring 156:8 309:8
recognition 231:12	Redfern 458:15	reflective 134:12 360:6,18
recognize 153:22 215:11 233:9 329:10 352:14 375:21 427:16		reflects 21:4 111:12 454:23
recognized 405:19		reflexive 82:22
recognizes 10:22 139:4 185:4 192:10 200:24 201:1 230:5 247:5 259:2 277:23 279:10 291:13 322:6 374:22 478:23		Reform 81:10
recognizing 147:17 453:3		reforms 398:23
recommend 135:8 165:10 192:4 252:7 326:19 347:14 388:19 392:2,6		refresh 276:19
recommendation 121:22 123:5 125:23 130:7 188:3		refute 83:5 253:4
		refuting 258:7
		regard 118:10 191:11 243:8
		Reggie 96:10
		Reginald 16:16 94:18 95:19
		region 74:11,18 85:18
		regional 39:13 51:3
		regions 23:5
		regressive 55:22 57:4

regular 58:2 475:1 regularly 202:17 203:4 regulated 66:12,17 reimagine 111:20 reimagining 207:1 reinvested 240:12 reinvesting 150:18 173:18 reiteration 420:13 relate 122:13 related 7:5 47:17 106:3 163:19 290:22,23 296:4 302:8 relates 12:24 169:20 205:2 284:7 327:22 328:2 337:21 356:23 357:1 364:1 369:22 370:3 371:10 372:19 389:14 391:2 relations 228:12 relationship 250:15 356:20 relationships 418:21 456:21 relative 154:17 155:17 157:8 161:19,23 162:1 178:15 181:23 183:12 242:18 243:9,12 302:7 324:14 relaunched 119:8 release 435:18 released 308:10 relevant 407:3 reliable 404:14 relief 323:14 relieve 263:21 relocated 141:22	relocation 240:21 relocations 310:5 rely 433:13 435:11 remain 121:24 405:11 remaining 177:18 remains 22:11 remarks 338:13 remediation 294:5 remedy 220:1 remedying 204:14 remember 14:3,6,7 27:2 32:21 33:12,24 34:10 35:11 38:21 48:5,7 56:4,5 59:3,4 61:6,14 66:21,22 67:2,7 73:2,7 74:24 75:4 79:15 83:18 91:4 134:2 170:21 172:9,16 270:6 282:19 351:11 418:3 remind 128:13 162:20 223:20 reminder 110:19 111:16 281:17 reminds 29:9 237:1 reminiscent 189:14 remiss 115:12,13 remodeling 240:24 removal 294:6 remove 381:14 removed 122:11 removing 122:5 renovate 73:7,12 198:7 357:23 renovation 199:1 240:23 274:22 277:2 378:11 renovations 213:9 354:4 378:8 rent 132:4 343:20	Rental 5:20 rentals 5:22 reoccurring 169:8,19 rep 292:9 299:13,19 315:22 360:21,22,24 361:15,19,20,22 repair 73:8 199:8 repairs 193:6,8 407:2 repeat 190:8 209:16 repeatedly 203:7 replace 199:9,10,11 252:13 270:1 replaced 188:20 replacement 193:10 270:5 344:13 replacing 275:12,13,16 replenishment 270:8 replicate 456:3 replicated 125:18 report 21:2 176:8,12 280:10 282:18 354:9 reported 398:18 reporting 100:9 reports 290:21 378:8 459:22 460:2 represent 330:13 381:1 403:19 471:22 representation 77:9 400:21 Representative 10:13 66:2 292:1 315:9 representatives 107:15, 21 represented 172:4 211:22 representing 89:17 201:19 424:21 432:18
--	---	---

represents 50:8 106:7 135:3 402:8 reprieve 249:3 Republican 59:20,21 76:7 77:1 89:16 repulsive 317:22 repurpose 121:14 reputable 93:22 request 131:6 153:24 178:16 186:8 193:13 194:6 198:12 278:20 338:20 385:19 requested 113:24 requesting 182:23 requests 220:24 require 104:22,23 105:9 106:19 146:13 284:21 435:18 required 106:2 420:18 requirement 9:23 requires 220:11 research 68:22 69:7,16 93:22 165:24 266:17 327:2 reserves 433:10,16 437:14 438:3 reside 454:15 resident 57:21 60:8 459:3, 5 residential 62:16 residents 13:1 62:20 109:8 resolute 432:22 resolution 2:15 8:6,21 102:16,21 103:11,14,17 104:1,9,11 105:1,5 179:10,11,12,13 207:16 281:18,20,21 308:17 309:23 310:14 312:24	313:15 326:17 327:18 344:14,16 350:7 357:15, 16,21 358:8 410:16 479:2,17 resolutions 5:5 102:23 resolve 251:23 389:24 390:13 resonate 210:18 460:13 resort 173:15 resource 24:16 resourced 137:6 resources 86:24 119:15 133:15 137:7 145:15 146:6 150:17 159:15 173:2 195:23 196:19 197:1,8 200:8 206:11 217:1,23 218:1 234:24 235:3 254:3,9 282:9 283:4,6 284:21 299:18 311:12,22 346:13 410:1 439:13 469:3 respect 6:23 8:13 11:13 12:6 72:19 181:15 193:22 218:12,15 257:19 332:7, 14 333:2 353:23 respectful 414:3 respectfully 182:23 363:5 respective 36:11 49:10 282:15 respond 27:17 30:22 49:7 92:15 194:11 231:23 255:18 268:16 305:24 309:9 385:17 response 118:21 150:9 242:1 responses 221:12 235:20 responsibilities 429:5 responsibility 99:1 241:5 responsible 81:1 416:15 429:2	responsive 114:23 207:15 220:22 rest 29:2 55:9 restaurants 14:15,23 restrictions 443:13 restroom 215:12 263:13, 19 319:10 restrooms 213:18 216:3,5 263:23 296:19 319:6 result 27:15 41:11 47:9 133:3 173:15 203:2 235:14 306:6 314:24 397:13 398:9 426:1 resulted 243:5 results 20:23 116:20 264:2 resume 94:15 retail 7:24 8:3 retain 123:9 197:19 retains 106:18 retire 130:15 retired 209:6 retirement 51:20 68:23 69:18 return 116:20 131:17 136:3 177:21 272:18 327:8 356:17 returning 419:15 457:10 revenue 15:2,11 19:11 29:18 31:19 34:2 36:2 37:15,23 38:3,20 40:23 44:16 47:8 50:12 51:7,13 52:13 56:22 60:18,22 61:18 64:21,23 78:2 79:2 83:9 85:15 89:20 90:22 93:17 134:18 135:12,14 138:2,5,9,10,16 153:9 327:6 revenue-generating
---	---	--

91:11 revenues 48:12 reverence 72:19 reverse 269:12 431:2 reversing 268:3 review 9:3 10:2 110:1 112:11 117:16 256:2,12 266:14,16 267:6,7 268:17 325:12 388:13 reviewed 256:23 reviewing 111:24 revise 111:20 revised 8:9 156:15 157:4 revising 6:6 7:4 revisions 8:12 revisited 236:19 revisiting 187:22 Reyes 108:3 RFP 327:11,13 Rhemar 471:21 Richardson 3:23 92:3 151:6,9 152:1 158:9,15, 23 159:23 160:5,14,20,24 161:8,17 162:17 163:7, 11,16 166:6,22 167:16,22 171:2,12 178:2,6 180:20 181:1,9,13 230:23 338:22 478:13 479:14 rid 361:13 380:4 ride 7:12,17 27:11 44:5,17 49:20 53:3,7,9,13,19 54:1,20 57:14,22 67:18 78:16,17 165:16 443:20 rider 64:6,17 rides 241:4 rideshare 133:4 rideshares 241:1	right- 376:16 right-size 83:11 88:20 133:14 137:9 right-sized 161:14 right-sizing 79:8 80:9 86:11 ring 297:5 rip 297:6 Rise 111:12,19,24 112:15, 18 risen 16:13 233:12 rising 129:16,24 176:4 risk 149:3 426:21 428:23 430:14 439:17 Rittenhouse 441:5 river 425:22 rivers 251:20 road 134:17 310:19 364:5, 11 Rob 46:24 Robbins 431:20,21 435:3 436:1,11 Robeson 122:9 123:5 188:4,8,24 189:7,21,24 190:13,15,17 191:12,18, 23 192:3 193:6,8 196:7 198:1,8 199:10 Robin 20:3 46:8 158:1 robust 239:17 rock 279:6 rodent 294:6 rodents 450:5 452:11 role 116:16 155:4 169:22 332:1 341:7 344:7 418:8 456:2 roll 279:6 Ronaldo 458:14	room 5:20,22 48:23 49:3 72:1 96:13 113:8,12,18 140:21 208:7 230:1 312:4 339:20 374:15 441:7 445:1 448:22,23 456:6 465:1 479:5,20 rooms 303:19 341:11 rooted 99:4 188:1 190:1,2 roots 54:5 250:20 Rosado 431:14 Rosita 66:2 round 221:20 292:20 322:11 440:3 roundabouts 446:23 roundtable 46:12 routinely 271:23 Rowan 72:7 Roxborough 249:19 455:10 463:18 Rue 221:7 247:7 259:3,7 Rule 9:2 10:1 ruled 15:21 17:12 rules 246:18,20,22,24 ruling 38:15 39:20 71:10 176:21 rumbled 34:22 rumbling 65:24 run 51:13 60:20,23 166:10,19 194:1 294:13, 14 419:6 449:14 459:17 Rung 414:18,20 running 69:2 364:16 438:10 450:5 rush 179:3,4 433:14,20 462:4 rushed 437:22 rushing 401:8
--	--	---

