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ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON EDUCATION

PUBLIC HEARING
ON GOVERNANCE OF THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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A P P E A R A N C E S:

CATHERINE T. NOLAN, Chairwoman,
Assembly Standing Committee on Education

MICHAEL BENEDETTO, Member of Assembly

AUDREY I. PHEFFER, Member of Assembly

RORY I. LANCMAN, Member of Assembly

ANDREW HEVESI, Member of Assembly

MARK WEPRIN, Member of Assembly

DANIEL J. O'DONNELL, Member of Assembly

BARBARA M. CLARK, Member of Assembly

MICHELLE TITUS, Member of Assembly

MARGARET M. MARKEY, Member of Assembly

JEFFRION L. AUBRY, Member of Assembly

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2 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Good morning. We have
3 a very nice crowd here today, so let me
4 officially welcome everyone and convene this
5 hearing of the Assembly Committee on Education.

6 My name is Catherine Nolan and I'm an
7 assemblywoman and I'm the chair on the Committee
8 on Education and I'm here today with a number of
9 my colleagues and a number of very important
10 witnesses and parents and others.

11 I want to just briefly, for the record,
12 note that this hearing will review the impact of
13 governance changes which granted mayoral control
14 of the New York City school system. It is the
15 first of five hearings on this topic, and one
16 will be held in each borough. There is a hearing
17 notice available at the desk out front. I want
18 to thank Deb McDonough and the team who handles
19 our hearings for making sure that all this
20 information is available and of course you can
21 check any number of websites and other things.

22 I just want to say by way of a quick
23 opening, many of you are more familiar with these
24 things than I, even though I've been fortunate to
25 have been a member of the legislature for many

2 years and a parent of a fifth grade student, it's
3 a complex subject, and in the short time that
4 I've chaired the committee, I feel very
5 privileged and grateful for the assistance of so
6 many of you and my colleagues, all of whom are
7 quite expert, but just for those that need the
8 review, in 2002 and 2003, after many many years
9 of a so-called decentralized system, the state
10 legislature took action to create a number of
11 changes which would, in the common phrase, grant
12 mayoral control - grant control of the New York
13 City school system to the mayor.

14 Both the laws that do that expire June
15 30th, 2009. We hope to have an extensive review
16 of this critical topic. We just ask as we start
17 that everyone have patience and mutual respect.
18 We're going to try to accommodate everyone. I
19 would ask that people leave the cell phone use to
20 a minimum or go outside with it. We're going to
21 try, as I said, to continue to work together in a
22 common way.

23 I just want to acknowledge first, we're
24 going to have a word of welcome from our borough
25 president, but we've also been joined by a number

2 of members of the assembly. From the Education
3 Committee and the chair of our recently formed
4 subcommittee on special education is Michael
5 Benedetto from the Bronx. Thank you, Michael,
6 very much, and an expert teacher in his own right
7 for many many years.

8 Also with us is the woman who was
9 actually on the task force in 2003 that moved
10 forward with a number of recommendations
11 regarding parents involved within the school
12 system and that's our good friend and colleague,
13 Assemblywoman Audrey Pfeffer.

14 We've also been joined by a newer member
15 of the legislature who has been very dynamic on
16 this issue, Rory Lancman, we thank you very much,
17 and, in the audience, Assemblywoman Vivian Cook,
18 a great friend of many of us for many years.
19 We're glad that she's here as well.

20 One of the things that I do want to point
21 out that many members of the legislature has had
22 individual meetings with their community, with
23 their CDCs, with the PTAs to generate comment on
24 this issue. So we will try to hear everyone in
25 one way or the other. You can submit written

2 testimony, you can send us an e-mail, you can
3 participate. I know that Assemblywoman Deborah
4 Glick, for example, had over 70 people at her
5 roundtable in Manhattan, so there are going to be
6 many ways for people to comment and voice their
7 concerns.

8 I do want to point out that the New York
9 Times in June of 2006 talked about "Where are we
10 Now?" and that was two years ago. Longstanding
11 problems in special education, entrenched failure
12 in most middle schools, severe overcrowding in
13 many high schools, persistently large class sizes
14 citywide, a widespread feeling of disempowerment
15 among many parent groups.

16 This particular hearing, although we
17 can't make it a perfect match, we're trying to
18 have a focus on that last sentence, parent
19 groups. Where do we feel parents are with this
20 system? What do parents want to see?

21 We've been joined, and I'm very happy, by
22 a number of people, including Assemblyman Danny
23 O'Donnell, who came in from Manhattan who is a
24 member of the committee, Assemblyman Andrew
25 Hevesi, and Assemblyman Mark Weprin. So we will

2 have everybody acknowledged.

3 I just want to make one comment about
4 parental control issues if I could. Full
5 governance reform in New York City did
6 significantly change the way that parents
7 interacted with local schools, community school
8 districts, and citywide school governance.

9 The 2003 law created something called
10 community education councils. The
11 responsibilities were integrated into the local
12 school district, and this new structure was
13 designed to give parents a meaningful role, with
14 accountability, transparency, accessibility and
15 partnership. So that is what this hearing will
16 attempt to discover and discuss today.

17 We really appreciate people's comments,
18 we appreciate the work that so many people have
19 done. We're going to start off after a word of
20 welcome by our borough president with our public
21 advocate who had an outstanding commission that
22 reviewed many aspects of mayoral control. I just
23 want to end with a quote from our speaker, Shelly
24 Silver, who said when we announced these
25 hearings, "We review the issue of mayoral

2 control, as we review it, we are mindful of the
3 real concerns of parents regarding the lack of
4 parental impact. I anticipate an open
5 collaboration and review process that will allow
6 parents, educators, the community, and other
7 stakeholders all to come to the table."

8 So with that, I would like to introduce,
9 for a word of welcome, our wonderful borough
10 president, Helen Marshall. We had her with us
11 because she was an assembly member for so many
12 years. I know that she can't stay, but we're so
13 glad that she has, really, as always, the staff
14 of Borough Hall has been so welcoming.

15 Thank you, Helen.

16 BOROUGH PRESIDENT MARSHALL: Good
17 morning, everyone. Welcome to Borough Hall. You
18 pay the rent, you pay our salaries, this is your
19 facility. It's a pleasure to welcome
20 Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan and other members of
21 the Education Committee from the State Assembly.

22 This is the first, of course, in a series
23 of hearings that will take place throughout our
24 city and I'm delighted that you began in Queens
25 because our parents have a lot to say.

2 As many of you know, I am a teacher by
3 profession and know firsthand the importance of
4 ensuring student achievement of all our students.

5 As borough president of 2.3 million people,
6 277,000 students, and 310 school buildings, there
7 is no more vital area than working to enhance the
8 lives of our children and the residence and
9 community than by ensuring the best possible
10 education, it's our real insurance for the
11 future.

12 No issue impacts more on all of my
13 constituents. During the past year, civic
14 associations, community boards, and community
15 education councils have addressed this issue and
16 forwarded their recommendations to me. I have
17 testified in front of the Commission on School
18 Governance created by our public advocate, Betsy
19 Gotbaum, and joined by my parent advisory board
20 and Mrs. Gotbaum and her committee, her testimony
21 from members of my board.

22 Dmytro Fedkowskyj, the Queens member and
23 the panel of education policy and the chairperson
24 of my parent advisory board will testify later in
25 the day. Together, we will try to summarize and

2 address the comments and concerns of many parents
3 who participated in our forums.

4 I commend the mayor and chancellor for
5 the many innovative and creative initiatives. I
6 applaud the focus on Cedar Schools, and applaud
7 the way Chancellor Klein has discussed the
8 inequities in our system that often shortchange
9 the students who could least afford it. I salute
10 the department's efforts to build new schools and
11 to provide a seat for every child and for many
12 other significant initiatives.

13 However, many parents remain concerned
14 about the lack of input they have in their
15 children's education, and objective decisions
16 concerning public education in New York City are
17 made without adequate information and meaningful
18 public input. Today, I'll highlight six areas
19 that I recommend to be strengthened and defined
20 in the renewed law to address these concerns.

21 One, strengthening the role of local
22 superintendents, increased authority of the
23 community district superintendent to enable this
24 person to coordinate and evaluate instruction in
25 district schools.

2 School district offices must be
3 reestablished and should have adequate staff to
4 commensurate with their responsibilities to hire,
5 supervise and evaluate principals who operate
6 schools within their geographic boundaries of
7 their respective district.

8 District offices should be a place where
9 parents can go when they have a question or
10 complaint that could be solved on the school
11 level.

12 Two, strengthening and redefining the
13 role of the school leadership team. In 2007,
14 principals were given more direct control over
15 personnel and budget matters and the role of the
16 SLT which was diminished in many schools,
17 however, in a recent ruling, New York State
18 Education Department Commissioner Richard Mills
19 found that New York City Department of Education
20 may properly change the rules governing parent
21 participation in school leadership teams.

22 Strengthening the role of the borough
23 panel of education policy in order to ensure that
24 the borough panel for education policy is
25 represented and it has a constituency to serve

2 and is empowered to exercise independence on
3 behalf of panels. Each one of them must be a
4 panel, each of the borough presidents are
5 representatives, and direct resolutions regarding
6 community issues to its borough representative on
7 the PEP.

8 The role of the parent coordinator should
9 be acknowledged in the State Education Law, since
10 they serve as a primary point of contact to
11 families in New York City public schools. Parent
12 coordination should report to the chief family
13 engagement officer. The chief family engagement
14 officer should be accountable for training parent
15 coordinators and submitting a quarterly report of
16 parent coordinating activities to the PEP.

17 Five, each borough should have its own
18 high school education council and special
19 education council. The needs of high school
20 communities and District 75 community of families
21 are currently disadvantaged by the citywide
22 structure of two councils intended to serve them.

23 The needs and voices of families within
24 each borough are diluted by the lack of adequate
25 representation. They, too, should direct policy

2 advice and report to the borough representatives
3 of the panel for education policy. This will
4 ensure that the needs and voices of both
5 constituencies are represented. I am not
6 objecting to mayoral control, but I think we need
7 to sharpen it up and we've had this opportunity
8 to see how it operates and we're going to be
9 listening today to what your suggestions are.

10 Each member of the panel for education
11 policy should serve at least one full term to
12 ensure continuity of services and policy.

13 Thank you very much for this opportunity
14 to address you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you, Helen.

16 Our next lead witness, and we want to
17 thank her again for that warm welcome, is the
18 public advocate, one of three citywide elected
19 officials, the very Honorable Betsy Gotbaum.

20 I just want to say on the record how
21 really impressed I have been with the tremendous
22 work of her commission, an independent commission
23 that had meetings in all the boroughs, that had
24 parent forums, meetings in the evening, weekend.

25 I met with some of her commission members just

2 informally, really every way that you can present
3 yourself to the public to try to solicit input,
4 whether it was through a website and other
5 things, Betsy has done it as she has always done
6 it over the course of a long career, so we thank
7 you Public Advocate Gotbaum and we welcome you
8 today.

9 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: Thank you and
10 good morning everybody, members of the panel.
11 It's nice to see you all.

12 Thank you, Assemblywoman Nolan, and the
13 rest of the committee for inviting me to this
14 hearing and I think you're going to see me at a
15 lot of the hearings because, clearly, this is a
16 very very important issue for me.

17 As Cathy mentioned, in the fall of 2007,
18 I appointed a commission to independently assess
19 school governance in New York City, and this is
20 the result of that. Hello everybody back there.

21 You have a copy and we'll bring you more. I'm
22 also very proud to say that this report was
23 picked up by the Brookings Institute and they
24 published a book on it, and the book is just out.

25 It's title, School Governance in New York City -

2 "When Mayors Take Charge," I'm sorry, "Assessing
3 School Governance in New York City." So we will
4 bring you copies of that book also at the next
5 hearing.

6 The commission, as Cathy noted, had heard
7 hours of testimony from many many individuals,
8 organizations, representatives of broad and
9 diverse constituencies. We commissioned eight
10 academic papers from top experts on the issue of
11 school governance so the commission could better
12 understand and learn from the experiences in
13 other states.

14 And, as I said, the book "When Mayors
15 Take Charge," is a book that's a companion to the
16 commission's final report, the articles are in
17 there, the leading expert articles, and there are
18 two new articles about school governance,
19 specifically about New York City and mayoral
20 control. Those are new articles that nobody has
21 seen before this book was published by the
22 Brookings Institute.

23 Overall, I agreed with what the
24 commission found and their recommendations that
25 we should keep mayoral control, but the law must

2 be amended or tightened, or whatever it is you
3 call it, to ensure greater public accountability
4 and more meaningful input from parents and the
5 community.

6 In order to maintain mayoral control, I
7 believe the mayor must have a majority of
8 appoints with a panel on education policy. But I
9 also support the idea of fixed terms for its
10 members, and I also believe that the panel should
11 be comprised of people with relevant educational
12 backgrounds and a stake in the education system.

13 I am opposed to one recommendation, and
14 that was that the panel for education policy be
15 involved in collective bargaining. I think that
16 that has implications for other contracts in the
17 city that really aren't something that the panel
18 for education policy should be involved with, but
19 that's something, again, that should be debated.

20 These are all issues to be debated, I would like
21 to point out.

22 We certainly need more oversight over the
23 finances and the data that is produced by the
24 Department of Education. I enthusiastically
25 endorse the idea that the independent budget

2 office could serve as an outside evaluator to
3 monitor and assess the data produced by the
4 Department of Education, such as test scores and
5 graduation rates.

6 In addition, to look and examine budget
7 data and budget information; right now it is
8 extremely difficult for those of us who ask for
9 budget information, not only to get it, but to be
10 able to analyze it because sometimes we're told
11 to look at the website, and I don't know if any
12 of you have been able to decipher the website on
13 budgetary issues from the Department of
14 Education, but I would give you a big prize if
15 you can come and explain it to be because I'm
16 having trouble understanding it.

17 Because the DOE spends billions of public
18 dollars, I do believe that they should follow the
19 same procurement procedures that every other city
20 agency does, which means they must be audited by
21 the city controller, "must be" audited by the
22 city controller, and the state controller.

23 To better - to get more accountability
24 and have more capacity for parental input and
25 information getting, the local geographic school

2 districts, which were created years ago, and
3 which are in the legislation as the borough
4 president said, must be reestablished and
5 reinvigorated. Parents desperately need help
6 when they have problems or questions. A central
7 call center like the one the mayor just announced
8 at his State of the City is a step in the right
9 direction, but it can't substitute for viable
10 local resources. Superintendents must be
11 accountable to their districts. They must be
12 able to supervise their principals.

13 I've been in many, many, many schools,
14 and I can tell you that almost every principal I
15 meet wants to be supervised and helped by their
16 local district superintendents. That's not
17 happening and I think that's something that we
18 all need to take a very close look at and make
19 sure that there's a geographical entity where
20 parents can go to find out about their specific
21 problem in their local school and where the local
22 superintendent has staff and capacity to help
23 parents, to help principals, something that does
24 not exist right now.

25 I know it is very very difficult to

2 legislate greater opportunities for community and
3 parental input. By recommending that the parent
4 panel be given more independence, district
5 offices reestablished the eligibility criteria
6 for the community district education councils to
7 be expanded, and that the state legislature
8 established standards of meaningful public input.

9 The Commission report really lays the
10 ground work for stronger community participation,
11 but we're not going to tell you we couldn't
12 figure out how to make for a better community
13 parental input. It's very difficult to describe,
14 to legislate, to know what is the right thing to
15 do. What is the most effective way to have
16 parental input and community input? I think that
17 it's something that needs to be discussed and
18 we'll leave it to your wisdom to figure it out.

19 We do think and we do recommend that the
20 state's contract for excellence model, the
21 contract for excellence model that they use for
22 parental involvement is a pretty good start. I
23 think that some of you have had experience with
24 it in the way in which it has been set up from
25 the contract for excellence from the state is

2 very very good. I'll just very briefly say what
3 it is and I think that any proposal that has had
4 large impacts on the school should follow this
5 kind of process. It is public hearings in every
6 borough, adequate public notice of proposed
7 decisions. These are decisions that have impact
8 on a school, and which have an impact on a
9 community.

10 For example, the closing of a school,
11 surely that should have public input and there
12 should be some kind of process where the public,
13 a, finds out that a school is going to be closed
14 and how to have the capacity to discuss that.

15 Hearings must be made available to the
16 public in a variety of languages, in the media,
17 in the Department of Education offices. Elements
18 of this approach, adequate notice, consultation
19 with or comment by parents and relevant
20 stakeholders, public forums, can be incorporated
21 at the community school district level, the CEC
22 and school levels were lesser citywide decisions.

23 According to our commission's report, an
24 increased capacity for change is the single most
25 important and measurable example of mayoral

2 control. The New York City school system has
3 seen more change in the last few years than it
4 has in generations. We are now at the point that
5 we can determine which changes will improve
6 school governance. But there is a change upon
7 which we must insist there be accountability.

8 Right now, where is the real
9 accountability? An election every four years is
10 not enough. The mayor himself said, boo me at a
11 parade if you don't like what I'm doing. That,
12 to me, is not accountability, and I think that we
13 have to figure out a way that there is more
14 accountability for actions and decisions that
15 have implications for our city. Where was the
16 accountability when the school bus routes were
17 changed? Where was the accountability?

18 There will be those who disagree with the
19 findings of our commission's report, and there is
20 no question that this report reflects the views
21 of stakeholders expressed throughout the process.

22 Again, I want to emphasize, these are just
23 suggestions for you all to have discussion, for
24 you all to come up with suggestions of ideas and
25 recommendations to the legislature itself as to

2 what we're going to do to make the school
3 governance law better.

4 Again, in summary, I do think that
5 mayoral control should be kept. I think it's
6 important to keep it. I think there have been
7 some good changes and some good things happening,
8 but I do think that we need to figure out a way
9 to have better parental input, better community
10 input, more accountability, more transparency,
11 and certainly an independent office that looks at
12 data and budgetary information.

13 Thank you very much and I'll be available
14 for questions if you have any.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you, Betsy.
16 Let me just continue with a little bit of
17 acknowledgement and housekeeping and then we'll
18 have a question or two.

19 We've been joined by a very special and
20 important leader here today and that's the regent
21 for Queens County, Regent Geraldine Chapey, thank
22 you. You can stand up for an applause, you had
23 so many years of service, you should be
24 recognized. I mentioned colleagues as they came
25 in, but we've also been joined by a very long-

2 standing member of the education committee,
3 Assemblywoman Barbara Clark, thank you, you can
4 clap for her too, and also a dynamic member of
5 the legislature who has young children as I do,
6 so she experiences some of these things firsthand
7 and that's Assemblywoman Michele Titus. Thank
8 you very much.

9 I want to - it's very special for me,
10 being a Queens member of the legislature, to have
11 the first hearing in Queens, and I think it's a
12 level of the commitment of the Queens delegation
13 that so many of my colleagues are here, both in
14 the audience and on the panel who represent
15 Queens, but I would like to start, if there is a
16 question, with the members of the actual
17 committee.

18 Assemblyman Benedetto, Assemblyman
19 O'Donnell, and Assemblywoman Clark, we'll start
20 with you and then we would move on.

21 Mike, anything you want to ask?

22 ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: No, not right
23 now, but I just want to compliment the
24 chairperson for calling these hearings. It's an
25 important subject and must be discussed and

2 hashed out, and I think by today's participation,
3 we'll see that these hearings, there's going to
4 be a lot of input into us, and be able to get
5 some good suggestions to move ahead.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Assemblyman
7 O'Donnell, question?

8 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: Yes, I would
9 just like to commend the public advocate. I've
10 read your report, I think it's extraordinarily
11 thorough and extraordinarily helpful and will
12 serve as a very good starting point for us to fix
13 what is obviously a problem throughout the city.

14 Thank you for being here.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Barbara, anything,
16 question? I'm sure you're familiar with Betsy's
17 report.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I haven't read the
19 entire report in detail. I do have a quick
20 question. The details of what the changes could
21 be, or should be, based on your report and your
22 opinion, can you just give us a quick brief on
23 what those were?

24 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: Yes, in
25 summary - first of all, sort of the overriding

2 summation would be I am for mayoral control, but
3 I do think there are areas that the legislature
4 must look at very carefully and fix the law in a
5 way that certain things will happen. For
6 example, there needs to be better checks and
7 balances on certain things that happen at the
8 Department of Education.

9 For example, when there are big decisions
10 made that really affect a community, school
11 closings, for example, I actually think of social
12 promotion, the use of cell phones, these are
13 issues that when they occurred in the department,
14 I'm sure your office has heard as much as my
15 office heard from parents on both sides of the
16 issue, but they felt they had no way of any kind
17 of input as to what they felt or what they felt
18 was right for their kids. So better checks and
19 balances, more accountability, and, as I said,
20 maybe you weren't here, Barbara, more
21 accountability. I don't believe that an election
22 every four years is accountability. I think you
23 have to have accountability for certain things
24 that happen. The school bus route fiasco, and
25 that's the most poignant one that I can remember,

2 when the bus routes were changed February, three
3 years ago, and there were so many inconveniences
4 at best happening to parents and children, there
5 was no accountability. What heads rolled? What
6 happened? Did we ever hear what the results of
7 that were? No. I think that's wrong. I think
8 we have to have a system where there's some
9 accountability to people like me, a citywide
10 elected, to the public, to the assembly, I don't
11 know that - that is something for debate,
12 something for you all to debate.

13 Finally, I do believe that there should
14 be an independent office that looks at the budget
15 and looks at the data and analyzes the data and
16 the budget. Actually, Chancellor Klein, when he
17 was here before our commission said he felt that
18 that was definitely something that he needed to
19 do.

20 Right now it's very difficult for people,
21 city controller, and public advocate, for us to
22 get information on the budget. It's very
23 difficult for us to analyze that information and
24 I think we need to figure out a way to make that
25 information, budgetary information, contract

2 information much more transparent, and make the
3 department much more accountable.

4 And the other one was, make sure that the
5 district system, the 32 district offices be
6 reestablished in a way that the district
7 superintendents supervise their principals, that
8 they have staff and capacity for parents in those
9 districts to be able to go and get information
10 and to be able to give information. I don't
11 believe that's happening right now.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: So mayoral control
13 to you would mean everything would sort of go
14 back to the way it was and that the mayor will
15 only have the ability to appoint the chancellor?
16 That's what it sounds like to me.

17 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: No, no. I'm
18 saying quite the contrary. I'm saying the
19 education panel, that the mayor will have most of
20 the appointments on that panel, but the only
21 difference will be is that the panel will serve
22 fixed terms, and that's the panel that sets
23 educational policy. But I do believe that there
24 needs to be some accountability, some more
25 accountability. I mean, I sort of have to ask

2 you, the best example is the bus route fiasco,
3 who was accountable for that? What happened?
4 I'm sure, Barbara, knowing you, you got a lot of
5 calls about children, you know, left in the
6 streets, or on the streets at 6:30 in the morning
7 and no bus came. I mean, we did. Who was
8 accountable for that? I do believe we have to
9 put a system -

10 I'm not saying you take - you just have
11 to put a system in of more checks and balances so
12 we know who is doing what and how you can fix it.

13 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. Audrey,
15 did you have a question?

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PHEFFER: No.

17 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Rory, do you have a
18 question? Mark? Go ahead.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: Betsy, thank you
20 for being here. I'm confused on the same point
21 that Barbara is a little bit. I heard so much of
22 what you talked about today, but when you talk
23 about accountability and the school, I agree that
24 that was a fiasco, and I'm sure the Department of
25 Education would agree that that was a fiasco, the

2 school bus, but what do you mean by - what kind
3 of accountability would you see? I mean, there
4 is accountability, but-

5 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: No, possibly I
6 wasn't clear about that, I apologize. If you
7 have a district superintendent who is responsible
8 in a district, and if certain actions and
9 decisions are then presented to that particular
10 community - for example, we're going to change
11 the bus routes throughout the city, how does that
12 affect your district, your district, your
13 district, how is that going to affect it? You
14 have a hearing about that so people know that
15 it's coming and people know what's going to
16 happen, and they can weigh in and say, no, I
17 don't want it; yes, I want it. The ultimate
18 decision will be for the district superintendent
19 and then ultimately the chancellor, but there
20 will be a chance for public input and for the -
21 in that case it just happened, and it happened in
22 February.

23 By the way, I suggested in September that
24 before you do it, changing the bus routes, that
25 you do a pilot project throughout the city

2 possibly at a time when it wouldn't be so
3 difficult for children to get around like in the
4 spring, you can do a pilot project in Staten
5 Island or in Queens because it's more residential
6 and there are larger distances, see how it works.

7 What I am really saying is that you have
8 some system where there is open discussion of
9 those kinds of actions.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: It's more access
11 for the parents and for the community as opposed
12 to some accountability directly, but having -
13 it's knowing where to go and having a system
14 locally.

15 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: Yes, I'm sorry
16 I wasn't clear. I also do think when there's a
17 catastrophe like there was, I'm not saying there
18 wouldn't be catastrophes, there has to - some
19 heads have to roll.

20 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Mark's question
21 prompted another, and that's fine.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: Good morning, it's
23 good to see you. I read your report. It was
24 very helpful to me in framing the issue, but I
25 just want to follow up on this notion of

2 accountability and make sure that we're
3 understanding each other.

4 Accountability, as you understand it, is
5 more than if somebody screws up, somebody gets
6 fired. Accountability is also on the front end
7 of the process, that in the formulation and in
8 the creation of policy that the policy makers at
9 the Department of Education and the mayor's
10 office be accountable to run their ideas by and
11 in consultation with parents and the community
12 and elected officials and whatever structure that
13 is.

14 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: Assemblyman
15 Lancman, very well said. I wish I had said it as
16 well as you did.

17 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Let me ask a final
18 thing, Betsy, just about the school leadership
19 teams.

20 Yesterday in Albany I understand
21 Chancellor Klein spoke about the need to improve
22 the school leadership teams and, of course, he
23 has to, because the State Commissioner of
24 Education said that he wasn't doing it the way it
25 should be done based on some other laws that go

2 back to the '90s to try to have a role for
3 parents on the school leadership teams.

4 Now, in your report, you call for a
5 reaffirmation of that role.

6 Do you have a finding you want to share
7 with us because we're trying to focus today on
8 the role of the parents?

9 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: I think, as I
10 recall, in the Commission report the re-
11 invigorating, the reestablishing school
12 leadership teams is a very important thing to do.

13 I didn't get into the details of that in this
14 presentation, but I do believe it's important. I
15 think it needs to be done. I believe at the
16 school base it needs to be strengthened. I also
17 believe that they should be given some resources
18 to be able to run their school leadership teams
19 as well as the CEC should have resources and some
20 training to know how to accomplish what they need
21 to accomplish.

22 Cathy, I will be able to give you more
23 detail on that.

24 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: That's fine. We'll
25 follow up.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Can I ask one
3 quick question about the school leadership? The
4 school leadership team, are you aware that they
5 get paid, the members of the school leadership
6 teams?

7 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: No, I'm not
8 aware of that. Are they all getting paid?

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I'm aware of that.
10 It's a small stipend.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I understand it's
12 a small stipend but it's an incentive.

13 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: Some of them
14 don't work - in some schools there are no school
15 leadership teams.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I understand, but
17 in some schools there's no PTA either.

18 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: Right.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: That's the
20 difficulties - when you get into the parent
21 thing, you're talking to the right person because
22 I was a PTA lady most of my life. I called
23 myself the PTA lady in the state legislature, but
24 here's the question.

25 It's very very difficult, and I never

2 stop trying to get a parent involved in their
3 children's education because it is critical to
4 the children getting a great education, not
5 required, but it helps.

6 But getting a parent to participate
7 sometimes is like pulling teeth, because parents
8 believe the system is supposed to educate their
9 children, and they're supposed to be just a
10 support or a minimal support, and that's the
11 issue.

12 So are we being real when we're talking
13 about parent participation as the ultimate, yes,
14 it is the ultimate. I fought to get parents on
15 school boards because I believe they would have
16 the vested interest in their children, because
17 they're the parent of those children.

18 So I wanted the school boards to be
19 parents because I got tired of the school boards
20 being patronage mills, so we got that, and I told
21 the chancellor, I don't want the school boards to
22 be minimalized because - that was made clear and
23 I got complaints about parents not having enough
24 input, but I'm just curious to know what can you
25 do if a parent doesn't participate?

2 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: I think what I
3 was trying to say is that it's one of the areas
4 that we need to look at. I think it's extremely
5 difficult to legislate that. It's very difficult
6 to say, how do you get parental input, but I do
7 think there are better systems that we can put in
8 place, some of the ones I mentioned, like going
9 back to the district, representation, the CEDC,
10 the things that are mentioned are ways of doing
11 it. I don't necessarily propose that I have the
12 best ideas about that, I think that is something
13 that has to be discussed. It is important.

14 Barbara, I agree with you, there's some
15 schools that I've been in where there are no
16 school leadership teams and no PTAs. I don't
17 really know how to do that, but I do think you
18 need to have a system where at least parents feel
19 there is a place to go where they can do that.

20 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

21 Did you want to introduce the staff member?

22 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: Yes, this is
23 Tomas Hunt who has been working with me on
24 education for a couple of years and was very
25 instrumental in this report.

2 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much,
3 Public Advocate Gotbaum. We look forward to
4 following up on your detailing of the school
5 leadership team issues and many other interests,
6 and I want to thank my colleagues for keeping the
7 questions moving like that.

8 Thank you very much.

9 PUBLIC ADVOCATE GOTBAUM: Thank you very
10 much.

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Our next witness, and
12 we're so lucky to have her here today, Martine
13 Guerrier, the chief family engagement officer
14 from the Department of Education, and with her
15 today we really - I can't thank him enough for
16 making the effort to come, we know how busy his
17 schedule is, the deputy mayor for education of
18 the City of New York, a great Queens resident, a
19 great Queens leader, Dennis Walcott. Thank you
20 so much for coming.

21 Again, I appreciate people bearing with
22 me. Please try to find seats, we're trying to
23 have this front row here where our borough
24 president, we thank you, Helen, perhaps is for
25 some people for the press, we're so appreciative

2 of people translating so everyone can understand.

3 We're trying also for this section to be
4 for some of our honored guests, like Deputy Mayor
5 Walcott, and Regent Chapey, and our colleagues,
6 and we just ask everyone to bear with us. I want
7 to again thank you, Dennis, for being here, and
8 Martine, who I know for so many years, for being
9 here. You might want to introduce the people
10 with you. Feel free to introduce them all, if
11 you wish.

12 MR. WALCOTT: First, let me thank you,
13 assemblywoman, and chair of the Education
14 Committee for hosting these hearings and, more
15 importantly, I want to thank Speaker Silver as
16 well, the members of the committee, and to the
17 assemblywoman and the Education Committee, it's
18 not just this hearing, but I will be at all five
19 hearings. I think it's important that the mayor
20 has specifically asked me to make sure that I
21 participate in all five hearings because we
22 believe strongly in the collaboration of
23 discussion with you and the members of the
24 education committee.

25 As you indicated, joining me today is

2 Martine Guerrier as well as Elizabeth Sciabarra
3 and John White from the Department of Education
4 in case there are specific questions, and they
5 can address that as well.

6 Before I give my written testimony, I
7 really want to acknowledge all the outstanding
8 work that you have done, but also being here at
9 Borough Hall, acknowledge our Borough President
10 Helen Marshall. I think Helen has been a strong
11 advocate on education in New York City,
12 especially with her parent advisory committee,
13 and we have participated with them a number of
14 times in meeting with parents and discussing the
15 issues of parental involvement.

16 So good morning to you, Chairwoman Nolan
17 and members of the Assembly Education Committee,
18 along with Martine Guerrier who heads up our
19 Department of Education's family engagement work.

20 I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak before
21 you today and answer your questions on the
22 subject of mayoral control and accountability,
23 parental engagement and the future of our
24 schools.

25 Before I begin, I would first like to

2 acknowledge the state legislature's bold action
3 almost seven years ago granting the mayor control
4 of the New York City school system.

5 Your leadership not only facilitated
6 unprecedented change in our city, it sparked a
7 national conversation about mayoral control that
8 is gaining steam across the country and you ought
9 to be commended for that.

10 As many of you, I have more than 40 years
11 experience in dealing with the New York City
12 Public School System, as a parent, as a graduate
13 of the public school system, my children attended
14 our schools, my children attended schools here in
15 the borough Queens, and they graduated from
16 Francis Lewis High School, Cardoza High School,
17 they attended Bayside High School, Campus Magnet,
18 so I have an active interest in our public
19 schools.

20 34 years ago I was a kindergarten teacher
21 and I taught in South Jamaica, so I have
22 experienced working with our students and, as
23 some of you know, I have a master's in education
24 as well. I have had a wide array of experiences
25 in working with our New York City Public School

2 System. In addition to being a former
3 kindergarten teacher, I was a former member of
4 the New York City Board of Education, I was also
5 a trustee appointed to take over District 5 in
6 Central Harlem. In the last seven years, I've
7 had the honor and the privilege of serving as
8 Mayor Bloomberg's deputy mayor for education and
9 community development.

10 So I bring a very deep and personal
11 experience with this system informed by a variety
12 of perspectives to this conversation. What's not
13 included in my testimony is that I also, when I
14 was president of the New York Urban League, was
15 at the forefront in the development of school
16 leadership teams and working with a number of you
17 as we undertook the process of originating school
18 leadership teams in our schools.

19 The idea here behind the law was a simple
20 one, creating a focal point of accountability for
21 New York City Schools and student achievement
22 that required giving the mayor and the mayor's
23 appointed school leader the power to make
24 decisions and create real change that would
25 benefit New York City's children.

2 Having now watched the schools evolve for
3 more than four decades, I want to be clear. I
4 believe that the system that we have in place
5 today is the best that I have ever seen although
6 there is still a lot of work to be done. The
7 mayoral control and accountability created by the
8 legislation has facilitated change and produced
9 dramatic results that would not have otherwise
10 been possible.

11 While I know that all of you are familiar
12 with the city schools, and probably more familiar
13 than I am, I thought it would be helpful for the
14 audience and just for us to lay out the system's
15 dimensions to provide all of us a full context of
16 our work.

17 As you know, we are the largest school
18 district in the country, with 1.1 million
19 children, with an annual budget of roughly \$21
20 billion. We have now 1,500 schools, we have
21 approximately 140,000 employees, some 80,000 or
22 so are teachers, there are more than 170
23 languages spoken at home by the students in our
24 schools. There are over 8,000 school buses and
25 we serve over 860,000 meals a day including

1 breakfast and lunch. If this system was city, we
2 would be the ninth largest city in the country,
3 truly amazing.
4

5 To inform the conversation, it is
6 critical to think about mayoral control and
7 accountability in relation to what preceded it.

8 Under the old system, decisions were
9 shared by several power centers. The Board of
10 Education, which was composed of seven members
11 appointed by five borough presidents and the
12 mayor, and they in turn selected a board
13 president. Together the board hired, and, all
14 too frequently, fired the school's chancellor.
15 Meanwhile, 32 elected school boards across the
16 city hired 32 community superintendents who had
17 32 different standards, 32 different policies,
18 and sometimes 32 different ways of operating.

19 In other words, there were many people in
20 charge, but no real source of ultimate authority
21 and responsibility. I remember this system, I
22 lived it as an educator, a parent, as a
23 policymaker. I remember the inequities inherent
24 in the 32 school systems, some run capably, and
25 some run corruptly. In those system-wide

1 curriculum, even in math and reading, it was a
2 system where school funding was opaque and based
3 more on politics sometimes than on needs. A
4 system where I remember 27 percent lagged in the
5 state math, and 23 percent lagged in English
6 scores. Students who could not read promoted
7 from grade to grade, the graduation rates below
8 50 percent, and much lower for students of color.

9
10 Talented but frustrated educators without
11 the necessary authority of support to improve
12 their schools. Many school construction and
13 renovation projects that did not get completed on
14 time, if at all. Those that did were often
15 determined by political influence and not
16 necessarily the need of a particular community or
17 district. And school boards that did not have
18 parent representation.

19 Now, today, because of mayoral control,
20 we can say that there has been unprecedented
21 progress in each of these areas mentioned before,
22 and many others. The legislation allowed us to
23 take a number of politically difficult but
24 necessary steps to bring about desperately needed
25 change.

1 Most fundamentally, our children first
2 reforms have promulgated the sense of
3 accountability created at the top through every
4 level of the system. As a result, where they may
5 have been ties of a sense of resignation and
6 complacency, there is now a culture of high
7 expectations driven by a desire for excellence
8 and achievement. To foster accountability, we
9 gave principals greater freedom to make their
10 personnel decisions, to set their budgets, to
11 choose their support services, and determine
12 their curriculums. Like mayoral control, they
13 are given the support to make change, but are
14 held responsible for results.

16 To make sure that parents are getting the
17 most information about their child's school, we
18 carefully track progress in each school. Our
19 progress reports provide us with key information
20 about how schools are helping students achieve
21 and help educators identify their strengths and
22 weaknesses in order to target school improvement
23 efforts.

24 In the same spirit, we put an end to
25 social dimension, a practice that was too often

1 used to disguise the system's failure ensuring
2 that our children were sufficiently prepared for
3 the next step in their educational journey. Now
4 those students get individualized support and an
5 additional class worth of instruction each day
6 until they get up to speed.

8 We also created the office of multiple
9 pathways to graduation to prevent at risk
10 students from dropping out and recover some of
11 those students who had already lost to the
12 system. We've added more than \$4 billion to the
13 system's budget, a vast majority of those dollars
14 targeting classroom improvements and now
15 calculate funding based on student need, and not
16 political connections so that resources flow
17 equitably throughout the system, and those with
18 the greatest need get their fair share.

19 Working with the City Council, we have
20 streamlined the heavily invested school
21 construction, and, as a result of the assembly
22 and the state senate, and all the new leadership,
23 we've been able to enhance the capital budget to
24 make it a \$13.1 billion capital budget. We've
25 also created another 63 charter schools and

1 delivered over 66,000 school seats since
2
3 September of 2003. 11,471 of these came on line
4 just this past September, and 80 percent of
5 school construction projects are now finished on
6 time up from 60 percent.

7 The results of these efforts are
8 unmistakable. In every category, we have seen
9 real improvements in student achievement, both on
10 the objective scale as well as progress of the
11 state.

12 In 2002, the percentage of city students
13 earning a three or four, doing well on eighth
14 grade math tests was 29.8 percent. We lagged
15 behind the state an average of 27.2 percent.
16 Today, 59.6 percent of our students are getting
17 threes and fours, being proficient on that test,
18 up 30 percent, and the lag behind the state is
19 now down to 11.7 percent.

20 In reading, we've gone from 29.5 percent
21 of eighth graders earning threes and fours, to
22 now it's 43 percent, and reduced the state lag by
23 2.7 percent. Among fourth graders, we've gone
24 from 52 percent and 46.5 percent earning threes
25 and fours on math and reading tests respectively,

1 now to 66.3 percent, and 79.7 percent. The state
2 lags have been closed by 2.7 percent and 3.5
3 percent.
4

5 We have defied what was believed to be
6 possible for a large school system and
7 substantially narrowed the achievement gap that
8 existed when mayoral control became law. What is
9 remarkable about our children's gains is that
10 it's disproportionate share of the progress comes
11 from Black and Latino students. The gap in
12 fourth grade math has been narrowed by 16.4
13 percent for Black students, and 15.2 percent for
14 Latino students. The gap in fourth grade reading
15 has narrowed by 6.3 percent for Black students,
16 and 6.2 percent for Latino students. Meanwhile,
17 we are graduating more students than ever before.

18 The state calculates our graduation rate at 55.8
19 percent, the highest in decades.

20 Using the city's calculation to get the
21 sense of progress of graduation rates, we have
22 moved from 51 percent in 2002 to 62 percent in
23 2007. The rates have improved by 23 percent.

24 While there's been tremendous progress,
25 there's not rising test scores of graduation

1 rates, but rather having a clear line of
2 authority that argues against alluding the
3 control and accountability of the mayor or any
4 mayor, the law creates through clear
5 accountability of fundamental incentive to
6 innovate and make changes through unified
7 decision making, the power to implement those
8 changes, through both the capacity of the
9 department to assess whether changes are working,
10 or whether it's time to try something new in a
11 reasonable timeframe and devoid of politics.
12

13 The capability of parents and the general
14 public to make the same judgments about those
15 responsible for the system, and so, while the law
16 holds our administration to full account, and
17 should, I would argue that it's renewal has
18 little to do with the mayor or the chancellor.
19 It is rather an opportunity to codify the ability
20 of New York City students and their families
21 under this and future mayors to hold someone
22 accountable for educational outcomes.

23 Since the main focus of today's hearing
24 is parental engagement, before I turn it over to
25 Martine for details, I just want to say just a

2 few words about the importance of this issue to
3 our administration.

4 From the beginning of his term in office,
5 the mayor has placed a premium on ensuring that
6 parents receive the information they need to help
7 their child succeed. That commitment has
8 demonstrated even before the state legislator
9 grants us the control, when we testified at a
10 March 2002 City Council hearing recommending the
11 creation of an all parent CEC as part of the
12 legislation authorizing control. It was
13 highlighted with the creation of the parent
14 coordinator role in 2004 to ensure that parents
15 always had at least one point of contact that
16 their child's school help them navigate problems
17 or issues of concern.

18 Then in 2007 the mayor created the Office
19 of Family Engagement in advocacy and brought
20 Martine on board to help us think more
21 holistically and broadly about how to proactively
22 engage parents, not just in their child's
23 education, but in the life of their child's
24 school.

25 2008 saw the introduction of the parent's

1 survey to solicit parent views of what was
2 working and what was not in the system, and this
3 year, as the mayor announced in the State of the
4 City that he addressed two weeks ago, we're
5 launching P through one building on the
6 successful customer service system to quickly
7 respond to parent inquiries. We have way more to
8 do and we will, but it has been gratifying to see
9 that the metrics that we do have in this area are
10 going in the right direction.

12 This year, parental response rate on the
13 survey, for instance, increased from 26 percent
14 to 40 percent. We've heard from almost 350,000
15 parents, of whom 92 percent say they were
16 satisfied or very satisfied with the education
17 their child received, up from 88 percent the year
18 before.

19 Almost seven years ago you took the
20 daring step of granting control over New York
21 City schools to the mayor. It was that
22 leadership that enabled a much better school
23 system for 1.1 million children. As I sit before
24 you today and in the coming weeks, I want to
25 acknowledge that there is once again an

2 opportunity to partner on the future of the
3 education of our children.

4 New York City is one city and this
5 legislation has allowed us to govern the school
6 system as such. There has been undeniable
7 progress in our schools. Of course there have
8 been challenges, questions about transparency,
9 accountability, parental and community
10 engagement. As the legislature embarks on this
11 process, I am here to say that we are listening
12 and welcome your ideas on how we can ensure a
13 better system.

14 At the same time, we urge you to
15 recognize that we cannot weaken the power or
16 decision-making ability of the mayor, and future
17 mayors, to take the necessary bold steps to
18 ensure educational success. This would turn back
19 the clock at the expense of our children.

20 Thank you very much for the opportunity
21 of allowing me to present. I promise you that I
22 will not repeat this again at a future hearing.

23 Now it's my pleasure to introduce Martine
24 who will talk about parental engagement.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We thank you. I do

2 look for a written copy of that.

3 MR. WALCOTT: We all have a written copy
4 for you.

5 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. Martine
6 Guerrier.

7 MS. GUERRIER: Good morning, Chairwoman
8 Nolan and Assembly Education Committee members
9 and colleagues. Also, thank you very much,
10 Borough President Helen Marshall, the members of
11 the parent advisory council for being - allowing
12 us to actually engage with parents, and then as
13 well listen to concerns and try to find ways to
14 meet their needs.

15 I am thankful and certainly grateful to
16 have the opportunity to testify today about the
17 department's education parent engagement and
18 advocacy work. In addition, to Deputy Mayor
19 Walcott, I'm joined by, as you were told earlier,
20 by John White who handles engagement related to
21 school citings and school closures, Elizabeth
22 Sciabarra, who is in charge of student
23 enrollment.

24 I've been at the Department of Education
25 for just about two years now as the chief family

1 engagement officer. I'm responsible for helping
2 families get information, get involved, and
3 become more active participants in their
4 children's education. I take this responsibility
5 quite seriously. As I'll describe, we've made
6 real progress in the past couple of years and
7 working closely with New York City public school
8 parents.
9

10 I joined the chancellor's team as a
11 parent of a now current seventh grader, and at
12 the time I was the Brooklyn Borough President of
13 the Panel for Educational Policy. I knew what
14 New York City parents were facing and believed
15 that I can help them better access the
16 information and answers we needed and improve
17 their ability to help their children succeed in
18 school. So I come to you as someone who has been
19 on both sides of this debate.

20 I want to emphasize at the out that I've
21 never doubted the mayor's commitment to parents.

22 Indeed, one of the very first reforms of the
23 children's first initiative was the creation of
24 parent coordinators who last year had phone calls
25 from more than one million and a half parents,

2 I'm sure you heard that quite a bit. But as the
3 person with the responsibility for collecting
4 that debt, I can tell you it's really true.

5 As we enter into this important
6 discussion about parents and mayoral control and
7 accountability, I think it's important for us to
8 remember this unflagging commitment to families.

9 I also want to emphasize that since I started
10 here, I have been continuously looking for ways
11 to improve our interactions with families and
12 parent leaders.