S		
Sabrina 47:1 414:18,20	286:21 287:4	100:17 101:1,12 102:3,10
SAC 445:12	sausage 45:17	106:4 107:24 108:2,5,12
sacred 17:12,13	Saval's 292:10 299:14	110:17,24 111:17,21
sacrifice 80:6 89:23	save 21:10 85:20 141:1	112:6,9 115:17 116:16,22
safe 18:14 95:10 147:6	148:18 403:20	118:5 119:3 121:24
205:9 413:6 419:8 434:10	saved 472:8	122:12,21 128:19 129:21
438:20 449:13	saving 253:17 477:9	130:13 131:11 132:9,21
safely 438:21 439:7	savings 150:11,16 157:3	134:2 135:1 138:19
safety 137:4 147:17	173:16 282:20,22	139:21 141:8,11,18
396:22 397:17 421:8	Sayre 188:21 463:17	143:22 144:12,14,17
470:23 471:2 477:2	scale 54:15 405:11	145:7,8,20 146:11 148:4
sake 282:1	scarce 234:24	152:6 153:2 154:14,23
salaries 129:16 282:24	scare 52:19	156:15 157:11,15 159:12
sale 326:24 327:10	scared 42:3,8 264:24	160:9 161:6,14,20 162:4
sales 12:17 32:22 33:24	352:7,8	164:20 165:11,21 169:9
34:2 36:2 37:21 44:14	scars 14:5	172:5,14,15 175:19 180:6
90:19 93:18	SCEE 254:11	185:19 186:22,23 188:6,
Sam 34:14	Scene 14:12,13	9,13 189:23 192:5,24
Samuel 152:10	scheduled 181:16,18,24	193:17 196:1 197:20
San 53:15,17,23	schedules 310:2	199:2,15 200:6 202:11,16
sand 61:16 82:7	scheduling 6:8	203:6 206:8 209:3 211:15
sandbagged 247:17	Scheinfeld 422:1 427:8,9	212:18 213:12,19 214:1,
Sandoval 444:4,21,22	430:23	23,24 216:6 217:10
445:22 446:20	school 7:10,13 9:5 10:4,7	218:20 219:3,4,7,9 220:9,
sanitary 450:24	13:7 15:11 17:7,8,10	18 225:10,11 227:3,18,
Santana 151:20	18:5,23 19:23 20:6,13	21,23 228:11,16 229:12,
Sarah 16:17 95:23 97:5	21:4 23:1,14 25:15 26:3	14 230:11 232:19 233:3
217:9	28:5,14,15 29:12 30:4	235:5 236:24 237:17
sat 45:6 361:1 441:3	31:9,13,19 32:1,6 34:5	239:23 241:5,17 242:20,
satisfied 21:3	40:4 41:2,9 43:12 44:19,	23,24 243:23 244:4 245:2
Saturday 245:6	23 47:3 48:13 50:13,20	250:11,15,23 252:5,8
sauce 383:7	51:18 52:12 68:9,11,14,	254:15 255:6,23 256:3,5,
Saul 144:12 146:4 227:1,	19 69:3,6,9,13 70:1 72:3,	14,20 257:11 259:15
7,16 228:18 253:6,7	5,7,9,18 73:1,8,13,15	260:16 263:10,16 264:3,
	75:14 78:23 79:6,8,16	24 265:11 266:23,24
	80:11 81:9 82:10 83:14,	267:17 268:6,7,22 269:19
	17,19 84:2 85:11,14,16,	270:21 271:6 272:22,24
	18 86:2 87:3 88:2,3,9	273:7 275:1 276:17
	93:21 94:22 96:3,24	277:13 281:2,23 283:19
		284:24 285:20,23 288:5
		291:22 292:22,23 294:3,
		7,18 295:14 297:24
		298:8,10 299:9 300:6,13
		301:12 302:13,17 304:13
		305:13 307:5 311:17
		312:7 316:10,19,24
		317:3,11,15 318:2,6

319:2 320:9 321:5 323:24
 324:9 326:10 327:8
 328:17 330:1 332:2
 334:11 339:2 342:14,15,
 18,19,23 343:4,8 346:17
 350:1 354:3,18 360:3,5,
 10,15 361:17 362:7,16
 364:2 369:21 370:4
 371:7,19 373:20 374:17
 375:22 376:2,10,16,22
 377:8 378:6,7,21,22
 379:3,4,7,8,10,11,13
 381:15,17 382:12,13
 384:3,9,10,20 385:4,5,7,
 8,10,13,14 386:9,17,22
 387:3,22,24 388:13
 389:6,8 392:3,15,22
 393:7,11 394:22 396:22
 397:4,17 398:1,4 400:5,
 22 402:10,14,17 403:19,
 21,22,24 404:19 406:14,
 16 407:4,10 409:9
 410:10,17,18 412:4,5,8
 413:6 416:6,8,10 417:21
 418:4,20 420:3,6,8,14,20,
 23 421:6,7 423:1 425:2,
 11,20,23 426:5,7,9 428:4,
 6,11,16,24 434:5 435:17,
 19 437:9,21 439:15 440:7
 441:18 443:9,23 445:9
 449:8,13 451:21,22
 452:24 454:13,22 455:7,
 11 456:15 457:1 462:17
 464:20 466:8,22 467:6
 468:23 469:5,6,13 471:7,
 23 472:1,7,8,20 473:16,
 18 474:1,9 475:9 476:3

school's 219:20

school- 47:17 435:15

school-based 41:11

43:13 46:4,16,19 47:10,
 15 48:4 160:15 426:17
 439:20

school-wide 419:5

schoolers 389:9

schools 12:2 20:10 21:13,
 23 24:4,5 41:17,19 42:14
 52:23 73:6 74:4 77:24
 79:13,14 87:9 102:6,8
 110:10,16 111:11 112:4
 115:16 118:8 122:7,10,14
 124:21,22 125:14,15,16,
 24 126:1,3 133:1,9,12,15,
 19 134:1 136:18 137:7,12
 138:14 140:2,15 144:16
 145:11,12,13 146:7,8,15
 150:18,20 154:20 160:7
 161:13 164:13 168:21
 173:17,19 174:23 176:1
 190:18 196:22,24 197:3
 200:2 201:22,23 203:19
 204:7 206:12,23 209:11
 216:17,24 217:24 225:13,
 14,18 226:1,9,11,20,21
 229:16,24 232:6 234:4
 236:17 239:7 240:10,21,
 24 244:3,14,15,16 245:1,
 23 246:10,24 248:6
 250:12,17 256:16,17,18
 257:5,9,13,14,15 260:4,6,
 8,18,19 264:7,16 265:2,6,
 9,21 268:1,14 272:12
 273:9 274:22 275:10,11
 276:4,12,21 277:1,9
 280:17 281:20 282:14,20,
 22 284:11 287:15 288:16
 289:4,16 293:11 305:9,17
 306:10,12 322:21 338:3
 343:1,2 350:9 352:3
 355:3 374:19 376:20
 377:7,23 378:4 379:1,2
 382:16 384:22 393:1,13
 395:23 399:7,8,13 400:2,
 4,5,12 402:14 403:12
 404:2 405:2 410:1,5,13,
 22 411:10 413:1 418:11,
 16 424:21 425:14,19
 426:21 427:15,22 429:21
 430:5,10 431:3 432:13,
 18,23 433:11,15 435:4,17
 437:14 438:10 439:2
 445:6 462:19,22 463:4,7

465:10 466:14,20 468:19
 469:2,4,8 473:6 474:17
 475:4 477:8,12 478:7

schools' 225:17 226:1

Schuylkill 122:18 141:16

science 123:17 226:2
 228:6 248:2 250:22
 251:9,14 252:16 420:3,22

scientific 188:17 228:10

scientist 253:1

scoop 14:16

scope 106:20 460:19

score 118:24 146:12
 191:19 378:1

scores 20:16 117:23
 128:14 139:17 175:16
 176:4 463:6

scoring 100:16

scrap 361:8,12

screamed 361:16,21,23

screen 98:1

screw 18:16

seamless 285:22 287:2
 423:5

seams 74:15

search 91:1

searching 318:24

season 427:22

seat 56:3 356:1

seats 2:4 74:6 252:6,9

secondary 58:24

seconded 479:15

seconds 150:7 304:3
 371:17 391:21

secret 135:20

section 6:17 7:11 319:9

sections 249:8	5,7,8	shakes 115:1
sector 67:10 69:19 130:2	separately 200:2	shamed 450:12
sectors 99:5	SEPTA 51:4 241:4 270:16 271:2,23	shameful 189:15 190:4
secure 406:8	September 67:18 129:15 412:1 415:14,19	shameless 405:6
security 51:20 68:23 69:18	sequencing 106:20	shaped 102:5 108:11
seed 253:16,17	SERGEANT 458:23	Shapiro 39:17 75:24 76:5 89:10
seemingly 51:9	SERGEANT-AT-ARMS 401:21 417:5 421:14 436:6 446:1 468:9 471:12	share 7:12 14:10 30:1 49:20 53:3,4,7,9,13,19 54:1,21 57:14,22 67:18 78:17 80:6 81:24 87:8,12 97:1 107:13,18 113:17 150:11 175:3 183:2 202:21 210:8 212:5 229:23 239:7 268:13 276:3 277:8 304:8 324:4 325:14,21 383:6 419:15 425:1 455:1,14
sees 441:6	series 281:1	shared 29:8 80:6 89:23 105:13 111:12 201:10 292:21 325:10
selection 256:3,6,21 259:16 260:17 416:6,9,10	seriousness 101:18	shareholders 70:5
self- 22:17	serve 110:18 201:15 382:4 417:23 418:10	shares 44:5,17
sell 250:5 328:19	served 451:13 455:9	sharing 47:22 108:9 210:19
selling 28:19 56:16	serves 110:2	sharp 393:21
Semira 108:2	service 16:21 105:23 112:23 117:9 118:11 119:3,11 143:18 178:11 215:19 419:3,16,20 430:5	she'll 429:24
Senate 59:22 76:21 77:1	services 57:15 128:24 129:1	Sheree 458:14 459:2
senator 89:13,14,16 148:13 292:10 299:14	serving 417:20 477:11	shield 85:9
send 132:15 250:7,17 258:9 269:14 325:9 359:23 360:2 369:8,10 428:10 443:7 469:3,12	session 325:11 329:23	shift 113:8
sending 40:24 132:13 258:10	sessions 419:2	shifts 239:11
senior 13:19 303:24 304:20,21 306:2 310:23	set 18:12,18 176:2 179:9, 10 203:17 253:22 281:21 297:24 431:11	ship 180:5
sense 60:12,17 140:12 143:22 170:20 179:2 204:21 208:15 235:20 236:6 241:15,16 362:12 381:24 382:2,3 434:17 460:18 466:11	sets 344:17	shirts 397:16
sensitive 243:17 245:9	setting 255:1 419:11 465:9	shock 224:12
sentence 117:19 430:24	seventh 462:18	shocking 402:18
sentiment 81:24 186:11	severely 74:7 377:3 378:2,5,22 379:15 393:8, 10,12	shoes 319:13
sentiments 185:17	sewage 320:23 321:10 452:3,9 453:5	shop 182:8 283:17
separate 134:22 136:9,12, 15 173:7 379:2,3,4 385:3,		

short 162:18 259:4 409:7	462:12 464:15 470:8	sister 413:19 414:7
short- 163:23	signals 300:11,14	sit 57:17 72:15 76:10
short-term 163:20	signed 318:16 401:10	262:4 292:2 297:13
shortage 404:22	444:3	314:17 400:23 464:10
shortcomings 257:2	significant 123:14,16	465:4 473:18
shorter 445:16	127:9 135:13 146:13	site 384:11 463:2
shortfall 215:17	150:16 173:15 212:3	sits 412:14 427:24
shot 169:14	230:2 295:19 373:23	sitting 74:2 206:19 217:24
shoulders 55:9	significantly 145:4	243:16 292:14 351:1
shout 152:1 225:2 322:16	silent 433:2,3	356:1 444:15 459:15
478:17	similar 141:20 356:23	464:9
show 13:21 114:10	423:19	situation 156:12 168:6
131:17 136:15 161:10	simple 73:5 244:17	214:22 449:23
169:2 174:20 177:13	262:12	sixth 343:23 353:18 449:8
233:1 293:16 363:15	simpler 62:18	size 144:14 145:20 200:7
377:1 407:6 473:2	simply 80:2 216:24 271:9	245:24 289:19 310:22
showed 323:3 338:14	simulations 228:24	354:2 376:17 380:18
455:13 477:15	sincere 143:4	sizes 42:11 52:21 197:2
showing 100:20	sincerely 228:21	389:5 435:6
shown 402:19,22 468:17	sincerity 228:5	sizing 209:20 244:7,12,
shows 134:13 135:5	single 232:17 262:4	13,14 245:22 380:21
156:16 165:20 174:24	373:15 441:15	skeptical 22:5
177:5 394:6 403:8 410:12	singularly 256:20	skill 412:18 423:18
shuffled 430:8	sir 89:1,5 95:8 104:6	skilled 262:22 264:10
shut 14:24 249:18,23	124:9,12 125:2,21 127:21	skills 453:3
275:24	128:1,3,6,8 144:3 145:1	sky 50:4 443:18
shutting 254:24	148:21 149:4 150:9	slashing 219:22
Siani 436:22 437:5	177:15 194:10,14 198:21	slated 154:12
siblings 453:12	211:2 212:14 215:10,16	sleep 217:17
sick 452:10	216:14 218:5 221:2	slide 97:19 98:4 99:10
side 56:5 76:7,8 77:2	222:8,11,15 223:2 228:5	101:8,10 107:3 108:21
118:1 152:12 239:8 240:1	229:8,21 230:5 242:11	110:7,22 111:22 113:6
292:3 371:7 372:12	247:5 255:19 257:23	116:9,23 117:3,15 118:9
437:12 450:5	258:3 263:8 275:7 277:3	119:4 120:6,15 122:1
side-eye 149:15	278:8 286:13 288:1	126:10,18 127:11 130:3
sides 226:22	308:24 309:21 315:5	134:13 136:4 137:13
sign 359:24 440:18,19	385:22 390:6 395:20	slides 98:6 120:11 122:2
	401:15,24 407:15,17	127:16
	430:19 439:10,22 442:16	
	458:12 461:19	