13 So I'm very excited for the opportunity
14 to talk with you today and certainly respond to
15 your questions. In my testimony, I plan to tell
16 you what we've accomplished on behalf of parents,
17 and briefly discuss the ways that mayoral control
18 and accountability has improved parental
19 engagement in New York City, and finally invite
20 you to show your ideas for how we can continue to
21 improve in this important area.

22 When I came to the department, I lead a
23 major effort to figure out how we can improve
24 parental engagement and improve the level of
25 interaction with parents. During that time, and

1 especially in the first 60 days, and, quite
2 honestly, the first six months, we met with over
3 8,000 parents and community organizations and
4 conferred extensively with parent advocates and
5 elected officials. We fully evaluated services
6 and support offered to families and parent
7 leadership, and convened over 500 special events
8 with community partners, and organized meetings
9 for parents to network and learn about Department
10 of Education services and programs. Then the
11 office of family engagement advocacy was created
12 as a system that would help us help parents.
13

14 The mayor and the chancellor had already
15 hired a parent coordinator in each school who was
16 responsible for helping parents. So we hired
17 parent advocates or district family advocates, as
18 they're known, for each district. These were
19 people who were responsible for helping families
20 right in their neighborhood.

21 More importantly, we've worked with other
22 offices across the Department of Education to
23 build capacity within the department to help
24 parents. We've also helped develop curriculum
25 materials to increase the knowledge of parent

2 leadership and enhance the expertise already
3 available within all of the district presidents'
4 councils and within each parent association, and
5 we've also developed materials for field staff
6 related to services and policy-related procedures
7 to make sure that they had the answers at their
8 fingertips to respond to questions from parent
9 leaders.

10 We planned and delivered events that
11 increase awareness of Department of Education
12 policies and programs. We promptly responded to
13 family concerns about school issues such as
14 leadership change, school citings, and
15 notification of policy changes, and built
16 relationships with the leadership teams which are
17 responsible for creating the comprehensive
18 educational plans for the school districts.

19 In fact, last November and by "last," I
20 mean November of 2007, we held a meeting for all
21 of the district leadership teams in the city that
22 hadn't been held in a very long time to talk
23 about their responsibility in creating a district
24 educational plan as well as being responsive to
25 the commissioner's 100.11 regulation that

2 requires that all district leadership teams
3 create their DCEP and work with their school
4 leadership teams to understand whether or not
5 they're functioning.

6 And as the mayor had announced in his
7 State of the City speech, we'll also soon be
8 adding new capacity and functionality to 311 so
9 parents can more easily get answers and solve
10 problems by phone. I think that a lot of people
11 are not aware of just how much we've done in the
12 past couple of years to work with and support the
13 families of New York City.

14 I would like to walk you through some
15 specific details. Since 2007, we have conducted
16 more than 1,200 trainings and workshops for
17 parents and some of them most recently have been
18 organizing with and through parents, meaning that
19 parent leaders are the actual presenters and not
20 just Department of Education.

21 We've handled 12,000 calls from parents
22 that came through 311 and 60,000 calls that came
23 directly to us. We've also met with 13,000
24 parents who walked into our offices, and I
25 personally have had more direct interaction with

2 parents by e-mail and can say that I definitely
3 answered more than 6,000 one to one e-mails with
4 parents asking for support and assistance with
5 their issues.

6 We've worked hard to talk to all parents
7 including the many that are not fluent in
8 English, and I would like to commend you for
9 ensuring that there's translation and
10 interpretation support here today. Each year we
11 have interpreters at more than a thousand events,
12 but we wanted to create an open forum for
13 discussion between Department of Education staff
14 and parents without the use of an interpreter as
15 a go between, so we created native language
16 forums to provide parents who don't speak English
17 with information on key topics.

18 We've held 10 series of native language
19 forums on topics including social promotion,
20 parent teacher conferences, teacher student
21 surveys, parent surveys, the English language
22 learner education program, gifted and talented
23 programs, and graduation requirements for high
24 school students.

25 This year we're planning to hold forums

2 in addition to our general conversation around
3 special education but also helping them receive
4 information about options for students who are
5 falling behind and more. We also had
6 interpretation services at 1,206 meetings in the
7 last school year, just up about 200 from the year
8 before. We provided over the phone translation
9 6,200 times, up about 3,000 from the year before.

10 In 2007, and this is possible, because in
11 2007 the translation and interpretation unit
12 because a part of the office for family
13 engagement in advocacy in order to accomplish the
14 following strategic goals:

15 to ensure that language access services
16 was a key element in all parental engagement
17 initiatives and communications;

18 to allow direct access to the district
19 family advocate and parent coordinator networks;

20 to provide support and increase
21 awareness;

22 and to monitor the Department's
23 compliance for the chancellor's regulations based
24 on an executive order that created a host of
25 mandates to improve language access services.

2 As a result of these combined
3 initiatives, schools have reported high levels of
4 awareness and satisfaction with the available
5 services.

6 The unit has also seen an increase in
7 both the number of requests for services received
8 from schools, and the usage of schools
9 translation allocation funding, specifically
10 earmarked for the provision of language services
11 - language access services.

12 Additionally, we have worked hard to
13 collaborate more closely with the community
14 education councils. Beginning in July of 2007,
15 the chancellor took significant steps to
16 strengthen relationships with councils and to
17 become more responsive to them. My office
18 supports community education councils by
19 providing technical assistance and professional
20 development opportunities throughout the school
21 year.

22 We have also initiated a number of new
23 opportunities for community education councils to
24 become involved in major policy discussions. For
25 example, CECs have partnered with the office of

2 Portfolio Development to host charter school
3 application hearings. CECs were engaged in the
4 early application process and served as leads in
5 community discussions about educational
6 priorities for new schools. CECs have
7 participated in internal work groups focusing on
8 special education, facilities budget and outreach
9 and training, and that last one I would like to
10 come back to that.

11 In an effort to meet the needs of these
12 parent leaders to discuss and advocate the issues
13 of great concern, the chancellor hosts a bi-
14 monthly meeting with the presidents and executive
15 board members of all councils. The issues
16 presented at these meetings have included special
17 education services during summer school, access
18 to up-to-date school district information,
19 transportation and zoning. The chancellor's
20 commitment to increase the visibility of CECs and
21 remind school communities of their importance as
22 partners, as reflected in his promise to support
23 distribution of CECs regularly monthly meeting
24 notices and calendars in schools, that also means
25 that schools can and have begun to send home the

1 notices for CEC meetings by backpack mail, and
2 also post them on school bulletin boards. CECs
3 are invited to send representatives to attend
4 special events held in their districts, are
5 invited to join citywide policy briefings by the
6 office of intergovernmental affairs along with
7 representatives from the City Council, state
8 legislature, congress, and borough president
9 offices, and publically acknowledge the
10 contribution of CECs and CEC members.
11

12 I would also like to give you an overview
13 of some of our toughest areas including what I
14 think is going well and where I see room for
15 improvement.

16 Three general points that I would stress
17 here. First, as we have tried to turn the system
18 around, result-oriented reforms were the right
19 place to start. Structurally it is very hard to
20 create effective engagement tools before you've
21 actually burned up the processes around which you
22 are trying to engage.

23 Engagement tools necessarily follow a
24 step or two behind reforms, but this creates
25 tremendous challenges in the work and sometimes

2 gaps in engagement, and I said I wanted to come
3 back to those work groups.

4 Those were our first efforts, to bring
5 community education council members into central
6 discussions about the work of the department.
7 They didn't go as we had intended, quite
8 honestly, because we weren't ready to have that
9 kind of central meeting because there are a lot
10 of initiatives and programs that we were trying
11 to implement, that weren't - for sure were really
12 early ideas, so trying to have a conversation
13 about ideas in a situation where community
14 education councils wanted to talk about their
15 districts as well as general concerns wasn't a
16 good match. So those work groups, they actually
17 failed.

18 But it gave me the opportunity to see
19 that we needed to do more work in providing
20 information about the policies that we were
21 considering and then to give community education
22 councils the opportunity at their district level
23 to have discussions about educational priorities.

24 Now, second, in the same vain, it's
25 important to remember that the best thing that we

1 can do for parents is ensure that their children
2 are getting a great education. Where we're not
3 doing that, and where that has ceased to be the
4 potential to do that, closing schools and
5 starting new ones, engagement challenges,
6 notwithstanding, have proven to be a crucial tool
7 in achieving the goal of providing families with
8 schools their children deserve.
9

10 Third, engagement in its most
11 concentrated form around specific decisions and a
12 moment of change of difficulty typically does not
13 elicit the voice of those who feel the system is
14 working or improving. As legislators, you
15 absolutely should be responsible to what you hear
16 from your constituents through these hearings,
17 but I would suggest that there's a sizeable group
18 of your constituents who are not actively in
19 contact with you, or even us, quite frankly, on
20 school issues. To the end, I would like to note
21 a finding from some of our efforts to hear from
22 those parents.

23 In addition to the various measurements
24 of progress we look at, we have also tried to
25 solicit direct feedback from parents. Last year,

2 40 percent of parents responded to our learning
3 environment survey, 347,829 parents. 92 percent
4 said they were satisfied or very satisfied with
5 the education that their children received up
6 from 88 percent the year before.

7 Now there's a disconnect between that
8 number and what we all hear. Some of that
9 disconnect is because large numbers of parents
10 who aren't that satisfied and are therefore not
11 vocal, and some of it is due to parents who are
12 happy with the school, but unhappy with the
13 system. Let me be clear, we need to work on that
14 part, but it's better than the reverse, and it's
15 a sign that we are doing the most important
16 things right.

17 Here are some of the toughest areas of
18 parental engagement. When a capital plan is
19 formulated based on demographic data and in
20 consultation with the Department of Buildings and
21 the Department of Housing Preservation and
22 Development, we meet with every community
23 education council to discuss ramifications for
24 the district. There is one caveat to that. We
25 send to all community education councils

2 basically a request to attend their meeting where
3 they would hold a capital plan hearing but not
4 every community education council actually takes
5 us up on the offer to host a hearing.

6 So when we say that we meet with every
7 CEC, it's really those who want to hear from the
8 School Construction Authority and the Department
9 of Education's School Facilities Office.

10 Now this capital plan is a living
11 document so it can be amended every year based on
12 CEC priorities. The SCA has created a
13 prioritization form to enable more detailed input
14 from community councils.

15 Now, in time of the release of the
16 upcoming capital plan, we work with all CECs to
17 schedule capital plan hearings for input and we
18 planned to train a few parent leaders to serve as
19 ambassadors who would be fully briefed and would
20 help lead engagement with parent leadership
21 throughout the city.

22 In Manhattan, we're involved with Borough
23 President Stringer's office, similar to the board
24 room convened with Borough President Helen
25 Marshall, and these board rooms are convened to

2 address specific neighborhood and school level
3 issues with key stakeholders.

4 The work we're doing for Borough
5 President Stringer may also be a prototype that
6 we can put to work in our neighborhoods and
7 boroughs because it actually is included as part
8 of that discussion.

9 I think we have made great strides in
10 engaging parents on capital planning. A lot of
11 these changes are recent and actually represent
12 big improvements. I think we've also made
13 tremendous progress with school closures which
14 can present some of the most contentious
15 engagements. Right now any school that receives
16 a D or an F on its progress report, based in part
17 on the parent's surveys I discussed earlier, and
18 it's a small part of the grade, but it's
19 significant, especially when we're talking about
20 school culture, school climate, and trying to
21 figure out whether or not parents are voting with
22 their feet to attend schools or are voting
23 through those surveys to let us know this is not
24 a place for kids.

25 As I started to say, schools that receive

1 a D or an F on its progress report are eligible
2 for a closing or a restructuring. This is a
3 systematic way of notifying parents far in
4 advance that closure is a possibility and allows
5 for a candid discussion of how the school might
6 be turned around. Nonetheless, often parents
7 continue to feel blindsided by closure
8 announcements.
9

10 We need to be more directly and more
11 broadly effective at communicating the likelihood
12 of closures based on progress report results and
13 that's something that we're working on and we're
14 looking at it.

15 We've defined a pretty clear protocol for
16 engagement for school closures. In most
17 instances, we informed the school principal prior
18 to making a firm decision to close a school and
19 give them an opportunity to respond. Once a
20 decision is made to close a school, we inform the
21 principal of that decision and have the principal
22 and school staff meet with their UFT
23 representative. Just after the staff finds out,
24 we convey the decision to elected officials,
25 local school community and parents and CPOs that

2 work within the school community.

3 We then invite parents to participate in
4 a school assembly and then a district leadership
5 team meeting along with the community
6 superintendent, the high school superintendent,
7 all parent leader representatives from CSA, UFT,
8 and TC37.

9 At these meetings we discuss why the
10 decision was made, what the implications are for
11 families and for teachers and how we intend to
12 solicit feedback on citing decisions for the
13 space.

14 During the school closure process in the
15 2007-2008 school year, each of the nine districts
16 with a school closure or a phase-out school held
17 at least two district leadership team meetings to
18 discuss it, and some that actually held three
19 meetings. I think we've come far, but there's no
20 question that we have to do better at keeping
21 parents informed when their school is at risk of
22 closure, and in consulting with stakeholders in a
23 way that doesn't make it harder to make change.
24 This is a process that we have refined year after
25 year and we are open to your suggestions on how

to change it for the better.

In new school creation, we are making every effort to reflect community priorities through constant discussion with CECs and district leadership teams throughout the school year. As part of a multi-step planning process, the Office of Portfolio Development takes a host of factors, including enrollment patterns, utilization of buildings, and a district's need and comprehensive educational plan into account when determining the sight of any new school. Increasingly, the process involves active engagement with the district leadership team to explain the factors and solicit feedback.

Where charter schools are involved, there are legal requirements for more comprehensive engagement. Much has been made of our difficulty in realizing the full potential of school leadership teams, and I must acknowledge that the commissioner's decision recently has given us the opportunity to refine language and to look forward to a robust community engagement process that will meet the needs of everyone who had a stake in that decision. And it certainly means

2 that our commitment should continue to ensure
3 that we - ensuring that they're elected and
4 they're up and running. This has been an area
5 focus for some time and that we have made real
6 progress.

7 First we remain committed to working
8 partnership with the council of supervisors and
9 administrators, the CSA and UFT. Last year we
10 were able, and a few instances, to work with them
11 to offer school leadership team trainings. We
12 weren't able to do the full compliment of all
13 trainings with them, but then when we realized
14 that we had run into a snag, and that we had not
15 really thought through how to offer SOT training
16 at a quick pace using the talent that we had, we
17 reached out for help and we worked with them, and
18 I found that those partnerships have actually
19 helped us. And that's actually one of the areas
20 that we may change.

21 We had previously delegated SLT training
22 to all district office staff, all district family
23 advocates, regardless of their interest or
24 ability to do public speaking and their actual
25 knowledge of SLT regulations, and that's when we

1 realized that we needed to go back and really
2 look at our own internal practice. So now what
3 we do is, we select the staff who have the
4 capacity, who understand the regulations and
5 understand the importance of SLTs to offer
6 training. This was in fact the lesson learned
7 from the fall 2007.

8
9 Finally, we are actively soliciting
10 feedback from every school and working at the
11 school level to bring SLTs to high levels of
12 effectiveness and functionality and to that end
13 district family advocates with the capacity to
14 offer school leadership team training actually
15 offer training one on one with schools so we're
16 not doing mass trainings for everyone. There are
17 schools who prefer not to be part of group -
18 people who are not within their schools, don't
19 want to be part of those processes so they've
20 asked us to do school level training and we've
21 said yes and those are actually working out quite
22 well.

23 So parental engagement is far harder,
24 quite honestly, to quantify than graduation rates
25 or test scores. There's structural challenges

2 and other barriers, and parental engagement staff
3 will always have the unfortunate role of being
4 bad news messengers, a job not known to come with
5 good reviews.

6 In retrospect, as we consider how far we
7 have come in this area, it's important to
8 remember that after the legislature fully
9 scrapped the old systems for organized community
10 engagement, we were starting from level zero.
11 Almost more than any other part of the newly
12 formed Department of Education, community and
13 parent engagement was starting over and we had to
14 build anew. But none of these are reasons that
15 we shouldn't be as open, as proactive, and as
16 solicitous with parents as possible.

17 I think we've made good strides, but this
18 work, like all of the work we do in New York City
19 Public Schools never stops. I'm glad to have the
20 opportunity today to participate in an exchange
21 of ideas on the subject.

22 Thank you.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Would the other
24 panels, can they please give their titles, it was
25 a little unclear, and if you would like to add

2 something, sir?

3 MR. WHITE: Thank you, Chairwoman Nolan.

4 My name is John White. I am the chief operating
5 officer for the Office of Portfolio Development
6 and thank you for having me here.

7 Our office assesses the range of
8 instructional services that the department offers
9 and makes adjustments to their services where
10 parents can need such changes and where there are
11 changes that are going to be made for a wide
12 variety of reasons.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: And that's citywide?

14 MR. WHITE: That's citywide, yes.

15 MS. SCIABARRA: Good morning, everyone.

16 Liz Sciabarra, I'm chief executive officer of
17 student enrollment and essentially and in very
18 simple terms we deal with all admission processes
19 and all the engagement around those processes and
20 so we work very very closely with Martine in
21 getting the word out and working with parents on
22 school readiness and getting children and parents
23 information about the next level of school that
24 they will apply to through our various admissions
25 processes.

2 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I want to start with
3 our committee members again. Barbara, you're the
4 senior committee person, do you want to start?

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I'll wait.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Mike, a question?

7 ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Just a question
8 on parental engagement, if I could. Are there
9 numbers, are there statistics that - what is
10 going on in the schools itself to reach out to
11 the parents, to bring the parents into the school
12 to give them training as to what's being taught
13 in the schools, and how they can translate that
14 to the home, and working with their children on
15 math that's going on, or the language arts
16 development, bring the parents into the schools
17 to give the parents the specific training?

18 Do you have any statistics on that? How
19 many schools are doing that?

20 MS. GUERRIER: I'm actually looking down
21 to see if I have that information specifically.
22 If I - we know that in the last school year
23 parent coordinators are responsible for actually
24 offering these workshops and they work with the
25 school principals and teachers to offer them, so

2 if you give me a moment I can see whether or not
3 I have that, but, if not, I'd be glad to get it
4 back to you, but I know that we're looking at
5 hundreds, thousands of workshops that were
6 offered to parents.

7 ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: You don't have
8 to give it to me right now, but if you do have
9 those numbers I would like to see it. I think
10 that that would be extremely important to know.

11 Do you know if all schools have parent
12 coordinators?

13 MR. WALCOTT: All schools with 200 or
14 more students. I'm hearing no in the back, but
15 if they don't, they should. We have a mandate,
16 and Martine can correct me if I'm wrong, that any
17 school that has 200 or more students are required
18 to have a parent coordinator, and again Martine
19 can adjust my figures around this, but we have
20 had basically a 95 percent retention rate of
21 those schools, keeping the parent coordinators
22 who start at the beginning of the implementation
23 of parent coordinators.

24 So for those who said no in the back,
25 we'll find out why, and that's where

2 accountability comes in, but they are mandated to
3 have them.

4 MS. GUERRIER: So we do have them get
5 that, but as Deputy Mayor Walcott said, every
6 school that has more than 200 students is
7 supposed to have a parent coordinator. I'm aware
8 that there are schools where parent coordinators
9 resigned or where they had stepped up more
10 recently, the achievement number of students that
11 they needed, but they hadn't yet actually gone -
12 come to us to ask for support in hiring a parent
13 coordinator. Those are instances, but there
14 aren't that many. We know that from 2003 through
15 today, we're looking at 95 percent of those
16 parent coordinators who were with us in 2003 are
17 the exact same ones that we have today.

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Do you know the
19 vacancy rate? Is the vacancy rate five percent?

20 MS. GUERRIER: It's about that number.

21 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I'm sorry, you said
22 something about hiring them. Could you just
23 reiterate who actually hires the parent
24 coordinators?

25 MS. GUERRIER: The school principal

2 hires the parent coordinators, and they sometimes
3 ask us for help in making sure that the posting
4 reflects the actual job description of parent
5 coordinators and they augment it with their
6 school needs. That's what I mean by that.

7 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you.

8 Assemblyman O'Donnell, you had a question?

9 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: Yes, I have a
10 couple. I attended one of these hearings, not
11 with all you folks, in my neighborhood last week,
12 and there was someone there on behalf of the
13 mayor named Fatima Shama who -

14 MR. WALCOTT: Fatima Shama who is
15 sitting right behind me, who is on my staff.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: There she is,
17 yes, her hair was different. You look very
18 different.

19 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Do you want to
20 acknowledge all the people that are here maybe?

21 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: If I got her
22 title wrong, she is the senior education policy
23 advisor to the Office of the Mayor. There were
24 two questions that were asked. The first
25 question both from parents, not from anyone on

2 the panel was, what were her credentials to have
3 that job, and her answer was that she went to
4 school, which I'm in favor of, she's a lawyer,
5 which I am too, so I can't really hold that
6 against her, and that her siblings were
7 educators.

8 The follow-up question was whether or not
9 the mayor believed that the current system is
10 operating well enough that there should be no
11 changes to it, and her answer was yes, that that
12 was what the position was.

13 So I want to make sure I understand this
14 correctly. Is it the mayor's position that the
15 current system is working like such a fine-tuned
16 machine that there should be no changes to
17 mayoral control?

18 MR. WALCOTT: Two things. One, her
19 credentials for the job was that I hired her, and
20 I think she's a very talented individual who is
21 steeped in education and knows education, who
22 happens to be as smart as can be, so I just
23 wanted to deal with that since you raised that as
24 the first point. I think Fatima is a person who
25 lives and breathes and believes in the

2 educational success of our students. So to me
3 that's the ultimate criteria as to why she's on
4 our staff.

5 Now to answer your question about the
6 mayor's belief, I think the mayor, in the State
7 of the City said, We're really open to listen to
8 how we can dialogue about improving the system.
9 We've always admitted that the system is not
10 perfect, but we think we've done a masterful job
11 as I indicated in my testimony. I think where
12 there's accountability, and that the public
13 advocate referred to buses a couple of times, and
14 that we admit it, we made a mistake and we were
15 very clear about that, and the ultimate
16 accountability is that we fixed that mistake, and
17 I think that even more accountability in that we
18 didn't repeat that mistake in the following
19 years. We're always looking to improve the
20 system, and I think Fatina's point, because I
21 heard about that as well, was that at that
22 hearing we're not going to get into the nuances
23 of what can be done.

24 We think it's important to have ongoing
25 dialogue and that's why the mayor made sure that

2 for the education committee of the assembly that
3 I participate and be at all five hearings because
4 we believe very strongly in that this is truly
5 something that we want to have a main dialogue
6 about.

7 So I just wanted to respond that we
8 always want to improve the system.

9 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: I'm sorry if you
10 took my question to be in any way negative to
11 her. She gave a wonderful presentation at the
12 meeting, I'm just repeating what I was told, and
13 I believe there are other members of your staff
14 who were in the room at the time that she said
15 those things.

16 I represent a part of Manhattan that
17 encompasses part of old District 3 and part of
18 District 5. We recently had a very difficult
19 issue in District 3 which had to do with the
20 allocation of resources, by which I mean, what
21 schools are in which buildings.

22 I sent a letter to the mayor which he
23 chose never to respond to to raise the issues
24 about how allocation of resource questions get
25 resolved.

2 In this particular case, there was a
3 school called the Center School where the local
4 CEC eventually decided to force that school to
5 relocate over the objections of almost all the
6 parents and the principals of whose kids go to
7 that school. I don't want to get into a
8 discussion about whether that was the correct or
9 incorrect decision, but what strikes me as odd is
10 that two weeks later, Tweed announced that
11 another school in the district was closing, and
12 it would seem to me that if you're in the process
13 of making decisions to close a school in the
14 district, at the same time that you're asking the
15 CEC to make an almost Sophie's Choice kind of
16 choice, there was only two bad choices available
17 to the CEC, depending on where your kid went to
18 school, why wouldn't that potential
19 impossibility, which clearly I imagine was not
20 made in a day, why was that not conveyed to the
21 CEC prior to the time that it was told that it
22 needed to make this impossible decision, and
23 don't you think that possibly, before you ask
24 CECs to make these very difficult choices, that
25 you have an obligation to the parents and the

2 families in the district to, in fact, tell them
3 and involve them in that before you do that?

4 MR. WALCOTT: Sure, and to answer your
5 question as simply as possible, and John can
6 elaborate, but in trying to keep my answers very
7 short, in all fairness, because I think what
8 happened in your particular area with CEC 3 and
9 I'm very familiar with it as well, was a pure
10 illustration of a deliberation that took place
11 over a number of months over some very difficult
12 choices that I think all of you will be facing as
13 far as the realignment of schools within a
14 certain district and what it means and where the
15 demographics and the patterns change, and I think
16 the CEC is going to play a very important role,
17 and to answer your question very directly, I
18 think it's important for the CEC to have all the
19 information as they're making these very
20 difficult decisions as far as the allocation of
21 the student populations, schools that potentially
22 will be closing, I think in my testimony, and
23 Martine's testimony, one of the things that we're
24 going to do better is make sure that all those
25 particular areas get that information as early as

2 possible.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: Are you
4 suggesting that the CEC was told or no?

5 MR. WALCOTT: That they were closing 44?

6 MR. WHITE: If I can just highlight it,
7 assembly member, because I was intimately
8 involved with that specific process. I would
9 just say a couple of things. One, I want to
10 underscore that we continue to welcome ideas as
11 Martine articulated for the closure process
12 generally.

13 We started a long discussion about school
14 placements in District 3 on the upper west side
15 specifically that literally ran for nine months
16 that started well well in advance of any
17 consideration of a school closure, and I think
18 that's where we're seeing the intersection that
19 these are two fundamentally disconnected
20 processes. Then we thought it best to involve
21 parents as much as possible in the question of
22 what schools should be located where.

23 I should finally say that the CEC was
24 involved specifically for the question of the
25 rezoning of the set of schools, not to make a

2 decision regarding the Center School,
3 specifically, but, broadly, again, we thought it
4 best to involve the parents as much as possible
5 in helping inform our decision.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: Let me, if I
7 may, just have one comment. CECs, as I
8 understand it, are different than former school
9 boards because their powers are enumerated
10 specifically, and one of them is to define
11 catchment areas, and so I have no question that
12 Tweed saying to a CEC, you're supposed to define
13 these catchment areas, that's one level of
14 decision-making.

15 But whether or not a school is moved or
16 not is not about catchments, it's about
17 allocation of resources and Mr. Walcott's
18 presentation was all about the accountability is
19 here, the accountability is here. Well, if
20 you're a parent and you don't like that decision,
21 who is it that you're supposed to turn to because
22 there is no place to turn. The CEC members are
23 not elected, and the mayor, if he chooses to run
24 for re-election, I've heard the rumor that he
25 has, if he does, right, what he gets to say is,

2 no, I defer to the CEC. But then when the CEC
3 comes to my office, they tell me, well, we knew
4 nothing about the closing of 44 when we made this
5 decision, and now we look bad to our neighbors
6 because there were a huge amount of resources
7 available to not make that decision, but nobody
8 seemed to want to put us in the loop.

9 So how do you, as a parent, connect
10 accountability and responsibility in a way that
11 allows them to have someone to go to, and just as
12 an aside for the people here in Queens, when I
13 tell my colleagues from the Assembly that parents
14 come to my office because they don't like their
15 third grade teacher, they're horrified. They
16 said, how can you possibly do your job that
17 they're coming to you? Why aren't they going to
18 a school board? And I say because you eliminated
19 the school board. So they come to me now. So
20 what am I supposed to say as an elected official
21 to the parents who say, I don't like the decision
22 that was made, or to the CEC that says, we
23 weren't given all the information in an
24 appropriate time to make a decision that was
25 fair, when, what you're saying to me is, you're

2 trying to work on it, and I guess the answer I'm
3 supposed to say is, don't vote for the mayor?

4 MR. WALCOTT: No, and I know Martine -

5 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Go ahead, John.

6 MR. WHITE: Just from the specifics,
7 again, I just think that it's worth reiterating
8 that the chancellor and the chancellor's team
9 made a specific decision regarding to relocate
10 the school and are accountable for such decisions
11 across the city, and we tried to make that as
12 clear as possible in the literally dozens of
13 meetings and we did include one last night on the
14 upper west side.

15 You are correct about the zoning
16 decisions which are discreet decisions and
17 totally distinct from the question of relocating
18 the school, but -

19 MR. WALCOTT: The only thing that I
20 wanted to respond to, sir, with this particular
21 case, with what was taking place, not just with
22 the Center School, but with the schools out
23 there, I was directly involved as far as getting
24 communication from the parents of the particular
25 district and the schools themselves, as well as

2 communicating back with a number of the parents
3 as well, and so that ongoing dialogue, you said
4 where do you turn.

5 You turn to the representatives from the
6 Department of Education, but also, more so than
7 in the past, there's City Hall that's available
8 and a number of you have been a part of that as
9 well, where we either agree or disagree on a
10 particular issue, there is direct access in
11 making sure that we're being held accountable for
12 what happens in your respective districts, and
13 making sure we resolve it. We take that very
14 seriously. So I just wanted to pick up on the
15 accountability piece.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: Then we'll get
17 the direct question. Can someone here tell me
18 today or sometime in the future when it was that
19 you notified anybody about your plan to close 44
20 because I'm an elected official in that
21 neighborhood and no one ever told me until I read
22 it in the West Side Spirit. It's nice that we
23 have the West Side Spirit so I can learn those
24 things, but no one told me before that, and the
25 CEC members were telling you that they weren't

2 told before they were asked to make this
3 impossible decision. So can someone tell me
4 directly where it was that you communicated that
5 you were closing this school, and maybe you
6 should perhaps begin with elected officials,
7 because I have not, to date, been notified that
8 you're closing 44.

9 MR. WHITE: I apologize if that notice
10 was not given. We have a list to ensure that
11 calls are made. I'm confident that a call was
12 made and I apologize if word did not get through
13 to you specifically, assembly member.

14 We try to notify, a, the community
15 broadly of school performance by being as
16 transparent as we can about schools that are not
17 serving their students as well as they should
18 through very transparent measures that we share
19 probably with the public. We had an open
20 discussion with the CEC about which schools were
21 not doing well.

22 In an attempt to do what Martine was
23 describing to establish a likelihood that
24 something needed to change, I would say that the
25 CEC in this case was charged with a very specific

2 task and thankfully took it up admirably which is
3 to rezone a set of elementary schools. We're
4 talking about a middle school that ultimately,
5 yes, we did decide to close, and I think those
6 are two distinct processes.

7 I would welcome ideas as I said before
8 about how the closure process can be better, but
9 I do want to emphasize that those -

10 ASSEMBLYMAN O'DONNELL: Except that the
11 Center School is a middle school, so, yes, you're
12 talking about catchment for elementary schools,
13 but the school that you moved was a middle
14 school, at the same time within days, another
15 middle school is closing and you didn't really
16 seem to get on top of that until after this
17 unfortunate decision was made, and maybe there
18 was a better solution when the resources were
19 there. Because the problem is that it seems that
20 no matter how much money we in Albany try to send
21 to the city to try to alleviate the overcrowding
22 problems in our schools, it never seems to get
23 down their on the ground and build schools where
24 buildings are going on at a rate that it was
25 unprecedented.

2 So, in the end, yes, you're right, the
3 catchment lines for the elementary schools are
4 entirely within the purview of the CEC, but the
5 school that you're closing and the school that
6 you forced to move were both middle schools and
7 that's not really in the purview of catchment,
8 and therefore that is about allocation of
9 resources, not about drawing of lines.

10 MR. WALCOTT: Assembly member, let me
11 apologize to you and any other member that we
12 have not communicated with. One of the things,
13 just to give you the quick sense of our internal
14 workings and how we deal with these things, I
15 have weekly meetings with the Department of
16 Education, the senior staff about a variety of
17 issues, and part of those meetings deals with how
18 we make things better. And part of the closing
19 issues and the integration that you're talking
20 about, as far as dealing with zoning issues and
21 the impact of the new schools that are coming in,
22 and what it actually means in that integration
23 process we talk about on a regular basis. I
24 think we've gotten better and, yes, we still need
25 to get even better than that.

2 So my commitment to you and to the
3 members of the assembly is that we will be doing
4 that, and doing it a lot better. We talked about
5 new internal communication systems to make sure
6 that people have more information earlier on so
7 that they know the impact in their districts, so
8 you, as the elected official, in your particular
9 area, have that information so you're not finding
10 out things through the West Side Spirit.

11 So I do apologize to you, but at the same
12 time we do plan to make it better as well.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you.

14 Mark, Rory, Barbara, quickly, so can move
15 forward with the testimony.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: Thank you very
17 much, Chairwoman.

18 Mr. Walcott, the panel, I'm very happy to
19 have you here. Mr. Walcott, you know I'm a big
20 fan of yours and it's not just because you're
21 from Queens, you know I think you've done a good
22 job and you've been very responsive to anything
23 that we've asked.

24 You know, my biggest policy concern with
25 the way that the Department of Education is

2 running is standardized tests. We've talked
3 about that. I feel we spend weeks and weeks
4 preparing for standardized tests, not necessarily
5 - just learning tricks in order to get the right
6 answer on standardized tests when I feel like we
7 should be learning knowledge that you can get on
8 regular classroom tests, and we've talked about
9 this before. It's not the point I want to make
10 here today, although I think it's the biggest
11 problem facing our schools, as well as this
12 obsession with standardized tests, and I
13 encourage parents who agree with me to keep
14 telling the mayor everywhere they go.

15 However, our job I think - and I knew
16 when I passed the school governance law board
17 there were going to be policy things that I don't
18 agree with. I didn't realize how far it was
19 going to go, but I understand that. So it's up
20 to parents and people to speak up and change the
21 mayor's mind during a campaign during the
22 election, and I hope we will do that and I'll
23 continue to speak out on that.

24 But the issue I think is most important
25 facing us when we're talking about school

2 governance is that when we pass the school
3 governance law, we were very specific to say
4 there should be 32 superintendents and 32 school
5 districts. There were reasons for that. I was
6 almost surprised how often my colleagues realized
7 how important those school districts are. They
8 are the family of the schools. They are the
9 place where people go to have their concerns
10 heard, they are the place where there's support
11 staff there to help principals who now are being
12 saddled with budgeting concerns, some skills
13 they're really not qualified to do, and they
14 really need support at the local level.

15 You made the point that the schools would
16 be the ninth biggest city in America if they
17 would just see themselves. That's exactly the
18 reason why school districts need to be in place
19 and really given authority. That was the intent
20 of the law.

21 It's my opinion, the way the chancellor
22 has been running the schools, is in violation of
23 the law although there is a main superintendent,
24 but they're not doing the job the superintendent
25 should be doing. There are a number of school

2 districts, but they don't really exist those
3 school districts in the way we intended them to
4 be.

5 That's the problem. It's exactly what
6 you said. It's 32 distinct communities. It
7 can't be run out of one central location. It
8 needs to have a local voice. I'm all for the
9 accountability. I'm happy to have them
10 accountable to the mayor who can fire them, but
11 that's got to be the nerve center.

12 I'll be honest, I don't believe we ever
13 would pass the School Governance Law if we knew
14 that this haphazard bureaucracy would have been
15 created and the school districts would be
16 decimated. I don't think it would have passed.
17 I can't speak for all my colleagues, but the
18 question is, can we get - if we're going to renew
19 the school governance law, which I do think we
20 should do, I want to see language that would
21 specifically bind the hands of the chancellor a
22 little, I'm looking to give them free rein to
23 some degree, but this is specifically in the law,
24 and it was in the law for a reason.

25 With the mayor's support of some type of

2 change to that, where the school districts would
3 then be given authority to actually help run the
4 schools. Those are the families. You've created
5 1,500 schools that are orphans now because they
6 don't have a family that they meet with and talk
7 to and I think it's a real problem.

8 MR. WALCOTT: A couple of things. I
9 enjoy our conversations, I enjoy our discussions,
10 I enjoy our debates because they're about policy,
11 and I think that's how we improve the system for
12 all of our children, and when you talk about the
13 32 being the nerve center, I view the 1,500
14 schools being the nerve center. And making sure
15 that the 1,500 have the resources for our
16 children in making sure that we divert as much
17 money as possible away from Tweed and the local
18 districts as far as the old offices and get those
19 dollars directly to the school, so we have a
20 little bit of a disagreement, but also not just
21 for the committee but for the member of the
22 audience as you well know, we were sued, and we
23 were sued by CSA as well as others as far as just
24 the issue that you raised, and, as a result of
25 that lawsuit we reached a settlement with those

2 who sued and we're in compliance with the
3 litigation, as far as superintendents in place,
4 not as defined before, but still superintendents
5 who have a responsibility and, as you also know,
6 and the members of the committee should know,
7 that we provide those type of professional and
8 support services to the schools through our
9 support organizations and they are professionally
10 trained and provide those services to ensure that
11 our principals are able to carry out the job.

12 Even though we're not going to talk about
13 it today, you mentioned the testing, I'm a big
14 believer in testing. I mean, we all were part of
15 a testing society, and, quite frankly, I think
16 the results that we see in our ELA and math
17 scores, and even our graduation rates are as a
18 result of putting the emphasis around making sure
19 that our students are learning, not knowing how
20 just to take a test but making sure they have the
21 capacity to do well on a test and we can talk
22 about that at a future hearing.

23 But, at the same time, we're always
24 looking to improve the system and this I think
25 will be part of an ongoing discussion as far as

2 the role in the definition of superintendents and
3 what it actually means, but we think that the
4 superintendents are doing a good job, and the
5 principals relayed to them, but the nerve center,
6 as I view it, are the schools themselves, because
7 the schools are the ones and not the offices and
8 the districts that provide the educational
9 opportunity for our children.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: The testing at this
11 point, I'm not against testing. We all took
12 tests, but when I took tests, my test prep was
13 the teacher would say, Tomorrow bring in two
14 number two pencils. Now, they're spending weeks
15 and weeks and weeks taking home Stanley Kaplan
16 packets that teach you how to get the right
17 answers with examples, and this one I just saw,
18 if the answer has always or never in it it's the
19 wrong answer. That's what they're teaching a
20 nine year old. He's not learning anything except
21 he knows, when you see always or never it's the
22 wrong answer.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you, Mark.

24 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: Sorry.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: That's okay. Rory,

2 Barbara, Audrey, Michele, and I appreciate, in
3 the audience we ask people to limit the testimony
4 to five minutes, obviously we had a deputy mayor
5 here and his staff, we extended extra time to
6 them, but if we can keep it moving, everyone will
7 be included.

8 Our next panel will include Kim Sweet and
9 Maria Dapontes, I just ask you to be in the on-
10 deck circle.

11 Assemblyman Lancman, and then
12 Assemblywoman Clark, Assemblywoman Pfeffer, and
13 she's been here the whole time and I didn't
14 acknowledge her, Assemblywoman Marge Markie, my
15 dear friend. Thank you very much.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: Good morning,
17 Deputy Mayor Walcott, and the whole panel. It's
18 good to see you. Whenever I enter a meeting and
19 I see that you are there, I know that the voice
20 of reason is in the room and, even though we
21 often disagree on policy and issues, I'm grateful
22 that we've always been able to have a respectful
23 dialogue.

24 You started your testimony with a long
25 list of accomplishments as you see it under

2 mayoral control, and I would just observe that
3 many of the accomplishments that the mayor cites
4 are disputed and not agreed with by many of the
5 parents in my community, and I don't think that
6 this is really the time to debate whether the
7 graduation rates are really what the mayor says
8 they are, or whether class sizes are really what
9 the mayor says they are, but I just want to put
10 that out on the table.

11 The essence of the mayor's argument is
12 that the Department of Education, just like any
13 other city agency, fundamentally, in that the
14 mayor should have control over it and be
15 accountable for it. So I want to ask two lines
16 of questions. One relates to the issue of
17 financial accountability and transparency which
18 Comptroller Bill Thompson has been at the
19 forefront of talking about, and the other relates
20 to parental involvement and maybe Ms. Guerrier
21 can answer those questions.

22 So let me ask you a series of why-nots
23 because these are specific policy proposals that
24 have been suggested to us by Public Advocate
25 Gotbaum, Comptroller Thompson, and many others.

2 The first relates to the issues of no-bid
3 contracts because Controller Thompson has
4 indicated that in 2007 there was something like
5 over \$100 million of what he described as no-bid
6 contracts coming out of the Department of
7 Education. Why not have the Department of
8 Education, like every other city agency, adhere
9 to the policies and procedures of the procurement
10 of policy board?

11 MR. WALCOTT: Two things, if I may, and
12 it's important for me to put into perspective in
13 that even under Controller Thompson when he was
14 borough president there were no big contracts. I
15 don't want to make it seem like we're the ones
16 who invented that - not borough president,
17 president of the board.

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I think about 15
19 million and now we're up to about \$100 million.

20 MR. WALCOTT: That's going to be my
21 second point, because a number of the contracts
22 that you're referring to are the SES contracts,
23 the state contracts that are basically no-bid
24 contracts that we have to do. So we have to
25 annualize those dollars and that \$100 million

2 that you're referring to, the state education
3 supplement services contracts, and that's
4 something that we're given to do.

5 The one that caught all the attention
6 obviously was the one that we did I guess around
7 three years ago now, around two and a half, three
8 years ago, the A&M contract as well. We've tried
9 to keep our no-bid contracts to a minimum, and
10 we've tried to ensure that the bid - just about
11 all the contracts that are out, and when there
12 are those contracts that are no-bid, we have a
13 process in place, an internal review committee to
14 review the efficacy of those no-bid contracts,
15 but we always need to do better.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: Let me ask you
17 specifically, because other city agencies have to
18 adhere to the policies and the procedures of the
19 procurement policy board, why not the Department
20 of Education?

21 MR. WALCOTT: Because it's just not the
22 way the rules are written, and what we tried -

23 I'm not going to get into a back and
24 forth with you on how to write the rules, I'm
25 just answering your question as directly as

2 possible. And at the same time we try to adhere
3 to the rules and also try to make sure that we do
4 not abuse the privilege of no-bid contracts.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: Let me ask you
6 also, why not have the Department of Education
7 also have the same responsibilities regarding the
8 City's independent budget office, which is
9 something that Public Advocate Gotbaum and
10 Borough President had raised, is that - that's
11 something that I'm advocating.

12 MR. WALCOTT: We'll look forward to
13 working with the idea. That's not an issue at
14 all. I think the other agencies though don't
15 necessarily have - and I think what you're
16 inferring, a direct line relationship with the
17 IBO. The IBO will analyze something and come
18 with its own findings, that's why it's the
19 independent budget office itself, it's not
20 directly tied into a city agency.

21 What we've done, we've done something
22 where we've gone one step further in that we're
23 creating a separate research on and we're doing
24 this through private funding to deal with the
25 validation issues and to instill confidence with

2 the public at large as far as the facts and
3 figures that you referred to earlier, whether
4 it's graduation rates or scores. We don't put
5 out the graduation rates. We follow the state's
6 graduation rates, and the graduation rates that
7 we put out we've been keeping the same exact way
8 since 1986. So the reason that we still use that
9 is just to show the trend line, but we've put out
10 the scores based on the state grade itself.

11 So there's no question about the
12 validation and the credibility of those scores
13 and with the ELA and the math scores, again,
14 that's done by the state, the city no longer
15 administers these tests.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: I understand. So
17 you wouldn't have any objection to the Department
18 of Education having the same relationship,
19 responsibilities, et cetera, vis-a-vis the
20 independent budget offices as other city
21 agencies?

22 MR. WALCOTT: It's sounds like - and I'm
23 not trying to be funny with this remark, a trick
24 question, in that, to my knowledge, unless I'm
25 not aware of it, the other city agencies don't

2 necessarily have a formal relationship with the
3 IBO. The IBO goes in and does analysis, and
4 that's basically it. The IBO has certain
5 authority and certain -

6 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: What authority do
7 they have?

8 MR. WALCOTT: To go in and get
9 information and obtain information. The question
10 itself, we're always for transparency. I want to
11 be very clear about that here today. We have
12 nothing to hide at all. We're always interested
13 in being more transparent. We look forward to
14 any suggestions on how we can become more
15 transparent.

16 I think it's also - to put it in context
17 as well, in that when I heard the public
18 advocate, and I've heard other comments before
19 that there isn't any accountability, whether it's
20 here with the Assembly Education Committee, or
21 the City Council Education Committee, or with the
22 controller, with the state controller, there are
23 various means of checks and balances as far as
24 verifying our facts and figure themselves, and
25 the submission of data to support the facts and

2 figures. The controller comes in and audits us
3 on a number of issues on a regular basis and
4 we're always cooperating with the controller.

5 Like any of us, we may have disagreements
6 around the results of the audit, but we never
7 tried to hide any figures, and if there are
8 suggestions on how we can become more
9 transparent, we're very much interested in that.

10 But we have never tried to hide anything, nor do
11 we want to hide anything. It's the public's
12 information and the public should have that
13 information.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: Thank you very
15 much.

16 Let me ask a couple of questions
17 regarding parental involvement, and, Ms.
18 Guerrier, if you can answer them, I would
19 appreciate it.

20 The panel on education policy, I mean,
21 you would agree, wouldn't you, that if you are a
22 panel, that you're supposed to oversee and
23 consult and be a part of the process of setting
24 educational policy?