slightly 87:5 200:6	solve 52:10 250:14 346:10 347:24	324:3 340:20,21 420:7 424:15 449:11 459:5 467:10 475:6,7,14
slipped 450:7	solving 354:13	speaker 34:14,15 39:24 76:22 89:10 191:17
slow 307:17 381:6 437:18	somebody's 60:11 62:11	speaking 191:8 315:16 322:4 340:5 420:4 424:17 425:5 427:20 432:8 437:9 450:1 474:2,11
slowing 466:16	someday 188:5	speaks 98:23
small 133:12 137:10 145:12 197:9 206:23 291:16 320:7 418:24 419:12	son 269:6	special 236:20 284:8 285:9 288:18,19 289:5 411:13,16,22 419:21 422:8,10,17,18,21 423:10 474:14
smaller 54:16 389:6	son's 160:9 426:9	specialists 434:14
smallest 131:12	sooner 211:21	specific 112:12 161:23 187:19 188:1 190:10 194:5 197:16 211:10,12 258:11 290:13,14,23 314:12 363:13
smart 63:8 275:6 466:10	sort 15:8 40:5 233:1 459:12	specifically 35:12 63:12 64:5 154:21 287:8 290:23 322:24 372:14 381:10 387:19
smarter 22:21	sorts 283:15	speech 285:1,2,3,4 335:12 459:13
smell 321:3 450:3	sound 55:16 66:8 248:11 384:13	speeches 33:11
smells 317:22 452:9	source 51:8	Spence 436:20,21 437:1,4 439:12,23
smidgen 169:11	sources 164:1	spend 354:3 373:3 453:14
smiling 24:10	South 125:9,10 458:6 463:16	spending 9:17 38:19 56:24 372:11 396:22
Smith 34:14	Southwark 201:24 202:5 204:24 211:10,13,22 215:22 261:3,5 262:8 263:13,24 292:11 293:24 295:20 296:16,17 316:17 318:10,22 320:16,19 445:9,10 447:3,15,24 449:7 451:21 452:14 453:1	spent 66:7 323:16 337:11 373:5 398:23
smushing 248:5	Southwest 125:11	spirit 26:23 27:3 94:8 112:17 144:7 163:2 195:19 391:13
SNAP 27:8,14	space 141:12 179:19,22 205:9 245:15 248:24 328:2 330:19 332:8 353:18 389:10 419:8 429:9 461:11 477:2	spirited 187:15,18
so-called 236:2	spaces 142:1 208:6 328:16 463:8	spoke 74:21 154:7
soap 317:23 321:1,12	Spanish 320:17 447:13	
social 42:12 283:1,21	SPAP 397:24 398:4	
socialized 14:20	speak 11:22 107:6 219:24 222:5 242:14 271:22 284:17 287:7 307:12	
soda 55:18,22 59:5 71:8 237:1,6		
sodas 56:16		
sojourn 400:2		
Solace 83:18		
solely 15:17 19:15 29:23		
solidarity 406:19		
solution 148:9 249:14 254:5 303:9 321:20 433:17 438:1 462:15		
solutions 249:16 251:3 254:13,20 255:16 450:21 462:13,15		

spot 198:8 329:19 367:15	staffers 298:11 428:22	401:16 408:1,9,20 414:23
spread 125:5	staffing 162:2 289:18,20	417:10 419:22 424:4
spreading 264:20	staffs 103:15	427:5 431:17 436:17,18
spreadsheets 49:4	stairs 202:18 321:20	440:14 442:19 444:6,18
Spring 391:3	stake 435:22	448:24 458:24 460:16
Springboard 25:23,24 26:1	stakeholders 45:18 415:5	stated 12:11 69:22 114:2 183:9 219:14 233:11 402:5 403:6
square 80:21 207:20 441:6	stall 321:2 452:19	statement 221:12 231:21
Squilla 2:20 10:24 91:21 277:24 278:1,5,9,13,21 279:2 280:3 291:13,17 292:4 295:16 297:19,23 299:8 300:18 302:9,12, 19,24 303:2,7 304:5 305:3 306:5 307:21 308:2,6 309:8 313:19 316:6 355:19	stance 365:20	statements 373:14,16
	stand 37:10 38:8 436:3 466:18 479:3,9,18	states 53:8 123:18 451:1
	standard 163:22 164:3 186:10	statesman 191:13
	standardized 22:20	Statin 434:12,19
	standards 112:1 203:18, 21	stating 407:23 472:22 479:22
	standing 16:1 33:4,10 424:24 432:20 433:1,20	station 470:17
Squilla's 202:1	stark 387:13	statistic 237:19
SRC 81:9	stars 208:5	status 291:2
SSC 417:18 418:5,10,23	start 49:5 76:18 103:23 104:8 140:1 154:8 157:5 180:5 192:20 207:19 232:1 259:14 298:12 337:2 338:10,20 407:23 422:4 434:17 436:19 452:14	stay 122:20 134:8 367:7 424:12 431:24 448:13 478:6
SSOS 396:24	started 22:10 25:3 30:6 42:14 48:7 63:19 82:18 83:10,12 95:4 152:20 192:8 224:19	stayed 22:12
stability 42:13 52:23 433:23	starting 152:22 184:11 431:4	stays 451:22
stabilize 37:13	starve 441:16	Steel 473:17
staff 41:15,17 103:16 132:11 133:18 146:22 155:3 162:8 163:21 174:21 177:14 195:10 213:2 215:6,7 217:9 251:17 265:14,23 282:17 283:6,13 284:11 287:6 294:17 311:11 312:17 327:2 328:21 334:10 372:19 394:18,21 413:16, 18 414:4 415:16 426:9,17 428:18 430:16,18 433:17 435:9,10,16 438:4,8,18 439:20 463:9 475:8 477:18	state 10:13 11:3 30:11 38:1 66:1 89:16 95:2 148:15 153:12 196:9 250:24 255:5 292:1,9 296:3 299:13 315:8,22 360:20 361:14 386:21	Steinberg 20:2 46:7 157:24 195:15 401:5,14, 18 402:1,5 407:16,18
staffed 215:18 283:14		STEM 188:6 189:3,23
		stenographer 12:14 259:5 278:18
		step 36:14 44:20 97:13 381:22 383:4 385:18 425:7 426:19 430:12 438:24 443:9
		stepped 15:10 37:15
		stepping 46:3
		steps 173:10 254:7 349:15

Sterling 59:18,19,24 60:10,16 61:2 64:12 65:12 Stern 97:6 Steven 471:16 stewards 129:1 stewardship 16:23 stick 348:4 356:4 stock 269:22 stone's 188:15 stood 436:2 472:4,14 stop 29:5 55:2 63:18 67:9 249:12 265:20 443:8 463:8 468:14 471:9 475:24 476:2,3 stopped 31:18 stopping 254:18 stores 56:15 470:11,13 stories 414:1 story 58:13,14 414:12 straight 93:12 239:2 strain 164:8 strange 130:18 Strassburger 451:17,18 strategic 79:11 165:23 170:16 171:5 195:21 306:3 strategy 28:9 84:21 169:7 170:6 173:21 Strawberry 132:8 245:4 352:7 376:23 391:22 392:2,11 464:19 469:11 stream 251:19 Streater 16:17 84:1 94:19 95:5,9,13,20 96:8 97:22 98:7 104:5,10 107:11 113:4,5 121:8 130:6 135:9 137:16,21 138:7,23	151:11 168:12 171:3 172:2 174:14 176:19 178:14,15,20 181:4 183:17,23 184:4,8,18 185:1,12,16 191:10,14 200:17 201:8 204:17 210:5,13,16,22 218:11,17 257:22,24 274:19 281:15 282:4 287:17 291:21 293:12 308:15 309:1,4,22 315:4 323:20 326:16 327:12 329:7 331:14 333:4 334:13 337:4 339:18 340:9 341:6,22 344:3 345:8,12,16,20,24 346:5 347:13,21 348:5,9, 16,22 349:2,7,17 350:6, 22 351:14,20 357:15 364:19 366:7,13,17,23 367:4,9 368:11,17 369:1, 10 374:14 385:20,21 399:17,24 472:11 Streater's 354:12 Street 86:16 238:24 239:3,9 240:1 463:17 strengthen 100:14 109:1 strengthening 23:11 24:1 26:10 86:14 111:13 112:19 476:20 strengthens 457:1 stress 404:17 strict 63:15 stroll 12:22 strong 21:13 101:23 199:15 228:7 232:4 306:15,18 412:2 418:21 456:20 strongly 114:1 256:24 struck 455:24 structural 31:8 41:10 43:17 78:23 128:12 130:16,21 135:18,21	136:2 155:17 156:17 461:1 structure 216:6 271:3 352:19 structured 419:8 structures 328:10,17 struggle 14:3 struggling 58:9 62:21 stuck 22:12 290:8 297:6 student 20:16 23:8 28:18 79:10 98:20 99:7,19 100:23 105:11,24 107:15, 20,23 108:1,3,10,16,19 112:16,23 117:22 119:20 159:15 169:13 170:13 180:9 207:14 219:22 223:13,21 224:6,9 266:1 269:22 270:3,16 271:2 284:22 287:19 298:20 311:6 318:23 417:19 419:13 423:18 437:9 443:12 454:12 455:20 456:17 student-centered 109:10 students 12:1 16:2,22 19:7,24 21:12,14 40:10 41:6,22 42:13 52:22 73:19 74:24 75:2,16 80:23 87:3,6 90:13 97:11 99:22 100:15,24 101:4 110:7 111:5,9,11 113:2 117:21 146:4,21 148:5 151:2 161:15 176:9 184:21 199:22 201:21 203:12 207:9 228:22 234:15 236:16 238:16 240:21 244:15 245:2 249:8 251:17 261:6 263:17,18 264:23 267:19, 24 269:18 271:1,5,10,15 272:9,16,20,22,23 273:17,20,23 274:3 284:7,15 285:18,20
---	---	--