25 If the mayor has the ability to fire you

2 from that panel without any cause or any reason
3 or any notice that would inhibit kind of a free
4 flow of ideas and debate in that panel, that's -
5 you wouldn't dispute that, would you?

6 MS. GUERRIER: I had to make sure I
7 wrote down what you asked. Also, as someone who
8 was a member of the panel for educational policy,
9 and I think just sort of referring to - what was
10 it, March 2003, I can say - no - right, 2004. It
11 feels like I was on there 20 years, but I hadn't
12 really been on there that long. It actually
13 didn't stop the flow of debate between panel
14 members. It didn't stop us from challenging the
15 chancellor, it didn't stop us from challenging
16 decisions.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: Have you not heard
18 any criticism from panel members that they're not
19 comfortable challenging the mayor vigorously on
20 issues and decision that he wants to make because
21 for fear that they'll be removed?

22 MS. GUERRIER: No, actually, I haven't
23 heard that, and I was on the panel. If I had, I
24 would actually tell you that I did.

25 MR. WALCOTT: We didn't follow Martine.

2 Martine disagreed all the time. If anything, we
3 hired Martine. Martine was -

4 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: The three people
5 were fired.

6 MR. WALCOTT: Let me tell you about
7 that. Since you raised that issue, and it goes
8 to something that I said in the paper today, I'm
9 not sure about any of you, but I remember under
10 the old structure, when there were fixed terms,
11 people were raging and complaining about board
12 members who were out of control. They were not
13 responsible, whether it was to the mayor or to
14 the borough president. They had fixed terms, and
15 with those fixed terms, they did their own thing.

16 We have several cases where, as you know, if you
17 check the newspapers, you will see people
18 constantly complaining around fixed terms.

19 I think it's also important to know that
20 that was the only case where people were
21 dismissed, and, as a result of that, and it was
22 purely around educational needs, because I can
23 tell you exactly, there was great consensus back
24 and forth dialogue between a variety of the panel
25 members. What people wanted to do wasn't just

2 around the policy, they wanted to delay the
3 policy a year. That meant that you would be
4 delaying the promotion or lack thereof of
5 children for a year, and that, to us, was
6 unacceptable.

7 So as a result of that, 18,000 children
8 received the education they needed to receive to
9 be promoted to the next grade, who otherwise, if
10 that policy had not been put in place would have
11 been just promoted, and then gone from grade to
12 grade and would have been future drop-outs.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: The policy merits
14 of leaving back children at that young age we can
15 have at another hearing, but aren't members of
16 the panel, the policy - the panel for educational
17 policy, aren't they there precisely to use their
18 independent judgment and act as they perceive to
19 be in the best interest of the kids, and they
20 should not be answerable to their appointed
21 authority.

22 MR. WALCOTT: I don't know if we agree
23 on that, but I will say this to you. We do not
24 micro-manage those individuals - we do not micro-
25 manage those individuals, when the panel voted

2 against establishing cell phone towers on top of
3 different school buildings, we didn't remove
4 them. It was a policy that came for the review,
5 they voted it down and that was that. We don't
6 try to micro-manage, and I think Martine has the
7 best insight since she was both on the panel as
8 well as now on staff in that there's a lot of
9 consensus.

10 Even with the policy around social
11 promotion that was eventually passed, there's a
12 great amount of consensus between the panel
13 members and the staff of the Department of
14 Education as far as achieving the ultimate policy
15 that was passed, and, as a result of that, the
16 assessments in doing that based on the test
17 scores, it was also based on a portfolio review
18 as well by the teachers, and was included in that
19 policy and, as a result of that, from the third
20 grade, we went to the fifth grade, as you know,
21 from the fifth grade, we went to the seventh and
22 then to the eighth grade, and those votes were
23 not controversial at all.

24 If we had not removed those individuals,
25 we don't know what would have happened as far as

2 the future, so something that we believe in
3 strongly, the special deals with the educational
4 welfare and potential educational success of the
5 children, that the people appointing the
6 individuals should have the right to dismiss it
7 if they're not in alignment with them.

8 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: A follow-up and then
9 we have to move on.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: I have one last
11 question. As far as the debate, what was going
12 on about mayoral control, I wasn't in the
13 legislature then, but I was part of the
14 community, and Chicago was used as a model quite
15 a bit.

16 I just did a little research on the whole
17 school leadership team issue because it's a very
18 big issue in the district that I represent.

19 Is there any consideration given to
20 giving the school leadership teams - I know that
21 the department just lost a very important ruling
22 at the state education commissioner level, but to
23 giving the school leadership teams, as they are
24 given in Chicago, budgetary authority, the
25 ability to make serious recommendations and be

2 involved in the hiring or firing of principals,
3 what is your plan for strengthening school
4 leadership teams?

5 MS. GUERRIER: So to answer directly,
6 school leadership teams have the authority to
7 develop the comprehensive educational plan in
8 alignment with the school's budget, and that
9 language comes directly from the commissioner's
10 regulation, 100.11, that's not something that the
11 city did, that's something that the State
12 Education Department has implemented, that they
13 didn't give full authority over the budget to the
14 school leadership teams.

15 That the school leadership teams serve as
16 the start for a C30 committee, which is how
17 school principals get hired. So they do have the
18 authority to participate in those processes and
19 to ensure that the needs and the voices of
20 parents and the entire school community are not
21 just heard, but also exercised in the final
22 decisions around both CEP alignment with the
23 budget, and the hiring of a school principal.

24 I think there has been, without even
25 turning around, that there are parents who are

2 probably in this audience who have participated
3 in C30 processes who didn't feel like their
4 choice had actually been respected or permitted
5 to become the leader of that school building, but
6 that's not the same as saying that there's no
7 avenue for parents to participate in the process
8 and to be heard in the process.

9 I think when we're talking about ensure
10 that standard, both for academics as well as for
11 parent participation, that they need to realistic
12 and they need to be within the purview of each
13 organization's responsibility. So when the state
14 changes the authority around school leadership
15 teams, I think we would be welcoming of any
16 opportunity to provide parents with more access
17 and more support.

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you.
19 Assemblywoman Clark. We're trying to move, I
20 just ask people's patience. I know have a
21 lengthy witness list. Please don't leave, we've
22 extended extra time because it's the deputy mayor
23 and the DOE team. Thank you, Barbara.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you. You
25 know, my oldest of four children started in New

2 York City Schools in 1962, and I've been an
3 active parent from the beginning. I know the
4 school system pretty well. I also know that I
5 lived through the strikes of 1967 and '68. I've
6 lived through it all and I've always rejected
7 becoming a member of the school board - I helped
8 them get elected, but I rejected it because I was
9 never pleased with how they worked, because in my
10 mind - most of the people on the school boards
11 were elected official people, union people, and
12 everybody else's people. They weren't the
13 parent. That's why when I went to Albany I
14 fought for the parents to be members of the
15 school board.

16 Here's what I also fought for. The
17 district lines to be changed, because school
18 district lines - different school districts have,
19 you know, thousands more children, and there was
20 a school district in the Bronx that I had I think
21 about 58,000 kids. When school districts were
22 created, there was supposed to be for about
23 15,000 kids.

24 So my question to you is, would there be
25 some difference in how the system operates now if

2 the school district lines were redrawn so that
3 there was more equality in the number of students
4 in a school district? I do know we passed a law
5 that would require that they be done, and I don't
6 think that - I think one maybe changed their line
7 just slightly, and no of the others would budge.

8 So can you respond to what difference
9 that might make? Because that may be another
10 area that we may need to start looking towards.

11 MR. WALCOTT: Back in 1994 when I was a
12 member of the Board of Education, we held
13 hearings around the lines themselves, and I think
14 that was one of the most third rail, hot-button
15 issues that we ever tackled. I remember the long
16 lines, and the protests around that, and it
17 really gets into a lot of the racial, ethnic, and
18 demographic challenges of navigating something
19 that is in a very difficult and complicated
20 process.

21 While we're never shy as all of you know
22 in tackling difficult things, even if we don't
23 agree sometimes on what those difficult things
24 are - I mean, taking a look at the lines
25 themselves is something that I would say is

2 something a couple of years maybe off, if at all.

3 I mean, it is a very third-rail issue. I think
4 we would really have to talk about developing a
5 process, developing a very open process with you,
6 the members of the assembly, as well as state
7 senate, and all the legislative leaders around
8 and how we would undertake that.

9 I think, assemblywoman, to tackle, I
10 think the next challenge for us, it goes back to
11 Assemblyman O'Donnell's question as far as the
12 zoning within districts and even that is a very
13 contentious issue, but I think one of the
14 challenges and one of the things that we want to
15 talk about in the future, chairwoman, is how we
16 enhance the role of CECs in addressing within
17 districts the zoning, because I think changing
18 demographics have made - have provided us a major
19 opportunity to look at within districts what
20 those opportunities can be to better a district
21 itself.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I have one more
23 question. The fact that when we had school
24 districts operating as they were, that we would
25 have as many as - I'm going to do school

2 districts and then I'm going to get to the board,
3 the fact that we would have principals serving
4 for three years as acting, those are the things
5 we lived with. Then when I dug deeper, there
6 were 10 AP's in a school district of 25 schools
7 at that time interim acting.

8 All of that lent itself to a huge
9 disservice to children, and those acting
10 principals never go the jobs. So the school
11 districts and their superintendents were doing a
12 horrible disservice to children to leave an
13 unqualified person in place for as much as three
14 years, and so I notified the chancellor of what
15 was going on. The chancellor had found out that
16 there were 10 AP's interim acting as well, that
17 was Chancellor Cortinez, so I'm going back a few
18 years.

19 But those are the things that made me
20 want to change the school district system. Not
21 just the numbers. Not just the fact all
22 districts are not created equal. And the
23 districts in the city that are working very very
24 well raised the most hell. And the districts
25 that are still struggling to try to get their

2 kids to where they need to be, are the ones that
3 are not raising too much hell, and I wish they
4 would. So, you know, we have a huge huge
5 difference in opinion here, because my opinion is
6 always focused on what happens to the kids. And
7 right now kids are moving forward so we can be
8 happy about that. Not as fast as I want or as
9 far as I want, but they are moving forward.

10 Getting back to a changing of the school
11 governance, it's the central board - Dennis, I
12 don't know if you were - yes, you were there at
13 the time this happened.

14 On December 23rd, the central board as we
15 knew it fired Rudy Crew.

16 MR. WALCOTT: I was not there.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Okay, you weren't
18 there. Fired Rudy Crew on the 23rd day of
19 December, and I can remember when I heard it I
20 could not believe it and it was about the mayor -
21 told his members to get rid of him, dump him,
22 because he had said that he would not entertain
23 vouchers in the school system.

24 We changed superintendents - we changed
25 chancellors, I always say faster than we change

2 diapers for a while in this city. We had a new
3 chancellor about every two years. Klein is a
4 senior citizen in terms of how long he served as
5 chancellor in this city, and how much does that
6 impact changing chancellors on progress, or lack
7 thereof, in the school system? Answer that
8 question for me.

9 MR. WALCOTT: Sure. I think all of us
10 when we do our reading and research we see that
11 when you go through a transformation, it's
12 important to have continuity in leadership, and
13 that way with continuity and leadership, the
14 changes that one proposes becomes grounded as far
15 as the new policies that are proposed. I think
16 we're seeing the results of continuity. And a
17 lot of times what happens is that it becomes the
18 accepted culture in making sure that high
19 standards are being set when you've had the
20 changes that we all lived through in the past
21 when we had an average chancellor stay 1.8 years
22 and, as a result of that, whether it was the
23 death of Richard Greene, or Ray Cortinez being
24 fired, Joe Fernandez being fired, or Rudy Crew
25 being fired, I mean, we can all just name them

2 throughout the years, you had a system in
3 addition to the dysfunctional setup of the
4 system, you had a system lurching back and forth.

5 As a result of that, I think the policies
6 that they may have believed in were never allowed
7 to get to the ground to stake and, as a result of
8 that, our children suffered.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Audrey.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: Thank you, and I
12 thank you for your input. We sat many long hours
13 originally on the task force trying to and
14 interviewing Chicago administration, and one of
15 the things that we did bring out was the fact
16 that having a chancellor in place for a longer
17 period of time was very important and we learned
18 that from the other school districts.

19 I always have a concern that we have our
20 school chancellor in place for many years, but
21 the curriculum and the involvement in the schools
22 keep changing, so we went from one line to cord
23 to something else which is very confusing, so I'm
24 not sure if we corrected one and instituted
25 another.

2 But one of the main things we did bring
3 out was about parent participation and
4 empowerment and involvement. And zoning was
5 something that we said had to be remained.
6 Budgetary involvement and I think strengthening
7 the CECs is something that we would look at and I
8 think it's something that we wanted somehow, what
9 we wanted and what actually turned out in the
10 legislation also was a little different, but that
11 involvement will be there.

12 Just a couple of quick questions. The
13 PTA or PA or whatever it's called, how many are
14 truly functioning? You said there are how many
15 schools, 1,500?

16 MS. GUERRIER: There are approximately
17 1,500 schools.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: Do you have that
19 information or can you get that for me?

20 MS. GUERRIER: Actually, we did our
21 survey - within the last two years, what we've
22 done, I need to give you just a little bit of
23 information there, what we've done is to ensure
24 that principals are also entering parent
25 participation involvement in their schools. So

1 to that end, principals certify to us whether or
2 not there is a PA PTA in their school that
3 they're actually working with. That's one way.
4

5 The second way is that we work through
6 the district family advocates connecting with the
7 parent coordinators, as well as district
8 president's council to collect information on who
9 has been recently elected to the parent
10 associations in the schools. So that's how we
11 find out. The number that we actually know, and
12 I have it by percentage, off the top of my head,
13 out of the 1,500 schools, we can say that 95
14 percent of them actually have a PA, that means
15 everyone is elected and they're having a regular
16 meeting, and that five percent are situations
17 where leadership is changing, and, at the same
18 time, where they might not have started off early
19 in the school year with all of the positions
20 filled, or they might have had turnover very
21 early on.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: Would it be
23 difficult for us, or a violation of some kind of
24 privacy to know exactly which schools, just so
25 that - five percent, we'll do it that way.

2 MS. GUERRIER: Sure.

3 MR. WALCOTT: So that's not violating
4 anything.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: Good. Because
6 it's important, we will work with the - you
7 mentioned one thing, charter schools, you said
8 had stricter empowerment process.

9 MS. GUERRIER: There's a greater legal
10 requirement when it comes to school citings for
11 charter schools, that's what I said.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: I wrote charter
13 schools have stricter engagement process.

14 MS. GUERRIER: For school citings.

15 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: For school
16 citings, okay.

17 I just want to support and we will be
18 very vocal about the fact about the
19 superintendent's involvement in the school, in
20 the school district. I've gone to many meetings
21 of the CEC and the superintendent gives a report,
22 and it's a very short report because her
23 involvement in the actual school district is very
24 very limited. So when all the questions come
25 from the people in attendance, or from the CEC

2 themselves, she cannot answer or would say, I'm
3 not responsible for that. I think that is a real
4 real problem and it's something that if you do
5 not have the proper suggestions for us, we would
6 have to look at it legislatively, to enhance the
7 legislation that's already in place.

8 I have many more questions but they'll be
9 many more hearings.

10 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Michele Titus and
11 then Michael Benedetto.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TITUS: Before you leave,
13 I just wanted to bring up an issue that I didn't
14 hear too much discussion about. I'm also in the
15 assembly to chair the task force on people with
16 disabilities, and I'm also a parent. I know - we
17 look at our children going through the school
18 system so they come out at the end being
19 successful, independent productive citizens in
20 this society.

21 If you could, could you just expand or
22 talk - what is the Department of Education's plan
23 with the transition for children with
24 disabilities once they leave the Department of
25 Education?

2 I'm hearing a lot of parents that are
3 sort of left in an abyss when it comes to what
4 happens, are there some sort of training
5 programs? I know it is the law in special
6 education that there's supposed to be a
7 transition period that's supposed to be
8 implemented on your IEP and parents should be sat
9 down and discuss what are the options.

10 Can you just discuss that aspect of the
11 Department of Education?

12 MS. GUERRIER: Quite honestly, I don't
13 have that information because it is very specific
14 to the needs of students in special ed. We have
15 within the office of family engagement advocacy
16 special education specialists. I'm not sure if
17 Liz can answer, so -

18 MS.SCIABARRA: I just need a little bit
19 more clarification, can you restate your
20 question?

21 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Just state our name
22 again so our wonderful stenographer who is
23 speaking.

24 MS. SCIABARRA: Liz Sciabarra, DOE. Can
25 you reiterate -

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TITUS: Right. Under the
3 law, federal law, children with disabilities,
4 their IEP, I think maybe by age 13 they should be
5 implemented on their IEP a transition plan. What
6 that child should be focusing, once they leave
7 the Department of Education whether or not it's
8 higher learning or some sort of work program, and
9 what I'm finding, there is sort of a gap there,
10 so to speak with those parents with children with
11 disabilities and what transition plan should be
12 implemented for their children, and I just want
13 to know if the Department of Education has looked
14 at this issue and what reforms you plan on
15 implementing as we go forward with all the
16 reforms in education.

17 MS. SCIABARRA: I'm not able to answer
18 that question totally, but that is - evidentially
19 that is a D75 issue. Students who are in D75
20 schools and also youngsters, they may be in
21 special classes or collaborative team teaching.

22 So I have your question now, and we'll be
23 in touch and I'll get back to you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We will be following
25 up, particularly in our hearing on Staten Island.

2 Is there anyone who can answer that? You have a
3 lot of people here. Can someone answer
4 Assemblywoman Titus' question?

5 MR. WALCOTT: Not with the people who
6 are here. I mean, we'll be glad to get back to
7 you regarding that specific question.

8 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Is that a question
9 that the family engagement office has gotten? I
10 know you wanted to respond to something that
11 Audrey said, perhaps in responding to both,
12 answer that.

13 MS. GUERRIER: The length of my response
14 is that we do have someone within our office who
15 works with families of students with special
16 needs. We have a special education specialist,
17 and she also serves as our director of special
18 services.

19 So she would be working with district
20 family advocates to provide workshops for parents
21 to explain the process for transition and to
22 really talk them through what the options are
23 that are available to them. So it's more like
24 information that I can have sent to you, versus
25 my ability to actually articulate what that is.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TITUS: Also, more
3 importantly, what I'm also hearing is that this
4 area is not probably an area that the Department
5 of Education is really focusing on.

6 MR. WALCOTT: No. We're no -

7 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: let's not jump down
8 the Assemblywoman's -

9 MR. WALCOTT: We're not.

10 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: There's an
11 opportunity to respond. She asked an excellent
12 question. Thank you, Michele.

13 MR. WALCOTT: No, we're not jumping down
14 her throat.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: It sounds like that.

16 MR. WALCOTT: No, no, no. I just wanted
17 to say to that, we are not the experts and we
18 don't want to provide the wrong information up
19 here more than that. We've done a lot of
20 reconfiguration of our whole special needs and
21 special education unit, and we have experts who
22 are very adept and we are doing a whole lot
23 better in responding to those needs.

24 It's just that the people sitting at this
25 table who are in the room just don't have that

2 area of expertise and I don't want us to give
3 wrong information, plus I would never jump down
4 Michele's throat at all.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TITUS: Just, of course, I
6 would love for you to follow up publically at one
7 of the hearings before these hearings are
8 terminated, but also just as we move forward with
9 reforms, we need to also make sure that we pay
10 special attention to those parents that have
11 children with disabilities.

12 A lot of times there are parents in
13 school. I get those phone calls when they have
14 gone a whole year without any of the support
15 services that are enumerated on their IP which is
16 egregious, is against the law, and we really need
17 to have some kind of focal point within the
18 Department of Education so these parents can get
19 their issues addressed immediately.

20 MR. WALCOTT: As the chair said in
21 Staten Island, or whatever other point, we'll be
22 glad to give you - and have the experts to give
23 you all the information.

24 MS. GUERRIER: And it's actually to that
25 end that within the office of family engagement

2 and advocacy, we've created the position of a
3 special education specialist, director of special
4 support services, as well as a crisis support
5 specialist for families of students who may also
6 receive special education services, but also
7 living in temporary housing, so we've done a lot
8 to ensure support for them.

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TITUS: Thank you.

10 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Assemblyman
11 Benedetto.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Yes, deputy
13 mayor, I'm a big proponent of supervision,
14 watching over people and making sure that they do
15 their job right. When I was a school teacher
16 myself, my special ed supervisor was there, my
17 principal was always looking over and that's the
18 way it should be. A principal, the school
19 district superintendent, is that who the
20 principal is accountable to? Who is their
21 immediate supervisor is basically what I'm
22 asking?

23 MR. WALCOTT: The superintendent is one
24 of the supervisors of that particular principal,
25 and -

2 ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: But there could
3 be more?

4 MR. WALCOTT: Well, it's the school
5 support organization to provide the information,
6 but the ultimate person is the chancellor, bottom
7 line. And what we've done is put a system in
8 place to allow the chancellor, through our
9 accountability system to measure the progress of
10 the principals and, as you know, I think it was
11 around two years ago we created, I think, a
12 historic agreement with the CSA as far as
13 performance measure for principals, and, as a
14 result of that, there are very strict standards
15 that we have in place to measure the progress, or
16 lack thereof of a principal, so the chancellor
17 and his team are the ultimate authority as far as
18 principals being successful or not.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Well, I firmly,
20 you know, support that, and I think that's a -
21 but 1,500 schools, the chancellor can't watch
22 over 1,500 people. What you have to do is have a
23 more localized observer, like the superintendent.

24 MR. WALCOTT: And with the
25 superintendent, they have specific

2 responsibilities, as stipulated by law, that we
3 are in compliance with, and they meet with the
4 chancellor on a regular basis, as far as those
5 principals that are part of his or her
6 responsibility in making sure that that principal
7 is carrying out those responsibilities, so we are
8 in compliance with the law, and we do follow-up
9 with that.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: Thank you.

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you for your
12 time. Just to review, 95 percent of the parent
13 coordinators are in place, 95 percent of the PA's
14 are certified. What's the percentage of - and
15 that's what you said?

16 MR. WALCOTT: Yes.

17 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: What's the percentage
18 of CEC vacancy and participation?

19 MR. WALCOTT: Right now, there are -

20 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: The CEC stands for
21 Community Education Councils. And, again, I want
22 to thank the audience. I never object to people
23 who have posters at our hearings. Just try not
24 to block the view of the people in back of you.
25 Just try to be patient and courteous to each

2 other.

3 What is the percentage of participation
4 in CECs?

5 MS. GUERRIER: Yes. Right now, of the
6 34 different councils, I believe there are only
7 two that do not have the full compliment of
8 numbers and we have place trustees on the board
9 so that they can actually engage in their
10 business for -

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: What are the two CECs
12 that have trustees?

13 MS. GUERRIER: Off the top of my head, I
14 cannot recall.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We would like that
16 for the next hearing. What percentage of CECs
17 have a vacancy as opposed to not even having the
18 ability to have a quorum?

19 MS. GUERRIER: Those are the two.

20 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: All right. What's
21 the percentage of people voting in the CEC
22 process through the parent associations?

23 MS. GUERRIER: I believe in 2007, out of
24 the, I think possibly 4,500 individuals who could
25 - actually, last year was 3,700 eligible

2 selectors, and out of that 3,700 it's my
3 understanding that there were just about 3,200
4 selectors that actually voted.

5 MR. WALCOTT: 32 out of 37.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: The number that was
7 given to me at an earlier discussion was 4,500,
8 not 30 -

9 MS. GUERRIER: Well, the potential
10 number of people who can vote -

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I just think we need
12 some clarification on that, as to what is the
13 number of who participated and the number who
14 voted.

15 Many people are not familiar with this
16 because it's not often mentioned. I thought that
17 you might mention it in your testimony, deputy
18 mayor, we actually have changed the New York City
19 school governance law with - about a year or two
20 ago in response to the intense complaints by you
21 in the editorials you wrote in the Queens papers
22 and others, you said you couldn't get anybody to
23 serve on the CECs because the state had imposed a
24 lengthy financial disclosure form.

25 So in response to that, we did change the

2 financial disclosure form. I have yet ever to
3 hear if that passage of that resulted in better
4 participation in CECs since for a long time you
5 said that was the reason that no one wanted to be
6 on it.

7 MS. GUERRIER: Actually, from when I
8 started with the department, now I can say that
9 there are fewer council members that are actually
10 complaining about the financial disclosure. I
11 think that was a major indicator -

12 MR. WALCOTT: When you say council
13 members, you mean the CEC?

14 MS. GUERRIER: Yes, I'm sorry. We call
15 them council members. CEC members are no longer
16 complaining about the financial disclosure form.
17 We did have individuals who had in protest of
18 that financial - of the original form left their
19 councils.

20 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We were also under
21 the impression that the 34 councils, that there
22 were far more than two, as recently as a year
23 ago, there were far more than two that had very
24 few members. What have you done then to change
25 that? What have you done in the family

2 engagement office to increase those numbers
3 since, as of the last data that I had, that was
4 not the data that I had.

5 MR. WALCOTT: Sure.

6 MS. GUERRIER: So, we've done a number
7 of things. The first is that we started a
8 campaign to promote community education councils,
9 so we started, quite honestly, a poster campaign.

10 We asked all of the community education
11 council members as well as the citywide council
12 members to stand for photos. We created posters
13 of them with taglines that they created
14 themselves, and we put them in our schools. So
15 that was one way to promote the councils by
16 making them more visible.

17 One of the disadvantages for the council
18 members had been that the number of individuals
19 who actually vote for them was a limited pool of
20 people, so that most of the information was
21 targeted just to their hands. What we've done is
22 to ensure that many more parents actually know
23 and understand what community education councils
24 do, one with the poster campaign, and second by
25 highlighting their recommendations and their

2 suggestions within a school community, that we
3 also ensure that they are participants in events
4 and, whenever possible, that the chancellor
5 actually speaks about them and certainly meets
6 with them on a more regular basis, and that we
7 also involve them more in a lot of the policy
8 initiatives.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Is there anything in
10 the law that requires them to meet monthly, or is
11 there anything in the chancellor's regulation
12 that says he must meet with them? Because one of
13 the complaints we've heard is that the chancellor
14 meets with them when he feels like it, as opposed
15 to when they want him there.

16 MS. GUERRIER: Actually, that's not true
17 at all. The chancellor -

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: What is true?

19 MS. GUERRIER: I'd be glad to answer
20 that. First, that it is within the law that DEC
21 should meet at least once a month and that they
22 are to meet on a monthly basis, I think the same
23 time with their superintendent, but that the
24 chancellor himself has actually extended to them
25 invitations for meetings, they participate in

2 intergovernmental policy briefings, and he meets
3 with them at their request.

4 Now there are times when scheduling
5 conflicts occur where we have to postpone a
6 meeting, but that is not the same as saying, I'm
7 not going to meet with you. We have bimonthly
8 meetings between the chancellor and what we're
9 calling the CEC president's alliance.

10 The chancellor, in an effort to try and
11 ensure that their voices will be heard and that
12 they were able to organize themselves, encourage
13 them to organize a citywide group. They chose to
14 organize as a CEC president's alliance and he
15 meets with them regularly.

16 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: When did that happen?

17 MS. GUERRIER: Sure. That started in
18 August of 2007.

19 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: What happened to the
20 chancellor's parent advisory committee?

21 MS. GUERRIER: It still exists.

22 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: How often does it
23 meet?

24 MS. GUERRIER: It meets monthly.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: How often does the

2 panel on educational policy meet?

3 MS. GUERRIER: Monthly.

4 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I understood there
5 were some gaps in that over the last six years,
6 there's been some times when both the panel on
7 educational policy and the CPAC and the CECs,
8 we've received complaints in our office, have
9 missed meetings, not have meetings, and we
10 understand that these things can happen, but the
11 question is, is it a pattern? We've had some
12 people suggest that -

13 MR. WALCOTT: In dealing with the PEP,
14 I'm not aware of any aside from maybe the month
15 of August when people may be on vacation, but I
16 can't attest to that, but what we'll be glad to
17 do, Madam Chair, is get you the actual meeting
18 schedules and provide to the committee the
19 minutes of those meetings as well, so that way it
20 will validate that.

21 And I know CPAC, I know CPAC meets on a
22 monthly basis, and I will go and others
23 participate in CPAC.

24 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We recently received
25 some letters, and there was some comment in the

2 paper, and of course I can't find the article
3 right now, I did bring it earlier this morning
4 where a number of CEC parents said that they felt
5 they were rubber stamped. It gets to the heart
6 of what Mr. O'Donnell asked.

7 What training do you do for the CEC
8 members so that they don't feel that way and they
9 do participate?

10 MS. GUERRIER: Sure. Community
11 education councils and the citywide council, we
12 offer regular training, not just in their role
13 and responsibility, but also on various policy
14 initiatives that are important to their function.

15 We offer this on a regular basis, regular
16 meaning, we've actually worked with them to
17 create the curriculum for it.

18 We've had an outreach and training
19 committee of CEC members and DOE staff to outline
20 that. We've brought in Doreen Dimartini, who you
21 might recall, who had been the head of what was
22 once called the office of community school
23 district affairs to work with CEC members to
24 outline the training curriculum. So we offered
25 them training, not just on parliamentary

2 procedure, but also on the aspects of the law.
3 We've done training with the special education
4 office, we've done trainings with enrollment,
5 we've done training with portfolio, we've done
6 trainings with the office of accountability, so
7 that they're actually able to use the tools and
8 information that we provide to them to understand
9 what's going on in their districts.

10 But also, just to go back to CPAC, it
11 meets monthly and hasn't missed any meetings.
12 They may have had a quorum concern, which is
13 different than not having a regular meeting.

14 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We'd like to request
15 that we get some of that information.

16 MS. GUERRIER: Sure.

17 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: People have been very
18 patient and we want to try to move on.

19 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Can I just ask one
20 quick question?

21 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: A lot of people are
22 starting to hold up signs, Barbara, so just
23 quick.

24 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Just one. Am I
25 wrong to believe that the community school

2 district councils operate under the same law that
3 community school boards operated under other than
4 they cannot be the final say on a school
5 superintendent, and if I remember correctly, that
6 power was taken away before we changed the law to
7 school governance? The chancellor had final
8 sign-off on the school superintendent, if I can
9 remember.

10 Are they operating under the same law as
11 the old community school boards?

12 MS. GUERRIER: There are some parts of
13 it that are different. I mean, the actual
14 authority of CECs include promoting achievement
15 of educational standards and objectives relating
16 to instruction of students, annual financial
17 disclosure filing, participate in training and
18 continuing ed programs, prepare district report
19 card, retain council if the council are members
20 of defendant or respondent, approve zoning lines
21 as submitted by the superintendent, hold meetings
22 at least every month with the superintendent to
23 discuss the current state of the schools in the
24 district, review the district's educational
25 programs and assess their effect on student

2 achievement, hold public meetings at least once a
3 month with the superintendent so the public may
4 speak, submit an annual evaluation of the
5 superintendent to the chancellor, hold a public
6 hearing on the district's annual capacity plan
7 and submit a plan to the chancellor, provide
8 input to the chancellor and the city board on
9 district concerns and provide assistance to
10 school leadership teams.

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: That's kind of
12 like the same, but it's different. Okay, thank
13 you.

14 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I really appreciate
15 everyone's patience. A couple of things as we
16 wrap up. The school leadership team members
17 receive \$300. They can choose to use that for
18 their expenses in the many meetings they attend,
19 or as most apparently do, donate it to the school
20 itself.

21 We do have questions at a later date
22 about the PTA and there are people who have
23 testified before us who sent us letters indicate
24 a much larger percentage of PTAs not functioning
25 and no real effort in these last six years to

2 change that, so we would like some documentation
3 from the DOE as to what you're doing to
4 strengthen parent/teacher organizations, and the
5 same applies to the CECs. We never did get any
6 feedback as to how the form changed things, so we
7 would like to hear a little bit more about that
8 at a later time.

9 Then the last thing I would like to say
10 is, we thank you. We made an exception - and I
11 know there are a lot of angry parents in the
12 room. It is the deputy mayor. He is the mayor's
13 representative here.

14 You went about 50 minutes, but you have
15 to understand that our colleagues are going to
16 have questions, but their testimony went much
17 longer than what we would normally allow. We
18 wanted to make that exception because you are the
19 people running the system, and we thank you very
20 much for your participation.

21 MR. WALCOTT: Madam Chair, if I may, I
22 want to thank you and the members of the
23 committee and the other assembly members who are
24 here, and as I pledge to you and want to
25 reinforce that pledge to you that any information

2 you require, we'll be glad to provide and you'll
3 have the full cooperation of both the Department
4 of Education and the mayor's office in making
5 sure that we collaborate together.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: As you know, this is
7 my third year and we're still waiting on some of
8 that, but what hopes brings eternal, and that's
9 going to be the last word.

10 Thank you very much. Our next witness is
11 going to be Kim Sweet, the executive director of
12 Advocates for Children, and I'm really
13 disappointed, I know Maria Dapontes-Daugherty had
14 to leave, if she's still here, we'll arrange to
15 have her at another time, since she was the
16 plaintiff in the school leadership team case, and
17 I can't apologize to her enough. If there's
18 someone representing her who can read her
19 testimony that would be great.

20 Dmytro Fedkowskyj, the Queens
21 representative on the panel for Educational
22 Policy is coming later, I know they just had a
23 baby. Queen Makkada, is she here, from the
24 Borough President's Advisory Council? We would
25 like to try to put panels together. I really -

2 there are a lot of people from DOE, Deputy Mayor
3 Walcott, can some of them stay or are they all
4 leaving when you leave?

5 MR. WALCOTT: I plan to stay.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: You can go, but if
7 you go, they'll all go with you.

8 Thank you, Kim, thank you very much, and
9 thank you everyone for your patience and for your
10 continued good will.

11 Please feel free to start.

12 MS. SWEET: Good afternoon. My name is
13 Kim Sweet, and I am the executive director of
14 Advocates for Children of New York. I want to
15 begin by thanking you all for holding these
16 hearings on this very important issue and for
17 giving me the opportunity to testify today.

18 I have to begin with a quick answer to
19 Assemblywoman Titus' question. This is
20 transition of kids with disabilities to life
21 after high school is not a district 75 issue,
22 it's actually a legal right for all 180,000 kids
23 in the school system, and it's a legal right and
24 a necessity. So if you would like to talk to me
25 more about the scope of that, I'd be happy to do

2 that.

3 For more than 37 years, Advocates for
4 Children has helped New York City's parents to
5 navigate the sprawling public education system
6 and to make their voices heard. We work every
7 year with thousands of parents throughout the
8 city, which gives us a unique vantage point for
9 observing how changes in school governance affect
10 families on the ground.

11 I also have the honor and the opportunity
12 to serve personally on the commission on school
13 governance appointed by Public Advocate Betsy
14 Gotbaum, and in that capacity I was able to
15 listen over the course of several months to more
16 than 50 parents and other stakeholders give their
17 views on mayoral control.

18 In addition, I'm presently a member of
19 the Campaign for Better Schools, a coalition of
20 advocacy organizations serving low-income
21 communities, and we are finalizing our platform
22 with respect to mayoral control and we'll be
23 sharing that with you as soon as it's ready.

24 What is remarkable to me is that across
25 all of these different contexts, the message has

1 been strikingly similar. Almost nobody wants to
2 go back to the system as it was before 2002, but
3 almost everybody wants some change from how it is
4 now. Regarding what needs to change, I've heard
5 almost universal agreement on the same three
6 themes, and I expect you will as well.

7 First, we need more checks and balances
8 on the mayor's almost total control of the
9 schools. Now, if the mayor wants to push through
10 on popular or unwise policies or wasteful
11 contracts, there is really no way to stop him.
12 And regardless of whether you think this mayor
13 has pushed through good or bad policies, this law
14 enables any mayor to push through policies
15 without really any meaningful check on the power.
16

17 Second, there is a general distrust of
18 data reported by the Department of Education and
19 a belief that is always being spun to reflect
20 positively on the mayor. We need some entity,
21 independent of the Department of Education to
22 access, assess, and report data objectively so
23 the public can really know how well the
24 department is truly doing at its job.

25 Third, parents feel, or most parents feel

2 completely shut out of school governance
3 decisions. We need to enhance opportunities for
4 parents to participate meaningfully in decisions
5 affecting their schools.

6 As a public school parent myself, I know
7 that most of us are not spending a whole lot of
8 time thinking about mayoral control. I doubt
9 that many of the parents of my children's friends
10 even know that this law is going to sunset in
11 June 20091.

12 But parents are thinking a lot about the
13 things that matter most to them. For example,
14 the decision to move their school to another
15 building; the frequent confusing changes in
16 kindergarten admission procedures; and for
17 parents of students with special education needs,
18 the success of reorganizations changing who is
19 responsible for what.

20 Parents are talking about how they can't
21 find out what's going on and how they feel
22 powerless to influence any of these decisions.
23 Most parents are not going to find the time to go
24 to community district education council meetings
25 on a regular basis, we're just too busy to do

1 that all the time, but when the issues they care
2 deeply about are being decided, they want an
3 opportunity, and they want an opportunity, not
4 only to be heard, but to be heard by people who
5 have actual authority to make decisions. In that
6 respect, I believe that school governance does
7 matter to individual parents and they want a say
8 in how the system is run.

10 I wanted to add that I agree with Deputy
11 Mayor Walcott that the system was in crisis
12 before mayoral control. Although the mayor has
13 done some really good things in the school
14 system, I believe we are still in crisis now. We
15 can't be afraid to ask how we can improve the
16 school's governance system. I believe it is
17 possible to make improvements to the legal
18 framework for school governance without going
19 back to where we were before 2002.

20 The Campaign for Better Schools will be
21 putting out our specific recommendations soon and
22 we're eager to share them with this committee and
23 welcome the opportunity to discuss them further.

24 I want to thank you for the opportunity
25 to speak today and I'm happy to answer any

2 questions.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN BENEDETTO: In the absence
4 of our chairperson, I'll ask my colleagues in the
5 assembly, are there any questions for Ms. Sweet?
6 Barbara.

7 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Ms. Sweet, the
8 Advocates for Children has a long, valued
9 reputation in Queens, so I commend you for being
10 involved.

11 My concern always, when we start doing
12 what we're doing now, we should hear from people,
13 but I also think that there has to be some sense
14 of how many parents are we talking about, who are
15 the parents who are constantly - how many times
16 are they the same parent, and are they really
17 talking for themselves, or are they talking for
18 someone else? Those are always very serious
19 questions for me. I've been there, done that.
20 I've been involved in the parent movement and
21 I've been the state legislator for 22 years and
22 served on the education committee for all of that
23 time. I'm beginning my 23rd year. I keep
24 thinking I'm going to quit this job, and the
25 schools keep me doing it. Trust me when I tell

1 you.

2
3 My concern is, how many parents really
4 are we talking about that's really unhappy about
5 what's going on? Obviously you're not - no
6 parent is happy about everything, obviously, but
7 my experience at this point in time is, many
8 parents are very very pleased that they can send
9 their kid to school and know what their kid is
10 learning, because once upon a time you didn't
11 know. You had to depend on the teacher. If your
12 kid was nice, your kid was going to get passed
13 along until they hit this wall where they
14 couldn't go anywhere else, and so we hear about
15 the testing, the governance, about everything.

16 How many parents do you believe that's
17 involved in all of this movement, and how many of
18 them do you believe are independent, speaking on
19 their own, are they apart of some other
20 interests?

21 MS. SWEET: I do know what you're
22 asking. I can't come up with numbers for you,
23 but I think there are different groups of
24 parents. There's parents who work professionally
25 with parent organizations, and that's a

1 relatively small number. There's parents who are
2 generally happy with their kids school system,
3 and I put their teacher, I mean, or their school,
4 and I put myself in that category, but there are
5 things that happen in the school that they would
6 want changed. So, yes, they're generally happy,
7 but when it comes down that their school is going
8 to be moved or they reshuffle the kindergarten
9 procedures and they don't know how they're going
10 to get their kid in, they're not happy.

12 So I think that the vast majority of
13 parents, to me, fall in that category. And then
14 there are parents that are completely independent
15 and supremely unhappy, but I think the bulk are
16 probably people that on a day-to-day basis aren't
17 giving this a whole lot of thought. But when
18 things happen, those parents are upset that their
19 voice does not get heard by someone who has the
20 power to change decisions, and I think that's the
21 majority and that's where they are.

22 So, no, they're not going to do this
23 everyday, but they're upset about certain things,
24 and they want an option beside calling Deputy
25 Mayor Walcott to be heard.

2 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you, Barbara,
3 for holding the fort while I just ran out for a
4 minute.

5 I just want to acknowledge the presence
6 of another Queens colleague, Assemblyman Jeffrey
7 Aubry, we're very happy, Jeff, that you're here.

8 I know you were at the hearing yesterday on the
9 budget, and I'm very impressed that you drove
10 down through that snow to be here, so that's
11 great.

12 I apologize, and I'm reading your
13 testimony here, and we've had the opportunity at
14 the commission, obviously, to talk, the third
15 point that you made, Kim, about parents not
16 knowing how to navigate this bureaucracy, I've
17 been concerned that this P311, to me - I know
18 when it's my child, I don't want to talk to an
19 anonymous person on a call center somewhere, I
20 want to talk to a person who can help guide me.

21 What do you think either of that proposal
22 or of some other proposal that would give people
23 more access?

24 MS. SWEET: I mean, I don't know the
25 details of how P311 is going to work. I'm a

1 little skeptical because I don't think that 311
2 has been hugely helpful for parents with
3 education issues, so I don't know exactly what
4 they're doing with P311 that's different than
5 311, and we're definitely open to seeing it in
6 any avenue to get parents more information is a
7 good thing.
8

9 But I would like to see the law change to
10 actually strengthen opportunities for parent
11 participation in the role of parents and not have
12 it be so dependent on which initiatives the
13 department wishes to push in a particular year.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Does anybody else
16 have a question? Is somebody going to read Maria
17 Dapontes' testimony? I feel so bad about that.
18 She was here until only a few minutes ago. I
19 thought that there was someone. From my staff,
20 can you just check at the desk if there was
21 another parent from district 30 to read her
22 testimony, and Dmytro Fedkowskyj will be here a
23 little later, and we'll try to accommodate him.
24 Queen Makkada I don't believe is here. Queen
25 Makkada? Okay.

2 Kim, thank you very very much.

3 MS. SWEET: Thank you.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: I do have a
5 question. The use of school report cards, is
6 that something that you think parents comprehend,
7 get a sense of what's going on in their school
8 from, believe, don't believe, how do you -

9 MS. SWEET: I'm concerned with the
10 school report card system that it oversimplifies
11 what's actually going on in the school. So I do
12 think that parents here, that their school gets
13 an A, B, C, D - F, and the parents that probably
14 care the most, the ones getting the Ds and the Fs
15 because there's always a question of what that
16 means for your school, and I think that parents
17 do in fact care when their school gets those
18 scores.

19 I just worry - I was glad this year that
20 the department expanded it to three letter grades
21 as opposed to one, but just like I wouldn't want
22 my kid's report card to come home with one
23 letter, I worry that it's such an
24 oversimplification. So what you do is, you have
25 parents understanding it, but what are they

2 understanding? That's my worry about the school
3 report card system.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: In your work, is
5 there any way to ascertain the involvement of
6 parents after a particularly bad grade is issued,
7 do we find an increase in parent involvement in
8 that school, inquiring, are there meetings set up
9 to try and explain that, and to tell what
10 corrective plans are being made?

11 MS. SWEET: We have not studied that. I
12 think it would be interesting study for somebody
13 to do. What we do see, we run a website called
14 inside schools.org that has reviews of all the
15 1,500 public schools which give much more in
16 depth descriptions of what actually does go on in
17 the school, and sometimes we do see sort of
18 flurries of activity in terms of people writing
19 in after their school gets a bad grade, and I
20 think parents, from what I've seen, do tend to be
21 very worried and gravitate.

22 What I haven't studied is how effective
23 that is, are parents really able to mobilize
24 around that bad grade and change the school
25 around, or is it just kind of a lot of fretting,

2 the school gets closed or not closed, I don't
3 know what effect that really has on the parent.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: And in the change of
5 principals, the involvement of parents and
6 principal selection, is that better or worse than
7 it was in former times, is it less effective,
8 more effective?

9 MS. SWEET: It's not something that
10 we're involved around intimately, but we have
11 heard that it's gotten worse and that people feel
12 less of a voice in the C30 process than they used
13 to have. So one of the things that we're going
14 to be looking at at the Campaign for Better
15 Schools is, are there ways we can strengthen that
16 process, is it appropriate for legislation to
17 strengthen that process and we'll be looking at
18 that.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: Thank you.

20 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TITUS: Kim, before you
21 leave, I just wanted to see if we can have some
22 of your expertise.

23 What recommendations would you give with
24 regard to when we look at school governance with
25 regard to special education and parents with

2 children with special needs? What suggestions or
3 recommendations would you make out there in the
4 field?

5 MS. SWEET: That's a good question, and
6 it came up somewhat on the commission on school
7 governance as well. There was a lot to be done
8 in special education in the New York City school
9 system. I'm not sure how much of it is a central
10 governance question. It's about structures and
11 things.

12 I think it's crucial when we talk about
13 parent representation, that we make sure that
14 parents of kids with special needs and also
15 parents of English language learners are
16 represented on the various panels that are put
17 together, so I think ensuring representation is
18 key.

19 A lot of what most needs to be done in
20 the city school system around special ed probably
21 is not a matter of school governance law, but,
22 again, I think it is essential that parents of
23 kids with special needs are integrated into the
24 school governance system and have a voice and are
25 not changed and re-routed with them being left

2 out.

3 ASSEMBLYWOMAN TITUS: Thank you very
4 much.

5 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. We look
6 forward to doing more work with you together.
7 Hope you're going to be here for a while. I
8 didn't want you to think I was distracted.

9 MS. SWEET: I do apologize, I have
10 another meeting, but I will come to the other
11 ones. I appreciate the opportunity to testify
12 today.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We have someone, and
14 I really bless you for this, who will read
15 Maria's testimony, and we can have her at another
16 time, and then we have a number of people who
17 expressed medical issues. I'm going to try to
18 resolve that as well. So just stand by and be
19 patient.

20 Just say your name and that you're
21 delivering the testimony for Maria.

22 MS. MARCUS: My name is Rose Marcus.
23 I'm a parent with two children at the Our World
24 Neighborhood Charter School.

25 In District 30 - before I read this, I

2 would say that I don't necessarily agree with the
3 statement that I'm about to read, but -

4 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I appreciate it as a
5 favor, I really do.

6 MS. MARCUS: She has a voice here just
7 as we all do, so I'm going to read this for her.

8 Good morning, my name is Maria Dapontes-
9 Dougherty. I am the president of District 30Q
10 Presidents' Council, and also currently the
11 corresponding secretary of CPAC.

12 I have been an involved parent and
13 advocate for our parents and especially the
14 students in the New York City public school
15 system for the past 12 years.

16 When mayoral control first came upon us,
17 I was enthusiastic and hopeful. I truly believed
18 that holding one person responsible with the
19 active participation of parents, teachers,
20 administrators, and Board of Education personnel
21 will lead to the success of our massive education
22 system. I was wrong. The years of mayoral
23 control in our schools have been a nightmare. "I
24 don't agree with that, anyway."

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Just read the

2 testimony. I you feel philosophically that you
3 can't do it -

4 MS. MARCUS: I was trying to lighten the
5 mood. I will begin with the topic of parental
6 involvement which is the closest to my heart, and
7 of which I truly believe that the strength of the
8 home school partnership is the key to the success
9 of our children.

10 Under mayoral control, parents are
11 philosophized and politicized as a vital
12 component of the system, but are blocked any time
13 they voice an opinion or try to participate.
14 Schools cannot be run exclusively like a
15 business, in, as the "products" of this business
16 are the future minds of our country. They are
17 our children.

18 The new regulation chancellor's A655 on
19 school leadership teams tries to decimate the
20 parental voice, parents spoke about that these
21 changes were against New York State law and no
22 one listened. It took a legal complaint and a
23 recent decision by state education Commissioner
24 Mills to confirm what parents already knew, that
25 parents must be involved in setting school goals

2 and strategies for meeting those goals.

3 Currently, SLTs are dysfunctional and
4 DLTs are orchestrated by Tweed. Teachers and
5 parents have become the required bodies present
6 and nothing else.

7 District 30 in Queens has been one of the
8 most overcrowded districts in our city. This
9 year class sizes went up in all grades except for
10 the seventh grade. Statistics show that the city
11 plans to build only about one half of the new
12 seats we need to eliminate overcrowding and
13 reduce class size.

14 Since mayoral control, we have opened one
15 school which was overcrowded on day one. This
16 school being built was a result of the previous
17 administration. Lockers for the children still
18 sit unused in as there are not enough for the
19 overcrowded building in which they sit. We saw
20 the past capital plan for this administration
21 showing new seats that never happened. SCA could
22 not find proper spaces, but somehow was able to
23 place charters schools.

24 Our legislators found spaces and strongly
25 support us, but we were ignored. We now see the

2 same seats in the new plan but hold no hope. We
3 still have overcrowded classrooms in aging
4 buildings. Reports show that this administration
5 has created the least amount of seats across the
6 city for our children. Nothing has changed, but
7 the DOE and the mayor continue to spin-doctor.

8 Tweed touts accountability, but it does
9 not exist. They flip flop their opinions on who
10 is responsible for our schools from whether it be
11 the auspices of the state or the city at their
12 whim, and whichever fulfills their choice at the
13 moment. A critical example would be the cell
14 phone lawsuit.

15 It is a sad day when parents, whose post
16 9/11 children are traveling across the city and
17 are denied the right to communicate to their
18 children because the mayor has a pet peeve about
19 cell phones. Ah, an example of the spin-
20 doctoring, the phones are used for cheating.
21 Hmmm, cheaters existed long before the mayor's
22 ban and will still exist long after. A cheater
23 is a cheater, no matter what era we are in.

24 Since mayoral control, our schools safety
25 agents are under the jurisdiction of the NYPD.

2 We have children that are being policed and
3 arrested. The NYCLU has fully documented these
4 unacceptable actions in its "Criminalizing the
5 Classroom" report. CPAC had sought advice on
6 what the rights and responsibilities of safety
7 agents were and we were told that the NYPD would
8 have to answer. The chief of school safety of
9 the NYPD refused our requests. We have instances
10 of five year olds being handcuffed and arrested
11 and are not provided with the framework of rules
12 that affect our children.

13 The system is not transparent and there
14 are no checks and balances. The PEP,
15 theoretically the body that would facilitate
16 accountability, transparency and checks and
17 balances is powerless. It is comprised of
18 mayoral representatives and borough president
19 appointees that are fired if they do not agree
20 with the mayor's beliefs. This is not an example
21 of a democracy, it is a dictatorship.

22 CECs, Presidents' Councils, and CPAC are
23 powerless. These bodies are micromanaged and
24 their valuable input is dismissed. Our
25 legislators are ignored. Our superintendents

2 have a title required by state law, but are sent
3 to schools across the city and are powerless in
4 the districts that they represent. The press is
5 influenced by our wealthy and powerful mayor and
6 his cronies. The revelation of the power of data
7 is only a tool to doctor the numbers to the
8 benefit of the administration and the unknowing
9 public.

10 I participated in the original hearings
11 on mayoral control, and remember how important it
12 was to the members of that panel that parents and
13 community be engaged. Years and countless
14 reorganizations later, our system is more
15 dysfunctional. Graduation rates are still
16 dismal. Classrooms are still bursting at the
17 seams. The bureaucracy, cronyism and entrenched
18 interests we believe would be dismantled have
19 been replaced by SSOs, multi-million dollar, no-
20 bid contracts and partnering with private groups
21 that only care about profits.

22 I plead that you bring the "public" back
23 to public education.

24 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.
25 You were a good sport about it. Thank you. I

2 appreciate it.

3 I just want to try again, Queen Makkada?

4 Okay.

5 The next group of witnesses please come
6 up as a panel, Robert Caloras and Erik DePaula,
7 the President and Treasurer of Community District
8 Council 26; Alicia Hyndman, President of
9 Community District Council 29; Abiodun Bello,
10 President of Community District Council 32; and I
11 want to ask if people will accept - I understand
12 that Reverend Calvin Rice is here and is not
13 well, and if Pastor Rice wants to join this panel
14 we'll try to work that out and hope that everyone
15 will understand that.

16 MR. CALORAS: Good afternoon members of
17 the hearing committee, assembled assembly people.

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I also want to thank
19 our stenographer who has been working right
20 straight through. Everyone should say their name
21 and their title.

22 MR. CALORAS: My name is Robert Caloras,
23 and I am currently the president of community
24 district education council 26. I've been in that
25 title for the past six years. I am a former co-

2 president of a PTA of PS221, and during the last
3 two years, the education council has had two
4 forums on school governance. I have gone to just
5 about every PTA in our district and talked about
6 school governance. I have gone to the community
7 board 11 and spoken about school governance.

8 I have also spoken with other CDEC
9 presidents about school governance, so to direct
10 a quick answer to Assemblywoman Clark's question
11 regarding how many parents are actually not
12 happy, I think the vast majority, once you start
13 talking and explaining to parents what has been
14 going on to their schools, what is mayoral
15 control in reality, most parents are very
16 unhappy. They do not want to throw out mayoral
17 control, they do not want to go back to the old
18 system, however, in District 26, that old system
19 served very well, I'll throw out.

20 We were happy, we had very high
21 performances on the old way of assessing
22 students' performance, but we understand that
23 we're not the whole city, and we understand that
24 the current system is not going to be thrown out,
25 however, with that introductory, let me just say

2 Erik DePaula had to leave. Erik was the attorney
3 on the Paulacino verse Department of Ed matter
4 which the chancellor said that certain of the new
5 chancellor regulations with SLTs are no longer -
6 shouldn't be in effect, and it was Marie
7 Paulacino who was also a District 26 member. I
8 have Erik's testimony, I'll hand that up. I
9 won't read because I have enough problems reading
10 my own stuff.

11 Let me just start with, change has to be
12 made. Why is the current law, the rules and the
13 intent are no way being followed? What the DOE
14 is going to tell you - I can tell you with
15 assurance that there's not a parent in District
16 26 who is happy with the way that they've been
17 marginalized, the way that district
18 superintendents been marginalized. We no longer
19 have a clear body of - not command, of some
20 semblance of authority that we can go to.

21 Just recently I was out at a meeting
22 where a parent said he had a problem at a school
23 and didn't get relief at the school, didn't get
24 relief from the superintendent. Deputy Walcott
25 happened to be there. He took care of the

2 problem. I'm very grateful that Deputy Walcott
3 took care of the problem, but without spiting my
4 nose - whatever that expression is, how would you
5 like to be the kid of that parent who went to the
6 deputy mayor to resolve a school-based problem.
7 Think about that.

8 Because I've gone to meetings where the
9 Department of Ed - you can send e-mails and you
10 can get responses, but, I, as a parent, do not
11 want to send an e-mail to Chancellor Klein
12 because my child is not getting the music class
13 that I think he's supposed to. That is not
14 Chancellor Klein's function, and it is not my
15 function to go past the whole school to the
16 chancellor because I have a school-based problem.

17 That is what we have now.

18 We do not have district superintendents.
19 We have principals of course, but as it was
20 said, it's 1,500 schools that he's concerned
21 with, not 32 districts. I'm concerned about my
22 district. I'm concerned about every district in
23 this city is functioning and is capable of
24 handling local problems that do not need the
25 chancellor or the deputy's response. It's

2 ridiculous to expect us to go to that high for
3 school problems.

4 Another reason it needs to be changed, as
5 has been said, as you know, there are no checks
6 and balances in effect. There's nothing. You
7 have enough documentation, I'm not going to go
8 into it, but regarding the education councils,
9 you were talking about zoning, Assemblyman
10 O'Donnell, he left, but as far as I see, that
11 little bit of power that the education councils
12 had on zoning, that's been marginalized, because
13 these days a new school is either a lottery
14 school or an application school which, my
15 understanding is, is not deemed to be subject to
16 zoning lines. That's what the chancellor has
17 interpreted the law as.

18 I have yet to be approached - we've yet
19 to be approached regarding any thought of a
20 zoning change. The chancellor says, if you have
21 a zoning recommendation, I'll be more than happy
22 to hear it, but we're not going to venture into
23 that if we don't have to.

24 We've been marginalized as education
25 councils. We conduct our forums, we try to bring

2 out the information to the people in the
3 community, it's very hard get parents out, but we
4 have had the crowds, as has been mentioned by Ms.
5 Sweet when there are issues that affect the
6 individual parents. We do our best. A lot of
7 parents are very happy to just send their child
8 to school and their child comes home at the end
9 of the day safe and seems to have homework and
10 seems to get some responses, but that level of
11 contentment cannot be interpreted as a
12 contentment over a system that has allowed the
13 mayor and the chancellor to aggrandize every
14 little bit of power that the school governance
15 law has. It's ridiculous the way that it has
16 gone on.

17 The panel of education policy, it's a
18 rubber stamp at best, not to mention, it's a
19 volunteer organization. How much time - and I
20 hate to say it as a lawyer, with all due respect
21 and the good intentions of the panel, how much
22 time can they spend to gather facts to confront
23 the barrage of facts that we just heard from the
24 DOE? How would you like to sit there and go hum,
25 hum, hum, and then when we do have the people,

2 like Raney Henson and the other people who are
3 beyond brilliant in providing the counter
4 evidence, a shoulder is shrugged, well, this is
5 political, or this is a policy concern. When we
6 say over and over again, it's not. We just want
7 you to understand that before you do a policy,
8 maybe, maybe you should listen to the panel of
9 education policy. Maybe you should listen to the
10 education councils before you come up with a
11 policy, not after.

12 Too much feedback? I'm sorry, I've been
13 waiting a while.

14 All right. We need a mechanism to ensure
15 that the law is followed. We cannot rely on
16 informal political pressure. We cannot rely on
17 lawsuits. We brought a lawsuit. We were
18 fortunate enough that we had a lawyer who was
19 doing it without any expense. He spent close to
20 50 hours. I don't know a lawyer who is going to
21 charge less than \$100 an hour, other than me
22 because I work for the government, but that's
23 beside the point.

24 We can't afford that, moneywise or time-
25 wise. I did not take a volunteer job to become a

2 litigant. It cannot be the volunteer
3 organizations, which is why we have produced, the
4 educational council produced a report. I sent it
5 to Assembly Member Nolan, I have a final version,
6 I swear, I've done the final edits, all those
7 typos are gone, I think, and I'll send it to you
8 once more.

9 However, we emphasize, as was mentioned
10 before, make the deal with a real city agency.
11 Put the City Council in some way in charge of it.

12 The way it is in charge of other agencies. I
13 know it's not much control, but they have various
14 hearing power, various subpoena power, that they
15 can get information and they have the time and
16 the paid staff to oversee the DOE in its \$21
17 billion a year budget the way integrity requires.

18 If I may, one last thing, I suggest that
19 all working in the system who are free of the
20 mayor and the chancellor, they want effective
21 checks and balances and oversight. That will
22 meet the challenge of preventing mayoral control
23 from denigrating into mayoral authority. It is
24 too easy to become an authoritarian when you're
25 given some power and nobody is there to stop you

2 from taking all of the power. That is what
3 happened. I'm begging you to change the law, so
4 whatever it is, whatever it is, there are
5 enforcement mechanisms to keep the power away
6 from only one person.

7 Thank you very much.

8 MS. HYNDMAN: Good morning, panel. My
9 name is Alicia Hyndman and I'm the president of
10 Community Education Council 29. I won't echo
11 some of the statement of Rob Caloras, but I do
12 want to add that - as we've spoken with the
13 members, a lot of parents don't understand what's
14 going on, because a lot of the parents, if you
15 have a child under the age of 12, all you know is
16 mayoral government.

17 You don't know the Board of Education,
18 you don't know school boards, so a lot of the
19 parents, especially the immigrant parents are
20 embracing because they may see signs in their
21 language so they feel more welcome.

22 But as a community education president,
23 what I noticed is, although we're volunteers, and
24 the amount of work it takes to get the
25 information out - and I know my colleagues will

1 probably say the same thing, it becomes a full-
2 time job, in addition to the full-time job that
3 you already have which pays your mortgage and
4 whatever other things your child may need. I
5 think it's really important that the DOE
6 recognizes that your parent group, they're all
7 volunteers, CPAC is volunteers, Presidents'
8 Council is volunteers, PTA president is all
9 volunteers.
10

11 So it's very hard sometimes to give your
12 all to something even though it is your child's
13 education when you realize it's not just me, I
14 have to partner with other parents around my
15 district. I have to go down to Tweed to find out
16 what's going on, and sometimes it can be
17 intimidating.

18 We also believe that the panel for
19 education policy should be changed. The makeup
20 that it is now we feel is too heavy on the
21 mayor's side so we - sometimes, as council, we
22 don't always get the exchanges that are going on,
23 so we feel the makeup should be changed, still
24 the five member, 25 borough presidents, and other
25 offices, such as the public advocate, City

2 Council should be represented on that panel also.

3 I did give everyone a copy, so you have that
4 there.

5 I do like the idea of being able to see
6 the budgets on line, as parents, we're able to
7 get access to the grades. A lot of our parents
8 use the internet to find out what's going on in
9 their schools, but they also get to see what's
10 happening in the other districts around the city.

11 So sometimes it's a blessing and curse
12 because you want to know - if you talk about
13 equity, how come we don't see the equity
14 distributed to all the districts, because if you
15 can call the deputy mayor to get something done,
16 then that has to be learned and it has to be
17 everywhere. Everyone wants the same access.

18 I do feel, as was said, the CECs feeling
19 like they've been rubber-stamped and we do.
20 We've had several things happen in our district
21 that we feel we've had no say in and that comes
22 from the office of OPD putting schools in
23 buildings that may have space without consulting
24 the community.

25 We've had a learning suspension site put

2 in a struggling middle school, is trying to make
3 progress, and at the last minute, during the
4 summertime, when parents weren't there, boom, it
5 was in the school.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Where was that?

7 MS. HYNDMAN: That was last summer.

8 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: No. Where?

9 MS. HYNDMAN: IS 231, which is the
10 intersection of South Conduit and Springfield,
11 and Ms. Titus, I remember you were there because
12 parents were really upset because if you're
13 talking about parent engagement, you can't tell
14 us that we have a say in something and then you
15 right away make an insulation of a suspension
16 site in a struggling middle school.

17 There may be space in the building but it
18 took away a science lab, and it's a state law
19 that middle school kids have science labs in
20 order to pass the exams. So when that happens,
21 parents look at the CECs, why should I even
22 bother because I don't - you guys can't do
23 anything, and that is where a lot of parents feel
24 disenfranchised, because if things happen and you
25 have no say, the people that you elected to

2 represent you have no say, then what's the point?

3 Then it is a top-heavy approach.

4 Superintendents, what we've noticed is
5 that as someone - Ms. Pfeffer, you said earlier,
6 that when you ask the superintendent a question,
7 they don't know. Parents come to our meetings to
8 ask the superintendent and he'll pass it on to
9 the DFA or say call me later and the problem is,
10 as a parent, if this is the person - I'm -
11 they're not familiar with the SSOs, that's a
12 falling entity to them, so if the superintendent,
13 my first line, I don't know why he keeps passing
14 things on. He's a SCAF, a senior chief
15 administrative facilitator, so with this title it
16 takes him outside of the district, so that means
17 he cannot handle the problems that are within the
18 district.

19 I think the staff needs to be increased -
20 I'm not saying go back to what was there, what
21 I'm saying is, increase the staff so that way,
22 when parents come, they're not always not in, or
23 dealing with an administrative assistance, or I'm
24 dealing with a DFA, they don't feel it's getting
25 done. So that way the parent sits home and they

2 say, I'm going to send my kid to private school,
3 or I'm going to try and use another address to
4 get him into 26. So we know it happens.

5 So rather than say - and I also feel like
6 Rob does, that it's going to remain, but with
7 these things in place, I think that it can change
8 for the better. You have to involve the parents
9 in the process.

10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very very
12 much.

13 MR. BELLO: Good afternoon, Chairwoman
14 Nolan. I want to thank you for giving me this
15 opportunity to speak on this issue.

16 My name is Abiodun Bello. I'm president
17 of the community education council in district
18 32. Prior to that I was a treasurer of the
19 school board in the same district, community
20 school 32.

21 I was the PTA president, I sat on the
22 presidents' council, I sat on all different
23 committees on the school level when it was a
24 school board.

25 Just giving you a base background to show

2 you my commitment for public education. One
3 other things I know about school governance is, I
4 usually go to your website and read a lot about
5 school education, I want to thank you for that,
6 something there that I can read.

7 I have a firm believe that all children
8 can learn and achieve. As a children advocate,
9 and community leader, I am in support of the
10 mayoral control.

11 The New York City school system should
12 remain under the control of City Hall. The mayor
13 should have to that control - the mayor should
14 have to that control, I repeat that. The only
15 thing we have to do is, is have to hold the mayor
16 accountable and responsible for the result and
17 the outcome. That's what we need to do.

18 I was on the school board before and now
19 I'm president of the committee of education
20 council for six years. I started on the PTA. I
21 can tell you countless of stories why the old
22 school board is a sham. I'm going to use that
23 word. Why do we want to take away what is
24 working now? We can limit the mayor to be
25 accountable and take responsibility for the

2 result, but having control to do that.

3 We cannot allow 13 - 32 different
4 districts doing what they want. That's why I was
5 on the school board. I started from PTA on the
6 school board and I want things to change. I
7 can't see - the programs that we are keeping now
8 to rule it back. Please don't do that. The city
9 all has run the school system better than they
10 were on the old school board and the committee
11 school board.

12 I came before you today as somebody that
13 lived in both worlds. I can tell you that.
14 Parents have no power now than they were on the
15 school board. They have no power. Everything
16 they have, they have to go to the district. I'm
17 going to explain to you - in your school now, you
18 have the school leadership, some of the members
19 here, they know what I'm talking about, parents
20 now have no power in the school. You can't be on
21 your school board, curriculum and school safety.

22 What the legislators have to do is strengthen
23 the school leadership team. If you make it more
24 powerful, we need now in the school base itself,
25 not on the district.

2 I was a treasurer on the committee school
3 board. We don't need the power in the district,
4 we need the power in the school. We are the
5 parents that make meaningful decisions in their
6 school, that's what we need to follow.

7 The community involvement in District 32
8 in collaboration is very excellent. I'm telling
9 you this, when I was a PTA president, when I went
10 to the community board, there are two things or
11 three things that suffered, the fighting, they
12 don't have to call, only five people show up. If
13 I call a CEC meeting, I can - this month alone, I
14 have over 100 parents. There were about 60
15 parents on January 15th. This is what he has to
16 do, not to worry about the curriculum because
17 we're not educators. We should be worrying about
18 how can we bring the parents, how can we increase
19 the contribution of the parent?

20 I'm going to talk a little bit about PTA
21 school leadership team. District 32, I do have
22 PTA I represent on the school leadership team.
23 This is where the power should be. We should
24 empower the school itself, the 1,500 schools,
25 that's what we should do. We should empower

2 them. The power should not go by the district,
3 it's not going to work, it hasn't worked before.

4 We're not going to fail the student now. We
5 failed them for so long.

6 The parents coordinator in my district,
7 to me, I don't have to - I call them or I can go
8 to the school. Because I'm the president of the
9 school board, on the CEC, I use the parents call
10 roll all the time and the workshop should be done
11 in the school itself, we don't need the workshop
12 for the district.

13 I was looking at the calendar last night,
14 and the following was the workshop and activity
15 ahead of my district that I do attended within
16 the last five months. That's what I would tell
17 you that there are activities going on at the
18 school. There is district family day, back to
19 school class, safety workshop, CPR workshop,
20 Hispanic celebration, special award assembly,
21 homework help, ELA pre-workshop, that was the one
22 that I get invitation but I couldn't go because I
23 work nine to five. So we have to look at that.
24 Please look at those things. District 32
25 children and the children of New York City have

2 made historic gains in math and reading.

3 When I was on the PTA in District 32, the
4 local high school, the graduation in that
5 district was 17 percent, high school. Now it's
6 about 43 percent. It doubled more than 50
7 percent. So you want me to go back to those
8 teachers and tell them that you want their
9 graduations to be 17 percent in New York City,
10 the greatest city in the world? We can't go
11 back, please don't do that to these children.

12 I'm going to end. Dr. King said
13 something that I want to end with, Our life
14 begins to end the day we become silenced about
15 things that matter.

16 As a children advocate, and a committee
17 member, I cannot be silenced with this issue.
18 Please don't do this to these kids. I am
19 confident that on that leadership, Ms. Nolan,
20 you're the legislator, we do the right thing for
21 the children of New York City. New York City
22 school system should remain under the control of
23 the city of the mayor. The mayor should have to
24 have control. The mayor should have to have
25 control. The mayor should have to have control,

2 be held accountable and take responsibility for
3 the outcome.

4 Thank you for your time.

5 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We have an addition.

6 We try to accommodate people's personal
7 situations. Reverend Rice.

8 REVEREND RICE: Good afternoon,
9 everyone. I would like to thank this assembly of
10 education committee and particularly you,
11 Chairwoman Nolan, for convening these hearings
12 and hearing my testimony.

13 I represent - let me acknowledge the
14 people whom I represent, Mousa Ruseum Baptist
15 Church, and EQUAL, it is Empower Queens United
16 and Action for Leadership. We are united for
17 common good and goals and priorities for our
18 community.

19 Let me begin with a cute little story
20 that many of you may have heard entitled, "That's
21 not my job." It's a story about four people
22 named everybody, somebody, anybody and nobody.
23 There was an important job to be done and
24 everybody was sure that somebody would do it.
25 Anybody could have done it, but nobody did it.

2 Somebody got angry about that because it was
3 anybody's job. Everybody thought anybody can do
4 it, but nobody realized that anybody wouldn't do
5 it. It ended up that anybody blamed somebody
6 when nobody did what anybody could have done.

7 Such was the environment before 2002 with
8 the New York City public school who was failing
9 our children. No one, absolutely no one took
10 responsibility and the bureaucracy was so
11 entrenched that no one knew who to blame. Now
12 that the mayor in charge, no matter who the mayor
13 is, the records show that schools are safer,
14 teachers are more qualified and better paid, test
15 scores are up, and graduation rate are higher
16 than ever before. While I will be the first to
17 admit that we still have a long way to go,
18 nevertheless, as a person who has lived in this
19 city for 37 years, pastored two churches in two
20 boroughs, Staten Island and now in Queens, was
21 congregations of more than 2,000 members, for 25
22 years I've heard their concerns and frustration
23 with a system that they felt helpless and
24 unresponsive to their needs and they were unable
25 to navigate. I've sent three children to New

2 York City public schools. I am now preparing to
3 send my grandchildren. There is no doubt in my
4 mind that New York City schools are better now
5 than they've been in 30 years. There's still
6 work to be done, no doubt about it. Improvements
7 need to be made no doubt about it, but it is
8 ludicrous to abandon what may not be a perfect
9 system, but certainly is better than what we had.

10 And with some tweaking here and there, it has
11 the potential to be even better.

12 We cannot afford to revert back to what
13 we know did not work. To what my good friend,
14 Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood described almost 20
15 years ago as a swamp, needing to be drained, a 21
16 billion dollar a year swamp, swamp of patronage,
17 and privileges for those who are politically
18 connected and those who have influence for
19 certain communities while denying other
20 communities.

21 Thanks to the senate for voting to begin
22 draining the swamp. I implore you not to plug it
23 up again. Before mayor control, we had schools
24 in southeast Queens listed as dead school zones.

25 Those schools have been resurrected and we do

2 not want to rebuild them in a good lap of
3 bureaucracy and patronage.

4 There's been a lot of talk about lack of
5 parental involvement on the mayoral control.
6 I'll agree that parents need to be involved.
7 They can get involved, and we should have a
8 mechanism for their involvement, but let's be
9 clear. The old system of community boards did
10 not - did nothing to promote parental
11 involvement.

12 In fact, only five percent of parents
13 voted and it was dominated by the teachers union
14 and local political interests, only five percent
15 of parents voted in the local school board
16 election because they understood that these
17 elections was a fraud.

18 In Staten Island, it took 25 years to
19 finally get one minority on the school board.
20 Now, one person, the mayor we can hold
21 responsible. He, and his appointed chancellor
22 can and should be held accountable. And every
23 four years we have the opportunity as parents and
24 as community leaders to go to the poles and pull
25 the lever if he does not perform. If he does not

2 meet our requirements, we can exchange him for
3 someone who will. We did not have that privilege
4 before.

5 Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

7 I'll see if any of my colleagues have
8 questions and I really want to thank each and
9 every one of you. Everyone gave great testimony
10 and I thank you. Questions?

11 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Ms. Hyndman, on
12 the issue that you talked about placing that
13 suspension site in 231. We had the chancellor
14 and the deputy mayor out in Queens, but I agreed
15 with you, and I don't know if you remember, I
16 made that very very clear to the chancellor and
17 to the deputy mayor that those decisions should
18 not be made without the community knowing
19 something about it.

20 The only other thing I would have to say
21 is, I'm very proud of you, Reverend, because you
22 told a true story of where we were, and right now
23 I hope you'll bring this whole contingent to
24 Albany and let the governor know that we can't
25 afford to take a billion dollars out of the New

2 York City school budget right at this point in
3 time, because that's our biggest hazard right at
4 this point, removal of money from the system.

5 I was at a public hearing in Albany
6 yesterday on the budget issues, and the
7 chancellor is talking about having to lay out
8 15,000 teachers if this budget goes through like
9 it is, and we need to be addressing that issue,
10 because that's our number one issue at this
11 point, so - but I agree with it, so thank you
12 very much.

13 Assemblyman Lancman, real quick.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: You know, I
15 overlap with 29 and 26, it was very nice to hear
16 your testimony. Before I was elected, I was in
17 the community board, I chaired the youth and
18 education committee.

19 I would like to hear from all the
20 panelists, particularly from the CEC presidents,
21 what's your view on expanding participation in
22 the CEC of nonparents of community leaders, and
23 is there any role or anything that we should do
24 to expand opportunities for community -
25 individuals from the community to participate in

2 educational decision making at the local level,
3 or is that just a bad idea?

4 MS. HYNDMAN: No. I think, speaking on
5 behalf of 29, two positions are appointed by the
6 borough president. We've had people send
7 information that they're interested in serving
8 who do not have children in the district, but
9 they are concerned.

10 Maybe they own property near a school,
11 and the school is not doing well, and they want
12 to know what they can do to help. Because of the
13 requirements, that person is not allowed to
14 officially sit on the board or be elected by PTA
15 presidents and secretaries for the board. So I
16 think we've had inquiries, but because of the way
17 it is now, it's not allowed.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: Would it be a
19 positive change if they were allowed, or do you
20 think it would be a mistake?

21 MS. HYNDMAN: I think it would be a
22 positive change, but I think the majority should
23 be parents.

24 MR. CALORAS: I would agree with Public
25 Advocate Gotbaum to expand the people who

2 conserve - to people who are on PTAs now, now if
3 you're on a PTA, you can't be on an education
4 council, so if a person so inclined they can be
5 on both. You only have so many interested
6 parents who are willing to come out and
7 volunteer. When you have to choose between PTA
8 or education council or PEP, you can't - a lot of
9 people will choose PTA over the - they can do
10 both, but they will usually pick the school, so
11 to expand it to PTA members and to people who
12 don't have children in the school but they're
13 interested, so we get a larger core.

14 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: Do any of you
15 represent in your capacity a school that has been
16 failing and, if you do, whoever that may be, what
17 was your experience and the response of the DOE
18 to the parents of the failing school?

19 MR. BELLO: To me, most of the - I don't
20 know what you mean by failing because I think
21 most of the school -

22 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: Let me explain. If
23 I got a failing grade in the grades that are
24 given to schools.

25 MR. BELLO: Are you talking about the

2 progress report?

3 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: A failing grade.

4 MR. BELLOW: Most of - I'm proud to say
5 that my district, 95 percent of the schools in my
6 district get an A or B, so -

7 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: Okay, so you don't
8 have to answer.

9 MS. HYNDMAN: I will say this. In
10 District 29, we have five traditional middle
11 schools, and by that I mean there are the K
12 through eights, and then you have the middle
13 schools, six through eight. What we found is
14 that some of our middle schools are performing
15 below state standards on the ELA and the math.
16 They tell us we're supposed to work with the
17 superintendent on the DCP to help - to find out
18 what are the education initiatives that the
19 district is doing.

20 But what we find is that by the time we
21 get it, our roles are so limited that you really
22 can't sit down with the principal and see what
23 the plan is for the year because SOT is supposed
24 to do that. So we need a vast array of what
25 structures are being set in place because some

2 schools are what we call the structuring for the
3 third or fourth year. And with state standards,
4 how is a school allowed to continue on this
5 spiral downward. That's a problem in the
6 district and that's something that the CEC is
7 tackling, but it's not easy when you don't get
8 the resources that you need or the information.

9 If you're supposed to give it to the SSO,
10 then you're not really supposed to involve your
11 SOT so much and your SOTs don't really know what
12 the SSOs are doing. So here are all these
13 acronyms I'm using, it's like another language.
14 The average parent doesn't know all of this
15 either.

16 You guys have to vote on this, so - and
17 if the parents don't know, then we sit here
18 shaking our heads.

19 ASSEMBLYMAN AUBRY: Thank you.

20 MR. CALORAS: If I may, we had a school
21 that received a much lower grade than expected.
22 They turned around and where did they increase,
23 test prep. So the next year their grade went up.

24 Test prep did it. It was a wonderful thing.

25 CHAIRMAN NOLAN: Did the size of the

2 school increase? Just quickly.

3 MR. CALORAS: No, it was relatively the
4 same.

5 Marge?

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN MARKIE: Thank you. The
7 reason I'm here is really to learn and to listen.

8 I do though have a question for you, Robert.
9 You mentioned, as a volunteer, having to come
10 back, DOE's statistical information.

11 Do you have staff other than the
12 secretary to help with that type of support
13 system, and do you think, if you don't, is there
14 a need for one?

15 MR. CALORAS: No and no. Because if we
16 had the staff, they would just generate their own
17 numbers, the numbers that they would create, we
18 would have to spend the same time. And I don't
19 mean to shirk the duty, but the time spent
20 looking at the numbers would take up all the
21 time, so that's why we suggest it's professional
22 people who are paid to do it, to oversee other
23 government agencies. I don't want that
24 responsibility.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Anybody else?

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I have just one
3 question.

4 Ms. Hyndman, I'm asking these questions
5 because I have most of my schools in District 29,
6 and I have two in District 26 but most are in 29.

7 In terms of the SLTs, you know, what effort
8 takes place for the school district - has taken
9 place under your leadership with the SLTs to
10 communicate on dealing with the middle school
11 issues, and, of course, you know, everybody up
12 here will know that that's my favorite lament
13 right now.

14 My workshop in Albany last year was about
15 the failing middle schools because kids, you
16 can't raise high school graduation rates, and I
17 say this every year to public hearings unless you
18 fix the middle schools, and New York City,
19 District 29, 80 percent of the kids going to high
20 school, level one, or lower level twos, and
21 therefore can't do high school work and therefore
22 they never graduate. So this is something that
23 people should communicate on. What do you do to
24 try to sit down with the SLTs on the issue?

25 MS. HYNDMAN: What we do in our

2 district, we partnership with our parent
3 presidents' council a lot. So when we sit down
4 with them, one of the things that we keep hearing
5 is that there is no training for our SLTs. So if
6 you get parents who come into the building and
7 want to - the principal says, okay, are you
8 interested in sitting on the SLT, in addition to
9 the PTA what they find is, they don't always know
10 what their role is and how involved they need to
11 be in the CEP, and that is what drives the
12 success of school.

13 So if you get parents just signing off on
14 this document, because we believe that that
15 happens a lot, then they don't get to see the
16 goals, and they're not making sure the goals and
17 the objectives are met in regards to what kind of
18 preparation are these children getting in middle
19 school, why is there a drop between fifth and
20 sixth grade, a little more than 10 points in our
21 district?

22 I think a lot of it has to do with
23 parents, and even when you go to parent-teacher
24 meetings at the middle school level, the
25 attendance drops off. We don't really understand

2 why, and think a lot of it has to do with our
3 parents not knowing this structure, not being
4 informed, and not having the training which is
5 why we think the superintendent's office needs a
6 little bit more staff, not saying how many
7 numbers, but needs a DFA who can really stay in
8 the district and work with the SLTs and train
9 these parents, and how is the school meeting
10 their goals and objectives month to month. Not
11 just every six-year span, not just sitting down
12 and - it's not who the principal likes or doesn't
13 like, but it's sitting down with the principal
14 and working on how these goals and objectives are
15 being met. I think if that's done, then our
16 middle schools would do better.

17 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: So that means
18 you're going to be in touch with Martine, because
19 she's talking about all the training.

20 MS. HYNDMAN: We are.

21 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: A couple of questions
22 just very quickly. I try as chair not to ask too
23 many because you can see how aggressive our panel
24 is, but just a couple of things.

25 The DOE represented that there was only a

2 very small two CECs had some type of vacancy, but
3 one of the documents I was looking for before
4 said 26 of the city's 34 councils have vacancies,
5 and I noticed on your letterhead it said, so do
6 all of you have vacancies on your CECs? Have you
7 had over the six years of mayoral control, yes,
8 no, one, two?

9 MR. CALORAS: We have - currently have
10 two, two candidates to fill them.

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: You have one?

12 MS. HYNDMAN: We have one.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: And you have two?

14 MR. BELLO: Two vacancies.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: And I just want to
16 say quickly, just to kind of clarify as we move
17 forward, there was a statement made earlier that
18 people at the school leadership team, Assemblyman
19 Clark pointed out, that they do get a stipend and
20 I clarified later it was \$300 and they can donate
21 it if they choose, and I understand that many do.

22 But the CECs, I don't think - you just
23 get the thanks and the good wishes of the
24 populous, I think, right?

25 MR. CALORAS: You get reimbursed - if

2 you're president, you can get reimbursed up to
3 \$200 a month for expenses. If you're a non-
4 president, \$125.

5 MS. HYNDMAN: But the reimbursements
6 take away from your budget which is \$20,000, so a
7 lot of members don't put in the full amount
8 because you want to make sure that you have money
9 for programming or so forth.

10 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: With that \$20,000, is
11 that a decrease from what it was?

12 MS. HYNDMAN: It was 25.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: So it was a decrease.
14 And then you hired the school secretary out of
15 that?

16 MS. HYNDMAN: Administrative assistant.
17 She's salaried from -

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: DOE directly. So
19 each CEC has one administrator, and then you have
20 a small budget to reimburse people to have small
21 events to do - I think in District 30 they give
22 out little citations to the children at the end
23 of the year, that type of thing. Right, okay.
24 Good, thank you.

25 I just want to also just quickly, and the

2 pastor can respond, I want to make sure that you
3 understand that I think everybody on this panel
4 voted in favor of mayoral control. I was an
5 enthusiastic supporter of the bill. I have a
6 fifth grader in the public school who has been
7 there since kindergarten. The purpose of this
8 hearing is to try to ascertain what progress we
9 made under mayoral control, what areas perhaps we
10 can shore up or do something a little better or a
11 little different.

12 I want to apologize to everyone again,
13 there's been some feedback about waiting.
14 Normally we ask people to be brief. The deputy
15 mayor is the deputy mayor. We tried to be
16 respectful, and his assistant Ms. Guerrier, she
17 spoke for 50 minutes, but she has an important
18 role to play. So we're trying to accommodate
19 everybody and I apologize, I know we were able to
20 accommodate you earlier, and I'm grateful that
21 you understood.

22 I also, just by way of housekeeping, I
23 know that there are representatives here from
24 both the governor and mayor's office, I will not
25 identify them, but I know who you are and I'm

2 very appreciative that you're here taking those
3 notes working to get back feedback to our
4 governor and mayor, and if there's someone here
5 from the state senate or the council, make
6 yourself known to us and we'll acknowledge you as
7 well. State senate, okay, thank you very very
8 much. Any other electeds or people like that
9 we'll make sure that they'll get acknowledged at
10 some point.

11 We have our next series of panelists, if
12 we have no further questions.

13 Thank you for your service to the
14 children of the City of New York. Very good.
15 Wonderful. We really appreciate that it was very
16 good.

17 Our next panel is Natalie Chappa, Ana
18 Maria Archila, Inez Mendez, Alejandra Vasquez,
19 and Frank Sobrino. I think we're going to have
20 Ken Cohen, but I don't know if we're going to fit
21 everybody so maybe we'll ask him to wait. But we
22 have a number of people here from Make the Road.

23 I just want to clarify one other point
24 just while we are gathering the next panel. A
25 question came up, Assemblyman Lancman asked it

1 about sole source contracting, and there was a
2 response about some kind of a state regulation
3 that was not correct, that is a federal - those
4 school support services are federally mandated
5 under "no child left behind." They are not sole
6 source contracts. The parent makes a choice from
7 a federal list of providers. So the hundred
8 million dollar figure should not and cannot
9 include that as far as I know.

11 I'm going to ask Assemblyman Lancman to
12 follow-up with that in his own style. We can
13 take that few seconds to let people - first I
14 want to thank Pastor Rice and the congregation
15 for being here. I know that some people have to
16 go, and I just ask you to try to transition as
17 quietly as you can as we bring the new group up.

18 We're very very grateful for your
19 presence here today. I see some senior citizens,
20 and it always amazes me with respect that you're
21 coming out and concerned about your children and
22 grandchildren. So thank you very much. Who's
23 first? Go ahead.

24 MS. ARCHILA: Thank you. Good
25 afternoon, Assemblywoman Nolan. Good afternoon

2 members of the education committee. Thank you so
3 much for the opportunity to participate in this
4 discussion about the future of our schools.

5 This is perhaps the most important public
6 debate about governance that we will have in this
7 city and it's a really important debate, it's one
8 that engages the entire city from the youngest of
9 the youngest of our New Yorkers to the oldest New
10 Yorkers. So it's really great to have this
11 opportunity.

12 My name is Ana Maria Archila and I am the
13 co-executive director of Make the Road New York.

14 Make the Road New York is the largest
15 participatory, low-income immigrant rights
16 organization in New York City. We have over
17 5,000 members who are activists, low-income
18 workers, parents, and even workers parents and
19 young people from Brooklyn, Queens and Staten
20 Island who devote an important part of their
21 lives to improve their community, to work on
22 issues from workplace justice to immigration
23 reform to civil rights.

24 We are here as part of the leadership of
25 the Campaign for Better Schools which is a broad

2 coalition of community and advocacy groups that
3 seeks to make critical improvements to mayoral
4 control in New York City, most notably in the
5 area of transparency, checks and balances, and
6 public participation. Those are the three areas
7 of focus that we think the legislation needs to
8 be changed in order to make sure that we have a
9 governance system that does the best thing for
10 our kids.

11 Over the last eight years, Make the Road
12 New York's parents and student leaders have been
13 working to improve educational outcomes for low-
14 income students in our city's public schools, in
15 particular focusing on English language learners.

16 There's an incredibly important, and very much
17 unknown crisis in the educational crisis for
18 English language learner students. More than
19 half of the New York City school age children
20 come from immigrant families. I know there's a
21 lot of noise. I hope that you can stick with me
22 for a second.

23 Over half of the children in the school
24 system come from immigrant families. A lot of
25 them are children that are learning to speak

2 English as well as - -at the same time learning
3 all the subjects that they need in order to
4 graduate.

5 Even by the Department of Education's own
6 statistics, ELLs have the highest dropout rate.
7 It's about 26 percent, one out of four graduates
8 in four years. Over the last eight years, the
9 graduation has not improved and, in fact, in
10 2007, it dipped below 24 percent. This is a real
11 crisis. These are not even graduations that are
12 with Regents diplomas. So you can imagine what
13 will happen in this city to immigrant students
14 once we implement all the Regents requirements.
15 You can imagine what that will look like.

16 You know the current mayoral control
17 system in which the mayor has almost total and
18 unchecked power over policy and budget
19 priorities, and has not delivered a solution to
20 these important crises.

21 At the same time that our kids are
22 dropping out of school, demoralized because they
23 don't have enough support inside the schools to
24 learn English and to learn all the content areas
25 that they need in order to graduate, immigrant

2 parents face incredible barriers for their
3 participation in the public school system. Some
4 of those barriers are barriers of language
5 access. I want to say that Mayor Bloomberg has
6 been after a lot of fighting and a lot of pushing
7 incredibly courageous in establishing the
8 largest, the most effective language access
9 system that covers all of the city agencies of
10 New York City, and that is a visionary thing for
11 him to do, but even though language access was
12 implemented in 2006, there's still more than 50
13 percent of the parents that we talked to that are
14 immigrant parents that do not receive information
15 in the language that they can understand,
16 therefore, they cannot make informed choices
17 about their schools, about their kid's education,
18 and they cannot effectively participate in
19 important decisions about policy and budget that
20 are obviously essential for the future of their
21 children.

22 So the reality is also that language
23 access is only the first step in ensuring parent
24 engagement of parents who do not speak English.
25 We here today to urge you to implement reforms in

2 the governance structure of our schools that
3 protects and respects the role of the public and
4 especially the role of parents and students in
5 important policy decisions and budget decisions
6 and, ultimately, their future.

7 The current form of mayoral control that
8 we have is flawed and needs to be improved. It
9 needs to be strengthened. We cannot continue to
10 have an educational system, a governance system
11 that holds students accountable to high standards
12 without the educational supports necessary to
13 help them meet those standards.

14 The reality - the experiences of
15 immigrant students are very critical, but
16 immigrant students are not alone in the
17 experience of not receiving enough support and
18 all the educational opportunities that they need
19 in order to succeed. We will see this crisis
20 deepen as we implement the Regents diploma
21 standards. So it's really important.

22 We cannot continue to have a system where
23 a school chancellor will promote budget cuts, as
24 Chancellor Klein did last year, instead of
25 fighting against the mayor's proposed budget

1 cuts. We cannot have a system that creates that
2 power dynamic where the chancellor feels more
3 accountable to the mayor than to the public and
4 to the kids. It is not healthy for our schools
5 to have that kind of system.
6

7 So we have seen time and time again,
8 through several chaotic reorganizations and the
9 reforms of the school bus routes that left
10 children stranded in the cold that making
11 decisions in a vacuum does not work. Children
12 are left stranded, they're dropping out, parents
13 are left with nowhere to go for answers or to get
14 problems solved.