286:17 287:4 290:24 292:3,12 298:19 299:24 306:11 308:7 315:15,20 316:8 318:16,23 334:9 342:24 354:16,17 377:1 378:4 382:6 384:11 385:1 404:9 405:1 406:14 418:13,23 419:8,10 420:5,16,18,19,23 422:12,16 423:2,6,9,16 424:24 438:21 443:7 449:7,12 452:4,6,10 456:3,7,21 464:20 466:18 475:1 476:12,19 477:7, 11,12,17 students' 43:15 418:22 456:13 457:2 study 225:19 226:23 253:15 271:17 studying 227:11 stuff 59:1 88:16 165:3 178:23 227:12 297:7 339:7,8 410:21 460:12 466:11 Sub-code 6:1 subjective 359:6 subjects 226:8 submit 12:13,19 131:5 158:3 178:8 264:9 448:11,15 submits 69:11 submitted 8:14 32:15 43:7 49:18 subs 426:8 430:17 subsequent 267:5 substitute 106:2 370:20 434:8 438:9 substitutes 435:10 438:11 suburban 405:13	suburbs 22:16 404:21 succeed 260:6 294:21 476:20 succeeding 247:14 success 28:18 260:13 417:19 419:14 454:12 455:20 successful 71:1 succinct 144:5 succinctly 242:17 suck 316:19 sued 64:22 65:11 suffer 258:17 263:18 suffering 425:24 sufficiency 22:18 sufficiently 403:15 suggest 148:10 suggestion 148:24 suit 96:10 331:18 sum 120:7,16 summarize 163:1 408:5 430:21 435:1 439:11 450:16 summarized 221:13 summary 102:15 summer 193:23 270:22 272:10 274:5 295:6 296:14 298:4 453:14 summoned 316:1 sunsetted 129:15 super 27:1 63:8 458:9 463:2 469:19 supercharge 205:11 superintendent 18:23 88:3 94:21 96:3 100:3 103:3 106:24 132:12 159:6,19 213:12 291:23	303:24 311:20 312:13 326:19 336:15 345:1 350:11 357:17 363:11 364:18 383:20 393:24 397:9 415:21 469:20 Superintendent's 108:15 139:22 superintendents 282:13 supermarket 169:23 supervise 282:14 438:22 supplement 9:1,24 suppliers 370:14 support 17:10 24:18 30:3 35:1 39:6,7,8 41:16 50:19 52:22 80:14 116:21 119:18 137:4 216:9 232:12,23 233:2,6 235:6 236:10 265:14,23 268:17 281:3,5 283:22 284:11 285:4 288:18,19 289:5,20 290:5 306:18 329:13 331:11 332:10 337:8 362:7 392:18 412:18 418:13,18,24 419:4 423:19 427:18 429:19 434:13 438:24 439:7 454:17 456:12,17 457:2 474:24 476:11 477:6,22 478:2,3 supported 232:21 supporter 232:5 476:16 supporters 432:21 supporting 27:23 28:1 80:7 109:21 334:5 418:21 454:21 supportive 27:22 143:9 302:5 supports 42:12 100:7 119:15 283:15 284:21 285:5 425:1 432:2 435:6 supposed 227:13 342:24
---	---	--

409:20 452:14 469:3,12 surface 409:12 surplus 135:4 surprised 26:17 surprising 403:3 surrounded 189:3 suspense 10:21 sustain 164:6 sustainability 105:23 225:20 sustainable 253:20 sustained 105:10 sweet 409:7 swiftly 85:1 400:17 swimming 458:22 462:23 swing 463:8 switched 308:13 system 38:1 74:6 80:18 111:2 118:12 204:6 268:22 298:16 325:8 404:19 417:2 442:8 468:21 systemic 52:10 systemically 51:9 systems 19:16 216:24 217:13,19 226:7 275:13, 14,16 systems' 432:16 Szymanski 414:19,21 420:1,2 422:12,23 423:15,24 T T.M. 276:22 table 40:23 46:14,20 77:7, 8 78:18 83:9 88:6 89:22 130:8 138:12 145:19	187:7 189:10 241:22 395:8 462:7,11 475:13, 15,17,18,24 tactics 264:20 tag 73:9 Taj 276:13 takers 22:20 takes 86:15 321:4 349:21 taking 147:24 173:10 232:24 280:17 283:3,5 288:12 374:10 380:13 409:16 459:14 tale 458:9 talk 50:23 70:24 74:14 76:9 83:20 84:11 94:1 180:22 202:6 215:21 234:21 236:5 248:18 262:21,24 270:15 274:8 277:17 288:11 312:6 319:4 340:17 358:19 361:14 390:23 394:8 415:10 460:1 464:12 465:10 475:22 talked 43:1,2 74:8 117:17 152:21 247:16 280:18 295:5 298:6 326:8 361:5 371:3 talking 29:19,22 46:16 48:6 52:4 53:24 54:15 56:8,12,19 60:3 62:4 74:23 78:1 105:6 115:2 159:1 198:13 213:24 235:18 247:23 248:22 250:2 287:20 299:3 346:8 395:3 396:19 397:6 422:19 423:14,20 447:7 464:17 470:12,22 474:18 475:18 talks 16:8 114:15 340:15, 16 415:4 tangible 8:4 87:2	tanks 471:1 tans 397:16 target 249:9 targeted 404:3 418:16 Tasha 473:15 taverns 14:14 tax 5:20,21 6:20,21 7:10, 12,15 8:1 12:17 14:1,4,19 15:5 32:22,24 33:24 34:3 35:4,5,10,16 36:2,4 44:13,14,16 49:20,23 53:4,13,19 54:1,21 55:9, 18,19,22 56:8 57:4 59:5 60:8,9 61:7 62:8 64:9,16 70:4,7 71:9 78:14,17,18 90:21 93:20 133:4 142:14 153:9 223:8,10 237:1,6 240:11 327:5 438:1 441:10 442:4 461:6 470:18 taxes 7:23 19:11,14 30:3 35:20 36:10 38:23 39:4 53:7,9 91:5 142:19 143:13,21 240:24 241:1 433:14 taxicab 57:15 taxing 17:11,16 470:13 471:5 Taylor 458:6 473:14,15 Tayoun 14:17 Tea 33:18 teach 410:23 455:6 467:20 468:4,5,8 teacher 59:1 72:13 117:22 152:7 159:13 434:7 438:12 454:23 456:23 457:7 teachers 20:7 41:14 72:21 132:14 136:19 137:2 150:13 154:19 155:11 157:23 162:12 174:22
--	---	--