15 The Department of Education has admitted
16 time and time again that they need to do a better
17 job on parent engagement. We agree with them.
18 They do need to do a better job on parent
19 engagement. They need to do a better job. They
20 have had eight years to get public involvement,
21 right, and they still don't have it. They have
22 all the power to do it, but they still don't have
23 the right systems for public engagement, but you
24 can help them. You can make sure that that the
25 legislation will create structures that ensure

2 public accountability, will create structures
3 where people will get notices about important
4 events in their education, important events in
5 the school, important events in the Department of
6 Education's functions.

7 The Campaign for Better Schools has
8 developed a plan for making the necessary changes
9 to the Mayoral Control system that will allow
10 parents to have expanded opportunities to
11 participate in the decision-making at the school
12 and district levels. Most importantly, we want
13 to restore the school leadership team's ability
14 to vote on their school's comprehensive education
15 plans and school budgets.

16 At the city level, we believe that it is
17 very important to have a truly independent parent
18 for education policy, a truly independent, which
19 means that people cannot be fired by the mayor,
20 and people have set terms, and there is a narrow
21 majority that is not appointed by the mayor.

22 That's what we mean by independent
23 education policy panel. These panels will hold
24 regular public hearings with translation in
25 multiple languages, because this is New York

2 City, and we'll make sure that things like school
3 closings and important educational policies are
4 discussed.

5 And, finally, we want to ensure that
6 there is an independent watchdog organization
7 like the independent budget office that analyze
8 data and create reports about what's happening in
9 the school. So when mayoral control comes up for
10 reauthorization in June, we need you, all of you
11 to make sure that there are real checks and
12 balances in the mayor's powers, and that you
13 establish a very clear requirement regarding how
14 parents and the public can be involved in the
15 decisions that affect their schools.

16 I want to explain that we - my
17 organization really understands the challenges of
18 running schools. We have helped create two of
19 the most successful high schools in New York
20 City. We helped create the Bushwick School for
21 social justice in Bushwick, a place where
22 graduation rates had been under 25 percent for
23 decades. Our school graduates over 80 percent of
24 our students. Bushwick is the same school, same
25 kids, same families, same neighborhood, it's a

2 different kind of school.

3 In Queens, we have created the Pan
4 American International High School, which is a
5 school for immigrant students that are learning
6 English and that shares Spanish as a common
7 language. So I don't come here to speak as an
8 outsider about what needs to be done in the
9 schools, we understand the difficulties, we
10 really understand the challenges. We also know
11 that a lot of the reforms that have been
12 implemented, that have been great great reforms,
13 implemented by Chancellor Klein and Mayor
14 Bloomberg can be implemented in the system where
15 there is more checks and balances and there is
16 more accountability.

17 Small schools can be created and were
18 created before mayoral control and can continue
19 to be created even if there is a strong panel for
20 educational policy. Some of the other important
21 reforms that have been beneficial to some of the
22 people in low-income neighborhoods across the
23 city can also be done even in the more democratic
24 and more accountable governance structure for our
25 schools.

2 So we really know that this is a complex
3 discussion. This is a difficult issue
4 politically as well as in terms of policy, and we
5 understand it because we've been on both side,
6 the pushing to make sure that a school functions
7 better and the creating of a school site, and we
8 want you think about how can we create a
9 governance structure that allows all of us to be
10 taken seriously, parents, students, community
11 members, elected officials, and that ensures when
12 things go wrong, there is going to be something
13 in check to make sure that those wrong policies
14 or those wrong ideas to kind of fester on their
15 own.

16 So thank you so much for listening to me
17 and I look forward to your questions.

18 MS. VASQUEZ: Good afternoon. My name
19 is Alejandra Vasquez and I am a member of the
20 Parents United for Schools, Community of Queens.

21 I am here to share with you some of the
22 experience of immigrant parents trying to
23 navigate to the school system.

24 I am here on behalf of many parents who
25 could not be here today to share our experience

2 as a result of mayoral control as it is with our
3 community. We continue to find it common
4 regarding the lack of support and inconsistencies
5 found in administration in the systems.

6 One of the examples of this experience
7 was a situation where a mother in our group had
8 to handle her son's suspension issue. With the
9 ultimate power given to the school
10 administration, it left this mother to navigate
11 the suspension process alone from receiving her
12 right to access all the accommodations on time,
13 the lack of translation support with the schools
14 to handling a suspension hearing process alone.
15 She was appalled at the lack of support she
16 received from the school. She has sent three of
17 her other children in a school she considered to
18 be part of the community.

19 Furthermore, with the lack of apparent
20 cooperation it compounded her feelings of not
21 receiving adequate assistance or an individual
22 who would advocate for her son. She has made it
23 a point to have participatory process with her
24 children's education. Throw out the suspension
25 process, she contacted the state family advocate.

2 The suspension - and to her astonishment there
3 was an irresponsive result. She feel her hands
4 were tired and her frustration led her to go to
5 other places that would support her concern -

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I have to ask, I know
7 people love to put up posters, and this has
8 nothing to do with you, please try not to block
9 the view of the other people in the room, I know
10 it makes for good copy, but you're not being
11 considerate of the people sitting behind you,
12 maybe people can take that out in the hall.

13 Please continue.

14 MS. ARCHILA: The one with the biggest
15 consensus by the school system to our parents has
16 been their lack of involvement when they continue
17 to have assisting further pushes. We are - there
18 not enough open avenues for parents to
19 participate in especially it comes to making
20 decisions about achievements, academic process,
21 behavioral issues, et cetera.

22 Why not ensure that the schools are
23 exhausting every possible avenues to make sure
24 that the parents are receiving the information
25 properly and the needed support.

2 Even through significant progress was
3 made when people in the communities fought to get
4 translation in the schools. For the most part,
5 parents still do not have a real place to go when
6 they have problems, and when we disagree with
7 important policies, like budget cuts or promotion
8 policies, we have met big ears in the Department
9 of Education, we are reminded again and again
10 that we don't have real power and that we are
11 considered important partners in our children's
12 school and their education and have a right to be
13 a part of the process, not out of it.

14 We believe that parents and the student's
15 voice equals better schools.

16 Thank you very much.

17 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. And thank
18 you for permitting me to interrupt you. We look
19 forward to meeting with your group at some future
20 time. Thank you.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I have to
22 apologize quickly that I have to go to a major
23 meeting about two hospital closings that's going
24 to affect a large part of my constituency.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I know Assemblywoman

2 Markie and a few others are on their way,
3 Assembly Aubry, and Assemblyman Hevesi too, so
4 we'll keep going. They'll be back if they can be
5 back. Give them my regards too.

6 Please continue.

7 MR. SOBRINO: My name is Frank Sobrino,
8 director of external affairs of ASPIRA of New
9 York. I'm here to present the testimony of the
10 executive director of ASPIRA New York, Hector
11 Gesualdo.

12 I would first like to thank the Assembly
13 Education Committee for convening this hearing
14 and for the opportunity to share my views on the
15 critical issue of mayoral control of New York
16 City's public schools.

17 For those who may not be familiar with
18 this bureau, we are a youth services agency
19 working to foster the advancement of the Hispanic
20 community by helping young Latinos aspire to
21 improve their lives for educational excellence
22 and to better their communities to enlighten
23 leadership.

24 ASPIRA alumni include Anthony Romero,
25 executive director of the American Civil

2 Liberties Union, Fernando Ferraro, former Bronx
3 Borough President and New York City Democratic
4 mayoral nominee, former Deputy Mayor Segara, and
5 the actor Jimmy Smitz. There are scores of
6 aspedontes, as our young people are known who
7 blaze trails for future generations of Latinos in
8 government, business, yards, and the legal and
9 legal and medical professions.

10 Fortunately for them, many of those
11 aspedo alumni attended New York City public
12 schools in the days before decentralization, a
13 well-intentioned but ill-fated experiment and
14 local control that for decades mired the school
15 system with petty politics, corruption and wide
16 spread academic failure particularly in minority
17 communities. Those bad old days are now just a
18 painful memory. There's reason enough to extend
19 mayoral control.

20 More important, however, is the fact that
21 we're seeing meaningful improvements across the
22 system from everything from test scores to
23 graduation rates to school safety.

24 Is everything perfect? Far from it. The
25 Department of Education data show that nearly 40

2 percent of Latinos drop out of school and clearly
3 communication between the Department of Education
4 and parents needs to improve, but it's also clear
5 that when there's accountability at the top of
6 the system, it's far better for kids than when
7 there's deniability throughout the system.

8 I implore you to extend mayoral control
9 of the New York City public school system.

10 Thank you for your time and attention.

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

12 MS. CHAPPA: Good afternoon,
13 Assemblywoman Nolan and distinguished members of
14 the State Education Committee. Thank you for
15 convening this hearing and thank you to everyone
16 for attending as well.

17 My name is Natalie Chappa, I'm an
18 education reform advocacy associate for the New
19 York Immigration Coalition. We are an umbrella
20 policy and advocacy organization made up of over
21 200 member organizations that fight for justice
22 for New Yorkers.

23 We also convened a collaborative of
24 immigrant organizations that fight for quality
25 education for immigrant and English language

2 learner students.

3 I'm also hear as part of the leadership
4 body of the Campaign for Better Schools, a broad
5 coalition of community and advocacy groups
6 seeking to make critical improvements to mayoral
7 control in New York City, most notably in the
8 area of public participation, checks and
9 balances, and transparency.

10 I'm going to talk about today increasing
11 immigrant parent engagement in our schools under
12 mayoral control. We can all agree that parent
13 engagement is of the utmost importance in the
14 education of a child. Research shows that
15 effectively engaging parents increases the
16 likelihood of a child's academic success. An
17 engaged parent is one that is able to communicate
18 with their child's school, get access to
19 information about their child's progress, and has
20 channels through which they can voice concerns.

21 Currently, for many immigrant families,
22 this is just not the reality. It impacts student
23 performance. English language learners are
24 facing a dropout crisis in the city that isn't
25 getting any better, it's actually getting worse,

2 In the gap between English proficient students
3 and English language learners is widening.

4 We've also been able to work with the
5 department to achieve some notable gains for
6 immigrant parents, specifically services for
7 translation and interpretation, however, we have
8 released three separate reports showing that the
9 majority of parents are still not receiving these
10 mandated services through their schools, and
11 other channels. So that's the question that I
12 have too, how can we seriously address parent
13 engagement in our schools if parents are
14 literally being stopped at the door and not able
15 to enter because they're unable to communicate,
16 or upon entering having cafeteria workers be the
17 translators during confidential school meetings
18 or receiving a report card only in English when
19 that's not even a language that they can
20 understand.

21 Even though we haven't reached that
22 baseline, language access is that baseline of
23 being able to participate. There are also many
24 more channels that we would like to see, for
25 parents to be able to voice - to have their voice

2 in important decisions that impact the education
3 of their children.

4 Parents must be supported in moving into
5 positions of leadership in the school system.
6 The current structures for parent participation
7 are not adequate for many immigrant parents, both
8 because of language and information barriers,
9 combined with limited, meaningful opportunities
10 for parents in general, have made it nearly
11 impossible for immigrant parents to have an
12 impact in their schools.

13 The Campaign for Better Schools is about
14 to plan for making the necessary changes to the
15 mayoral control system that will allow parents to
16 have expanded opportunities to participate in the
17 decision making of the school, the district, and
18 department levels.

19 At the school level, we are proposing to
20 restore the school leadership team's ability to
21 vote on their school's comprehensive plan,
22 including the budget. At the district level and
23 city level, we are calling for principals and
24 district superintendents in the panel for
25 education policy to hold regular public hearings

2 with translation in multiple languages to ensure
3 that parents are aware of important decisions in
4 development regarding their child's education and
5 able to voice their concerns.

6 At the city level, we call for a truly
7 independent board, the panel for education
8 policy, which will have community representation,
9 including parents, students and community groups.

10 In order to ensure more independence from the
11 chancellor, a majority of the members will need
12 to be appointed by someone other than the mayor
13 and serve fixed terms.

14 Thank you for your time and
15 consideration. We look forward to working with
16 the state legislature to ensure a more democratic
17 governance structure that guarantees parent
18 participation and promotes parent leadership.

19 In particular, we look forward to working
20 with you to adjust parent empowerment in
21 immigrant communities and improved outcomes for
22 English language learners and immigrant students.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

24 I just want to say to Mr. Sobrino, we're
25 dating ourselves because I, at Grover Cleveland,

2 when ASPIRA first came in, I was active in
3 student government, and I'm sure you know my dear
4 friend Alice Cardona who was very active with it,
5 so I'm very happy that ASPIRA participated today,
6 but we are dating ourselves.

7 I also want to just ask Ana Maria and the
8 panel just for a minute, I recently participated
9 in the testing of my son, who is a fifth grader,
10 they call it the all-SAT test, and we had to go
11 to a site with - I don't know, 4,000 other
12 people, parents of fifth graders, and I was
13 actually quite surprised to find that there was
14 no one there who spoke any other languages -
15 actually they did find someone who spoke Spanish,
16 but there did not seem to be a plan in place for
17 that, and there are many many other nationalities
18 and languages represented now.

19 My own school, we had a very terrific
20 parent coordinator when my son started who made
21 sure we had the meetings in three languages
22 often, we used the learning leaders program to
23 get someone who spoke Bangladesh and we were able
24 to really make a lot of progress on a lot of
25 fronts in that, as well as Spanish. It was a

2 great experience. So I guess I thought that that
3 was the norm. I knew she was special, but now I
4 see that she was more special because of this
5 thing, it was really terrible, actually, because
6 they were really upset, the parents, very
7 anxious, and it was not - it didn't play out as
8 we had been told with our little piece of paper,
9 and parents were just very very upset.

10 Then the school safety officer was put in
11 the unenviable position of basically screaming at
12 everyone for 15 minutes to get in line, and I
13 just felt so bad for everyone involved because
14 that was poor training also.

15 So what are you seeing on these special
16 events that the DOE holds? You think that they
17 would have planned for that, but - and maybe they
18 did and the people just didn't show up, I don't
19 know, but I'm wondering if you've seen other
20 evidence of this.

21 MS. ARCHILA: I mean, what we're seeing
22 is that there is an even implementation of
23 something that's supposed to be a citywide system
24 that's easily available for teachers, easily
25 available for school administrators. So we'll

1 see schools that take the initiative because they
2 have leaders that really cares about connecting
3 to the student's families, and will take the
4 initiative to make sure that documents are
5 translated at any cost, whether it is asking
6 other parents to translate it, or doing all the
7 things that they have to do to make sure that the
8 translation unit actually serves its purpose for
9 that particular case, but we continue to see in
10 many many communities across the city parents who
11 say they have not received the information that's
12 really essential about testing, information about
13 school programming.

15 Parents of special education students
16 that do not receive information that's essential
17 for the student's achievement, and we have done a
18 lot of monitoring and have been communicating
19 constantly to the Department of Education about
20 this. There have been improvements, especially
21 during the first three years there was kind of
22 the big push to try to implement new systems, but
23 it doesn't seem like there's a governance
24 structure where if something is failing we can go
25 and say, create a timeline, create a timeline to

1 fix it now.

2 The governance structure that we have
3 right now basically relies on the capacity of
4 organized communities, organized constituencies
5 to push, to have their basic rights respected.
6 That is not a governance structure that we can
7 continue to have that we can rely on. We can
8 have really great people at the Department of
9 Education, and I believe we do have great people
10 at the Department of Education that care about
11 these things. We can have a great mayor, but if
12 we don't have a way of holding people
13 accountable, we know what that means. That means
14 that some things are going to fall through the
15 cracks and especially those things that matter to
16 people who don't have a lot of power like
17 immigrant New Yorkers, like low-income people
18 across the city. So we really need to fix the
19 structure for governing our schools so that these
20 things don't happen, so that the good initiatives
21 continue to be implemented, are implemented
22 fully, are supported fully, are understood, and
23 people get the opportunity to buy into them and
24 participate in those things.
25

2 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

3 Any colleagues have questions?

4 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: Not a question,
5 just an observation.

6 In talking with Deputy Mayor Walcott,
7 I've said that there are lots of good things that
8 are going on in our school system and I, as an
9 elected official, have had the opportunity when
10 there's a problem in my district to get someone
11 on the phone or via e-mail at the Department of
12 Education and try to get it fixed. But that's
13 just a very ad hoc way of doing business, and
14 going forward, I understand the gentleman from
15 ASPIRA your support for the core concept of
16 mayoral control, and I don't want to speak for
17 anyone else, in fact, I don't want to even speak
18 for myself at this point because it's too early
19 in the process on where on stand on that core
20 concept, but there needs to be some structural
21 changes to the way that parents are able to
22 participate.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Let me just stop for
24 an interruption, Rory. Congressman, we're so
25 happy to see. That's a glutton to come into a

2 state hearing - Congressman Joe Crowley, thank
3 you very much for being here today. I'm sorry,
4 Rory.

5 ASSEMBLYMAN LANCMAN: I just wanted to
6 say that I agree with you.

7 MR. SOBRINO: And we wouldn't disagree
8 with our point of view.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you all very
10 much.

11 Our next panel includes Kenneth Cohen,
12 President of the NAACP Northeast Queens, a good
13 friend of mine. I thank you Ken for being here.

14 Leo Fahey, citizen activist from the borough
15 president Queens parent advisory board; Dan
16 Jacoby, Democracy for New York City; Steve
17 Zimmerman, CEO and founder of Booklinks
18 Publishing.

19 Then right after that the next panel is a
20 group of people - a new organization called Learn
21 New York which includes Josh Solomon from the
22 Young Women's Leadership Network; Nicholas
23 Tishuk, from the Renaissance Charter School;
24 Brett Peiser, Uncommon Schools; Jim Merriman from
25 the Charter School Center; Frank Headley and some

2 people from Voices Charter School; Yolanda Tasso
3 from Our World Charter School - sorry, Doris,
4 that would be you; and Steve Bell, a member of
5 the Independent Commission on Public Education.

6 You all know who you are, just so you
7 know that you're keyed up and you're next in the
8 batter box.

9 Let's just start with Ken and move right
10 along.

11 MR. COHEN: I would like to thank
12 Assemblywoman Nolan, chair of the Education
13 Committee and the education committee members for
14 holding these hearings.

15 Good afternoon, I bring you greetings
16 from our New York State Conference President
17 Hazel N. Dukes, who will deliver our official
18 statement at the hearing next Friday in
19 Manhattan. We are here today to set the platform
20 for our president.

21 The NAACP, which turns 100 years old on
22 February 12th, which is approximately 15 days
23 away, had led the charge in fair, equal and
24 quality education for those 100 years. The
25 NAACP, the champions of Plessey versus Ferguson

1 and Brown v Board the more celebrated case,
2 opened the door to change in America. Although
3 we only want the door open in New York City for
4 all, we must look at the fight for governance.

5
6 In 1996, the New York State Legislature
7 started the process changing the control and
8 powers of the community school boards. In 2002,
9 the New York State Legislature changed the entire
10 system and gave full control and power to the
11 mayor. The NAACP New York State Conference was
12 there leading a charge for change. We agree that
13 the man we elected to govern New York City should
14 be held accountable for education, both successes
15 and failures.

16 We sought to change the governing bodies
17 by expanding representation, placing a certain
18 number of parents, community members and voting
19 students on those entities. We were disappointed
20 at the results but open to the possibilities.

21 We returned eight years later seeking
22 change once again. Today we want to open your
23 eyes to Queens only where the disparities in
24 schools are as broad as hot and cold water. The
25 resources that should have been equaled by the

2 Campaign for Fiscal Equity are not reaching the
3 schools and students they were meant for.

4 Education in Queens has not changed, as
5 the same overcrowded districts still fight for
6 more classroom space, but yet the city cannot
7 find space to build a school. We see many
8 schools in our low-income communities and of
9 color without computer labs, while in our more
10 successful districts, those schools are working
11 on their second and their computer labs.

12 The one thing that stands out is that the
13 past eight years we have lost parents, driven
14 away by principals and empowerment schools and
15 the DOE. We have seen the demise of community
16 organizations work with schools, even the NAACP
17 is not welcome in many schools.

18 Our youth and college division strives
19 for quality afterschool programs and agencies
20 that promote academic advancement and are not
21 glorified babysitters.

22 In recent days, the statistics have been
23 circulating, but there are statistics that prove
24 success and failure. It is the turn for
25 students, parents and communities to step up and

2 let their voice be heard. It is time for the
3 NAACP and other organizations to hold forums and
4 town halls, to have sit-downs with you, our state
5 legislators, and express reality.

6 The end result will be in your hands.
7 Remember, the students are our children, our
8 future, who will lead this nation to greatness.

9 Just in closing, as a former school board
10 member who served on the last eight years of
11 school boards, I express to all people speaking
12 that those years were not demon years, and there
13 were some successes, there are people now that
14 are serving in government, one of the most
15 successful people, Robert Jacksons served on the
16 school board and so forth. So there were some
17 good things that came out of school boards and we
18 should always look at the past as we move to
19 change the future.

20 So I would just like to thank you.

21 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Just quickly, you did
22 make a serious statement there that the NAACP is
23 not welcome in certain schools, if you want to
24 back that up with us, we would be curious to find
25 that out.

2 MR. COHEN: And I will clarify. We have
3 access to the chancellor. When we ask to come
4 into a school - my particular branch - and let me
5 clarify also, I'm the regional director for all
6 the branches of New York City, so I'm exposed to
7 all 14 branches and what happens in them.

8 In my particular district, District 25,
9 there are three different schools; two that we
10 opposed when they closed down the one school, so
11 we have access, probably because of opposition.
12 One, we were a part of the formalization of that
13 school, so we have access but the other schools
14 we have no access. When we do send letters, we
15 meet hesitance.

16 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you for that.
17 That's important and we may follow up on it.

18 Mr. Fahey.

19 MR. FAHEY: Thank you very much,
20 Chairwoman Nolan, and I must congratulate those
21 existing members of the assembly who have
22 remained without lunch or any kind of resting, so
23 I thank you very much.

24 I am a member of the Queens Borough
25 President's Education Advisory Board. As an

1 educator of 28 years instructing in colleges and
2 in high schools, as an advocate for the special
3 needs, gifted and talented, the twice
4 exceptional, and as a father of one of these
5 youngsters so badly mauled by being ill-served, I
6 wish to state my opposition to mayoral control.
7

8 The over-centralization of mayoral
9 control remains insensitive and unresponsive to
10 the needs of children, especially the twice
11 exceptional. Several times over the last two
12 years, I have petitioned Ms. Bonnie Brown,
13 superintendent of the City Wide Special Education
14 District to include service to the twice
15 exceptional. I even once had the intercession of
16 City Councilman James Sanders in trying to move
17 Ms. Brown to work with me or to connect me to
18 someone in Tweed to whom I can encourage the
19 establishment of service for this population.
20 But there was no cooperation, no contacts
21 forwarded, and no movement to include such
22 service to this population.

23 Shortly thereafter I began working with
24 fellow education advisory board member Jeannie
25 Basini. The as then president of Community

2 Education Council District 30 and was herself
3 fighting the dumping of autistic children in
4 trailers in the schoolyard of PS 151. Ms. Basisi
5 introduced me to John Englert, the president of
6 the City Wide Community Education Council for
7 Special Education Council who was kind enough to
8 add his assistance. Even these two fine CEC
9 presidents, tried as they might, could not breach
10 the walls of Tweed. All efforts on behalf of the
11 twice exceptional were to no avail.

12 Unfortunately, the twice exceptional are
13 an absent category in both the federal
14 individual's with Disability Improvement Act of
15 2004, and New York State Education Law. Thus,
16 the state and the city can easily ignore these
17 children. I have been petitioning as the
18 individual educator and the father of a son who
19 should have been so labeled and served, to have
20 State Law amended so as to force service.
21 However, Mr. Greg Roberts, a policy analyst in
22 the office of new state senate majority leader
23 Malcolm Smith advised me on May 14th, 2008, that
24 current state law does not preclude service to
25 the twice exceptional.

2 Indeed, if Chancellor Joel Klein and his
3 subordinates were sensitive to the needs of this
4 population, they could allow programs to be
5 fashioned for them. However, in their infinite
6 wisdom, they describe and identify gifted and
7 talented as the top five to 10 percent of test
8 takers, all the while completely ignoring the
9 twice exceptional who must suffer the indignities
10 and severe emotional distress of being totally
11 misplaced and mis-educated.

12 Members of the Assembly Committee, I say
13 the New York City schools must decentralize yet
14 be fully accountable to its stakeholders,
15 therefore, I am proposing a decentralization plan
16 which puts stakeholder accountability as central.

17 The present system would decentralize
18 into community districts contiguous with the
19 present district geography. The schools in the
20 community districts would be collectively
21 governed through what I would call district
22 congresses - a kind of reorganized and empowered
23 community education councils. These congresses,
24 acting as if they were boards of trustees for
25 independent multi-campus learning organizations,

1 would be composed of students, parents, teachers,
2 administrators, representing all the K through 12
3 schools in the district, and of the general
4 public representing their political geography of
5 the district; membership would be weighted so
6 that students and parents make up the majority.
7 This way, I truly believe you will offset an
8 awful lot of the corruption and the politics that
9 other speakers have suggested in conforming to
10 centralization.
11

12 Anyway, to go on, the present Department
13 of Education would relinquish all
14 responsibilities to the District Congresses. A
15 citywide congress will be instituted with
16 oversight function of the district congresses but
17 with limited veto power over the decisions of the
18 district congresses.

19 Incidentally, the city wide congress
20 would again be drawn from the congresses and not
21 from the folks who like to use the board for - to
22 step up the next political ladder. Membership in
23 these congresses would be by both an - we'll do
24 that another time.

25 School building decisions, already

1 decentralized to the schools under current
2
3 policy, would remain exclusively the schools, but
4 would be subject to district congress oversight,
5 however, the decision making for each school
6 within each school district community would
7 democratize into a unified majority-ruled
8 governance policy.

9 This is very different. It puts the
10 stakeholders of the parents, and, most
11 importantly, the student front and center along
12 with the professionals in managing their schools.

13 There is a hierarchy of stake holding
14 within each school. Children have the most at
15 stake as it is their lives schooling is shaping.

16 Next come the teachers and the librarians and
17 then the administrators, aids and ancillary staff
18 whose decision to the art and the service
19 encompass both their beings and their
20 livelihoods.

21 Given this hierarchy of stake holding,
22 for a school to be truly sensitive and responsive
23 to children, they ought to have the lion's share
24 of authority for making decisions. Yet, the
25 wisdom of the professionals is as much required

1 because they have the knowledge of methods by
2 which children can satisfy their needs. Thus,
3 any democratic school governance must combine
4 children and professionals in a manner by which
5 decision-making is weighted in favor of the
6 children but infused with the wisdom of the
7 professionals, such schools as Windsor House, in
8 North Vancouver, British Columbia; Sands, in
9 Devon, England; Sudbury Valley in Framingham,
10 Massachusetts, a public school, Lehman
11 Alternative Community School in Ithaca, New York,
12 among many others, employ what is called
13 democratic education governance which, indeed,
14 combines the favor of children with the wisdom of
15 professionals.
16

17 In a democratically governed school, the
18 school meeting is the unifying majority-ruled
19 governance mechanism which weights decision-
20 making in favor of the child but infused the
21 community with the wisdom of the professionals.

22 The entire school community comes
23 together in democratic meetings to decide all the
24 issues with adults and children having equal
25 rights to speak and to persuade and with each

2 having a single vote on questions up for
3 community decision.

4 The democratic meeting, for instance, can
5 decide the quality review tasks or the
6 comprehensive education plan and the budget
7 necessary to accomplish the plan, or they can
8 determine textbooks, or even the amount of
9 homework, if any. It can define appropriate and
10 inappropriate behavior and how inappropriate
11 behavior is to be dealt with.

12 Such democratic decentralization in a
13 school, or throughout a system, for that matter,
14 cannot be just thrown together. Therefore, I
15 call on this Assembly Committee to strongly
16 recommend the State Legislature direct the
17 establishment of a task group, weighted so
18 children and parent form the majority, for the
19 purpose of establishing a demonstration project
20 to fully explore this democratic community
21 governance model.

22 This task group would oversee the
23 establishment of several new small schools based
24 on a decentralized, democratic governance model,
25 and would institute a Congress unifying and

2 overseeing these small democratic schools. I
3 already said it and I would hope funding for this
4 project should be through the city's and the
5 state's education stimulus money hopefully
6 awarded from the federal government's economic
7 stimulus plan.

8 I thank you.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. Dan?

10 MR. JACOBY: Hi, my name is Dan Jacoby
11 and I'm an organizer with -

12 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I just want to
13 apologize, you should have said that you were a
14 member of the Borough President's Advisory Board.

15 MR. FAHEY: I did. First line.

16 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: But in this printout
17 we have, we will correct that for the formal
18 record. Thank you.

19 MR. JACOBY: My name is Dan Jacoby and
20 I'm an organizer with Democracy for New York
21 City.

22 By the time I graduated from high school,
23 I had attended schools in seven different school
24 districts in five different states. I therefore
25 have a rare opportunity to not only compare and

2 contrast different approaches to the many aspects
3 of how the school and the school system can be
4 organized, but also how well each separate aspect
5 works and how well they work together.

6 A couple of examples, in Stamford,
7 Connecticut, 1974, students were treated with
8 dignity and encouraged both to reach their own
9 maximum potential and to help other students
10 reach there.

11 Conversely, in Kalamazoo, Michigan in
12 1977, and indeed throughout the 70s, the ninth
13 grade was in the junior high school building. My
14 own ninth grade English teacher still owes me a
15 McDonald's hamburger over a bet regarding the
16 correct spelling of the word triple.

17 In recent years, I have been a private
18 math tutor helping prepare early elementary
19 school kids for their citywide tests, and high
20 school juniors and seniors for their college
21 entrance exams. To help understand what the kids
22 I tutored were dealing with, I visited classrooms
23 and seen teachers and their curricula in action.

24 With my variety of experience, I have
25 come to the conclusion that any successful school

1 system needs three things, one of them above all,
2 and that our school system has none of them.

3
4 First, a school system needs input from
5 more than one point of view. Mayor Bloomberg and
6 Chancellor Klein share a point of view, and while
7 both of these people are remarkably bright and
8 capable, neither of them knows much about public
9 education. Now their view can be a welcome part
10 of the general discussion, but only a part, not
11 the first, last, and only word.

12 Chancellor Klein treats teachers as
13 fungible. His desire for uniformity reveals his
14 failure to understand that education is an art,
15 not a science. His mania for standardized tests
16 not only limits severely what is taught, but also
17 requires a colossal waste of valuable classroom
18 time as teachers administer practice tests.

19 Bloomberg and Klein claim significantly
20 higher graduation rates, but hide students who
21 drop out early. They claim major improvements in
22 test scores, but only on those tests they
23 themselves write. They claim tremendous
24 reduction in crime but only in those few schools
25 in which they place extra police. They trumpet

2 phony successes and hide enormous failures.

3 In short, one point of view only leads to
4 disaster. We need a system where major decisions
5 are reached and implemented only after healthy
6 debate.

7 Second, very briefly, a school system,
8 like any system, needs to put facts over
9 ideology. The problem with the current system is
10 that Bloomberg and Klein, like the recent
11 president, put ideology ahead of everything else
12 including students. Their ideology, that schools
13 can be run like businesses is a tragedy, and I
14 have already listed many of the sad results.

15 Finally, we come to the most vital
16 attribute of any successful school system.
17 Rather than state this feature directly, I would
18 like to take the scenic route by asking a
19 question. If you had to use one, and only one,
20 number as the ultimate measure of the success of
21 a school system, what number would you choose?

22 Now I have run one choice by teachers,
23 parents and administrators for years, using them
24 as a sounding board. Since nobody has ever
25 contradicted me, I am confident that if this

1 choice is not absolutely correct, it is at least
2 extremely close. The one number that best
3 represents the success of a school system is the
4 percentage of parents who attend parent teacher
5 conferences.
6

7 The key is parental involvement. If
8 parents are communicating with teachers,
9 principals, and their children, if parents know
10 what and how well their children are doing in
11 class, if parents know who is making the
12 decisions and how those decisions are made, it is
13 nearly an iron-clad guarantee that children will
14 get a good education.

15 Parental involvement naturally leads to
16 multiple viewpoints. It guarantees that teachers
17 will be exposed to many different ideas on how to
18 run their classrooms. It also ensures that
19 decisions will only be reached and implemented
20 after that much needed healthy debate.

21 This type of debate also means that facts
22 are far more likely to enter into the decision-
23 making process and become the means for reaching
24 a consensus. Additionally, parental involvement
25 carries the promise that children will be more

attentive, more active and more responsible.

When I was young, I hated parent-teacher conference time because I knew it meant I wasn't going to get away with anything. Now I'm grateful that my parents went.

Side note, don't tell them I just said that.

Under the current system, while there is plenty of lip service regarding the need for parental involvement, parents are shut out. This must be reversed.

Whatever system you cobble together, I urge you to make certain that no one person can make decisions, that facts trump ideology, and, most importantly, that parents are strongly encouraged to become involved.

I just want to add a quick thing, I will have a list of specific suggestions, my internet access went down this week, so I will get that together. But the one thing I do want to mention, whatever you do decide, please put a sunset on it. One of the real problems with the corruption that exists in the previous school boards was that they had been there for so long

2 unchanged.

3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you.

5 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Ms. Nolan, members of
6 the standing committee on education, my name is
7 Steven Zimmerman. I'm a 20 year resident of
8 Sunnyside, Queens, and I'm also founder and chief
9 executive of a publishing services company that
10 develops educational materials for major US
11 textbook companies, some of whom like Scholastic,
12 McGraw Hill, Pearson, have a major presence in
13 New York City.

14 In my spare time, I also serve on the
15 board of trustees of Our World Neighborhood
16 Charter School in Astoria where I have a middle
17 school kid. I may not look it. I actually have
18 40 years experience in education. I have six
19 years - I started as a kindergarten teacher in
20 the inner city of Chicago, Longdale, in 1968, so
21 I have six years on Dennis Walcott of males who
22 were in touch with their inner five year old.

23 I've been an educator, taught materials
24 development advocacy and I hope innovation. But
25 I'm not here to talk about my school or my

1 business, and I'm not here either as part of
2 charter school advocacy, I'm really here - I
3 believe someone said, a lifelong interest in
4 public education, and I've seen a lot of swings
5 in educational policy.
6

7 When I was at Cornell back in the 1960s,
8 I was a kid from the Midwest rooming with four
9 guys from Brooklyn, and all of these guys were
10 brilliant products of the New York City Public
11 School systems. They all went to regular high
12 schools and Flatbush and Canarsie, and I was
13 amazed at how well prepared they were for
14 college, far better than I was, and I had gone to
15 one of the best suburban high schools outside of
16 Chicago. At that point, at that time, New York
17 City was unequivocally the center of urban
18 American public school excellence.

19 A lot has happened since that time, and I
20 don't really want to get into history lessons
21 here, but I think that it's fair to say that the
22 events following the Ocean-Hill Brownsville -

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: It would be the
24 members left, we were there. The younger members
25 all had to go, so -

2 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Well, your memory is
3 long too, so you all know about the fiasco in
4 1968 that lead to the deterioration of what once
5 was a great school system, and despite having a
6 number of talented school chancellors, it
7 degenerated over the next 30 plus years into a
8 prolonged exercise and backbiting and finger-
9 pointing and no one taking responsibility. New
10 York City still has some great public schools but
11 people are fighting to get their kids into them
12 because of the exception, not the norm.

13 Mayoral control is not perfect, and we've
14 heard a lot of good things said about problems
15 with mayoral control, but it has been the single
16 best thing that has happened to this school
17 system since those awful events of 1968 that tore
18 this city apart.

19 I've been to the DOE a number of times in
20 the past five years, and I can say, as someone
21 who knows a bit about business, a bit about
22 policy, a bit about education, that something
23 very right is happening there. The place is
24 efficient and its smart. A lot of the meetings
25 are held in large, open conference rooms,

2 sometimes several meetings going on at the same
3 time, and I think it's there to encourage
4 openness and transparency, there's energy there,
5 there's intelligence.

6 New York City has become open to
7 experimentation and entrepreneurship. Schools
8 have become more accountable. Many new smaller
9 schools have opened, including charter schools.
10 And most importantly, academic achievement has
11 improved finally and markedly.

12 A very important tenant in education is
13 to practice what you preach. So now is the time
14 when everyone in education, especially those of
15 us in charter schools, are being held
16 accountable. No one can pass the buck.
17 Accountability is being demanded of our school
18 and everyone up and down the chain embraces it.
19 We don't demand of our children what we can't
20 perform for ourselves. So in that light, I
21 believe that the mayor has been very successful
22 in getting schools to be accountable because the
23 DOE, as it is presently run, is, itself,
24 embracing accountability.

25 At bottom, we have to look at what works.

2 And in a time of huge economic peril, we have to
3 look at what works efficiently. Mayoral control
4 is working and is getting the job done. We all
5 are in favor of greater accountability, greater
6 transparency, and, yes, I've heard a lot of
7 voices here, by all means, a better means of
8 ensuring meaningful input from parents. But we
9 should be very very careful regarding the
10 establishment of any new layers of authority that
11 would adversely impact what is now an efficient
12 and well-run department.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Colleagues,
14 questions?

15 I do have one, actually, the principal's
16 union, the supervisor's union, they'll be
17 testifying at another hearing, and I've obviously
18 have read most of the reports prior to this
19 hearing, and I think in one of their
20 recommendations was that the chancellor, I want
21 to say him or herself, but since there's never
22 been a woman chancellor, we'll just for the
23 moment say himself, should be subject, not
24 necessarily to a changed educational panel, but
25 some type of a regular performance review in some

2 type of public way. Just like, we're grading
3 everyone else, but they've had six and a half
4 years, and the panel doesn't seem to have any
5 ability because the chancellor serves on it to
6 say, What are you doing right? What are you
7 doing wrong? And say, well, we think this is
8 wrong, you should work a little more in this
9 area.

10 I don't want to put anybody on the spot,
11 but some type of performance review for the
12 chancellor as well, is that something - I know
13 you're a supporter of control, is that something
14 that you would object to or does that seem to
15 make some sense?

16 MR. ZIMMERMAN: Well, certainly - I
17 mean, I'm using the idea of charter schools, but
18 our chief officer who is our principal is subject
19 to those types of reviews every year by the
20 charter board, by a committee that we put
21 together, and it works for us. So, again, people
22 should practice what they preach. If they're
23 preaching accountability, that seems to me to be
24 a reasonable way of getting something.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you.

2 MR. FAHEY: If I might, accountability
3 to whom? Parents and children are the single
4 category that are the stakeholders first and
5 foremost, children because their lives are on the
6 line every day. Parents because they have the
7 responsibility to see through with the education,
8 the health, and welfare and the safety of their
9 children.

10 Parents and children ought to be the ones
11 passing judgment, ought to be - I really dislike
12 the word input, because the input is put down.
13 It does not, it will not, and will never equal
14 any kind of power. We ask parents to do an awful
15 lot. We ask parents to shoulder the
16 responsibility of raising children in our society
17 which is a tremendous task.

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. I want to
19 thank the four of you for your testimony and
20 please give my regard to the great Hazel Dukes, a
21 great friend of 25 years, and, of course, our
22 Astoria, Long Island City branch where we just
23 celebrated Dr. King's day.

24 I understand there's a group of people
25 here from Learn New York. My list may not be

2 correct, so let's see what we have here. We have
3 Josh Soloman, Nicholas Tishuk, Brett Peiser,
4 James Merriman, Franklin Headley, Michael
5 Kirkbride, and Yolanda Tasso.

6 While those people are coming up, I would
7 like to let our stenographer, whose done a
8 phenomenal job at keeping everybody's voice
9 heard, let him take that little break and we'll
10 get you settled.

11 (Whereupon, a break was taken.)

12 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I want to re-open the
13 hearing. I want to thank our stenographer for a
14 fantastic job and our wonderful staff for a
15 wonderful job. I want to clarify something that
16 I said earlier.

17 This is a group of concerned independent
18 voices on school reform, not affiliated with
19 Learn New York, which I'm not exactly sure what
20 that is yet, but we'll find out when it's their
21 turn, but I want everyone to understand that we
22 are trying to accommodate every group, person, as
23 I made a little joke, my sister-in-law is picking
24 my son up, and I'm prepared to be here as long as
25 it takes to hear from everyone in this Queens

2 hearing and will do so for all five hearings, so
3 I would like, if you could though, to get
4 started, understanding people just ran to a
5 moment, get a glass of water, shall we say, but
6 if you don't mind just starting the whole row,
7 and then as questions come up, and it's nice to
8 see you, a fellow soccer mom. I can say that, I
9 am a soccer mom.

10 MS. NEARY: I'm Geraldine Neary, and I'm
11 the PTA president. I'll probably have the
12 shortest speech of the day. It's Genaldine Neary
13 and I'm the PTA president of the Renaissance
14 Charter School. My concern - well, actually I
15 should say welcome and thank you everybody for
16 having these meetings.

17 While I do believe that mayoral control
18 works, it does need to be tweaked. Having said
19 that, the one thing I do feel strongly about is
20 that it can't go back to the old system having
21 over 30 boards deciding, arguing, or finger-
22 pointing on who and how to run our school.

23 That would bring me back to remember my
24 first experience with public school in the city
25 back in 1998 and my son first started school. We

1 arrived at the school that morning and I was
2 shocked to see a very large orange line spread
3 across the entrance of the school. Parents do
4 not cross this line, and that was the principal
5 standing there and stating this to 30 odd new
6 kindergarten parents. So that was a rather large
7 slap in the face to me.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: That's a welcome to
10 New York.

11 MS. NEARY: Yes, it was my first
12 experience with schools in this country, and I
13 decided I would stay and try and see if I can
14 change in my nature, I stayed for the year. My
15 child didn't work with the principal and then I
16 left and found a charter school where my voice is
17 heard loud and clear. I've held every position
18 there is on the PTA and parents are paired in
19 charter schools. So after listening to
20 everything today, and a lot of people saying in
21 the regular public system that parents aren't
22 paired, that's a definite plug for charter
23 schools, because smaller schools, parents, they
24 need parents, they have to have parents or they
25 don't work. And having been there, I have three

2 children there, and they have flourished, and
3 I've learned my way through the system, and I
4 would hate to see it go back to where you're on
5 hold with someone who knows nothing about you or
6 your child. Here, at least in our school, there
7 is someone to answer to. I think that's the
8 bottom line. One of the mayoral control does
9 need to be tweaked a little bit. I would hate to
10 see it go back to the old way. The decision was
11 made in 2002 for a reason, and the bottom line is
12 to remember that reason.

13 The last thing I have to say is, too many
14 cooks spoil the broth. That's it.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We learn that in the
16 legislature every day. Thank you. It's nice to
17 see you. It's one reason, as chair of the
18 committee, I've tried something, and I don't want
19 to be mean, but I'm trying to get through it
20 because we got a big panel and a lot of
21 witnesses, but only one chair, so I'm trying my
22 best.

23 Thank you very very much. I appreciate
24 it and look forward to visiting your school.

25 MS. NEARY: Thank you.

2 MR. TISHUK: Thank you. I would like to
3 thank you, Assemblywoman Nolan, and the rest of
4 the committee. My name is Nicholas Tishuk, and
5 I'm the director of programs and accountability
6 at the Renaissance Charter School.

7 My perspective comes from being in public
8 education in New York City for the last eight
9 years. I started as an 11th grade English teacher
10 in the Brooklyn and Staten Island School
11 District, superintendent's seat in Bedford
12 Stuyvescent, and now a public school authorized
13 by the chancellor. I can say one thing with
14 confidence in these eight years, things have
15 really changed on a school level, and that's
16 really where I'm at every day.

17 The message that's really come from above
18 is that all public schools in New York City,
19 whether in regular districts or in charters is
20 accountability. Students must be held
21 accountable for their work in order to gain a
22 Regents Diploma, and parents must support their
23 children in this work.

24 Teachers must be responsible for their
25 students and the families that we serve.

2 Administrators must be responsible for all
3 aspects of the school, and if we don't, we can be
4 fired, if we do not meet the needs of the
5 students in our care.

6 If our schools fail, and what I mean by
7 that is, if we do not successfully educate our
8 children, then our schools will be closed. This
9 message has been very clear. What does this
10 really mean at a school level though, this
11 accountability? It means in the old board of ed,
12 when I taught English, a 55 is the passing grade
13 for English Regents exam, and now it's 65, is
14 that enough? Is that high enough? Despite that
15 it makes my harder and the jobs of my teachers
16 harder, I think that we would never say that we
17 want that older level of accountability.

18 Are the tougher regulations and all the
19 standards and expectations make my life any
20 easier? Not really. But I think that in the
21 end, the kids count, and that's what matters the
22 most, and that's the message that we've gotten
23 being authorized by the chancellor. It's a lot
24 to take in because sometimes it feels like tough
25 love, but in the end I think that the mayor and

2 the chancellor could work more effectively with
3 the parents, getting more communication. I think
4 that the charter model does offer some insight
5 for school reform. Our board of trustees has
6 parents on it, has community members on it, and I
7 think that that insight really makes us
8 successful.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Renaissance is a K
10 through 12 school?

11 MR. TISHUK: Yes, a K through 12 school
12 in Jackson Heights.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Are there any other K
14 through 12 schools in the charter -

15 MR. TISHUK: No, there is only one other
16 K through 12 school in the entire system, and
17 that's Staten Island.

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. I,
19 myself, think it's a wonderful idea.

20 MR. TISHUK: Yes, and I think it works
21 for our parents as well. I can't really speak
22 for our parents, but -

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Are you a certified
24 teacher?

25 MR. TISHUK: Yes, certified teacher, and

2 certified administrator, and also a member of
3 CSA.

4 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

5 MR. PEISER: Thank you, Chairwoman Nolan
6 Assemblyman Weprin, for convening these hearings
7 and having us here today.

8 My name is Brett Peiser and I was born in
9 Flushing. I come from a long line of educators
10 including a brother who currently teaches at
11 NewTown High School in Elmhurst, and two parents
12 who were longtime teachers at Forrest Hills High
13 School.

14 I'm here today as the managing director
15 of Uncommon Schools, which is a nonprofit charter
16 management organization that starts and manages
17 charters schools dedicated to closing the
18 achievement gap and preparing low-income students
19 for college.

20 As a short story, I began my teaching
21 career at Midwood High School in Brooklyn in 1990
22 before all the current changes were in place. I
23 can tell you that the assistant principal at the
24 time wanted to hire me but at that time it was a
25 bureaucratic nightmare. I just couldn't be hired

1 because they needed teachers. I had to wait
2 until the first day of school when they could
3 declare an emergency opening. From there I had
4 to go to a central district hiring hall and just
5 hope and pray that they would pick me to fill the
6 open spot. It was not a rational system and it
7 didn't appear that any one person was in charge.

8 The principal and his staff did not have the
9 control a school administrator needs to do their
10 job well.

11
12 What education looks like today in New
13 York City is night and day from when I first
14 started teaching 19 years ago. And thank you to
15 everybody on the committee for their vote to
16 enact mayoral control in 2002.

17 What I think mayoral control has done is
18 put education in the spotlight, and even more
19 than that it has given a spirit of education
20 reform that makes this city an incredibly
21 attractive place to teach and learn and innovate.

22 It has given the mayor and the Department of
23 Education the tools they need to close the
24 achievement gap and have students perform at the
25 highest level.

2 After years of some frustration I
3 actually left the city because I found other
4 places in the northeast more hospitable to
5 education reform. Several years ago, after
6 starting and leading a charter school in Boston,
7 I came back to New York with a host of other
8 education leaders who had started some of the
9 highest performing charters schools in the
10 country, including Boston Collegiate Charter
11 School, North Star Academy Charter School, and
12 Roxbury Prep Charter School, which was just
13 honored by the Education Trust as one of our
14 schools nationally dispelling the myth that the
15 achievement gap can't be closed.

16 We came back because we heard from
17 Chancellor Klein and Mayor Bloomberg to come back
18 to the city and open great schools for our kids.

19 And today, our five schools serve nearly 1,000
20 students. By this summer, we'll have nine
21 schools serving 2,000 students, and at full
22 capacity we'll be helping manage 20 New York City
23 schools serving 9,000 students.

24 We, as a city, have come so far
25 especially in terms of education reform. Today

2 we have more schools and more options for
3 families, and it's not just about the mayor and
4 the chancellor serving as strong advocates for
5 charter schools, the chancellor has gone the
6 extra step and has actually spaces for our
7 schools in the most underserved communities. Our
8 schools are located in neighborhoods where there
9 is a strong need for better schools and parents
10 who wanted us to come in and help.

11 So far, the results are strong. In 2007,
12 one of our schools, Williamsburg Collegiate
13 Charter School was the number one ranked public
14 school on the chancellor's progress reports. And
15 last year, in 2008, another one of our schools,
16 Excellence Charter School, was the number one
17 ranked elementary school, and across all of
18 Uncommon Schools, 96 percent of students scored
19 Advanced or Proficient on last year's New York
20 State math exams.

21 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: That's a three or a
22 four?

23 MR. PEISER: Exactly, 96 percent of
24 nearly 1,000 students. As importantly as those
25 results are, parent's demand is overwhelming. We

2 have students who are on the bus by 6:00 in the
3 morning because they want a better option. And
4 for every seat that we have opened, we received
5 more than twice as many applications. Every one
6 of our schools has extensive waiting lists and,
7 like all charter schools, we end up holding a
8 lottery and we feel terrible that not every
9 parent can win.

10 When I started teaching in New York,
11 there was never one place where you could get all
12 the answers; enrollment, teacher certification,
13 fingerprinting, how to get hired, that was always
14 handled by a different office. Today, if you
15 have a question, there is one place you call and
16 they have an answer.

17 When no one is in charge, no one makes it
18 a priority, and today education is a priority and
19 we know who to hold accountable.

20 Thank you very much for your time and
21 attention.

22 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you.

23 MR. MERRIMAN: Good afternoon, my name
24 is James Merriman. I'm with the New York City
25 Charter School Center. We are support and

2 advocacy organization for charter schools. Full
3 disclosure, Joel Klein sits on the board of the
4 Charter School Center, as does Garth Harries,
5 it's two of nine members, they provide no
6 funding, so my remarks haven't been vetted by the
7 chancellor nor would he ask such a thing.

8 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. That's
9 important to know, I appreciate that.

10 MR. MERRIMAN: Absolutely. You've heard
11 a lot today, and you're going to hear a lot over
12 the other four hearings, and later today.

13 Obviously charter schools and the sector
14 are supportive the mayor and the chancellor. He
15 has been good to charter schools. What I would
16 suggest that is important about this isn't
17 whether we benefitted or not, it's that it serves
18 as an example of some other things that this
19 chancellor and mayor have been able to do, which
20 is have a bold and consistent policy over a
21 number of years.

22 In this case, obviously, it's charter
23 schools, but I would suggest in a system that had
24 diluted political accountability, and a number of
25 competing power sources, you would never get

2 anything along these lines. And if the issue
3 were class size, and if that was the mayor's
4 signal policy, if you had a diluted system, you
5 would get nowhere.

6 I think the other thing that I would like
7 to say that is critically important is, I guess
8 with the term limits battle and the mayor likely
9 running for a third term, this debate has been
10 intrinsically tied to the mains, Bloomberg and
11 Klein, but it is not about Bloomberg and Klein,
12 it is about a form of government that I assume
13 would outlive them.

14 And I urge the members of the assembly,
15 and I know that they keep this in mind, but this
16 is not about the personalities of the people in
17 charge now, and the signal ability of a mayor and
18 a chancellor to push through consistent policies
19 is what cannot be affected when people talk about
20 tweaks, in my humble opinion.

21 Now, when you get to issues such as the
22 data, and what it means, I would suggest, just as
23 Brett said, there has been more reporting on that
24 data, which supposedly the mayor has manipulated,
25 than at any time previous that I have been a

1 sentient adult in New York in 1981, I would say
2 only going back to Frank Macurola's tenure was
3 there the kind of spotlight on data. It does not
4 take more than a click of the internet to find 30
5 articles disputing what that data means on both
6 sides of the debate.
7

8 That said, if the assembly and the senate
9 and the governor feel there should be independent
10 body producing independent reports, it's probably
11 a pretty good idea, but it isn't as if we haven't
12 had a healthy debate already.

13 Finally, on parent participation, clearly
14 there are parents who feel alienated from the
15 system, and equally clearly the district has said
16 consistently that it doesn't do a very good job
17 of it. The question will be though in tweaking
18 are we talking participation, which can be more
19 mandated, or are we talking the ability to
20 decide. I would suggest that if you create a
21 legal structure in which the chancellor doesn't
22 have the authority to hire and fire principals
23 according to whatever rules there may be, doesn't
24 have the authority to cite schools, and doesn't
25 have the authority to close schools.

2 Essentially, you will have mayoral
3 control in name only and you will really have a
4 CSD structure that for the most part was
5 dysfunctional.

6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you.

8 MR. KIRKBRIDE: First of all, thank you
9 to the Education Committee, and particularly
10 Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan for bringing us here
11 today.

12 My name is Michael Kirkbride and I'm on
13 the board at VOICE Charter School here in Queens,
14 and I'm also a parent of a kindergartener in
15 public school in Manhattan. I currently work on
16 a mutual fund at Bank of America, which is a
17 whole other story. At least I think I still work
18 on a mutual fund at Bank of America. But I spent
19 my first decade long career as a public school
20 teacher in Los Angeles and in Brooklyn in Bedford
21 Stuyvescent also.

22 VOICE Charter School's mission is to
23 combine a deep emerging in music, specifically
24 cord music with a powerful academic program. We
25 feel very strongly that these two components,

1 which are often in competition with one another
2
3 for time slots in today's education environment
4
5 are complimentary, and that a focus on one
6
7 actually reinforces and enhances the other.

6 50 years ago, even 25 years ago, this was
7 a given. Music was given in every child's life
8 in school. That is no longer the case. We
9 believe that music matters and at VOICE every
10 child is in music class at least once every
11 single day. We believe that reading music leads
12 to better reading skills, and we believe that
13 understanding structure and rhythm leads to
14 better math skills. We believe that cord music
15 builds foundational skills like team work and
16 delayed gratification, and all of this is
17 compounded by the very simple impact of general
18 exposure to music and the arts.

19 Our school is very young. We opened in
20 September, but we're on the right track. I've
21 had the pleasure of spending time at the school
22 with our principal, Frank Headley, and I'm amazed
23 at the focus of our kindergarten and first grade
24 students. We will grow over the years adding a
25 grade every year to our K5 and eventually,

1 hopefully, K8.

2
3 I'm also amazed at the focus of the
4 administrative staff that has worked tirelessly
5 to open and manage a brand new school, and also
6 the involvement of parents who demand rightfully
7 a high quality education for their children. We
8 hope that in five years our results will have
9 proven, or re-proven, the power of music as an
10 essential element and component of education. We
11 hope that this will have an impact on the way
12 that people think about education. I'm here
13 today telling you these things because I believe
14 that mayoral control of the school system is
15 essential.

16 As a general principal, accountability is
17 at the core of any system, education business,
18 what have you, and having centralized
19 accountability means that, in cases both good and
20 bad, performance excellent and poor, uneven and
21 even, we, the voters know where that
22 responsibility ultimately lies.

23 In our specific case, changes made under
24 mayoral control cleared the path to our existence
25 and innovative approach at VOICE. The equity and

2 funding and access, in space citing, and
3 information around school choice that has come
4 along with this particular version of mayoral
5 choice, has provided students and families at our
6 school here in Queens, and we had 800 families in
7 our lottery for 80 spots, it's true, and he'll
8 say it again, there's clearly demand. We've
9 given parents an option that they would not have
10 otherwise had.

11 We may agree or disagree with future
12 mayors and their choices on education and it
13 sounds like there's plenty of reason to talk
14 about tweaks in the current system. But at least
15 with mayoral control, we will know where the
16 ultimate responsibility and accountability lies.

17 Thank you for your time.

18 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We want to have
19 questions for you so maybe you can just switch.

20 MR. HEADLEY: Good afternoon. My name
21 is Franklin Headley and I'm principal of VOICE
22 Charter School. Thank you so much for the
23 opportunity to speak today, and I've enjoyed very
24 much hearing the other speakers.

25 I particularly like that statistic about

2 - that the rate of participation of parent-
3 teacher conferences is the key indicator because
4 we're at 100 percent.

5 Some of those parent-teacher conferences
6 took place on bus stops, so whether parents like
7 it or not, we make the parent-teacher conferences
8 happen.

9 I've come today to support the renewal of
10 mayoral control of the schools because our little
11 school would not exist without it. We believe
12 that the creation of VOICE Charter School is
13 proof that the actions of parents can speak
14 louder than words.

15 Last spring, VOICE Charter School had no
16 building, a rented mailbox, and a homemade
17 website, we didn't have any glitzy ad campaign,
18 we just mailed parents a three-page application
19 and a simple brochure that we made at a copy shop
20 on Queens Boulevard. We were hoping to get just
21 enough to open with 80 students. The parent's
22 response for our kindergarten and first grade was
23 overwhelming. It was 800 families supplied,
24 that's 10 families for every seat, which is more
25 than 10 percent of eligible families in District

2 30, and enough for 10 schools.

3 We have students who represent the
4 diversity of Queens; children from East Elmhurst,
5 and Woodside, and Jackson Heights, and Astoria,
6 and Long Island City.

7 The results of the mayor's effectiveness
8 in allowing space for our school to exist is best
9 told through two brief stories about my students.

10 I've changed the names, of course.

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Just briefly, how
12 many students are in the school right now?

13 MR. HEADLEY: Right now, we did go over
14 - we went over the limit of 92. It was so hard
15 saying no, but we originally were targeted for
16 80, but we were allowed to go up 15 percent.

17 Maria is a student for whom English is
18 not her second language but her third. She
19 speaks Spanish and sign language since both of
20 her parents are death. Her parents took that
21 courageous step to apply this school that did not
22 yet exist. I cannot express the joy of these
23 parent's faces when they see their daughter,
24 seeing her dance, and they read the reports of
25 her improvement and speaking English.

2 The other student I want to talk about is
3 Zia. These children have music more than two
4 hours a day, and we have to have a longer school
5 day to fit it all in. This was not possible if
6 we were a district school. Anyway, one day it
7 was raining during lunch, and we were watching
8 our Sound of Music sing-a-long, and I often
9 interrupt the sing-a-long and we discuss
10 different aspects of the film in Music. Last
11 week Zia asked me, and the other students, what
12 genre is this film? And by the way this is a
13 first-grader. I said, I don't know, Zia, what
14 genre do you think it is? She said, I think it's
15 realistic fiction since some parts really
16 happened and some didn't.

17 I think more than anything that these
18 children tell us that it's possible to have an
19 arts rich school that is academically rigorous.
20 I would like to thank the supporters of mayoral
21 control for schools for allowing that to happen.

22 Thank you.

23 MS. TASSO: Originally I had this as
24 good morning, but it's good afternoon.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: It may be good

2 evening before it's all over.

3 MS. TASSO: I would like to thank the
4 Assembly Education Committee and Assemblywoman
5 Cathy Nolan for convening these hearings and
6 hearing my testimony.

7 My name is Yolanda Tasso. I am a parent
8 with a child in a charter school at Our World
9 Neighborhood, and I also am a co-chair of their
10 PTO organization. I am lucky also to say that I'm
11 an employee of VOICE Charter School.

12 I'm here to support the renewal of
13 mayoral control of schools, and charter schools
14 would not continue to exist without the mayoral
15 control. Of course, there are checks and
16 balance.

17 Charter schools are public schools with
18 individuality. As a parent, I wanted the choice
19 for my child. In 2002, when my son was born, I
20 was worried about what choices I would have in
21 schools for him to go to. When it was time for
22 him to go to school, I knew I had made the right
23 choice by sending him to a charter school.

24 Our World Neighborhood Charter School,
25 like many other charter schools, strive to give

2 the parents a choice. I was concerned with
3 things like grade curriculum, socialization,
4 diversity and culture.

5 My son Joseph is in first grade and
6 learning from excellent teachers, has become very
7 independent, has many friends of races and
8 religion. I feel right now that the only way I
9 have a voice in my local community is through the
10 mayor's office. As a charter school parent, I am
11 not allowed to sit on my own CDC board.

12 I hope one day as parent I can be
13 included in the community education council
14 board. Parents deserve the opportunity to be
15 involved in the education of their children. Our
16 children are our future, and their education
17 should be our priority.

18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

20 Mark, did you have a question?

21 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I'll start. I have
22 a couple of questions. Do the charter schools
23 take the standardized tests that all the public
24 school take, the same exact ones?

25 MS. NEARY: Yes.

2 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: Because I talked
3 before about the standardized tests and the
4 pressure being put on schools, and you talk about
5 a school like yours, which sounds great, where
6 they focus on music.

7 The anecdotal stories I get from parents
8 all over the place is that their music classes
9 have been eliminated because of standardized
10 tests. Their basketball programs are put on
11 hiatus for four months because of standardized
12 tests. It goes on and on. Their arts program,
13 school plays, nothing happens during the months
14 of December to March in schools.

15 I know that for a fact because I got a
16 program that I got funding for for my schools, an
17 arts program, sort of as a way to counteract the
18 standardized tests, but nobody wanted them during
19 those months. But once March comes around,
20 things can start.

21 So I'm not against charter schools, I
22 never was, and I am - and in theory, the idea of
23 a charter school, there are bad charter schools,
24 good charter schools, and there are certain
25 private charter schools that could be a problem,

2 but I think that they make a lot of sense, but
3 how do you avoid that emphasis on testing that
4 seems to be prevalent in a lot of the other
5 schools?

6 MS. NEARY: Well, none of the students
7 in our school have lost their arts, music, or
8 anything due to testing. Children are invited on
9 a Saturday, if they wish, to come to the class
10 for the math or science, or whatever the test may
11 be, but we haven't lost anything out of their
12 education day.

13 We do have an extended day for seventh
14 and eighth graders. But during the day, they
15 extra math and English classed, but they still
16 have an extra interest group which we've compiled
17 their interests, put them altogether, and they
18 have an hour in which to go and do something
19 completely separate, it could be culinary art,
20 could be sewing, could be knitting, could be
21 anything. But we haven't taken away any of the
22 arts in our school to make sure that - during
23 testing periods.

24 MR. TISHUK: We have a K through 12 arts
25 program in school. Every single student in K

1 through 12 has either music, drama or visual
2 arts. In the high school, every student is a
3 major. We're one of the only schools in the city
4 where everyone can be an arts major even if
5 you're not fantastic at it.
6

7 That being said, we have excellent
8 standardized test scores. Last year we had a 97
9 percent English language arts exam rate. We just
10 took them yesterday, so hopefully the kids will
11 come back with it even higher. We have hopes for
12 that. We think you can do both. We're a
13 humanistic school that gets results and I think
14 that this is a model that the whole student can
15 look at and learn from.

16 MR. PEISER: As is probably heard on the
17 panel, charter schools have a lot - nearly - very
18 strong control over their program. A lot of
19 charter schools that have a longer day and a
20 longer year. With a longer day, and a longer
21 year, obviously, and we've chosen to implement,
22 we don't have to, we can actually follow the same
23 school day, we've chosen to have a longer day and
24 a longer year, so that gives us a little bit of
25 an advantage to be able to extend that.

2 But I will say just on the point about
3 preparing students, the worst thing a school can
4 do to prepare the students for the exam is to
5 test prep. It is a poor choice that the school
6 and the school leaders have made. If you look at
7 the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade - let's just
8 say the math exam, the skills that you need to
9 succeed on that exam are to add, subtract,
10 multiply and divide, and manipulate decimals,
11 fractions, whole numbers and percents.

12 If you just have a really good teacher
13 who focuses on those four operational skills,
14 those four other skills, you will succeed with no
15 - and I'll add and maybe with, listen if you
16 don't the answer, just guess, just with a day of
17 that, but if you just prepare the students with
18 the state standards that are very clear, that's
19 the best form of preparation that you can
20 provide.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I hear you and I
22 think that's great. They don't say just guess,
23 they say pick C because C is statistically the
24 most common answer, that's what they tell the
25 kids.

1 But I want to talk about this data thing
2
3 a little bit in regard to what you just talked
4 about, because what you say sounds great to me,
5 and that you have these art programs and all
6 this, you got 97 this year, be careful, because
7 if you get a 96 percent doing well next year,
8 your report card grade goes way down the tubes,
9 and that's my problem with those progress
10 reports.

11 And that is that those progress reports
12 are 85 percent about tests, about not even tests,
13 and they are the same, it's amazing to me to hear
14 you talk about that, because they talk about when
15 you go up on the tests, and, as a parent, what I
16 would like to know is, do you have music programs
17 twice a week, do you have whatever four times a
18 week, and don't make me feel bad here, he gets
19 gym once a week, he gets art every other week,
20 and it's frustrating - but my point is, the
21 things that I care about as a parent, is it safe,
22 are the teachers good, and do they - and the fact
23 that we're judging teachers, and I understand
24 that it's hard to quantify a skill, but teachers
25 like yourself should not be judged just by

2 whether my son does better on a standardized
3 test. That's not what a good teacher does.

4 Teachers, probably like yourself, went
5 into teaching to inspire a kid, because they had
6 a teacher when they were young and maybe liked
7 science or art or music, and that's why I want to
8 be a teacher. I'm afraid that this is going to
9 kill teachers, like teachers are going to start
10 getting frustrated, not because of what's going
11 on in your school maybe, but I'm telling you
12 what's going on in most of the schools that I
13 come across. I cannot find a teacher in my area
14 that likes these standardized tests and thinks
15 that it's helping them teach. They feel they're
16 teaching less.

17 MR. HEADLEY: Let me make just two
18 points. The first one is, just that in some
19 cases charter schools actually have more tests,
20 probably related to our reauthorization. In this
21 case that we have to take nationally norm tests,
22 like the Terranova, which my first graders took,
23 and we don't do test prep for Terranova, because
24 the whole purpose of the test is to see how the
25 children are doing by virtue of our curriculum,

2 of our school concept.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I wish all tests
4 were just like that. If they were, I wouldn't be
5 nearly as upset about the tests, but they're
6 never about how the kid is doing or what he
7 knows, it's about how is the teacher doing, and
8 how is the principal doing, and therefore he gets
9 lost on -

10 MR. HEADLEY: Part of it though I think
11 requires a culture shift here, that the test is
12 supposed to be a test about the effectiveness of
13 the curriculum. One of the arguments our school
14 concept is trying to make is, that having
15 intensive arts, more than two hours a day is
16 going to put them in a better position to do well
17 on tests without test prep.

18 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I don't hear the
19 chancellor ever saying that though. The
20 chancellor never says, you know, you should be
21 focusing more on arts and music and not be doing
22 so much test prep. The like the test prep
23 because - I know you don't think it helps the
24 grades, I actually think it does help the grades,
25 not because they're learning more, just because

2 they're getting the right answer, and maybe on
3 math it's a little more different, but the
4 English language arts, I mean, my kids are
5 learning things that, yeah, he's going to get the
6 right answer now, but he's not going to know any
7 more.

8 MS. TASSO: I know I'm just PTO in our
9 school, but I know that based on my son going to
10 Our World, they do have the turnover test also,
11 they have an art program for the children and
12 they do give music, and Spanish lessons. They
13 also have - twice a year they have an arts
14 festival, one that's in the winter, another one
15 that's in the spring, and this year we had a fall
16 arts festival and the children, you have to see
17 the beautiful work that they do and we auction
18 off some of their work and it's amazing how
19 beautiful these children - I have one in my house
20 that looks like a Van Gogh painting.

21 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: It sounds great,
22 but one last point I want to ask, is that all
23 right? I just wanted to correct something, you
24 all keep speaking about mayoral control and your
25 charter schools do well, but we passed the

2 charter school law before the mayor was in even
3 in office, and I understand that the mayor is a
4 support of charter schools, but it could just as
5 easily be the mayor who hates charter schools,
6 and then you'll never get a charter school.

7 We passed it already, started it, and I
8 understand that the mayor and the chancellor had
9 been advocates for it and helped it a lot, so I
10 understand this particular mayor, but for your
11 sake, God forbid the mayor loses to someone who
12 hates charter schools, you're closed up, I mean
13 they can close you up this mayoral control. It
14 can work either way, I mean - I don't have a big
15 problem with charter schools, at least not as
16 much as some of my colleagues, but to tie it to
17 mayoral control, like that's what you made you
18 guys great, it's not fair, I don't think because
19 mayoral control usually kill you as it created
20 you.

21 MR. TISHUK: I think James was very
22 eloquent when he said, it isn't so much, you
23 know, we love the mayor because he's helped us
24 out, it's saying, look, give educators and
25 communities and teachers and parents a chance to

2 make the schools they want to make. And when
3 they do, they can be successful. And when
4 they're not successfully, shut them down. We
5 have these vigorous debates within our own
6 community.

7 Our mission is developing the leaders for
8 the Renaissance of New York, not developing 100
9 percent on the Regents exam, but we find that - I
10 find as an English teacher, if your kids are
11 doing poorly on the standardized exams, with a
12 3.2 on Regents exams, you're not being effective
13 in the greater mission. We're aiming way beyond
14 just competency. The three is not good enough
15 for us.

16 We think that when you have a community
17 that comes together that has a lot of that, we've
18 been given that opportunity not just from the law
19 that you've passed, but also from saying, well,
20 run with it now, we'll let you fail, we'll let
21 you succeed.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I agree with the
23 theory. I'm not convinced that that three or
24 four tells me that that kid is doing great in
25 school. There are kids who are getting fours who

2 are not great students, I'm sorry, and there are
3 students that are getting two who are probably
4 great students and are learning a lot but not
5 doing well on standardized tests, so that's my
6 big problem with that.

7 And Cathy wants me to shut up now, so
8 I'll just -

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: No, no.

10 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: You talk much
11 faster than she does, by the way, so I didn't
12 think that that was fair, so -

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: But we know each
14 other a long time.

15 Yes, Audrey.

16 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: The teachers, and
17 maybe I should know this, but the teachers, are
18 they part of the UFT?

19 MR. TISHUK: Schools have the option to
20 either be a union shop or not. Our school is,
21 many of them are not. But it's available.

22 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: And your school
23 is a longer day?

24 MR. TISHUK: We have an extra period in
25 the middle school because we found that we just

2 weren't getting enough time to do everything so
3 we actually added in middle school interests as
4 an elective and a bunch of other advisory
5 programs, extra math and English.

6 MR. MERRIMAN: Just to be totally clear,
7 the schools don't have the choice to be union or
8 not, the teachers have the right to collect -

9 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: And yours is not
10 union but you have a longer day.

11 MR. TISHUK: That's currently correct.

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: So you have a
13 longer day and not unionized?

14 MR. PEISER: Yes.

15 MR. HEADLEY: But that's different from
16 us. My school is longer but we actually hire
17 different teachers for the longer day.

18 MR. PEISER: We actually pay our
19 teachers more as a result of our longer day, so
20 our teachers get paid 20 percent more. We start
21 with the New York City salary scale, then we pay
22 20 percent above that.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: But you don't
24 have to adhere to the seniority or any of that?

25 MR. PEISER: No, unless - it depends -

2 it's a school by school, it's a group of teacher
3 by teacher decision, so Renaissance different
4 than our schools.

5 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: One more
6 question, if I may.

7 You started the school with 80 children,
8 you did a lottery, and they're going to move up
9 to the first grade and second grade, and then for
10 your kindergarten, is that again done by lottery,
11 or do it by application?

12 MR. HEADLEY: We already have 100
13 applications.

14 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: That's it. Thank
15 you.

16 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I just have a
17 question.

18 How do you think the charter school
19 movement will face the downturn in the economy
20 going forward, with all the extras that you've
21 been able to offer, with the private sector
22 support that you've been able to collect, how do
23 you face the future, maybe Jim better answer
24 that.

25 MR. HEADLEY: I'll just answer really

2 quick. We're really trying to keep our budget
3 within the tax levy, what's provided by the city
4 and the state, so that we don't expect, unless it
5 actually goes down considerably. And charter
6 school is supposed to be two years behind what
7 the allocation is, so that as long as we stay
8 right where we are, we don't have a dependence on
9 outside funds.

10 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: And then just
11 quickly, chartered by SUNY, and there's only two
12 approving bodies, state ed and SUNY charter
13 school institute.

14 MR. MERRIMAN: So obviously people are
15 looking with trepidation. There's no doubt that
16 the philanthropic sector in New York City has
17 been hit and hit very very hard. We held a
18 session and advised the schools basically that
19 they need to create contingency budgets that put
20 them on the tax levy, and that the tax levy,
21 depending on what happens at the state level, the
22 federal level, and obviously city level, it's
23 possible that it can go down.

24 It might lag because the calculations are
25 made off two years ago, because if they need the

2 audited figures of what the district spent in
3 order to figure out what the charter school
4 should get as a fraction of that. Basically red
5 flags just like at the public level.

6 MR. KIRKBRIDE: Just one more point and
7 that is that the wildcard in that is space,
8 actual physical space. We are currently using
9 our tax levy money and nothing more than that
10 because the Department of Education has been very
11 flexible and we are in the Department of
12 Education space.

13 When that is not the case, if that is not
14 the case, especially in a financial scenario like
15 we are facing, that could be a deal breaker for a
16 lot of charter schools, I think that's fair to
17 say.

18 MR. TISHUK: Just to answer your
19 question, 98 percent of our budget comes from
20 state or federal funding.

21 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: But you're in leased
22 space though.

23 MR. TISHUK: Yes, but our funding is
24 coming from, the majority from the same as - the
25 DOE and others.

2 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I just want to thank
3 all of you. I really appreciate the
4 participation of the charter school movement in
5 this hearing and it's an opportunity to get to
6 know you all a little better and I appreciate you
7 coming. Thank you all very much.

8 Our next group will be Steve Bell, a
9 member of something called the Independent
10 Commission on Public Education; Joseph Segreti
11 from the Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic
12 Association; Nigel Pugh, is he here?

13 Mark Dunetz, the Principal of Academy for
14 Careers and Television and Film; and also Anthony
15 Lombardi, and also a principal, come up. We
16 don't have you on this list, but we're putting
17 you both together since you're both principals.
18 Maybe you could sit with him.

19 Let me just say something. I'm going to
20 say it now and I'm going to say it once,
21 everything that we do is in the interest of the
22 parents. I'll say that again, everything that we
23 do is in the interest of the parents and the
24 children. I'm a public school parent. I
25 understand how stressful it is. We are trying to

2 accommodate everyone. You've asked an official
3 request from Deputy Mayor Walcott's office if
4 these gentlemen will defer for some other parents
5 of your choosing, if they are willing to do it, I
6 am willing to do it.

7 But you're from the deputy mayor's
8 office, you make the request, you ask the
9 principals and this other gentlemen, and if
10 they're willing, we're happy to do it. Speak up.

11 You spoke up just now. You were quick to say
12 it's about the children. Speak up. You made a
13 characterization just like I want to say to my
14 friend, Jim Merriman, I have not in any way for
15 the three years I've chaired the committee
16 breathed a word about the mayor or the
17 chancellor. Many words have been breathed about
18 me, and some just now.

19 It isn't about personalities, it's about
20 the children, and I have nothing but respect for
21 the mayor and chancellor and I would ask the DOE,
22 once again, to share a little respect towards me.

23 So if this group would like to go, if I
24 could just put that on the record, yet again,
25 from the DOE to perhaps to extend to me the

2 courtesy and respect that it says that we're
3 mutually concerned about the children. So if the
4 other group doesn't mind, and you're asking that
5 from the deputy mayor's office, I'm sure we can
6 accommodate you.

7 Would you like to go ahead? Go right
8 ahead. This lady here. Go ahead. Say your name
9 because we have a different list.

10 MS. IDARRAGA: Sure. My name is Yolanda
11 Idarraga and I'm a parent. My daughter attends
12 VOICE Charter School, kindergarten, and I want to
13 say that although I do - I've been here all day,
14 as many of us, I do understand the concerns of
15 the parents that they're facing, and I'm honored
16 to be part of the charter system.

17 Since this is my first child attending
18 school, I haven't been exposed to that type of
19 experience, so I'm very blessed to be heard, be
20 part of the school, and actually have teachers
21 and the administration office listen to me and
22 really welcome me into the school system.

23 Thank you.

24 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you so much.
25 What grade is your child in?

2 MS. IDARRAGA: Kindergarten.

3 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: That's the nicest.

4 Thank you. By fifth grade, you see they change a
5 little.

6 MS. BOVIAN: Hello. My name is Leshelle
7 Bovian. I'm the PTA co-chair of VOICE Charter
8 School.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I do want to say for
10 the record to the representative from the Deputy
11 Mayor's office, we just had people from VOICE
12 Charter School, so it's not like they were not
13 represented. But, feel free. Go ahead.

14 MS. BOVIAN: I would like to thank the
15 Assembly Education Committee and the chair,
16 Assemblywoman Nolan, for hearing my testimony.
17 As a parent, I care first and foremost about what
18 goes on in my child's school and I'm here today
19 to ask the assembly to renew mayoral control so
20 that my child's school district will continue to
21 improve.

22 In the past, before new legislation was
23 passed, it was felt that the public schools were
24 failing New York City kids as you had school
25 districts with tremendous resources, and others

2 where families found themselves with few
3 resources. If you were not able to pay for your
4 choice of school, your child was subject to an
5 unfairly run educational system.

6 This was devastating to families of
7 limited means, as they were unable to afford
8 choice. Mayoral control served to level the
9 playing field between school districts and to
10 allow parents the opportunity to be more involved
11 in the education of their children despite social
12 economic status.

13 VOICE Charter School believes a student's
14 academic achievement requires that parents have
15 an understanding of curriculum, academic
16 achievement standards, assessments, district
17 school policies and procedures, and of how to
18 monitor their child's progress and work with
19 educators to improve the achievement of their
20 children.

21 My daughter's current school holds its
22 parents to such a high level of accountability,
23 so imagine what is expect of their teachers.

24 This type of commitment to my child's
25 success is invaluable and came at no price to me

2 through mayoral control. What we must always
3 keep in mind is why the old system didn't work
4 and how the new system has made significant
5 reforms, problems in old systems came about
6 because no one was responding to the challenges
7 that schools were facing and because authority
8 was through many different bodies, no one was
9 accountable, and remained silent by bureaucracy
10 for decades.

11 Decisions took years to be made and, in
12 my view, is something that is entirely
13 unacceptable when there are a kid's well-being
14 and development on the line.

15 When the Assembly considers legislation
16 this spring to renew mayoral control, it's
17 important that you maintain the system
18 accountability so that principals and teachers
19 are held accountable, and we can hold the mayor
20 accountable as well.

21 There is so much work that still needs to
22 be done, and opportunity for improvement across
23 the board, but kids, including those who are
24 economically disadvantaged, have disabilities,
25 English language learners, have limited literacy

2 skills, are of any racial or ethnic minority
3 background, or children of migratory parents in
4 New York City to serve a system that is working
5 for them. Let's keep moving the bill forward.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We have some
7 questions at the end. Go ahead and introduce
8 yourself. The gentlewoman from the deputy
9 mayor's office asked that you be considered now,
10 so you might as well at least introduce yourself.

11 MS. O'TOOLE: I appreciate that, but we
12 did ask for that because we have to pick up our
13 children.

14 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We understand that.
15 What's your name?

16 MS. O'TOOLE: You have someone, I don't,
17 to pick my son up.

18 My name is Maureen O'Toole, and my son is
19 in VOICE Charter School in the first grade.

20 MS. ACOSTA: Hi, I'm Erin Acosta. My
21 son is also in VOICE Charter School in
22 kindergarten, and I would like to thank everybody
23 for staying all day, for the group of gentlemen
24 that gave us the floor and for anyone that stood
25 up and said that we need to get our kids. Thank

2 you.

3 I'm going to read what I wrote. I'm
4 going to share my experience as a parent. I was
5 faced with the decision to send him - basically
6 was in a school that was failing, PS 151,
7 District 30. So now, as a parent, I have to
8 figure out, what can I do, what choices do I
9 have?

10 It's imperfect, it needs to be improved,
11 but I did have choices because of mayoral
12 control. I was able to go to the district office
13 right by the Queens Borough Bridge and figure out
14 what application I had to fill out and I actually
15 got him a spot in PS 70, which is actually up the
16 block from me, but there's an imaginary line
17 blocking me that being his own school.

18 Then at the same time I was able to get
19 the applications for the various charter schools
20 that are in District 30, Renaissance and VOICE,
21 and also I was able to have him tested for the
22 gifted and talented program.

23 I had those choices. I believe I have
24 the choices because of the shift from the old
25 system to the new system. But, I will also say

2 that I am a New Yorker, born and bread, I speak
3 the language, English, and I had resources to go
4 and figure it out what it is I needed to do. As
5 a representative also of VOICE Charter School,
6 parents, as part of the PTA, many of my parents
7 do not speak English as a first language, if they
8 speak any English at all.

9 So I think going forward, an improvement
10 for this process would be how to make it as easy
11 possible for parents to navigate the system. A
12 lot of times they get lost, it makes them
13 frustrated, they get angry. However, that
14 happens, it needs to be addressed. Just
15 listening to everyone here today, I think that
16 parents feel like they don't have a voice. I do
17 believe it's great that the mayor is ultimately
18 held accountable for the way the system works,
19 and I am happy that charter schools have a place
20 in this system. They can address some of the
21 challenges the system faces, but if parents
22 aren't heard in the end, it's not going to
23 matter, because that's what's happening at home.

24 Thank you.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Do you have time to

2 take a question or too?

3 MS. O'TOOLE: Sure.

4 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I don't want to hold
5 you up, I know how stressful it is. I normally
6 would be picking my son up myself, but I asked my
7 sister-in-law to cover for me. I know how
8 stressful it is when you don't have that.

9 You're at 111?

10 MS. ACOSTA: PS 111, yes.

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: How are you finding
12 the physical plant of the school, we've had maybe
13 a 20 year battle with the DOE to try and make
14 some repairs to the electricity at that school,
15 to really no success from the School Construction
16 Authority, so I was hopeful that once they put
17 the charter in there perhaps your voice is added
18 to our regular parents at the school might make
19 some improvements in a physical plant that I'm
20 sure you will acknowledge leaves something to be
21 desired.

22 What experience do you have with the
23 electricity and the heating system there?

24 MS. BOVIAN: It's been somewhat
25 difficult. We have had to be creative. We're on

2 the second floor. It's cold. It depends on the
3 day. So we just made provisions, you know, the
4 children dress with sweaters, and the uniforms
5 help, because that covers a lot, and we're just
6 happy to be in that space and just happy to have
7 a school.

8 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Did you want to
9 respond to the writing issue there, I know that's
10 another concern?

11 MS. ACOSTA: I think part of it is,
12 well, we have an earlier cafeteria time because
13 the school has accommodated us. We didn't exist
14 last year, now these cafeteria workers are
15 working an extra hour to feed our children at
16 10:30 when that used to be - there's no one in
17 the cafeteria. But I would say that the
18 bureaucracy that's set up, talking to security
19 guards, talking to the maintenance, there seems
20 to be - you can't just talk to the person in
21 front of you, it's got to go this way before the
22 message actually gets where it needs to go. I
23 don't know how that can be cut out as we are the
24 new people in the building. If we can help PS
25 111 advocate for themselves to improve the space

2 and create teamwork there, I think that would be
3 beneficial to all the children that go there, not
4 just VOICE Charter School students, but PS 111
5 students as well.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

7 Any colleagues have a question?

8 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: First, what are the
9 hours? The kindergarten child goes from what
10 hour to what hour?

11 MS. BOVIAN: 8:00 to 4:30.

12 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I can't ask you
13 about testing, because you don't take it yet,
14 although the chancellor has talked about doing K
15 through two also, but we haven't gotten up to
16 that yet, but you'll enjoy that in fourth grade,
17 when your fourth grader takes nine standardized
18 tests, nine days of standardized tests.

19 So for nine days there won't be music
20 classes, but for nine days they'll be just
21 focused on those tests for those nine days, and
22 that doesn't include any test prep. Even without
23 test prep, nine days of taking tests, nine years
24 old.

25 MS. ACOSTA: I'm hoping that in what you

2 are doing and what you've been tasked with is how
3 to improve that and how to make that better.

4 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I also, once again,
5 want to reiterate, I'm skeptical that mayoral
6 control is the reason you guys are here and doing
7 great, because next year you may get a mayor who
8 hates charter schools and then they close you
9 out.

10 MS. ACOSTA: I agree with what you're
11 saying there. I think the idea is that 10 years
12 ago, before mayoral control, there was no room
13 for possibilities other than what was. So now,
14 going forward, hopefully, it's finding what works
15 best.

16 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I think you may be
17 just misreading. You're right, 10 years ago they
18 didn't have charter schools, the charter school
19 movement is just getting underway, a lot of
20 people hadn't been enlightened on charter schools
21 who believed in them. With or without mayoral
22 control, I think by now we would have been there
23 and would have existed with or without mayoral
24 control. I know that, again, the mayor has been
25 very supportive of the charter schools, so I

2 understand that it's been better because of this
3 mayor, but I'm just not sure that that's about
4 mayoral control.

5 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: But we are happy to
6 hear your voice and we're glad you came, and I
7 look forward to seeing the school. I've been at
8 111 for many many times over many many years, I
9 have utmost respect for Principal Seabrook who
10 has been a stable force there in the early years
11 of mayoral control, we had a different principal
12 every year, and we're just grateful that the
13 heaving have stopped and we have a principal
14 that's made a commitment to being there and we're
15 grateful and hope that you'll enjoy working with
16 her.

17 MS. ACOSTA: And to her credit, she's
18 been extremely kind and gracious to VOICE Charter
19 School and she's a wonderful principal.

20 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Yes, a wonderful
21 wonderful person to work with.

22 Thank you very much. We know you have to
23 get back. You have 45 minutes. Plenty of time
24 to zip down the boulevard.

25 I want to apologize again to my other

2 panel. And, you know, we tried to put this
3 together based on how people came in. We always
4 give the deputy mayor the courtesy of going
5 first. We never expected him and Martine to talk
6 for 55 minutes but they did, and that wasn't with
7 the questions, but that's the way deputy mayors
8 sometimes go.

9 Why don't we have those other people come
10 up.

11 MS. ACOSTA: Parents with letters, can
12 we hand them to you or is there someone who takes
13 care of that?

14 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. Why don't
15 we have our two principals speak first if that's
16 okay with you. Why don't you go first and then
17 the two principals. Go ahead.

18 MR. BELL: I would be happy to have the
19 last word, it's really not a problem.

20 I am a principal, by the way, but not in
21 the New York school system. I have 35 years of
22 experience in public education.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I apologize. I guess
24 there are some other parents in. We're trying to
25 accommodate you all. I apologize that now we

2 took some parents ahead of some other parents,
3 but the deputy mayor's office asked us to take
4 those parents first.

5 Please try and work with us. I will be
6 here all evening if I have to be to listen to
7 everyone.

8 And people that were not able to stay,
9 they can submit written testimony or come to
10 another hearing or come back because I'm not
11 obviously going anywhere. And just for the last
12 time, we would ask that we let these gentlemen
13 now give their testimony. They did register
14 quite early.

15 MR. BELL: Thank you. I appreciate the
16 opportunity to speak. I appreciate the assembly
17 holding these hearings and your endurance for
18 this day to hear the testimony.

19 I do have the experience as the principal
20 of three schools, one of which was a magnet
21 school. I'm representing iCOPE, the Independent
22 Commission on Public Education, and I must
23 apologize like the Department of Education,
24 Mayor's office, I need to improve too. One of
25 your attachments is missing, so I will send that

1 by e-mail, that's the iCOPE plan, I don't know
2 how I could have avoided putting that in there,
3 but we'll make sure that you get it.
4

5 I would just like to clarify something
6 with regard to charter schools. Like magnets,
7 they are special in that they are selecting
8 students by application. Whether it's a lottery
9 or not, it's a group of families that are looking
10 for something different. And for every kid in a
11 charter school, there is a long waiting list of
12 kids that would like to be there. And that
13 speaks to unequal access to outstanding
14 educational opportunities for all kids.

15 That long waiting list for charter
16 schools in the New York City school system really
17 says that the local schools are not doing the job
18 that needs to be done, even after six years of
19 mayoral control.

20 We feel that governance has a purpose.
21 And the governance of the school system would be
22 to guarantee equal access to outstanding
23 educational opportunities for all children in all
24 schools in every neighborhood, not in some
25 schools.

2 We believe that governance should have
3 the purpose and the ability to turn failing
4 schools into successful ones. We have not seen
5 that. We don't believe that the leadership of
6 this school system has a plan or knows how to
7 turn a failing school into a successful one.

8 After closing 70 schools after six and a
9 half years, more schools are scheduled to be
10 closed, more schools are listed as failures.
11 This is not success. Something is wrong. We
12 have a plan. We have this goal of equal access
13 to outstanding educational opportunity for every
14 kid in every school. We believe that's an
15 attainable goal, but things have to change to
16 make that happen.

17 We are not alone in that any longer. We
18 have joined a coalition called the three R's
19 Coalition. The attachment that you have has
20 something less than that listed. But the three
21 R's Coalition has a pledge to action which you
22 have received, among the things that it is
23 asking, and we will be asking the legislature to
24 support this idea, regardless what changes are
25 made in mayoral control, whatever tweaks or

2 modifications the legislature deems appropriate
3 and necessary at this time, we are asking that
4 you authorize a constituent's commission to study
5 the school system in depth; to develop a
6 consensus plan for moving forward, a consensus
7 plan that includes all the constituents in
8 identifying what the purpose of the school system
9 is, what its goals, its accountabilities, what
10 its operating procedures should be, and then what
11 its governance structure would look like to
12 facilitate that.

13 We define constituents as persons who
14 have a dependence on the school system, an
15 interest in the school system, or a
16 responsibility to the school system. So that
17 commission would be composed of representatives
18 of all those constituent groups. They've been
19 previously called stakeholders but they really
20 are constituents. They're your constituents, and
21 the school system's constituents.

22 So we look forward to that process
23 because we believe we can do better as a city,
24 but we believe, we, as a city, need to be
25 included in this process, that this is a process

2 bigger than one person or two. All that you have
3 heard, all the complaints that you have heard
4 reflect the fact that two people are making all
5 the decisions and disempowering effectively
6 everyone else. All the research shows that
7 parents need to be involved, that teachers need
8 to be involved, that students need to be involved
9 in developing the policy at the school and in the
10 school system to make it successful.