265:14,23 282:24 294:17 299:24 316:24 320:18 402:7 410:23 418:12 419:22 426:7 428:16 430:18 435:11 438:9 456:2 468:1,4 478:8 teaching 110:15 158:18, 19 162:2,7 226:16 370:20 453:14 455:18 team 17:23 18:2 49:1,2 73:10 83:8 139:22 147:7, 15 195:10 217:16 230:20 266:17 281:10 283:10,11, 13,24 285:7 295:24 296:21 336:5 338:2 365:18 371:6 389:13 390:18 472:15 tech 53:22 70:3 technical 64:19 100:13 103:15 technically 71:5,7 techniques 226:5 313:12 technologies 226:5 technology 67:10 teens 369:24 370:12 telling 67:13 172:10 207:24 314:11 342:20,21 349:13 352:20 353:17 355:24 356:3,13 359:8 tells 355:20 temperature 96:14 141:14 Temple 84:14,20 228:9 266:18 temporary 199:19 293:18 Tempore 89:19 ten 24:5 57:22 tension 263:21 349:23 tensions 311:8 Teresa 69:5	term 107:21 163:24 198:23 terms 5:23 6:9,15,24 7:6, 19 8:5 191:20 263:12 268:12 285:24 288:5 296:11 335:15,20 370:13 terrorizing 264:21 265:20 test 20:16 22:20 117:23 128:14 139:16 145:8 175:16 176:4 463:6 testament 176:19 tested 141:15 testified 448:19 testify 10:17 149:18,19 407:22 408:16 431:11 436:10 478:20 testifying 413:24 testimony 10:7,10 11:5 12:21 15:8,14 32:15 69:11,21 96:7 293:8 318:20 401:18 407:14 408:2,4,22 409:5 411:2 415:1 417:8,12 419:24 424:6,10 427:4,7 431:7, 19 437:3 440:16 442:17, 20 444:1,20 448:11,15 449:2 454:2 457:6 461:18 478:15 testing 196:10 201:6 tests 321:16 text 59:12 thanking 476:10 thankless 375:6 theater 26:21 87:20 theme 244:21 then-- 345:19 theoretically 188:5 Theresa 454:17 455:6	thing 22:3 55:17 56:11 61:3,8 92:13 115:6 149:8 166:4,15 184:5 232:13 234:21 235:11,12 247:13 260:14 280:8 297:1,5 303:11 312:22 313:17 314:19 324:12 339:13 340:14 346:9 362:17 366:16 394:19 415:9 462:12 469:23 473:10 things 23:21 27:11 48:20, 23 81:8 88:15 97:23 100:6 104:24 132:3,19 139:14,16,20 140:9,17 142:3,21 147:16 148:4 149:16 160:22 179:23 182:6,9 193:21 205:23 206:17 207:11 208:19 211:18 216:14 226:23 229:1 234:16 236:5 268:10 269:9 275:9,11 282:6 284:9 291:7 295:15,17 296:23 298:21 299:20 300:3,5 301:23 308:18 310:17 313:3,16 314:10,11 317:11,12 318:5 320:15 321:17 323:9 327:20 328:5 331:15 334:18 338:8 341:17 345:4 346:21 347:1,2 350:8,17,18 352:6 354:7 357:8 362:11,13 363:3 365:19, 20 367:18 368:5 372:18 374:7 376:7 378:13 379:18,20 396:1,5 399:21 415:22 447:19 450:14 459:12 461:11 473:21 thinking 14:8 30:6 39:23 40:12,14 52:2 75:23 84:13 86:23 104:16 167:5 169:17 170:5 171:14 192:9 206:3,5 226:24 288:13 289:7 thinks 79:19
---	--	---

Thomas 4:1,2 11:19 24:5
 29:1 37:6 44:11 46:1
 50:18 58:15 61:1 81:10,
 21 82:9 88:5 92:4 116:5
 140:19 149:19 230:24
 279:12,22 322:9 335:9
 336:11,12,17,19,23
 340:7,11 341:18,24
 345:6,10,14,18,22 346:2
 347:11,16 348:2,7,14,19,
 24 349:4,9 350:4,20
 351:12,16,22 353:14,21
 355:9 358:5,9 359:18
 362:4,9 363:20 364:9
 365:8,12,16 366:14,15,
 18,19 367:1,6,11 368:7,
 13,23 369:7,12 370:17
 371:22 373:24 375:4
 383:18 385:16,23 387:2,
 4,8,12 389:11,19,23
 390:5 391:17 393:17,23
 395:10,18,21 396:12
 397:8,19 398:3,15 399:2,
 10,19 400:14 401:7,23
 402:2 407:12,19 408:12,
 15,19 411:1 413:13
 414:10,22 417:7 419:18
 421:16 422:3,14 423:12,
 22 424:1 427:3 430:19
 431:6,16 434:23 435:23
 436:8,12,23 437:2
 439:10,21 440:1,21 441:2
 442:14,23 443:24 444:5
 445:20,23 446:3 448:6
 478:24 479:7

thought 19:20 22:5 56:14
 60:13 83:22 168:6 169:15
 183:20 198:11 249:22
 257:10 275:4 286:7
 296:17 308:20 310:18
 377:9 454:10

thoughtful 147:22 344:20
 455:16

thoughtfully 88:22 290:16
 350:14

thoughts 48:20

thousand 53:10 240:22

thousands 74:5

threat 437:21

threaten 29:4

threatens 29:4

three-and-a-half 266:9

thrive 111:9 269:1 389:9
 439:8 456:22

throw 66:18 188:15
 299:16

Thursday 154:5,6 181:19
 183:13 301:3,24 308:11
 339:5 360:13,16 369:16
 403:16 425:3 437:22

Tiana 449:5

tickets 241:3

tier 249:10 411:12,13,22

tight 201:14

tiles 452:4

Tim 152:9

time 23:18 27:2 32:19
 34:7,15 35:2 36:16 43:19
 51:23 56:7 65:23 67:5,16
 69:13 72:17 75:6,13
 76:10 78:4 90:16,17 97:3,
 15 98:11 101:2 103:20
 108:8 114:9 118:21 120:2
 121:22 125:24 126:7
 150:15 153:14 159:7
 164:7 169:15 173:16
 182:18 186:9 195:4
 197:17 199:22 205:16
 213:16 217:2,4,7 218:13
 220:4,7 235:9 242:7
 243:20 258:8 260:2 262:5
 267:15 294:12 296:15
 307:17 310:7 311:11
 318:13 321:4,22 324:15
 327:17 328:23 329:3,4
 334:19 337:11 339:5,9

341:3 342:12 346:23
 348:21 358:15 362:8
 363:4,10 364:22 365:1
 375:14 384:1 386:14
 396:1,4,17 404:21 408:7
 409:13,17 413:21,22,24
 414:1 425:21 433:9
 438:15 443:11 444:24
 445:16 446:24 447:11
 449:17,18 464:15 472:4
 478:10

timeline 42:21 137:14
 219:13,14 295:22 296:6,
 11 297:12 356:2,5

timelines 407:9

times 19:10,13 36:13
 53:11 57:22 186:17
 224:11 266:7 330:8
 342:17 386:4

timing 106:20 205:2

tinted 470:24

tiny 429:22

tipping 41:8

tired 469:15 470:11

tirelessly 441:24

title 5:4 6:3,11 7:21

Title-1 474:7

titles 231:11

TNCS 65:20 66:16

today 9:13 10:11 11:21
 14:5 31:17 36:17 57:1
 74:22 85:9 96:9,11,12
 97:24 98:6 109:12 114:15
 138:21 152:23 157:13
 158:3 175:3 180:12
 183:22 184:12 185:14
 187:16,21 189:10 193:4
 195:17 217:11 224:20
 247:24 261:6 262:12
 292:13 316:11,18 319:4
 320:6 329:9 330:9

331:16,18,19 334:23 339:7,15 347:7 353:13 360:8,9,22 363:8 367:14 373:1 380:11 386:4 394:15 400:16 402:21 415:10,20 416:5 417:23 420:4 424:14 427:10 432:2 437:9 441:22 443:6 445:3,13 446:21 447:20 448:2 453:8 476:13,14 479:3,18 toilet 203:5 204:9 317:19 450:8 452:20,23 475:9 toilets 202:9 204:9 295:10 406:16 told 14:22 38:13 46:13 47:13 65:4 95:16 120:18, 23 121:2 148:17 207:6 241:18 250:11 258:19 265:12 449:17 450:2 472:15 tomorrow 137:18 181:16 183:6,9 205:6 331:13 344:15 421:12 ton 154:19 tone 144:9 tonight 473:22 Tony 17:22 94:20 96:2 tool 17:13,17 394:12 426:15 435:14 438:4 439:18 toolbox 39:13 tools 39:12 90:1 361:3 top 298:10 335:24 343:6 429:5 topic 11:22 274:16 topics 356:9 torn 428:24 Tosha 458:6 total 193:10 202:9 422:13	total-loss 199:7 totally 134:21 136:9 261:19 404:4 473:12 touch 291:6 377:5 tough 16:6 75:9 78:21 80:15 97:13 142:24 179:16 206:10 367:18 toughest 368:8 towels 321:2 tower 78:17 133:5 towers 6:23 49:23 track 143:8 364:23 462:19 trade 463:16 trade-offs 284:16 trades 262:22 tradition 27:4 traditional 23:1 387:24 trailers 74:13 trained 251:12 253:1 training 255:4,5 trajectory 370:15 transfer 133:23 245:13 transforming 188:23 transition 220:8 282:17 283:7 284:1 285:23 287:3,9 289:2 307:4 423:5 transitioned 219:4 326:13 transitioning 289:16 transitions 280:10 289:23 transparency 112:3,20 308:16 410:19 transparent 42:10 47:20 103:4 transportation 7:16 51:3 65:21 148:2,6 271:16	283:19 transporting 236:16 traumatized 149:7 364:21 traumatizing 364:12 travel 57:7,12 58:18 132:11 202:15 285:6 463:10 treat 149:17 treated 403:4 Treaty 352:9 trends 106:11 239:15 trick 339:11 tricks 339:12 triggered 55:7 326:18 triggers 313:15 trim 131:24 trip 70:4 146:5 231:11 trips 26:11 228:24 truancy 139:18 true 20:24 22:11 113:22 185:23 363:3 380:10 388:6 395:4 433:7 trust 21:5 262:6,7 314:18 363:17 364:3 404:8 410:17 421:8 428:11,12, 15 429:10,20,24 430:6 431:3 456:11 trusted 41:23 435:7 469:18 trusts 434:10 truth 55:4 232:15 322:4 tucked 397:3 Tuesday 479:4,10,18 Tuition 152:7 tune 133:24 462:24 463:11
---	---	--