11 We haven't seen that process in any urban
12 school district in this country yet, but New York
13 could take the lead and authorize that process,
14 and then we can come back to you after a year
15 with a comprehensive, cohesive plan that you can
16 consider.

17 Thank you very much. I appreciate this
18 opportunity.

19 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Just mention for the
20 record the supplemental materials you brought.

21 MR. BELL: What you have received is the
22 YRNES Report which is a student report which was
23 prepared under the auspicious of iCOPE, the
24 Independent Commission on Public Education. That
25 provides data for you on the school system's

2 needs currently from the student's perspective.
3 We think that's really important.

4 You'll also receive iCOPE's summary of
5 its plan for the school system's governance
6 structure moving forward, it's not there, but it
7 does reflect local districts, local
8 superintendents as a part of that plan.

9 You've also - what was the third
10 attachment? The three R's Coalition pledge to
11 action which calls for that commission.

12 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you very much.

13 MR. DUNETZ: Good afternoon,
14 Assemblywoman Nolan, thank you very much for the
15 opportunity to present today and for holding
16 these hearings. I wanted to speak in support of
17 mayoral control through the perspective of the
18 new principal of the new high school, so one of
19 the new schools, and many new schools that have
20 opened up, and I understand and speak knowing
21 full well that the small school's movement does
22 pre-date mayoral control and the current mayor,
23 but I do very much believe that what we've been
24 able to do in a short period of time, and what
25 we're in the process of building is a function of

2 some very unique opportunities that are afforded
3 right now for creativity for initiative within
4 the public school system.

5 So, very briefly, I would like to say who
6 we are. We are in District 30. Our name is the
7 Academy for Careers In Television and Film, and
8 we're one of the new career and tech ed schools.

9 We were created in partnership with
10 Silver Cut Studios and some other organizations
11 within the television and film industry really to
12 provide what was missing before which is a link
13 to an industry for public school students, so
14 that public school students coming through our
15 school system have opportunities to learn about
16 career, opportunities and paths within the
17 television and film industry, an industry which
18 employs in one form or another, up to 100,000
19 people in our city by some estimates, and to make
20 those paths accessible to public school students
21 in a way that they were not before.

22 When I came to the decision to put
23 together a team, it was a two-year process to
24 open up the school, what seemed to me very clear
25 was that the deal was transparent and it was on

1 the table to a prospective principal.

2
3 You were being asked about significant
4 autonomy over budget and how budget would be
5 used. You were given autonomy and the power to
6 make decisions about who would be working for
7 you, and in return you would be held accountable
8 for graduation rates, for demonstration of master
9 in core content areas and in the case of career
10 and tech ed schools for providing a relevant and
11 meaningful career preparation.

12 That seemed to be the deal and seemed
13 very clear to me, and I was willing to make this
14 move and to go through the fairly arduous process
15 of creating a new school because I believed that
16 that was how I was going to be held accountable.

17 To date, my experience is, that is very
18 much what is happening at least from my vantage
19 point. I want to talk very briefly about how
20 we've used the autonomy at my school, how I, as a
21 school leader, have used the autonomy that I've
22 been granted.

23 In the first place, I've used it to
24 address common concerns of parents, students and
25 teachers, particularly around class size. I have

1 been able with the budget that is allocated
2
3 according to the same formula as any other school
4 in the city, reduce class size to a maximum of 25
5 but more importantly, reduce the total number of
6 students that a teacher sees in a day to below
7 100, rather than the 130 to 150 that is most
8 typical. I can do that on the same budget
9 because I have the flexibility with hiring and I
10 have the flexibility in how that budget is used.

11 I think I have also been able to create a
12 like-minded group of educators who are incredibly
13 committed to the goals of our school, and finally
14 to create an innovative instructional program
15 that blends career preparation with the
16 traditional academic subject areas.

17 I believe we are on our way - we have
18 created and we are on our way to seeing a
19 graduating class that includes over 90 percent of
20 the students who came into our school in the
21 ninth grade. We are an unscreened program. We
22 are a program that has over 70 percent low-income
23 students. We are racially and ethnically
24 diverse. We serve Queens primarily, we serve
25 many neighborhoods in Queens, but we are

1 accessible to local students. All of these
2 things I believe we've been able to do because of
3 the autonomy I've been granted as a school
4 leader, over-hiring and overuse of budget.
5

6 Very quickly, I know that today's focus
7 really is around parental involvement. I can
8 speak to that at our school and how that is
9 played out. Some very concrete things that we've
10 been able to put in place around parental
11 involvement. All of my teachers are accessible
12 by e-mail and voicemail to parents at any time.

13 We have an online grade reporting system
14 that parents can check real time the grades of
15 their children in any academic class in the
16 school. We have an advisory system that provides
17 a common point of contact for any parent, a
18 single point of contact at any time for a parent
19 advisor to have no more than 15 students.

20 We have an active PTA that works closely
21 with me, not just to fulfill the mandates of the
22 SLT, but to actually talk about our common
23 constraints, talk about our common goals and on
24 an ongoing basis negotiate how we're going to use
25 the limited resources we have.

2 I believe that the things that we've
3 created and that I've spoken about are consistent
4 with the training I've received by the Department
5 of Education, as well as the message that has
6 been sent to me about what the expectations are
7 on me as a principal of a new school from the
8 beginning of my training throughout the school
9 creation process and approval.

10 So for all of these reasons, I encourage
11 the Assembly to continue to support mayoral
12 control.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: You began your
14 school, again, by lottery?

15 MR. DUNETZ: In terms of initial? We
16 have an unscreened, a limited unscreened
17 admissions process, so we give priority to
18 students who come to a recruitment of that.
19 There's no academic screening. We at the school
20 level don't have access to any academic records
21 from middle school.

22 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We do have questions
23 for you, but I want to let Mr. Lombardi testify,
24 who I also know for many many years.

25 MR. LOMBARDI: Good afternoon,

2 Assemblywoman Nolan.

3 First, my name is Anthony Lombardi. I'm
4 the principal of PS 49 in Queens, so to be pre-K
5 to eighth grade, we're opening up a new wing in
6 September 2009.

7 I've been in public education for 28
8 years. During that time I was a language arts
9 teacher and music teacher and an assistant
10 principal and a principal. I've been principal
11 for 11 years.

12 I was a CSA district rep for District 24
13 as a Queens legislative rep up in Albany for a
14 period of time. Our school has been recognized
15 as one of New York State's 200 most improved at
16 that time. We've been recognized for improvement
17 for English language learners. We won the award
18 in 2002 for New York City Pencil award, Public
19 Education Needs Public Involvement, collaborative
20 community site school where we received a grant
21 over five years.

22 We've been the recipient of awards of
23 Carnegie Hall and I think we're - just as
24 Chancellor Klein calls it, a PONS, plain old
25 neighborhood school.

2 Today there was a lot of discussion about
3 a number of issues that I find interesting. I
4 work closely with the administration, and my
5 school does do tests, and I'm hoping Assemblyman
6 Weprin comes back soon, so - I was involved with
7 some of the school report cards, I was involved
8 with some of the restructuring, I was involved
9 with teachers contracts, I've been involved with
10 a lot of things down at the DOE and the
11 chancellor's office.

12 I'm going to go back and forth with a
13 prepared statement that I made, but I think a lot
14 has been said, but I'll go through with it
15 anyway, and hopefully after I stop you can ask me
16 some questions later on.

17 On December 14th, 2006, a report was
18 released by the National Center on Education in
19 the economy and it was titled, "Tough Choices for
20 Tough Times."

21 The report articulated the challenges
22 that we, as a nation, will face if we do not
23 overhaul and revamp our educational system. The
24 Commission summary states while our international
25 counterparts are increasingly getting more

2 education, their young people are getting a
3 better education as well, basically stated,
4 they're getting more time in school as well as
5 better prepared teachers. American students and
6 young adults place anywhere from the middle to
7 the bottom of the pack of achievement in math,
8 science, and general literacy.

9 Later on in the document it states, "if
10 we current course, and the number of nations
11 outpace us, and the education rates continues to
12 grow at its current rate, the American standard
13 of living will steadily fall." It violates the
14 problems we have ignored and the measures we need
15 to take to strengthen public education.

16 Unquestionably, the correlation between
17 education and economic stability should remain an
18 ongoing topic of the current administration, both
19 nationally and locally.

20 If you review the report, you will see
21 that New York City is well underway to addressing
22 the problems and seeking some of the solutions
23 that it calls for. Seven year ago, the New York
24 State Legislature granted mayoral control of the
25 New York City school system. You have scheduled

2 forums such these to receive input as to whether
3 it should be continued or revamped.

4 In my estimation, mayoral control has
5 supported all the initiatives that are essential
6 in good public education and has provided a
7 profile on how we should redefine public
8 education nationally. If the intent of these
9 hearings is to determine to what extent mayoral
10 control has been effective with the future role
11 it plays in education for the New York City
12 public school system, I believe our discussion
13 and debate should focus on we can best improve
14 student outcomes and tackle the issues that have
15 been raised in light of the research on improving
16 public education.

17 Mayoral control has supported several
18 basic principles, which include leadership,
19 accountability, and increased student
20 performance. As a principal for the past 11
21 years, I understand the complexity and importance
22 of my position. My scope of authority includes
23 evaluating educational programs, teacher
24 performance, and advancing student progress. It
25 is my responsibility to ensure that each teacher

2 in every classroom is effectively addressing the
3 needs of their students.

4 I also should be promoting an environment
5 which is receptive to parents' needs and concerns
6 so they best can navigate and understand a
7 complex set of issues with respect to student
8 achievement.

9 Mayoral control has stripped away some
10 unnecessary bureaucratic impediments and has
11 attempted to focus on accountability. Let me
12 briefly digress. For far too many years, prior
13 to mayoral control, there were no consequences
14 for failing schools, failing administrators, or
15 failing teachers. We accepted poor performance
16 as our standard operating procedure. Through
17 legislation, policy, and contractual obligations,
18 we undermine accountability and ignored student
19 achievement. As a system, we ignored identifying
20 poorly performing schools, principals and
21 teachers.

22 A system was in place where political and
23 bureaucratic interests superseded the needs of
24 the children. We were not responsive at all the
25 failure of the educational system that we were

2 part of.

3 Many times, the educational community has
4 debated nonsense, which does not leave to
5 effective change in the classroom practice or
6 greater accountability for adults. We still have
7 a long way to go on developing and legislating
8 appropriate measures for the dismissal of those
9 teachers and administrators who negatively impact
10 student performance.

11 The mayor has focused on raising
12 accountability for the employees who are
13 entrusted to the care for children.
14 Accountability tools have been developed in an
15 attempt to evaluate how effective and responsive
16 the adults have been to student performance. The
17 system is beginning to make an attempt to codify
18 which practices work and who delivers the best
19 positive results in classrooms.

20 Clearly, teachers and principals are
21 crucial to the progress of schools and individual
22 student performance. But what they are also
23 critically responsible for is its failure year
24 after year. Mayoral control has engaged in this
25 dialogue. Prior to the legislation, 2002,

2 conversation related to accountability did not
3 exist. We simply accepted failure to a great
4 degree.

5 We are now exploring developing
6 sophisticated data instruments to help us
7 evaluate the performance of students and teachers
8 and principals.

9 Mayoral control has supported and has
10 continued to explore the performance of teachers
11 and principals attempting a fair system of
12 metrics, a long way to go, but we're starting to
13 look at what the real results are of what
14 children do in a classroom.

15 We are beginning to use measureable
16 outcomes to determine best practices or poor
17 quality practice. Our discussion now centers on
18 evaluating school effectiveness based on success
19 or failure of its students. We're more focused
20 on what is happening inside the four walls of the
21 classroom, it is really about placing children
22 first.

23 Unlike many critics would like to
24 portray, and I hope this sentiment comes back in
25 about the next 10 seconds, over the last seven

2 years, mayoral control - we were never directed
3 to establish a test prep curriculum. I'm happy
4 to say we do not do that in my school, and I'm an
5 ordinary plain old New York City Public School.
6 We were never once directed to use test prep to
7 support our curriculum.

8 If we do not agree on supporting
9 accountability measures and support legislation
10 which protects children, our discussion about
11 school improvement will linger for years to come.

12 We do not support tenure legislation that has
13 allowed teachers and administrators who have
14 shown a poor performance to return to schools and
15 negatively impact students.

16 If we are going to be serious about
17 improving the educational system, we should
18 support the mayor and chancellor's effort to
19 raise accountabilities for the adults in the
20 system. We should continue to develop means to
21 support good performance and rid the system of
22 non-performers. The system has improved because
23 mayoral control has raised the bar and is more
24 knowledgeable about scores.

25 As legislators and school leaders, we

2 should be collectively supporting efficiency and
3 accountability in schools. Many times, parents
4 do not have a clear understanding of the
5 complexity of a school system. I think that
6 often that they're used as pawns. Students with
7 voices were central recipients of our compromised
8 decisions and policies. We can no longer afford
9 to accept failure on their behalf. We need to
10 continue the momentum of success that has begun.

11 The bill to support mayoral control
12 should be reauthorized and we need to continue to
13 develop clear lines of accountability for every
14 member of the educational community. I'm hoping
15 that you, as representatives, on behalf of the
16 children, to support the work that has begun and
17 to continue to be going on in New York City.

18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I want to apologize.

20 Apparently there is an additional principal in
21 the room, Ali Sharna, from Learn New York,
22 Francis Lewis High School. If they are, maybe
23 they're outside and the staff can make sure that
24 we get their testimony.

25 Thank you very much. Do any of my

2 colleagues have any questions? Mark?

3 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I apologize, I was
4 out of the room, I had to make a phone call. So
5 I don't know what you said exactly, but you all
6 looked at me like you said something that I
7 should be interested in. You said that you
8 weren't told to do test prep. I don't think
9 anyone is told to do test prep.

10 MR. LOMBARDI: I think principals have
11 been given the ability to make decisions. We
12 have a very art focused curriculum in my school.
13 We're involved with Carnegie Hall, the
14 Philharmonic, we won awards from them, et cetera.

15 I do agree with other speakers and other
16 principals that spoke that test prep is the least
17 effective way to increase student achievement.
18 But I will tell you something that it's also the
19 easiest thing for teachers to plan for principals
20 to make decisions about because it takes up a
21 hell of a lot of time.

22 So I think we're all guilty in this issue
23 about test preparation and class. As far as
24 suspending programs and all those other things,
25 I've never done it in an effort to increase

2 student performance by use of test prep.

3 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: How many years have
4 you been a principal?

5 MR. LOMBARDI: 12. 11 or 12.

6 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: You know what I
7 found a lot, and by me it's more and more that
8 these principals come in, one or two years - most
9 of my teachers, they come sometimes from Columbia
10 Teachers College, they're 22 years old, they're
11 scared to death, and they've been told that if
12 you don't do well on this test they're going to
13 be in trouble. And they pass this great feeling
14 on to the kids too, and the third graders come
15 home and say, if I don't do well on this
16 standardized test, I'm not going to fourth grade
17 and they freak the kids out, but I don't want to
18 make it touchy feely - but I think you're unique
19 in that, and based on people I've talked to, most
20 principals are not as secure in themselves and
21 their jobs, and they - I mean, I don't blame them
22 for test prep because their livelihoods are on
23 the line because they're judging - see, my
24 feeling is, if I want to test you, you should
25 take a test. Your teacher should take tests. My

2 kids - how my kid does on the test does not mean
3 that my son's teacher doing - my son doing well
4 on a test is because my son is doing well on a
5 test. But if my son does lousy, that's not
6 because the teacher didn't teach him properly,

7 MR. LOMBARDI: Can I flip the switch on
8 you a little bit?

9 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: Yes, sure.

10 MR. LOMBARDI: If we can have this open
11 dialogue. Unfortunately, for what it's worth,
12 tests have become increasingly more important for
13 our country in terms of how we rate against other
14 countries around the world. With the idea of the
15 internet and the world becoming closer that I
16 really believe that the need - I'm for
17 standardized testing across the country, but
18 there are states like Mississippi where they
19 thought that they were doing pretty well and they
20 took a national test, they weren't doing too well
21 at all.

22 So I think, even though it's poor, it's
23 the only thing that we have. I focus quite a bit
24 on the classroom test, which you were talking
25 about before, but given across a large system of

2 1,500 schools, there has to be some kind of norm
3 reference apparatus that we can make judgments of
4 what's working and what's not.

5 So I think that the discussion around
6 standardized tests has been obviously great. I
7 do not think that principals should focus their
8 curriculum on that, and I do quite a bit of
9 principal training, I was at Columbia teaching
10 school, I did training for principals from
11 Columbia University, things like that, we've
12 always focused on curriculum first.

13 I'm going to say again, it's easier for
14 teachers and principals to do test prep. It's
15 much more difficult to teach classrooms and
16 prepare lessons.

17 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: But you agree with
18 me that there are a lot of principals who are
19 doing enormous amounts of test prep?

20 MR. LOMBARDI: Are not doing -

21 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: No, I mean, you
22 don't believe that -

23 MR. LOMBARDI: More than I would like,
24 yes.

25 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I'm telling you

2 it's the majority for sure. I mean - even in my
3 area, the schools are good. And when I say
4 "good," they always had high test scores, that
5 was never their problem. The kids in the schools
6 in my area are learning less because of the way
7 this chancellor is running the schools. No
8 question in my mind.

9 And I bet the SAT scores, when they start
10 coming out, they're going down, because these
11 kids are learning less vocabulary, learning less
12 English, learning less everything because all
13 they're focusing on is what's on that test, and
14 not even specifically what materials are on the
15 tests, but how do I get the right answer on that
16 test. That's what really kills me. They're not
17 learning subject matter. They're learning - when
18 you the question - they come home with little
19 mnemonics, read the first line of the paragraph,
20 look for the italicized words, look at the
21 pictures, read the questions first, eliminate
22 anything that says always or never. So that's
23 what drives me out of my mind. It's bad enough
24 that they're taking 16 days including the
25 assessments of standardized tests a day, taking

2 those out of my son's school year, but, aside
3 from that is the fact that they focus not on
4 material, not like learning about the history of
5 New York State, they focus on, when you read a
6 paragraph about the history of New York State,
7 look for this.

8 MR. BELL: Assemblyman, if I may make a
9 brief comment about this. In my prepared
10 testimony, I had this comment but I didn't say
11 it. Despite all the focus on data and improving
12 test results and claims of progress, we ought to
13 recognize and should keep it clearly in front of
14 our minds that on the national assessment of
15 educational progress there has been no change in
16 six years. So that's important.

17 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you everyone.
18 Audrey or Mike a question? Mark, I appreciate
19 you getting a chance to talk about this concern.

20 It was good dialogue to have and I thank you, I
21 believe it's another step forward.

22 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: I didn't want to do
23 it when the deputy mayor was here because it
24 would have just changed the whole focus of the
25 hearing. Even though it isn't a hole in the

2 school governance issues, I think it is as a
3 result of it and it continues to grow.

4 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Unless there's
5 anything else? Thank you.

6 Our next group of witnesses, Nigel Pugh
7 is not here. He did leave testimony and we're
8 very appreciative of that. Monique Ambrose,
9 teacher and parent. Geraldine Neary did talk
10 already. Doris Suda I think left, my best wishes
11 to Doris. Steve Newman, Qiana Gregg, Reverend
12 Edwin Reid, David Quintana, who I saw.

13 All those people that I just called,
14 please come up if you're still here.

15 I also want to acknowledge Councilman
16 Leroy Comry, takes a lot of dedication to attend
17 another body's hearing, I want to thank you and
18 Congressman Crowley again for being here for part
19 of this.

20 We're starting to - I don't want to say
21 wrap up, because I understand that there are some
22 people who are outside in the hallway, but I
23 would ask if there is anyone who wants to deliver
24 testimony who has not signed up, this is that
25 moment.

2 Let's call Monique Ambrose.

3 MS. AMBROSE: Good afternoon. My name
4 is Monique Ambrose and I am from -

5 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I'm sorry, just say
6 your name again, I got distracted.

7 MS. AMBROSE: Monique Ambrose, Region 3,
8 District 25.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you for waiting
10 and letting some other parents go ahead of you,
11 that was very gracious of you. Thank you.

12 MS. AMROSE: I'm just going to read from
13 a statement that I prepared.

14 Mayoral control, the words alone cause me
15 to bristle and the thought of reauthorization of
16 mayoral control, particularly under our current
17 mayor, Michael Bloomberg, troubles my very
18 thoughts.

19 In his recent State of the City address,
20 the mayor referred to public education as a
21 quality of life issue. On that point, I agree.
22 Every child deserves access to a sound, well-
23 rounded educational foundation; however, Mayor
24 Bloomberg then went on to suggest that the
25 demolition of the old Board of Education and the

2 institution of mayoral control made public
3 education so much better. Of course, he cited
4 numbers to prove it.

5 The problems with the statistics though
6 is that they can be manipulated to serve special
7 interests. For example, if 66,000 classroom
8 seats were created, couldn't this mean that some
9 class sizes are larger than they were previously?

10 After all, if new classes actually had been
11 created by these 66,000 seats, then many
12 experienced educators who have been placed under
13 ATR status would be able to deliver educational
14 services to these students rather than float from
15 one assignment to the next.

16 If the \$350 has been cut from the
17 bureaucracy and redirected to the classroom, why
18 don't all students have textbooks and
19 instructional resources in all content areas?

20 If the bureaucracy is in fact shrinking,
21 why are some schools increasing administrative
22 staff although student population has decreased.

23 Again, mayoral control, something about
24 the term frustrates me. I think it's the word
25 control and the oppressive, abusive leadership

1 that has ushered into many New York City public
2 schools.

3
4 Control pushed its way in and forced out
5 the tenants of human decency. It seemed that
6 anything that could not be measured by a test or
7 tracked on a spreadsheet lost significance in the
8 educational realm. Employees under mayoral
9 control, the students, their products,
10 periodically plopped down and inspected by
11 quality control instrument, a test, along the
12 path to the promotion to the next grade.

13 Sadly, under this school governance
14 model, standardized testing and data analysis
15 have essentially replaced the genuine, creative,
16 and innovative. The development of well-rounded
17 students has been deemphasized for the sake of
18 churning out statistics.

19 Schools should reflect and empower the
20 communities within which they're situated.
21 Special needs students should be able to access
22 adequate public school support within their
23 neighborhoods. In addition, English language
24 learners should be engaged in meaningful
25 instruction even if it means including bilingual

2 lessons in essential content areas, if they are
3 literate in their first language.

4 Mayoral control has not adequately
5 provided for students who enter the system with
6 special circumstances and needs, ranging from
7 mild learning disabilities to extend educational
8 interruptions to severe emotional challenges.
9 Referral and evaluation procedures have become
10 more arduous translating into greater service
11 delays for at-risk children.

12 With mayoral control, communication and
13 relationships among school personnel, families,
14 and the Department of Education are more
15 difficult to foster. Getting a straight answer
16 is often very difficult, and any news released to
17 the public has been sifted and shaken by the
18 powers that be.

19 Those who directly care for and work with
20 the students, parents and teachers, rarely are
21 invited to the table for meaningful discussions
22 regarding educational policy and instructional
23 programs or materials; rather, we are offered
24 meager opportunities for measurable input, that
25 is surveys.

2 In the end, I am not convinced that any
3 one government official, in this case the mayor,
4 should be entrusted with control over the New
5 York City public schools. The manner in which he
6 gained such control and the arrogant manner in
7 which he is seeking to retain it, remember the
8 term limits issues, disgusts me because it seems
9 to place his position in power above all.

10 While touting the end of social
11 promotion, he neglects to mention that standards
12 have been watered down. Level two is now
13 acceptable for promotion, level three used to be
14 the standard. So I question his character and
15 his personal agenda. Someone who wants to
16 control essentially wants his or her way.
17 Control does not lead to relationships and
18 community building, but to fearful compliance.
19 Under such circumstances, transformation and
20 public education will be stalled.

21 Going forward, students, parents,
22 teachers, administrators, government officials,
23 and labor union leaders and members, as well as
24 community-based organizations need to reflect on
25 themselves and their roles in public education.

2 Our system is large, our responsibility is great,
3 and our issues significant.

4 If we truly have to educate and mold
5 children, we must put our personal agendas aside
6 and go about developing pure and suitable means
7 to reach this most cherished outcome.

8 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Just say again for
9 the record, because I know one of our City
10 Council people came in and Assemblyman Aubry came
11 back, tell us again your title and what you do in
12 the school system.

13 MS. AMBROSE: I'm an elementary school
14 teacher and also a parent in Region three,
15 District 25.

16 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Any particular school
17 or a parent you want to mention?

18 MS. AMBROSE: I would rather not
19 mention.

20 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Okay, we understand
21 that too. Thank you very very much.

22 MR. QUINTANA: Good evening. My name is
23 David Quintana. I feel that the six-year
24 experiment with mayoral control of the New York
25 City Department of Education has not achieved,

1 improved student performance. Many speak about
2 tweaking the system, but I think it is in need of
3 a massive overhaul to make it more responsive to
4 the concerns and needs of the primary
5 stakeholders, namely parents, teachers, and
6 students.
7

8 I believe the development of a whole
9 child requires the reinstitution of arts, music,
10 PE, student government, and the teaching of basic
11 American civics, so that students can learn how
12 our basic democracy works so that they can make
13 intelligent, political decisions on their own,
14 and their family self interests as adults, and
15 concerned citizens of our society.

16 These skills have been neglected to make
17 time for endless standardized test prep. I call
18 for the elimination of the massive NYPD presence
19 in our school buildings which I feel creates a
20 prison like atmosphere in our schools, as the New
21 York Civil Liberties Union has noted in its
22 determined effort to bring these official
23 vigilantes under control that "the massive
24 presence would make the New York City school
25 safety division the fifth largest police force in

2 the country, larger than those of Washington,
3 D.C., Detroit, Boston, or Las Vegas."

4 I feel we should put educators back into
5 the Tweed courthouse and not corporate media spin
6 doctors who misinform the citizenry about the
7 conditions of our school.

8 I would call for a serious reduction in
9 the staffing of the DOE press and public relations
10 department. This department has succeeded in
11 convincing most people in this great city that
12 Mayor Michael Bloomberg is the education mayor, I
13 feel that's pure propaganda.

14 Mayoral control has eliminated the public
15 election of community oversight bodies which
16 violates the basic rights of our communities and
17 parents to participate in our children's
18 education.

19 As you will recall, community school
20 boards were one of the first things on the
21 mayor's chopping block, effectively silencing and
22 neutering the public from any public discourse on
23 this power issue of the day.

24 Mayoral control over the New York City
25 Department of Education has not achieved student

2 - improved student performance. According to the
3 most recent NAEP scores for New York City, test
4 scores are stagnant. There's been no significant
5 gauges in scores during the period of mayoral
6 control.

7 Mayoral control has resulted in education
8 leaders being replaced by lawyers and corporate
9 consultants as policymakers and decision-makers
10 causing widespread demoralization within the
11 system. Mayoral control has resulted in costly
12 no-bid contracts, such as the multi-million, \$80
13 million computer system, thereby taking money out
14 of the classroom where it's urgently needed.

15 Mayoral control has ignored the basic
16 rights of our children and has a major, negative
17 impact on an entire generation of students,
18 elementary school, all of which has been driven
19 by, a, high-stakes testing and constant test
20 prep; b, limiting the scope and the depth of a
21 comprehensive curriculum; c, lack of fulfilling
22 special education mandates; and, lastly, constant
23 upheaval causing high anxiety, those are the
24 three or four reorganizations.

25 The PEP, or the Panel for Educational

2 Priorities, membership needs to be reconstituted
3 in a fair manner to eliminate the control the
4 mayor's office has upon it, with eight of the 13
5 member panel being named by the mayor.

6 Furthermore, the CECs have virtually no power and
7 are basically ignored by DOE hierarchy.

8 I would recommend the dissolution of the
9 DOE Office of Family Engagement to be replaced by
10 an independent parent's union or suitable
11 replacement and for the transfer of OFE's budget,
12 \$55 million to this body, it will provide New
13 York City public school parents a greater voice
14 in the education of their children.

15 I believe that the City Council members
16 should have authority to monitor schools within
17 their district. I feel that the New York City
18 public advocate, and/or the New York City
19 controller should have the authority to oversee
20 and assess the DOE performance citywide.

21 I implore on the New York City
22 legislators to respond to this educational
23 catastrophe of malfeasance by eliminating mayoral
24 control in its current form and remodel the
25 school system based with a government plan which

2 incorporates local autonomy, school-based
3 decision making, parent and community involvement
4 with strict oversight by independent bodies, New
5 York City - and overseen by either the advocate
6 or the controller.

7 Earlier this week, I received an e-mail
8 from Robin Warren at Learn New York, who asked me
9 to post on my blog an invitation to parents to
10 testify at these hearings on behalf of their
11 agenda to retain mayoral control. There is
12 nothing wrong with their attempt to reach out to
13 parents. What is wrong is the deceptive language
14 they use to try and entrap them in their web of
15 deceit.

16 For example, they said to me, "With the
17 law coming up for renewal, now is a time for
18 discussion and improvement, particularly when it
19 comes to increasing transparency and ensuring
20 more parental engagement in the New York City
21 School System. That is why parents from across
22 the city are getting involved with Learn, New
23 York."

24 Indeed, this administration has done
25 nothing - it has done everything that it can to

2 eliminate transparency and real parental
3 engagement. I can only assume that Learn New
4 York will do the same, including attempts to
5 eliminate the right of parents in the school
6 leadership teams, to have any say when it comes
7 to their educational goals in their schools.

8 Here's another example of an excerpt from
9 the Learn New York website, "In 2002, the State
10 Legislature voted to abolish the board of ed and
11 put the mayor in charge of the city's schools.
12 Since then, a series of reforms have led to real
13 immeasurable process. Classes are smaller,
14 schools are safer, test scores are up. Classes
15 are smaller? The city has received more than one
16 billion dollars in additional state aid over the
17 last two years that could have and should have
18 been used to reduce class size.

19 Instead of doing so, last year, class
20 sizes, and/or student teacher ratio increased in
21 more than half of our schools according to the
22 New York State Education Department. What
23 happened to these funds? The state has no idea
24 and has asked for an audited statement. They
25 demand it improve the accountability and result,

2 but this fall, instead of shaping up their
3 performance, class size has increased in all
4 grades but one for the first time in 10 years.

5 Test scores are up was another thing that
6 they say on their website. As I said earlier,
7 according to the most reliable measures, the
8 National Assessment called NAPES, there has been
9 no improvement in any subject except fourth grade
10 math, and even in that subject there were many
11 accommodations made that several testing experts
12 are saying that the results should be considered
13 invalid according to an article in the New York
14 Sun, why?

15 Another thing on their website, "New York
16 State gave accommodations to more fourth graders
17 than any other state in the nation, and New York
18 City gave more help than any other of the 10
19 major studies that participated in a separate
20 city-by-city comparison."

21 On three of the four tests that
22 accommodation hovered around 20 percent. On
23 fourth grade math exam, city officials are
24 trumpeting as evidence that the Bloomberg
25 Administration program is working, the rate was

2 25 percent only.

3 What's also disturbing is active,
4 involved parents like myself who would volunteer
5 for many years at our children's schools as well
6 as the district and citywide level, it's how
7 dismissive and contemptuous the administration is
8 in terms of our concerns on issues like class
9 size, overcrowding and the DOE's obsession with
10 standardized testing.

11 As a former co-president of my daughter's
12 PA at middle school 210 in Ozone Park, the former
13 district 27 representative CPAC and the recording
14 secretary of the high school for Art and
15 Imagination and Inquiry, and presently a member
16 of community board 10 education committee, I
17 resent how Learn New York is attempting to
18 discount or minimize the views of active parents
19 by saying on their website, "Part of Learn New
20 York's argument for keeping mayoral control is
21 that those some very vocal parents loudly
22 criticized the system, a silent majority of non-
23 loud parents support it, or they would if they
24 properly understood what mayoral control is."

25 You said we date ourselves. This reminds

2 me of President Nixon's invocation of the
3 majority who supposedly supported him during the
4 era in which his administration was causing havoc
5 throughout our country and the world.

6 What I believe instead is that non-loud
7 parents, if they really understood the
8 lawlessness, and unaccountable actions of the
9 current administration, and their insistence on
10 wielding absolute power, they would be outraged
11 as we are, and would be protesting at our side.
12 It's that they are inundated with half-baked
13 lies, slanted statistics propounded by well
14 established nonprofit organizations that are
15 shilling for the mayor.

16 According to Doplín Schools, Learn New
17 York is coming to these hearings having enlisted
18 nonprofit allies to its cause. I urge this
19 committee to question the representatives of
20 these nonprofits closely to ascertain whether
21 they are beneficiaries of the mayor. I know few,
22 if any, nonprofit advocacy, or community
23 organizations that support this administration's
24 misforgotten policies or ruthless methods when it
25 comes to our schools.

2 Lastly, I would hope that you question
3 them closely about what Learn New York proposes
4 in terms of improvement. The parent engagement
5 simply means more hearings. Forget it. Parents
6 have participated in countless hearings during
7 the last six years and the administration has
8 never listened to one single word we've said.

9 Thank you for your time.

10 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I know Assemblywoman
11 Pfeiffer -

12 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: No, no. We will
13 have other forums in the local district, but I
14 want to thank David personally for all his
15 involvement. We do not always agree on
16 everything -

17 MR. QUINTANA: Nor should we.

18 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: Right, but the
19 one thing is that you give it lots of research,
20 lots of thought and I appreciate your
21 participation.

22 MR. QUINTANA: You're welcome, and all
23 these statistics are the current - the complete -
24 unlike what the mayor's office often gives you.

25 Thank you.

2 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: We're now going to go
3 through this list and we're going to see where
4 we're at. Our borough president spoke, our
5 public advocate spoke, the deputy mayor for
6 education spoke, Martine Guerrier, the chief
7 family engagement officer spoke, Kim Sweet spoke,
8 Dmytro Fedkowskyj, the Queens representative on
9 the panel for educational policy, come up.

10 Maria Dapontes-Dougherty, we had her
11 testimony read, but she had to leave, if she
12 comes back, we would like to have her come up.
13 Queen Makkada, member of the Chancellor's Parent
14 Advisory Council.

15 We did hear from Rob Caloras, both on his
16 own behalf and on Erik DePaula's behalf. Alicia
17 Hyndman and Abiodun Bello also spoke.

18 Deycy Avitia was not here but she was
19 represented by Natalie Chappa, I think it was;
20 Ana Maria Archila was here; Maria Nelasco was not
21 here but she was represented by Inez Mendoza;
22 Alejandra Vasquez was here; Frank Sobrino was
23 here; Kenneth Cohen was here; Leo Fahey was here;
24 Dan Jacoby, Steve Zimmerman, someone named Josh
25 Soloman from the Young Woman's Leadership Network

2 had to leave but I believe he left testimony;
3 Nicholas Tishuk was here from Renaissance; Brett
4 Peiser; Jim Merriman; many people were here from
5 VOICE Charter School; Yolanda Tasso was here from
6 Our World Charter; Steve Bell was here; Joe
7 Segretti was not here but left testimony; Nigel
8 Pugh had to leave but left testimony; Mark Dunetz
9 testified along with Anthony Lombardi; Monique
10 Ambrose just testified; Gerry Neary testified;
11 Doris Suda had to leave; Steve Newman I guess had
12 to leave, we'll double-check at the desk to see
13 if they left testimony; Quiana Greg testified a
14 little earlier today, as did Leschelle Bovian;
15 Maureen O'Toole; Erin Acosta, with Learn New
16 York; Reverend Edwin Reid, I think we called but
17 is not able to stay, but Reverend Calvin Rice we
18 were able to accommodate earlier in the schedule;
19 David Quintana testified; Yolanda Idarraga, she
20 was here also.

21 That leaves us with Dmytro and we have a
22 number of add-ons. I know many of my colleagues
23 have to leave. I have made a commitment to stay
24 as long as I can endure to make sure that we hear
25 everyone.

2 So Dmytro Fedkowskyj, we'd like to hear
3 from you, and, again, if I may take a personal
4 note on behalf of all of us, congratulations on
5 the birth of your son just a few weeks ago.

6 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: Thank you. I'll show
7 you pictures later.

8 I'm glad that this time has come that
9 we're able to examine this and look at this
10 closely and present our assembly with some facts.

11 So I'll open up with, Dear Assemblywoman
12 Nolan and other members of the Education Assembly
13 Committee. Thank you all for this opportunity to
14 testify during your first public hearing on
15 mayoral control.

16 I will first provide personal testimony
17 on this matter and then provide other matters of
18 concern that were raised by Helen Marshall's
19 parent advisory board members. These matters of
20 concern were obtained from a past advisory board
21 meeting that I chaired on mayoral control.

22 My name is Dmytro Fedkowskyj, and I have
23 been involved with school governance since 2004,
24 starting out as a CEC member until May of 2008
25 when Borough President Marshall appointed me as

2 the Queens representative to the panel for
3 educational policy, better know as the PEP.

4 It is an honor to serve this borough and
5 I look forward to the challenges ahead.

6 Currently, I have two children in the public
7 school system, so I too have a vested interest in
8 the current system, and what effect any changes
9 will have on our system.

10 While I may be part of a small group that
11 supports mayoral control, I have had a hard time
12 supporting the current system. Of the law if not
13 revised to require fiscal transparency with some
14 additional checks and balances on the mayor's
15 power.

16 Fiscal transparency entails being open to
17 the public about the structure and functions that
18 determine policies and outcomes. Such
19 transparency will foster better informed public
20 debate as well as greater government, government
21 accountability and credibility. Our CECs need
22 local governing power while they work in
23 conjunction with fully operational district
24 offices on curriculum and other local matters.

25 Our community superintendents need to

2 solely supervise on a full-time basis their own
3 district schools, and our CECs must be part of
4 meaningful discussion with the DOE at all times.

5 Since education is the community's investment in
6 its own future.

7 I think it is only right that since our
8 federal government works on a full system of
9 checks and balances that the New York City
10 Department of Education do the same. We can say,
11 because the numbers don't lie, that the mayor's
12 bold leadership has driven more operational and
13 capital funding into our school system and that's
14 a good thing, but this same bold leadership has
15 worked as a disadvantage to the current system
16 because there's no meaningful oversight.

17 A situation that comes to mind, and,
18 unfortunately, there's more than one, are the
19 millions of dollars that have been spent on no-
20 bid contracts without PEP approval. So I ask,
21 who is being accountable to who with taxpayer
22 dollars?

23 Many thought the main purpose of the PEP
24 was to have meaningful oversight of the DOE. But
25 when the PEP is bi-passed, then the public is

2 being shut out of the process too. At this time,
3 the PEP and our borough presidents do not have
4 the power to approve appropriations of the DOE
5 expense budget, how to spend it and where to
6 spend it, but can only approve a total estimate
7 for total operations.

8 This has to change. Both operational and
9 capital budgets need to be approved by the PEP
10 with meaningful debate before the implementation.

11 We need safeguards in place to ensure
12 that every child receives a balanced and quality
13 education, and that parents have a voice in their
14 children's education at the local level.

15 So let's take this opportunity now to
16 correct the past and move towards the future.
17 Let's build from past mistakes because we all
18 make them and promise the kids of this great city
19 a brighter future.

20 This concludes my testimony, but at this
21 time I want to draw attention to the other
22 matters of concern that were provided by Helen
23 Marshall's parent advisory board members.

24 There is low teacher morale while
25 teachers teach the tests. Some parents feel lost

2 with no connection to their school. Children
3 lack the balance of a well-rounded education with
4 limited arts and music programs. State Ed law
5 needs to be rewritten in a more specific manner
6 that addresses the public's priority concerns.

7 The majority of members on the PEP are
8 appointed by the mayor, given an unbalanced
9 profile on the board. Most DOE policies are not
10 publically discussed with the stakeholders and
11 this gives the parents a powerless feeling. Why
12 do borough president appointees, like myself, on
13 the PEP have to have children in the system while
14 mayoral appointees do not? It should either be a
15 requirement for all or for none.

16 There should be five borough-wide
17 councils for our high schools and special ed. We
18 need more than the current amount of one that is
19 currently set up for the entire city.

20 And, finally, CEC members are appointed
21 by borough presidents and they should not term
22 out since it very difficult to retain qualified
23 and committed members. Some CECs do not have
24 enough members to make quorum. It seems
25 reasonable to request since our City Council and

2 mayor have approved themselves the opportunity to
3 seek another term.

4 In closing, I want to thank you again for
5 your time on this matter, and look forward to
6 responsible changes in July.

7 Thank you.

8 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Questions from anyone
9 on the panel?

10 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: Yes. You said
11 the borough president's appointees on the CEC
12 panel that's in each area, their term limit -

13 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: They're allowed to
14 serve two terms. The first year was 2004 to
15 2005, that term didn't count, that wasn't
16 considered a full term, but then if they were
17 appointed in 2005 and they're coming to the end
18 of their term now, they cannot be reappointed.

19 It's a big concern for a lot of CECs who
20 don't have enough members, and then when the
21 panel can't make quorum, it's very difficult for
22 them to conduct business.

23 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: But there's a
24 little debate here.

25 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: There are CECs that

2 don't have enough members.

3 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Let me just interrupt
4 for a minute, Assemblyman Weprin, Dmytro was not
5 here earlier. The deputy mayor's office and the
6 chief family engagement officer made - in their
7 testimony said that there are no CECs operating
8 without a quorum, and that only two have
9 vacancies. Now that was almost immediately
10 dispelled because -

11 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: We had a panel of
12 three CECs here and they all had vacancies.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: And you did mention
14 it, and, listen, we're not trying to have any
15 conflict here, we appreciate everyone, we treat
16 everyone with respect, but maybe you can comment,
17 it was my contention that as many as 24 - I have
18 the statistic here somewhere, many of the CECs
19 have at least one and many have two and three
20 vacancies. They said that's been improved in the
21 last few weeks. It's six years, and maybe you
22 can give us some perspective.

23 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: Well, District 24,
24 which, for the most part, served almost for the
25 full board is now down to seven. And depending

2 on the selection process that's taking place and
3 how many people put their name in the hat to want
4 to do this job, the two borough president
5 appointees of District 24 term out.

6 So it's very hard and I try often to get
7 parents to join the CECs to put their name in the
8 hat and go for it, but they're reluctant to do
9 so. It's very hard to find committed people.
10 It's a time requirement, a significant time
11 requirement to this, and it becomes frustrating
12 for a lot of them.

13 ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: For the record,
14 Chairwoman, District 24 was not one of the three
15 CECs who were here who said they didn't have a
16 vacant - so if we count 24, we're now four for
17 four.

18 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: Right, and they have
19 seven which is borderline, because a quorum is
20 six.

21 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: In your position as
22 our Queens representative, and I might add the
23 position was vacant for a number of months, so
24 we're very grateful and there was some turnover
25 and it is hard to find people to make this

2 commitment so we're grateful to Borough President
3 Marshall for appointing you.

4 In your time there and your prior
5 experience on the CEC, what would you suggest the
6 DOE do or what would you suggest the legislature
7 recommend to the DOE or put into law to encourage
8 more participation in the CECs? Just give us
9 some idea of what you think might be something
10 that might encourage that.

11 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: I think at the end of
12 the day the Department has to - the Department
13 has to display a sense of - they have to be
14 upfront with the parent bodies that are basically
15 at the local level. They have to know what's
16 going on every step of the way and not be told
17 after it's already put in place.

18 The process of putting something in place
19 needs to go through a public process and they
20 have to be involved in that from the beginning,
21 not at the end where they're reacting, they have
22 to be part of the process, and I think it turns
23 back to having fiscal transparency and being part
24 of that process from the beginning, and the panel
25 needs to have some kind of say in what they vote

2 for and how they approve budgets and where the
3 money is being spent and none of that is taking
4 place, and it's unfortunate because they fall
5 into this, it's not an educational matter, they
6 take that position.

7 So if the law is written tighter, maybe
8 they couldn't wiggle out of it that way. I don't
9 know. The department has lead liaisons that they
10 handles several CECs, not just one. One of them
11 they have three or four CECs, so there is a
12 connection, but it's just a transmittal of
13 messages, it's not input seeking.

14 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: You were going to
15 something else, I apologize.

16 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: I forgot what I was
17 going to say. It will come back to me maybe.

18 I think that one fashion of the panel
19 would be that they appoint them chancellor and
20 not the mayor. And if the mayor controls the
21 board, but at the end of the day, the board
22 appoints the chancellor, maybe that's an option
23 down the road to seek as something that could
24 work.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. Anybody

2 else?

3 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: It's been a long day.

4 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Well, we started
5 pretty promptly and we haven't really stopped,
6 but I thank you very much.

7 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: And I thank you for
8 this time also, thank you very much.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Certainly,
10 eventually, transcripts will be available and
11 people can read other testimony and what have
12 you.

13 Our final witnesses, why don't we put a
14 panel up? We called your name several times.
15 We're happy to have you, come and sit. I would
16 like Ms. Dalton who has been so faithful, please
17 come up, and Monique Minnus, Rachel Epioto, Rob
18 Cermeli, Irene Fennel, Sol McCantus, Patricia
19 McGuire and James Vasquez. If you're still in
20 the room, just be patient, we will get to all of
21 you.

22 I would like to start with Queen, if it's
23 all right? We're so happy you were able to make
24 it and come in.

25 MS. MAKKADA: It is definitely an honor

2 to be here. It's an honor to have on our 44th
3 President's shirt because this is truly a change.

4 I want to thank the assembly, I want to
5 thank the chair, Assemblywoman Pfeffer, who helps
6 wherever and whoever calls her. The other two
7 gentlemen, I am new to meeting you, so don't feel
8 slighted.

9 However, I'm so happy I came behind
10 Dmytro because he talked about a group that was
11 very solid but was very powerful and we are
12 called the duly elected parent leaders.

13 I just want to, quickly off the top of
14 your heads, I want you to understand that there
15 are roughly 1,425 schools in the Department of
16 Education. Each school has PA or a PTA, so you
17 multiply 1425 times four, that's your executive
18 board; president, vice-president, treasurer,
19 secretary, so you're up to 4,900.

20 Then you take that and you multiply it by
21 a minimum number of six, that's the smallest a
22 school leadership can function because the
23 assembly and the state, you're up to 29,000 plus
24 the 49. So without even counting the title one,
25 parent leaders that go throughout this country,

1 you already have almost 35,000 elected parent
2
3 leaders who are being disengaged in this mayoral
4
5 control.

6 However, the ones that I have spoken to,
7 we're not totally unhappy with mayoral control,
8 and, no, we do not want anyone at this point to
9 throw the baby out with the bathwater. No, we do
10 not want you to create an entirely new system.
11 What we want to happen, considering that the
12 state assembly and the state senate, legislative
13 and empowered our beautiful mayor, who lost no
14 money in the financial crisis - well, he's
15 keeping it quiet, not like everybody else, and I
16 need you to understand that when I sit as an
17 elected parent leader and say that I support
18 mayoral control, it's because I have some fruits
19 of mayoral control, and the fruits of mayoral
20 control is that I can get the New York City
21 Department of Education as a president of a
22 district to breakdown for me because they are
23 accountable to me as the president of a district,
24 which is 27, to tell me how many schools are in
25 my district, how many of them are title one, how
 many of them have functioning SLTs.

2 Under this present administration, I am
3 able - it's a fight, but I'm able, to go to
4 conventions that professionally develop my parent
5 capacity. It makes no sense in saying that you
6 want parent involvement if your parents are not
7 being trained in curriculum. So what do I want
8 you to do? I want you to make sure that more of
9 this, that there's already money for you, you
10 don't even have to appropriate anything, there's
11 millions always out there.

12 But as Dmytro spoke about checks and
13 balances, no one is making sure that us parent
14 leaders first, and our parents at large are being
15 able to access these wonderful funds that are
16 made available, through the Department of
17 Education's office of title one working with
18 principals because this is the role model of the
19 school leadership team.

20 When New York legion two on the national
21 level was not able to do a title one conference
22 for New York, the state, for Puerto Rico, the
23 country, the Virgin Island, the Commonwealth, and
24 also for New Jersey, PS 42 was able to take 50
25 parents on a bus where the principal worked with

1 the title one to use her funds and our funds and
2 we went and we trained parents and children in
3 title one.
4

5 So, I came here today to say that as an
6 elected parent leader, what is missing is your
7 elected parent leaders in the process. One of
8 the things that I love about the state chair, is
9 that if you reach out to her, she will affect
10 change, because sometimes all it takes is to get
11 one of the important guys to write a letter,
12 sometimes a letter from Audrey changes perception
13 of what an elected parent leader is.

14 I've already had a few walk-throughs in
15 schools. This is the first time District 27,
16 first time in history that District 27 has had a
17 Black president, and I've been welcomed in every
18 school that I've walked through and principals
19 have engaged. But same thing that Dmytro says,
20 it's like a vague area, why is she here, you know
21 why? Because the money has been removed from the
22 district level of parent governance, and where
23 there are no dollars there are no empowerments.
24 So we must look at this mayoral control, because
25 somewhere in the budgeting, without talking to us

2 parent leaders, the district parent funding for
3 the district parent independent process somehow
4 disappeared. Whereas, before, there was millions
5 in district parent budgets that govern parent
6 involvement and allow elected parent leaders and
7 their constituents to come together and not only
8 have recreational and social programs, but to
9 attend professional development.

10 Parent involvement means professional
11 development. I want to give you that and I want
12 to leave you with that. I really hope that on
13 the Assembly level, school leadership team
14 legislation came out from the Assembly has said
15 it, you'll have to revisit it, because the whole
16 idea was parents as partners, not asking me do I
17 like pink curtains, but asking me, what do I
18 think about an enrichment program, what do I, as
19 a parent, envision in an enrichment program,
20 okay?

21 I thank you. I thank you, and to the
22 rest of my panel, you can take it from here.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Just stay for a
24 minute for questions. It's always a pleasure.
25 I've heard you speak before and I'm really really

2 glad you were able to make it. Let's move along
3 and then we'll have questions from the panel.
4 Thank you.

5 MS. MINNUS: My name is Monique Minnus,
6 and I am a community activist, and I'm the former
7 PTA of John Baum High School and also of John
8 Baum Elementary School, which is PS 20, and also
9 Junior High School 189.

10 I just want to say that under mayoral
11 control that there have been some good things
12 that came out of it. Some good things were that
13 there was some accountability with schools and
14 the school system which we did not have
15 beforehand. The other thing is, the school and
16 the school system started reflecting our
17 communities.

18 In other words, many of our communities
19 are multi - well, look at New York, we're like a
20 melting pot, there's so many. You don't have to
21 take a plane if you really want to meet someone,
22 go to another island or another country, it's
23 right here.

24 However, there were no checks and
25 balances, which left total control up to one or

2 two persons who were in full control of
3 everything and they left the parents out
4 completely.

5 And parents, we are our children's first
6 teachers, and I also teach religion every
7 Saturday morning I get up, and I teach from 10:30
8 to 12:00 and I go anywhere from - a class of
9 eight to up to 25, so I know what teachers go
10 through, because if I give a homework assignment
11 and I give each kid one minute, because sometimes
12 I used to substitute, so when I had the
13 confirmation class one day, the teacher gave out
14 homework, so I let each kid speak for one minute.

15 Well, 35 kids, you know what I'm saying, it was
16 over a half hour that we were doing homework.
17 That's when I really got to understand what
18 teachers were going through in the classroom with
19 the large class size.

20 Now, you give us money, you give us some
21 money, you tell us to reduce our class sizes,
22 which the campaign for fiscal equity worked for
23 that for smaller class sizes. Then you take back
24 the money after they made the classes smaller.
25 That's what happened up at Baum High School and I

2 think that happened with a lot of other schools
3 because they were all on the blogs, and everybody
4 was, you know - and the other thing is, being
5 that there is so much control under one person
6 more so, teachers, staff, in the school system,
7 they're working under an intimidating
8 environment.

9 When they put something on a blog, their
10 names and their schools are not on it, it's very
11 few that say, I'm principal so and so and I'm at
12 school so and so. There are very few that do
13 that. That shouldn't be because that transmits
14 to our children, whether we want to believe it or
15 not.

16 The other thing is, superintendents used
17 to have a little more - they seem like puppets
18 now. They don't even - we used to be able to go
19 to them and say, okay, we got a problem, this is
20 the problem, how are you going to fix it? The
21 principal can go to them and say, we got a
22 problem, this is the problem, how are you going
23 to fix it? Now they hardly know what's really
24 going on because they're spread out so thinly.
25 Okay?

1 The other thing is the CECs. The CECs
2
3 when they first got started, it was the parents
4 who selected who they wanted to be on during an
5 election process that the DOE came up with that
6 the Department of Justice concurred with, okay?
7 Then all of a sudden that slipped away. We're
8 always told, parents you're invited, come. Come
9 out parents. Then when we get there there's
10 brick wall. You can't climb it, you can't go
11 around it.

12 Another thing, because this affected me
13 personally, students who are doing 90 percentile
14 of work or above or who are in advanced classes
15 are being taught how to take college entrance
16 exams. College entrance exams they tell you,
17 it's just what you learn, we're going to test you
18 on what you learn. No, there's a crook in it -
19 like the baseball pitcher when he pitches that
20 ball, it doesn't go straight down, there's a
21 curve in it. Well, that's what happens with our
22 college entrance exams. My youngest son is a
23 very good writer, my youngest son, and he was so
24 flipped out, while all my kids are college
25 students, he's the last one, and he didn't do

1 well on the college entrance exams, so he has to
2 take a remedial course. He flipped out. But I
3 said, life will go on, and you'll do well.

4 So I think that you need to adhere more
5 to teaching our children, their grandma, going
6 back to the three Rs, the grandma, the
7 vocabulary, and not teaching to test, because the
8 tests become repetitious and the students bug
9 out.
10

11 I just want to leave you with a little
12 tidbit. I went to hear Dr. Freyer speak. Dr.
13 Weiss, who is his buddy out of Harvard does his
14 statistics, and I was blown out the water, I
15 really was, it wasn't water, but I was sitting in
16 my seat and I just couldn't believe it and I had
17 to utter a sound that the number of Black males
18 dropping out of high school, the number has not
19 changed in 40 years. It has for the White
20 female, the White male, the Black female, the
21 Latino male, and the Latino female, all have gone
22 up. I don't know - some of them went up in high
23 numbers and some went up in low numbers and the
24 fact is that they went up. But for the Black
25 male they stayed. Now something is wrong. And

1 the system that I thought that Bloomberg and Joel
2 were going to bring, I thought they were going to
3 address that and they're not addressing it, and
4 the children now, it's across the board, it ain't
5 no more just the Black male being stagnated, it's
6 all the males, okay?

7
8 The jails are going to fill up because
9 they're going to get - some won't be able to make
10 it and work the system, legally, and others will
11 not, so I just wanted to leave you with that
12 little tidbit.

13 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. And thank
14 you, Ms. Makkada, for coming because I know it
15 was hard for you.

16 Go ahead, Ms. Dalton.

17 MS. DALTON: I'm Grace Dalton. I used
18 to be a president of PS 34 when I first started.

19 I only wouldn't join the 34 because one of my
20 daughters passed away, I became - I'm the
21 grandparent. I had the two grandchildren, and I
22 didn't think that I could handle them, but I was
23 right, they were something else, because the new
24 time is different is different from my time where
25 I teach my own kids.

2 I went only to the school at 34 because
3 of the fact is, nobody was getting involved, just
4 like you have no involvement right now, so I got
5 involved by being on the team of - what is it,
6 when you go for voting, I talked to people
7 because I sent the school was not going to have
8 it because they had problems from before.

9 I finally, after a few years being there,
10 I ran out of presidents, and I had not other
11 choice but to resign from the committee and then
12 running for the president.

13 After I ran for president, they wouldn't
14 let me go because nobody would run it, because
15 you know how much trouble it is. So from there,
16 even before that, I was on the community - Far
17 Rockaway Community Organization where they help
18 people out in housing and different things. We
19 turn things around and I was concerned, that's
20 how I was concerned in 34 because I would have my
21 grandchildren going to school.

22 From there I went IS 109, from 109 I
23 became the second vice president, I still tried
24 not to be on no kind of election or anything -

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I apologize, let me

2 interrupt. Are all three of you ladies from 27?

3 MS. MINNUS: I'm from 25.

4 MS. DALTON: I'm from 29.

5 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I just wanted to -
6 and I know you were here for the whole time, but
7 I -

8 MS. DALTON: I was here, and the
9 beautiful questions you asked, and I knew the
10 answer, you did it right.

11 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: The reason I ask
12 this, you're from three different districts, are
13 any of you familiar with a school called P-9
14 which is in 24 which services children
15 apparently, primarily, from 27 and 29, and it's
16 been a real source of frustration for me with the
17 DOE, I asked Deputy Mayor Walcott to come and
18 tour the school, but I wanted to talk about the
19 issues that you represented, Ms. Minnus, that
20 there's not enough of an approach. That school
21 is warehouse and it's very very troubling and
22 it's something that - and Regent Chapey also
23 visited the school and we talked to the Borough
24 President and we would like to have her come out,
25 and if we do that, perhaps we can start to get

1 some of the parents there with some of our most
2 at risk young people, almost entirely, I might
3 add, young African American males, almost
4 entirely, just a handful of other.
5

6 It hurts to go to a school that is so run
7 down and has so many violent incidents, and that
8 the children are traveling an hour and a half
9 from Far Rockaway or southeast Queens, it's just
10 not right. Maybe we can make this a project.
11 This has nothing to do with mayoral control
12 except that we would like to see parents make
13 something better.

14 MS. MINNUS: Can I just say something to
15 what you just said, District 25, we do very well
16 in preparing our kids, thank goodness, coming up,
17 and when they get into high school, most of our
18 students are prepared. John Baum High School
19 gets a lot of students, not only from District
20 25, 26, some from Jamaica, but also District 24,
21 and we're finding that many students in District
22 24 are not up to level and so therefore in the
23 ninth grade they put together a program, Ms.
24 Cowade is really working well with it, where
25 we're trying to address those students because we

2 have to teach them what they didn't learn so that
3 they can come up to par, so they can do the work.

4 So I just wanted to say that.

5 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. And I
6 didn't mean to interrupt.

7 MS. DALTON: No, if you want to know
8 about PS-9 ask me. I did witness things there
9 that I shouldn't witnessed that one time one of
10 the kids started acting up and he just ran out of
11 the room and different things, and then another
12 thing, another kid ran around - what is it,
13 Flushing Meadow, and went on P-9, you were
14 talking about that, what I witnessed there,
15 there's got to be a lot of changes made in there.

16 You need to go in there and check that
17 thing out because the principal at that time, it
18 was a little while back, I don't know if she's
19 still there, she didn't know anything, the rules,
20 the regulations, because I had to insight her on
21 all the things that she didn't do. You need to
22 go to P-9. They do have a separate place on the
23 ground floor when I was in there, and I found
24 that the kids run around like I don't know what
25 and they take over the school, and the way the

2 principals act like, they're scared to do
3 anything because they will be penalized, what's
4 that word, corporal punishment, these are things
5 that you're not supposed to do, so I do believe
6 if you want to, I'll try to work with you on that
7 and you want me to come in on that. People think
8 I'm Mother Theresa, which I'm not, because I know
9 all, tell all, and I do tell it all.

10 I want to tell about the beautiful job
11 you did today, but the question you asked about
12 how many were on there and how many was off, in
13 District 29, they did have one person that they
14 had to go by the by-laws, which I did put my two
15 cents in, but the by-laws state, if you miss X
16 amount of meetings, without no excuse, you're not
17 supposed to be on there. They just remove - and
18 they did get one back in, but they are sure two
19 as she said.

20 Anyway, what I'm here about is some of
21 the things that they was talking about, number
22 one, there's three types of children in the
23 school now. When you used to have the 400, you
24 had the kids that are bullies and whatever, and
25 you had strong teachers that came and made them

2 do what they had to do, and they still respect
3 them. The teachers now today are not trained to
4 teach these bullies, because to motivate a kid,
5 ever since they took out the 400 schools, which
6 I'm aware that Mr. Walcott, if you've seen the
7 paper, his son was in some troubles, and I
8 believe his son was in one of those schools, but
9 that ain't the point.

10 The point is, he said not on his watch
11 when I asked why didn't they bring it back. The
12 point is, you got motivated kids in the school
13 that are not learning because of the bully and
14 the lazy ones. The lazy ones just take up space
15 and look for attention. And I don't think that's
16 a very good idea, it's safe and right for our
17 kids, because our motivated kids are coming down,
18 down, down.

19 The other problem I have is about the
20 training. I did aggravate everybody in the
21 department, and for some reason they do respect
22 me, they even had the nerve to give me a letter
23 from the chancellor stating - and then they made
24 a statement pertaining that, if anybody goes to
25 any meeting, who's there, Grace Dalton, which is

2 true, because if I don't get my information back
3 from the leaders like I should, I do go to these
4 meetings and I do bring back my information.

5 The thing about the training that they
6 had I keep aggravating the heck out of, and they
7 told me, and - followed one of the administrates
8 into the bathroom, which I did, saying they need
9 the workshop like they was talking.

10 Well, they did finally get the workshop,
11 and when I found out that I didn't get notice of
12 it, then they sent me a notice, so they called it
13 a summer program - they called it summer parent
14 academy, that was beautiful. It was in the
15 summertime, but not a lot of parents come out,
16 because number one, it's summertime, they're out
17 on vacation, or out wherever, and it was all the
18 way down there when I had to take bus and had to
19 walk all the way down to no man's land. I found
20 it, but the fact that we didn't have enough
21 people in 29, because I was a 29 person, but the
22 fact is, they had good training, but they too far
23 away from District 29, I'm just talking about
24 pertaining to 29, but I'm sure it's far away from
25 all the others, because I go to Brooklyn, Bronx

2 and Manhattan.

3 Now, I asked again where they're going to
4 have the summer program again, they called it
5 Saturday Academy, whatever, so you know I've been
6 there. So anyway, they finally - in December,
7 they finally sent out about - certain dates, I
8 kind of missed one, the one for the school
9 leadership team on that Saturday, they didn't
10 know that they had room enough, and they said
11 that's okay, I'll bring my own chair, and then
12 they told me, well, if you have - we'll put your
13 name and I did get there. Thank God they had it
14 in the auditorium so they didn't even know that I
15 asked for it. But that was beautiful.

16 If they have these workshops that they
17 had that I watched, man, it is beautiful. My
18 parents wouldn't know what to do. A lot of my
19 parents, and not just District 29, I'm talking
20 about all, I go to 26, 27, 28, they all know me,
21 if they see my face, they know me.

22 Anyway, we need these training for these
23 parents because the parents - I was the first one
24 on when Rudy Crew had the first one come out for
25 school leadership teams, because it was the

2 president, the UFT and the principal that we went
3 to that meeting, so you know I've been there.

4 When they asked a question when the
5 parents said that they don't get paid for it, and
6 she said, what did you say? I said, she said
7 they don't get a stipend because of the fact -
8 okay. What they did first, they made it as a
9 stipend, \$300 like you said, and then they
10 changed it because there was a problem, taking
11 the money from us, like they were saying, so they
12 turned around and made it reimbursement.

13 Reimbursement means that we could use it - pay
14 for our babysitting or whatever we need it, at
15 the end of the year we get the \$300. Now,
16 they've been doing a lot of changes on the SLT,
17 and they took a lot of things out. I think you
18 need to check on the SLT, and I appreciate, Ms.
19 Nolan, if you do investigate of all - in 29, I
20 believe it's 32 schools, you need to find out how
21 that Title one is going on, because I've been
22 involved in that one too. You need to find out
23 because some of the principals -

24 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: If you could try to
25 wrap up because some people came back, and I want

2 you to have that opportunity, so if you -

3 MS. DALTON: I just want to say, you
4 need to get involved in the SLT because there's
5 too many changes done and it's not right. You
6 need to get involved in the Title One, because
7 they're not all function, you need to get
8 involved on the CEC because our mind is
9 beautiful, but there are others too that need
10 help. I think you need to get involved in
11 everything.

12 And as far as for the mayoral control,
13 and you had said that - somebody said that they
14 didn't think he got lost money, but let me
15 explain to you, you forget about Miss Stewart?
16 Miss Stewart didn't lose because someone told her
17 about it -so, to go back to what I'm trying to
18 say -

19 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I just don't want to
20 get into anything personal, that's what I'm
21 asking.

22 MS. DALTON: I don't blame Chancellor
23 Klein because he did bring the parent
24 coordinator, I had to fight when they only had
25 one.

2 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Ms. Dalton, we have
3 to wrap it up.

4 MS. DALTON: I'll wrap up. Can we have
5 the CDEC have a website where people can go in,
6 because if they go into the board of ed it's a
7 lot of links, even the people who are experts
8 can't do it, okay?

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: You lit up the room.
10 I want to tell you, I've been here all day, and
11 I respect that. I apologize, we have to move
12 along. I want to thank Assemblyman Benedetto
13 came all the way from the Bronx to be here, so
14 we're going to wrap up.

15 I just wanted to ask, I asked about P-9
16 already, and then just CECs, from your
17 perspective, I just want to ask Ms. Makkada, how
18 do you feel about - are there vacancies?

19 MS. MAKKADA: Yes, there are, and they
20 are dysfunctional and someone must revisit that,
21 because there are not more people voting in that
22 process, there are less people voting.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I was very shocked to
24 hear the statistic that the DOE gave, it doesn't
25 jive with everything else that we heard.

2 I can't thank you enough.

3 MS. DALTON: I wanted to tell you about
4 that, it was just the president, the secretary
5 and recording secretary that was voted in and
6 that's how they made it, okay? I thought you
7 should know about that.

8 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Ms. Makkada, thank
9 you for all your patience with us as well, we've
10 been working on some letters.

11 MS. MINNUS: I just want to say that the
12 charter schools and traditional schools can co-
13 exist. We're doing it at IS-237 and of course
14 the East West High School if you would like to go
15 down and check it out.

16 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: My husband actually
17 recently visited that school because they had an
18 open house for middle school and was very
19 impressed.

20 MS. MINNUS: The only thing, shutting
21 down schools and putting charter schools in their
22 places causes parents to be upset and causes
23 displacement of the youth.

24 Thank you.

25 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Maria, you were very

2 very kind to come back, your testimony was read.

3 We're wrapping up.

4 Let me ask Margie Kolb, Bob Cermeli, and
5 Rachel Epioto, Irene Fennel, Sol, McCantz - who
6 is still here? Start now, you and Margie and
7 Bob.

8 Ms. Fennel, CEC 26? Mr. McCantz? Ms.
9 Saber McGuire? Mr. Vasquez? Ms. Epioto? Is
10 there anyone else that wants to testify that we
11 have either called, not called, anybody else out
12 there?

13 So our final panel is Marge Kolb, Bob
14 Cermeli, but I would like to start there from 24,
15 and I'm very appreciative, because 24 was the
16 only school board that wasn't here, CEC that
17 wasn't here. I'm very sorry that we didn't get
18 you on sooner. We did have your testimony read,
19 Maria. Please feel free to give us an insight
20 into the lawsuit regarding the SLTs or anything
21 else you would like to say.

22 MS. DAPONTES-DOUGHERTY: First, I would
23 like to thank you all for coming. I would just
24 like to first like to make a comment, and I'm not
25 being dismissive of you, but as parents and

2 constituents, we consider this a public hearing,
3 and I feel that this morning, the Department of
4 Education abused their privilege of going first,
5 and I think we need to find a way to maybe have
6 them communicate to our legislators when they
7 should, and not at a public forum when parents
8 are supposed to be there. And I'm not trying to
9 be disrespectful in any way.

10 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: No, you're not. It's
11 frustrating for us too.

12 MS. DAPONTES-DOUGHERTY: I feel they
13 were pulling a filibuster, and it wasn't to
14 prevent the bill from being passed, but it was to
15 prevent the public from speaking, because I know
16 I wasn't the only one that had to leave
17 unfortunately.

18 I would just like to say a couple of
19 things commenting on what they said because I
20 feel they misinformed people.

21 When assembly members asked questions
22 about SLT training, Ms. Guerrier basically
23 responded with, there are workshops, there are
24 training, and she regurgitated the law, which was
25 regurgitated to her by parents when they changed

2 A655 and we told them they were breaching the
3 law.

4 So it's just an example of the fact that
5 there is no accountability, and everything that's
6 done is basically policy by mandate, policy by
7 press conference, there's not interaction.

8 I was here when the hearings were here
9 for this to occur, and the people that sat up
10 here, and I think you were one of them, the
11 questions they asked us were all about community
12 engagement, parent engagement. I was involved in
13 creating the green book, and while the parents
14 had hope that we were going to come to a point
15 where all constituencies worked together for the
16 same cause, which is our kids, getting educated
17 and becoming successful, and with this
18 administration, we've seemed to have lost that.

19 A lot of people have asked for training.

20 I think it's important, but what I've seen a lot
21 of the training is, being an old school parent,
22 I've been involved for over 12 years is, my
23 future parents, unless they have a couple of us
24 old timers left, are being trained to be robots
25 and follow DOE rules, and they're not being told

1 the full picture of what their rights are, what
2 they do to get IEP information for their children
3 and what they do to fight for their kids. They're
4 just given these rules and they're becoming
5 robots, and that's my fear because a lot of us
6 are going to be graduating out soon. I just
7 wanted to make that comment.

8
9 On another thing, the superintendent
10 issue, Dennis Walcott sat up here and basically
11 was just rude in stating that, we were just
12 following the law because the lawsuit was brought
13 and we have superintendents. But that's all we
14 have is a title. You know what, this city is so
15 massive, that each district is a city somewhere
16 else, and the reason why we had community school
17 districts because each is a community with its
18 own diversity, its own personality, it's own
19 ethnic breakdown, its own issues and problems,
20 and that's why we need to have a superintendent
21 that's within that district.

22 In 30, we haven't seen a new building
23 since this new administration. We saw one and
24 that was from the last administration. The
25 capital plan, the current one is the same as the

2 last one, and we no longer have a Dr. Germundo, a
3 superintendent that was strong, and scratched and
4 kicked and fought for his kingdom, because that's
5 what it really was, and I'm not being
6 condescending of my current superintendent, but
7 he's not given that power or authority anymore,
8 and I think that's something that has to come
9 back that's part of accountability.

10 On the end of the DOE and my legislators,
11 I feel that they've been disrespectful to them.
12 I have a lot of proactive legislators in District
13 30, and the doors are always shut on them. And
14 that's just another example of - they can sit
15 here and spew all they want that there's
16 transparency and there's accountability, but it's
17 only there when they choose to give it, otherwise
18 we're all together, fighting and kicking to get
19 it down.

20 I'm going to end on the last note which
21 is the dismissive nature of Ms. Guerrier
22 commenting that the only parents you hear from
23 are the complainers. I'm not here speaking for
24 myself. I'm here representing everyone. I'm not
25 here for my kid to do better and me to get

2 attention, and I'm sure you already knew that
3 when it was stated, but I found it to be
4 extremely dismissive. And touting parent's
5 surveys, that is how they abuse data. I'm in the
6 business world, you can take data, and you could
7 make it - give the result that you want to say.

8 I could have taken the survey, which I
9 refused to take again, and I probably would have
10 come out showing that I'm really happy because
11 the questions were skewed in a way that you
12 answered, yeah, I'm happy with this, I'm happy
13 with that. Did they ask, am I unhappy that my
14 kids don't get art anymore, or all the other
15 special things that they no longer get because
16 they're in test prep, no.

17 So that's just another instance of how
18 things are skewed. I want to thank you for being
19 here, and I want to thank for having someone read
20 my testimony and I hope that we can come to a
21 point where all our communities are coming
22 together for the success of our kids.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I have a quick
24 question. The commissioner of education sided
25 with you -

2 MS. DAPONTE-DOUGHERTY: No, it's not
3 me, it -

4 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I understand, but
5 sided with this issue of the school leadership
6 team, did anyone from SED or DOE, State Education
7 Department or the City's Department of Education
8 contact you in any way or any of the other
9 parents involved in that lawsuit?

10 MS. DAPONTE-DOUGHERTY: No, basically
11 all parents that were either involved or tagged
12 on after Marie Feliciano first created it
13 basically found out because the press released
14 it, as far as I know.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Thank you. Because
16 one of the questions we always have is what kind
17 of due diligence did the state education
18 department do, being from the state legislature,
19 so I appreciate that insight. If you can stay a
20 minute, and we're almost wrapping up, we would
21 like to hear - I'm going to say this again, these
22 are our final two speakers.

23 Then we're going to take a picture of the
24 die-hards that stayed. Go ahead.

25 MS. KOLB: My name is Marge Kolb, and I

2 know Cathy. I want to give you a quick bio. I
3 feel like the DOE and the mayor question our
4 credentials all the time.

5 I was born in Brooklyn, I'm a graduate of
6 New York City public schools, including Hunter
7 College High School, which falls under CUNY, I
8 went away to college for four years, earned a
9 Bachelor's degree, and I've lived in Queens for
10 over 20 years.

11 I have three sons, the oldest is in
12 college, and the other two are in second and
13 sixth grade. I'm a past PTA president in primary
14 and middle school. I'm a past CEC member for
15 four years, and currently I'm the president of
16 District 24's president's council, which is all
17 the PA PTA presidents in the district, and by
18 that I'm a member in CPAC which is the
19 Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council.

20 The reason I didn't run again for the CEC
21 was because I felt like we didn't get very much
22 done at all. We weren't consulted, we had no
23 powers, and I thought by joining CPAC, which is a
24 body that essentially meets in Manhattan at Tweed
25 every month and brings in citywide speakers,

2 we've had the controller come in, chancellor come
3 in. I thought we would have more power, but I've
4 seen CPAC's powers decline as well. The
5 chancellor hardly ever comes to our meetings
6 anymore, and even though we're called the
7 Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council, he never
8 consults us or asks us for advice in any way.

9 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: How many meetings
10 have you attended?

11 MS. KOLB: CPAC?

12 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Yes.

13 MS. KOLB: I don't know. I missed two
14 this year.

15 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: At least 10?

16 MS. KOLB: Yes, I've been to probably at
17 least 15, 20 meetings over the past few years.

18 So I've been a parent activist going on
19 10 years, so I know the old system and the new
20 system. I'm against mayoral control as it
21 currently exists.

22 It's funny, because when I was at work
23 today, I heard a story on the radio about this
24 hearing going on and they were citing poll
25 results that 40 something percent of people are

1 happy with mayoral control, and 30 something
2 percent weren't happy. Then I also wanted to
3 note that there's a nonprofit that was founded to
4 promote mayoral control and they always talk
5 about the solid majority as if we noisy
6 complaining parents are a small minority.
7

8 But as other people have said, we're the
9 elected parent reps. We talk to other parents.
10 We know how they feel. They may not be able to
11 come to these meetings, but we feel like we're
12 representing them. And I think that a lot of
13 people who say they favor mayoral control, either
14 aren't familiar with all the implications or they
15 may not even have a child in the public schools.

16 The mayor has a habit of bringing in all
17 these people to back him up and they don't even
18 have kids in the public school. When he did the
19 latest re-org, he had 100 people sign the letter
20 about how great the re-org was and there was a
21 press conference and the reporter said, how many
22 of you have kids in the public school, and out of
23 50 people, one person raised their hand. So if
24 you get the president of the board of directors
25 of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to go along

2 with you, doesn't mean he knows anything about
3 the public schools, or what the re-org entails.

4 But when I do talk to someone that says,
5 oh, yeah, I do support mayoral control, I ask
6 them one simple question, do you think that your
7 12, 14, or 16 year old child, who may be
8 traveling 30, 60 minutes each way to school,
9 taking multiple public buses or subways should be
10 able to carry a cell phone, their invariable
11 answer is yes. When I tell them because of one
12 man's decision their kids can't, most of them
13 rethink their position on mayoral control.

14 I'm not saying that is the most important
15 issue in the New York City public school system,
16 but it is representative of how this man governs.

17 And some people may like a dictator if the
18 dictator is benevolent, but we don't always get a
19 benevolent dictator. So that's my concern about
20 the way mayoral control is currently comprised.

21 I have heard Bill Thompson say that he
22 wants mayoral control, of course, because he's
23 running for mayor. I don't blame people for
24 that, but what I'm saying is, there has to be
25 some system of checks and balances and I agree

2 with what Dmytro said, PEP members, all of them,
3 should either have a child in the system or be
4 educated. We used to have Augusta Kapner on the
5 PEP and she was the head of Bank Street. That's
6 what we need, not a guy who is an investment
7 banker who is also on the Board of Health and
8 Hospital for Special Services. What does he know
9 about the public school system?

10 What have we gotten under mayoral
11 control? We got a common curriculum in
12 textbooks, and some people might think that's
13 great, but then you find out that our math
14 curriculum follows this spiraling, and that a
15 national presidential commission on mathematics
16 education has discounted that method of teaching
17 math, so, you know - then we get rigid classroom
18 structure where we have to have 90 minutes of
19 readers workshops, writer's workshops, math
20 workshops, every single day. So the classroom
21 teachers don't teach art, music, science or
22 anything else. So that's left up to the cluster
23 teachers.

24 So your kid might get science twice a
25 week, and no gym or art, and they have library,

1 whatever, I'm just saying that because the
2 classroom teachers are in this rigid, daily time
3 structure, they don't get to cover the stuff they
4 used to cover.
5

6 The district superintendents are hardly
7 ever in the district because they wear a second
8 hat of being performance facilitators in other
9 districts working with those principals. When I
10 told Chancellor Klein at a meeting that I didn't
11 like the fact that he had destroyed the
12 districts, he said, Oh, but we've saved so much
13 money by having integrated service centers, and
14 taking back some of the work. And I said, that's
15 not what I'm talking about. I don't care if you
16 have efficiencies because you're doing all the
17 food service or busing at an integrated service,
18 that's fine, I think that's a good thing. But to
19 take our district superintendent out of the
20 district 90 percent of the time is absurd.

21 Then we have staff from central and hired
22 consultants that don't know our communities or
23 our geography making decisions about where to
24 place new programs, charter schools, whatever.
25 Someone from Tweed can't tell me, oh, we're going

1 to put a program in Glendale, which is the
2 southern most part of District 24, it's
3 accessible only by two streets, Fresh Pine Road
4 and 80th Street, and that's been your district
5 wide program? Come on, give me a break. The
6 vast majority of the district is north of that
7 location.
8

9 Just on the whole topic of charter
10 schools, what does it say about the DOE that they
11 have a department specifically to incubate
12 charter schools? I thought charter schools were
13 supposed to challenge the existing school
14 bureaucracy and we're supposed to organically
15 arise from outside of whatever the governing body
16 was.

17 The innovative stuff that DOE wants to do
18 in charters, why aren't they doing that in our
19 public schools? Then there's all these ideas
20 that they introduce that they want to make
21 widespread like K-8 schools, small themed high
22 schools, there's no evidence to support the
23 efficacy of any of those things, and they just
24 dump them on communities without input and expect
25 us to just swallow that.

2 So I think I covered everything. One
3 more thing. You read out who had spoken this
4 morning, and there was a few people from VOICE
5 Charter School.

6 Now, it's my understanding and belief
7 that's a brand new charter school this year, and
8 only one grade, as far as - so where are all
9 these people getting experience about the public
10 school system, I have no idea, but that's just
11 me.

12 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Ms. Kolb, I really
13 enjoyed your testimony, and Maria, thank you,
14 and, yes, that was the group that felt they had
15 to go and we tried to accommodate them. So we
16 just keep trying to accommodate everyone, that's
17 part of the political process.

18 Mr. Cermeli.

19 MR. CERMELE: Thank you, Assemblywoman
20 Nolan. You must be very tired.

21 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER: Me too.

22 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: Yes, let me just
23 thank Assemblywoman Pfeffer because she has
24 really served a leadership role today and we
25 should thank her.

2 ASSEMBLYWOMAN PFEFFER; I will tell you,
3 because I sat on the original task force, and the
4 speaker put me on representing Queens, and we had
5 the hearings, and on and on, and we had such
6 strong testimony which, in a way is repeating
7 itself now, because the one thing we wanted to do
8 was for parental involvement and empowerment.
9 And as it got through the legislation and became
10 law, it became a little different and the
11 interpretation is completely different, so we
12 have to work on tighter, and, unfortunately, you
13 do have to keep going to court, it happens with
14 so many pieces of comprehensive legislation.

15 That's why I'm sitting and listening, but
16 the thing is, we have committed parents and we
17 have people who really understand the system the
18 way it should be, and that's what we want to say
19 to you, don't give up, because we're not giving
20 up. That's really it. We've been here, we'll be
21 here again, but each time I think we pick away
22 it.

23 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I know Mr. Cermeli
24 for many many years and he has a very calming
25 presence and he'll do a good wrap-up and then

2 we'll all take a little picture.

3 MR. CERMEI: Well, I didn't think I'd
4 speak today because I was here for another
5 meeting, and I didn't even think I had the time,
6 but you kept going on and I walked over.

7 Let me just tell you a little bit about
8 me, Bob Cermeli, and I'm a product of the New
9 York City School System, studied mechanical
10 engineering at City College, went through three
11 years of that and didn't finish because of budget
12 cuts and some personal reasons, but just recently
13 I got my bachelor's degree of science at the SUNY
14 system.

15 There's two aspects of this. First of
16 all, I do want to compliment the mayor in having
17 the courage to take on such a complex system. I
18 think what happens with a lot of people though,
19 they don't realize how complex the system is
20 until you get into it. You always hear this, if
21 I took over this system, I'll make it work. And
22 I can see elected officials saying that too
23 without realizing how complex the system is. And
24 I even said that when I first became a school
25 board member. 15 years I was a school board

2 member, I was the past president three terms. My
3 wife taught in the public elementary school over
4 30 years, and, as I evolved in the school boards,
5 and with my wife and learning what she does and
6 speaking to the people, I've learned how complex
7 the New York City School System is.

8 One of the things that I see then that I
9 don't see now is much in speaking to the
10 teachers, maybe because the morale is down. You
11 expect the morale to be down with change, but
12 maybe not as much as I'm seeing it now, but I
13 remember in the good ole days my wife taught in
14 the southeast Bronx and a few students didn't
15 show up sometimes for school and after school she
16 went to their tenement houses and knocked on the
17 mother's door to find out why the child wasn't in
18 school.

19 Or I see teachers putting out their own
20 money to buy certain things, teaching aids,
21 because the schools don't have it. That comes
22 from their heart. It doesn't come because they
23 have to do it, they want to do it. If you have
24 people doing work because they're forced to do
25 it, they're not going to do work like if they

2 want to do it. That's a very big thing.

3 When we made this change, I kept an open
4 mind, and a lot of people did, I said, you know,
5 let's look at this, maybe the mayor is right,
6 maybe he'll make changes, because with any
7 system, any corporation, it gets bloated and you
8 have to clean it out sometimes. There's people,
9 in doing this and doing that, maybe not in the
10 teaching positions, so you need to clean it out.

11 So I kept an open mind and I looked at it, and,
12 to tell you the truth, after six years, I don't
13 see significant change.

14 One of the things that we had before that
15 we don't seem to have now, and the first thing,
16 the change is too structured, it's too full. One
17 is the Board of Education. You got to understand
18 what that is. There's the Board of Education,
19 now we have the Department of Education. The
20 Board of Education is a body of people that
21 overlook the whole system, and if they made
22 mistakes, you always had the mayor, you had a
23 division of power and authority to criticize
24 them, and to change chancellors and things like
25 that.

2 But when you don't have that division of
3 power, and it comes from one source, and things
4 don't go well, what do you do? One of the things
5 you can do is just put a spin on things to make
6 believe that it looks good. But you don't have
7 the division of power arguing with each other.

8 Now, we have a mayor who is dedicated to
9 education, so he says. What happens when we get
10 a new mayor who may not be as dedicated and still
11 with that kind of responsibility?

12 So I really thing we should have the
13 division of power come back to the Board of
14 Education, have the representatives, you have two
15 mayoral representatives, one from each borough
16 also, and that would be your central Board of
17 Education, and they would be the advocates to get
18 money, to fix the system, to argue, and with
19 argument you see change, not spinning, I think
20 that's what's happening now.

21 Now the other aspect of change that took
22 place was the CEC, which resembled the old school
23 board, but one of the glaring things you'll see
24 if you go to CEC meetings, and I tell you, the
25 CEC at school board 24 where I come from are

2 doing a wonderful job, but very few parents. Why
3 don't the parents show up if they're doing a
4 wonderful job? Because the power of the CEC has
5 been taken away. Parents feel that if they have
6 an issue that they want to speak with the CEC
7 member, all that CEC member could do is pass it
8 on. They don't have that kind of authority.

9 Now what did the old board have, what
10 kind of authority, what are we talking about?
11 Well, the old board, prior to 1996, used to hire
12 principals, and principals used to come to those
13 meetings because they were hired by the school
14 board, so there was an accountability there.

15 So 1996 there was change, there were some
16 problems with that. Still, after the legislative
17 change, the school board still evaluated the
18 superintendent, so if there was a principal or
19 something or a school not running, and the school
20 board didn't like it, they would go to the
21 superintendent and the superintendent has to
22 listen to them because they may not renew his
23 contract.

24 So there was a power. So now when you
25 have people, especially special ed, I used to

2 remember because I handled that committee, and
3 they felt they weren't getting the proper
4 treatment for their kids, and you have to be an
5 advocate when you have a handicapped child. And
6 if you don't get treatment, they went to the
7 board members. Many came to me, you son has
8 dyslexia, all right, and I would call the
9 chairperson in that particular district, listen,
10 why isn't this person getting so and so? And
11 they would listen and things would change, so
12 parents had a vested interest in coming to the
13 meetings because if they have something to say,
14 they knew we were their advocate, and who voted
15 us in, it was the parents who voted us in. The
16 parents.

17 There were a lot of arguments. Some
18 board members weren't parents, they were - I
19 didn't children in the system, my children were
20 grown up, they were out. But I had certain
21 expertise that I tried to use, I was an advocate
22 of getting schools built. When the neighborhood
23 at the time - some of them were against it
24 because you put a school in a neighborhood,
25 they're worried about change and everything. So

2 I got involved - one of the few people that was
3 on the community board and I advocated, I said,
4 listen, we need these schools. District 24 is
5 the most overcrowded district in the City of New
6 York and, you know what, I think it still is.

7 It's very late, I'm just going to read a
8 couple of paragraphs, I just wanted to show you
9 what the school boards of past did and what some
10 of their responsibilities were at the time and
11 then I'm just going to end it because I'm not
12 going to criticize, you've heard all of that.

13 After the 1996 change, they still
14 functioned and made important contributions to
15 the school systems. School board provided a
16 forum for parents, community residents, community
17 actives, elected officials to come together and
18 discuss their educational concerns, while in the
19 presence of the district superintendent.

20 His or her staff and the press, school
21 boards are advocates of educational issues and
22 can act as the voice parents without fear of
23 retribution. They have the authority to set
24 policy - this is the old system, and see to it
25 that it was followed. They oversee school

2 zoning, capital construction, they reviewed the
3 district's comprehensive educational plan and
4 evaluated the superintendent on its
5 implementation and performance. School boards
6 are required to meet with teacher parent
7 associations representing the whole district to
8 discuss mutual school concerns. School boards
9 enhance the morale of administrators, teachers
10 and students by recognizing and honoring their
11 accomplishments.

12 School boards form subcommittees that
13 address reoccurring issues such as school
14 construction, school lunch, special education,
15 legislation, communication and others.

16 School Board 24 in Central Queens, one of
17 32 school boards, which I was elected a member,
18 has been proactive throughout the years. The
19 board addressed issues, they passed common sense
20 solutions to safety issues. I remember when an
21 intruder came into the school premise, and when a
22 young student wandered out unnoticed, just walked
23 out of the school, school boards requested
24 increased parental vigilance and passed
25 resolution to increase the number of security

2 guards and installing school monitoring devices
3 in the school.

4 School board 24 is the most overcrowded,
5 and this is an old report, you probably heard
6 this many times, but what I'm trying to say is,
7 these group of elected officials were there to
8 become advocates for the parents because they
9 were voted in by the parents. Now, there was a
10 lot of argument saying, you know, there was only
11 a five percent parental involvement or voter
12 involvement when school boards are running, sure,
13 there was because the city government didn't want
14 school boards, so they didn't publicize the
15 elections. If you didn't publicize the
16 elections, you do have a problem. Because you
17 get people on the school board that shouldn't be
18 on the school board because they don't have
19 proper representation of people. They may have a
20 big apartment building they come from and get all
21 those people to vote for one person.

22 So you have to have a wider and
23 publicized election process if you want a school
24 board truly representative of the people. But I
25 think in the old system, when you had good

2 members, you had good representation of the
3 parents, and it was shown because the parents did
4 come to the meetings.

5 That's my testimony.

6 CHAIRWOMAN NOLAN: I would like to thank
7 you very much. I would like to just say to Maria
8 and to Marge, in particular, Bob, thank all of
9 you, and I would like to do some follow-up also
10 with Queen and with the other people who were
11 here.

12 We will continue to meet you and we'll
13 talk again. I don't think we've ever done this,
14 but we've heard 45 witnesses, and that's a lot of
15 people when you think about it, and in a
16 relatively reasonable space of time, especially
17 given my real shock, and I will agree with you, I
18 never expected the people from DOE to read
19 testimony like that for 50 minutes. I was - I
20 just never, I probably should have cut them off,
21 but I felt that that would have been a whole new
22 nest of problems and I always want to give that
23 courtesy.

24 I want to thank each and every one of you
25 for coming. We would like to take a picture with

2 Assemblywoman Pfeffer over here with everybody,
3 especially since a lot of you are from both her
4 district and mine.

5 I want to thank the staff of the New York
6 State Assembly for working so hard, the staff
7 from my office for working so hard, Kathleen
8 Winot, Claudia Chan, Nicolas Terelli-Castro, and
9 Debbie McDonough, and our wonderful stenographer
10 for doing all the work to put this together, and,
11 again, thanks to Borough President Helen Marshall
12 for the use of the room and thank you to Speaker
13 Silver and my colleagues and the majority in the
14 Assembly for instituting these hearings.

15 This hearing is now closed. The hearing
16 will resume on February 6th in Manhattan with the
17 focus on school capital construction and some
18 other issue areas.

19 (Whereupon, the Assembly Standing
20 Committee on Education adjourned at 5:50 p.m.)
21
22
23
24

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, EDWARD LETO, a Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of New York, do hereby stated:

THAT I attended at the time and place above mentioned and took stenographic record of the proceedings in the above-entitled matter;

THAT the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate transcript of the same and the whole thereof, according to the best of my ability and belief.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this _____ day of _____, 2009.

EDWARD LETO