turn 113:3 191:9 229:10 279:15 280:5 335:9 357:9 362:18 384:10 388:12 405:2 turnaround 249:5 turned 132:9 267:18 turning 387:2 turnover 134:5 Turzai 34:13,16 tutoring 283:18 tweak 274:8 two-way 118:11 type 91:1 187:1 311:16 313:3 341:16 345:4 386:12 423:13 460:12 typical 423:17 typically 217:3 243:1 U U.S. 57:6,8,11 58:17 68:3 Uber 53:18 Ubers 66:22 uh-huh 315:18 398:5 ultimately 21:10 219:22 382:5 unable 164:6 unacceptable 42:16,18 43:17 263:22 unapologetic 22:18 uncomfortable 294:10 448:10,13 unconstitutional 38:2,11 under- 137:5,11 under-enrolled 133:13 under-resourced 150:19 173:19	underachievement 205:19 346:12 underfunded 38:15 176:22 177:3 underfunding 40:16 41:4 72:2 129:10 165:5 underground 216:9 296:22 underneath 320:4 underperforming 137:5 150:19 173:20 underpopulated 469:9 understand 22:9 24:23 45:4 62:10 90:8 97:14 101:14 103:10 109:17 113:14 114:13 158:24 167:16,17,20 170:8 184:9,19 185:2 205:9 207:22 210:9,14 220:20 239:11 284:10 286:11 301:2,19 308:8 310:10 321:13 323:12 332:17,19 333:2,11,14 335:21 336:6 344:9 347:4,5,23 351:4,5, 10,17,18 363:22 368:14 374:2,15 376:17 377:4 380:19 382:22 383:4 390:14 420:9 435:21 453:8 understandable 329:12 understanding 101:21 114:4 171:9 204:24 208:17 235:3 254:16 302:23 304:7 346:14 368:2 381:2 400:3 understands 303:13 459:11 understood 200:3 218:5 351:21 353:20 364:8 381:13 underutilization 365:15	underutilized 191:20 377:3 384:19 393:7,8,11, 12 underwhelming 237:11 Undoubtedly 240:17 unexpectedly 378:13 unfair 413:4 unfold 433:6 unforeseen 130:18 unfunded 34:19 unhappy 352:15 Uniformity 61:24 63:7,21, 22 64:14 65:13 91:10 uniforms 396:23 unintended 259:19 union 44:23 157:20 263:1 union's 405:4 unique 90:16,17 250:21 254:22 255:1 296:20 406:12 UNITE 20:4 46:9 395:3,4, 22 428:22 united 28:20 123:18 228:14 299:15 394:9 427:13 432:11 451:1 units 63:3 239:19,22 275:21 university 13:20 83:21 84:9,14 119:9,13,23 123:13 146:20 188:14,22 189:18 191:2 200:15,16 238:2 271:11 unlike 282:19 unmodified 373:13 unsafe 453:4 unsatisfactory 209:12 276:10,15
--	--	---

unused 243:17 unwilling 206:10 312:2 347:7 367:14 369:2 upcoming 263:4 451:2 update 110:24 112:11 117:1 128:10 304:6 399:22 updated 120:2 126:19 156:20 updates 97:2 98:3 107:7, 14 116:19 219:10 264:8 328:22 329:2,3 upfront 149:19 upgrade 128:22 213:21 307:4 upgrades 307:8 upset 223:5 318:5 upstairs 292:14 464:23 urban 18:20 165:21 172:15,17 urge 433:21 urgency 179:2 204:22 urgent 320:21 407:2 432:13 urinals 295:11 user 58:2 usual 235:15,17,21,23 236:4 utilization 243:14 377:23 utilize 146:6	Valerie 316:16 Valles 135:23 valuable 455:23 valuation 298:3 vantage 191:3 variety 154:20 269:9 vehicles 397:2 399:5 vein 153:21 vendor 102:24 verification 398:22 verify 195:13 version 186:5 355:21 versus 87:23,24 200:2 vest 398:9 veteran 459:9 Vice 16:17 95:7,22,24 97:4 99:24 107:7,9 121:9 130:6 135:9 137:16,21 138:7,23 185:12 Victoria 444:22 view 64:18 77:14 202:5 441:12,20 viewing 26:20 31:10 views 28:12 200:13 village 72:22 103:4 violation 63:20 64:12,13 65:12 violent 264:20 virtue 325:1 vision 98:16,19,20 113:1 197:12,15 371:9 visit 201:21 399:7 400:2,8 visited 399:13 400:12 visiting 110:9 visits 102:3 110:11,17 283:19	visual 420:19 423:7 vital 110:3 Vocational 467:17 voice 108:16 222:4 411:18 424:9,18 427:11 431:9,21 432:9 436:10, 16,17 437:7 440:3 444:24 445:11 voices 109:9 316:11 320:7 void 427:21 volume 216:10,23 volunteer 368:8 413:18 volunteers 400:3 vote 107:3 114:5 154:4 178:16 181:24 232:18,24 247:19 280:17 307:23 309:16 310:13 313:14 314:1 329:14 331:12 334:20 338:24 339:6,16 349:1 356:6 360:12,16,17 382:23 386:1 403:7 404:8 421:12 425:2 432:3 433:15 voted 142:14 237:6 280:21 301:3 314:6,14 326:15 voters 432:15 votes 97:14 103:24 104:9 142:24 179:17 188:11 237:2,3 voting 102:19 107:2 301:22 308:11
V		W
vacancies 133:20 134:1 241:2 264:12 vacant 88:8,10 157:11 217:24 243:16 326:10 328:8		W.B. 144:11 wage 51:19 60:7,9 129:18 Wagner 342:14,15,17,22 354:14,15 355:12 362:20

wait 29:16 43:21 74:10 160:10 203:3 205:4 278:22 296:7 321:7 347:14,15 449:18 452:17 waited 48:15 waiting 115:10,14 400:19 414:11 437:24 444:15 449:22 walk 42:5 74:19 132:19 148:3 319:12 321:5,19 343:19,23 405:15 428:6 wall 275:2,3 Walton 453:23 454:3,6,11 455:5 457:19 458:2 wander 452:19 wanted 15:6 47:19 60:14 62:4 72:15 76:1 118:13 151:12 152:19 153:17,21 154:8 170:2 174:16,20 184:23 208:16 210:8 218:13 231:21 247:22 248:17 266:10,15,21 267:1 269:15 270:15 274:16 277:7 302:5,6 305:21 309:5 328:6 338:10 390:11,15 415:10 424:2 442:13 473:20 war 34:8,24 87:22 Ward 89:19 warehousing 468:17 Waring 378:20,21 384:4, 8,12,17,19 385:1,5,10 406:7 warm 316:13 Washington 53:12 172:6 waste 319:15 wasted 140:6 wasting 365:1 watching 54:22 62:11 72:11 330:18	water 141:14 149:20 319:9,12,14 321:10 450:9 452:3 Watlington 17:22 18:11 82:1 83:24 94:21 95:11 96:2,3 104:15 113:24 114:11 116:2 124:9,12,17 125:1,6,12,22 127:15,20 128:3,7 143:24 144:4,21 145:1 147:7 148:21 149:4 150:5,10 151:12 157:6 158:10,13,21 159:5 160:3,17,21 161:1,9 162:15,18 163:9,13,17 166:20 167:3,19 171:20 174:1,2 175:11,12 177:15 180:4 185:11 186:3 191:5,16 193:19 194:7,14 195:1,8 196:14,18 197:7 198:16,22 199:6,20 201:8 204:18 205:1 207:19 210:23 211:4,8 212:8,14, 19 213:3 216:21 218:16 220:5 223:24 224:22 228:2 229:4,8,22 231:18 237:16 241:19 242:5,12 244:20 246:4,9 247:3 251:5 252:24 255:8,20 261:19 263:3 266:3 270:2 271:19 274:18 275:7 277:5 281:16 282:1,3 284:19 286:3,9,14,19 287:5 288:1 290:9 291:23 293:13 295:15 297:22 299:6 300:16 302:2,11, 15,21 303:5,21 304:20 312:17 313:6,10,14,21 323:18 324:6,21 325:1, 17,23 326:3 327:15,19 328:21 337:3 353:7,15,19 354:5 355:11 357:12 358:7 359:16 362:1,6 363:2,21 364:7 365:6,10, 14 371:9,12,13 372:15 373:10,22 376:19 383:8, 21 384:16 385:17 387:6, 10,14,15 388:4,11,18	389:2,12,16,21 390:3,7, 20 391:10,20 392:6,10 393:15 395:7,16,20 396:11 398:24 472:12 Watlington's 18:21 32:2 98:9 wave 165:16 ways 146:1 239:15 240:18,19 312:9 348:12 350:13 380:16 456:8,13 weakness 312:7 wear 445:2 website 162:22 192:14 193:24 194:12,22,23 459:24 week 21:16,17,20 43:3 44:1 49:17 72:12 118:16 154:5 162:9 181:24 182:1 188:2 202:4 205:7 285:5 296:7,9 weekends 270:23 272:10 273:13 274:5 weeks 356:5 412:7 425:16 weigh 334:18 335:4,5 weighing 339:15 welcomed 455:19 welcomes 188:23 welder 206:17 wellbeing 398:8 457:2 wellness 427:17 west 41:21 141:7 189:16 190:6,21 193:1 238:24 239:8 428:4 437:6 454:15 459:3 Whip 11:18 231:1 whistles 214:3 white 441:6 454:6 who've 115:16 390:17
--	--	---

wholeheartedly 16:20 17:15	183:1,15 184:14 189:6 199:18,19 207:22 212:23 218:17 224:14 229:24 242:22 243:4 251:18,19 259:6 263:12 267:4 270:22,23 271:16 273:10 275:23 277:16 280:22 281:3,6,10 283:1 285:9 287:1 289:22 298:17 307:13 312:10,19 314:15 322:18 323:5 330:11 337:19,21 338:5 352:22 355:17 356:2,12 359:9 362:23 363:18 366:1,11 373:6 374:9 375:3 379:21 394:21 395:23 401:15 402:9 405:22 407:7 412:16 420:7 424:23 429:6,11,12,21 430:10 437:19 440:4 441:18,24 442:10 451:10,16 457:15 458:1 462:8,9	works 271:23 347:10 443:4 461:13
whomever 52:3	world 39:1 73:24 74:3 174:20 264:15 338:6 351:15	
wildlife 253:19	world's 188:16	
Williams 89:14	worries 211:5	
willingness 292:8 293:10	worry 317:18 413:5 471:5	
Wilson 458:7	Worrying 317:23	
win 342:7 405:7	worse 172:19 238:8 449:24 465:7	
win-win 146:10	worth 114:19 169:16,17 405:19	
window 343:6	worthy 453:19	
windows 275:22 410:10 470:24	wound 51:6	
wins 419:12	wow 23:5	
winter 209:13	wrap 178:2,7 181:15 288:7 408:4	
withdrawn 125:23	wrapping 218:6	
witnesses 129:4	wrath 247:12	
woes 50:21	write 65:8,9 464:14,15 470:7	
Wolf 67:4	writing 155:8 175:4 177:13 268:16 272:19 360:14 369:8 395:15 448:12,16	
women 214:4	written 59:11,12 61:5 63:10,11,17 409:5	
won 59:5 64:10 373:17	wrong 38:6 55:1 212:20 245:17 302:4 353:2 364:13,21 394:2 416:19, 20	
wonderful 152:17 261:5 441:20	wrote 64:15 71:10	
wondering 339:1 469:8		
word 68:2 76:3 330:6 459:19 469:1		
words 70:6 120:5 361:19 455:1 460:11		
work 15:18 18:7,22 21:9 29:1 40:14 57:15,23 69:16 77:5 79:1,8 80:13 84:4 86:7 87:16 91:16 92:16,17 94:2 97:2,18 98:15 99:6,10 101:18 108:9 110:13,18,20 112:8 114:3,4,17 115:4,21 119:24 123:10 151:19 152:15,18 167:13 175:8, 19,20,21 182:11,24		
worked 45:6 55:14 68:10, 22 81:3 152:6 170:6 175:1 256:1 346:22 426:10		
worker 439:5		
workers 395:22 425:10 438:8 439:4		
workforce 51:15,16 88:13 477:3		
working 19:1 41:5 47:2 62:24 69:1 80:19 83:10 86:5,22 89:3 118:14 139:18 140:16 185:22 202:19 211:17 212:17 215:23 216:6,14 217:15 240:12 247:16 262:5 263:15 270:17,20 275:18 283:10 290:16 295:2 297:20 317:23 321:18 329:17 333:15 356:20 404:11,15 406:16 418:12 451:23 453:20 466:14		
	year 5:8,11 8:13 9:18,20, 21 16:5 20:22 21:11,14, 15 22:7 24:14 35:6 36:3	

44:19 59:20 66:8 100:17
 110:8 117:5 118:16 119:7
 124:21 128:21 130:11
 134:4,11 135:7 153:6,7
 156:17 157:12 161:6,21
 162:23 163:5 196:7
 207:17 219:23 223:13
 233:22,23 234:21,22
 235:6 243:3 249:3 256:19
 264:3 267:4,5 268:7,9
 272:14 287:10 295:14
 300:13 307:16 316:20
 318:14 346:24 348:17
 350:10 354:18,19,21
 370:13 371:21 411:15,22
 417:18,24 418:10 419:3,
 16,17,20 421:5 426:6,9
 441:15 451:10,12 452:1
 454:12 455:9,11,17,19,22
 456:18,24 457:10,11
 462:5 474:20 476:12,17
 477:18,19 478:1,18

year-over-year 129:3

year-round 124:21

yearly 104:20

years 5:15 8:11 15:21
 24:22 29:10 30:7 37:16
 38:11,18 40:15 65:20
 73:17 81:12,13,18 88:11
 101:6 117:10 118:12
 128:19,22 134:15 135:2,
 19 147:20 153:9 165:15
 170:24 172:6 179:6 204:3
 206:20 233:10 239:5,6
 242:1 255:22 260:24
 266:9 267:19 270:6
 282:11 311:19 316:22
 349:21 351:2 354:17
 369:19 378:7 404:16
 410:7 416:10 422:24
 430:5 451:13 462:14
 463:5,20 465:17 473:8,9
 476:18

yellow 135:4

yesterday 53:21 95:17
 99:11 139:11 148:20
 152:20,21 153:23 154:3,7
 180:13 186:16 187:15
 201:11 202:24 209:17
 225:7 226:19 248:16
 329:9 330:9 331:16
 361:18

York 53:14 54:13,17 68:4
 176:14

you-all 180:22 183:20
 184:13 207:24 279:6
 321:24 322:1 365:4 367:7
 368:20 422:4 466:10
 467:12 469:24 470:15

young 3:4,5 71:6 84:16
 91:18 92:1 98:24 108:6
 117:8,15 140:22 144:17
 147:23 199:13 234:17
 237:24 243:1 263:18
 289:14,15 294:8 322:10
 343:3 352:11 358:11
 365:23 367:3 369:18
 374:23,24 383:10,22
 384:15 386:2,5,15 387:1,
 17 388:6,10,15,16,20
 389:3,14,17 390:10,22
 391:16,21 392:4,8,12
 393:19 394:5 403:9
 455:16 457:3

Young's 124:5 127:3

Youngblood 66:3

younger 465:12

youngest 204:11 452:13
 453:15

Z

Zach 451:18

zip 26:8

Zone 124:16

zoning 6:6