
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"Superintendents from the 31 Abbott Districts have been invited to discuss the effect the current State Aid figures will have on their budgets, as well as the impact of past State Aid freezes"

LOCATION: Committee Room 16
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: March 26, 2007
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Ronald L. Rice, Co-Chair
Assemblyman Craig A. Stanley, Co-Chair
Senator Martha W. Bark
Senator Thomas H. Kean Jr.
Assemblyman Joseph Vas
Assemblywoman Joan M. Voss
Assemblyman Bill Baroni
Assemblyman David W. Wolfe



ALSO PRESENT:

Melanie M. Schulz
Executive Director
Sharon Benesta
Chief of Staff

Brian Alpert
Senate Republican
Committee Aide

Christopher Hughes
Assembly Republican
Committee Aide

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
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Senator Ronald L. Rice, Assemblyman Craig A. Stanley, and
Joint Committee on the Public Schools
submitted by
Dr. Clarence C. Hoover III
Superintendent of Schools
East Orange School District

8x

lmb: 1-69
rs: 70-127

SENATOR RONALD L. RICE (Co-Chair): Good morning.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS FROM AUDIENCE: Good morning.

SENATOR RICE: We're going to get started with the Joint Committee on the Public Schools meeting. I just want to thank all of the superintendents who responded this morning. I know that you are very busy, particularly with the April elections coming up, the school board budgets, and we know that it's also important for you to come before us today.

This particular session is to hear from you in terms of your hue and cry: your benefits, if there are any benefits; as relates to where we are going with the information you received with the funding for the school districts -- the Abbott districts, as well as some of the other districts that border our communities, such as Belleville, Bloomfield, and some of the other out districts surrounding other urban cities.

With that, why don't I just turn it over to the Co-Chair, Assemblyman Craig Stanley, to see if he has anything to say, and then we'll start our meeting. If the other members have something to say, they can speak after the Co-Chair, and then we'll get started calling up names and taking the record.

ASSEMBLYMAN CRAIG A. STANLEY (Co-Chair): Thank you very much, Co-Chair Rice.

I was very adamant, really, about making sure that we had this particular session. Mainly because we have to understand the Supreme Court requirements for the Abbott districts in particular; but also our constitutional requirements -- which really is just enforced by the Supreme

Court at this point for the Abbott districts -- but our constitutional requirements for all of the districts for the State of New Jersey. And one of the things that we were very concerned with last year -- Senator Rice and myself -- was the fact that many districts were forced to have a zero-budget increase, and actually -- practically every district in the state was forced to have a zero-budget increase last year.

Now, if you're getting 70 percent of your budget from State aid, because you don't have the property and wealth to do more than that, it becomes a much more serious situation. A zero-increase budget becomes actually almost unimplementable; or it certainly makes a lot of your programs, a lot of the things that you need in your budget almost impossible to implement. And so there was supposed to be a process in place last year that would allow districts to come in and actually prove need. And I understand that that process was very difficult. It was almost counterproductive. And most districts just decided to really opt out and just not even try to fight the State with respect to trying to get additional aid, even if it was needed.

And so two problems existed there: Number one, the fact that there was not a process in place that allowed districts to get the aid that they needed, because every time they came to the State and said, "This is why we need the dollars," the State went back and said, "Well, we need more details." And the other problem that arose because of that was that the districts didn't get the dollars that they needed to continue much-needed programs. And that is the most significant problem that people dealt with last year, and that's something that we would like to try to avoid this year.

We understand that there is a process in place this year where districts can go to the administration and, of course, request additional aid. However, we want to make sure -- and we're trying to get engaged early in the process -- to make sure that if districts, in fact, need additional resources to implement effective programs or to keep effective programs going, that the process is such that it allows the districts to make their case and that the Commissioner would be willing to accommodate the districts.

So this is a very, very important hearing here today. It's a matter of getting information from superintendents. It's a matter of making sure that, when we do get that information, we go back to the Commissioner and the Governor to ensure the districts have what they need in order to implement our constitutional responsibilities.

I thank Co-Chair Rice for his assistance in putting this hearing together, and certainly staff. And with that having been said, Co-Chair Rice, I think it's appropriate for us to begin the hearing, and certainly appeal to any of the members who might have an opening comment.

SENATOR RICE: Why don't we start over here -- anyone have any comments prior to?

Assemblyman Wolfe.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Yes. I'd like to thank both of the Co-Chairmen for having this hearing, because some of my legislative colleagues have heard my story over and over again. But being a constant member of the Education Committee, and being on the Special Committee that formed this Summer to look at school taxes and how that could implement the total tax structure-- Meeting 18 times; writing two letters to the Committee members; and publicly stating twice, at public meetings, I

wanted to talk about Abbott districts, that never happened. And now it's finally happening. Since August those hearings had gone on, and now we're actually going to have that meeting. So I think this is very important.

I think the other thing that is very important is that the goal of having a new funding formula has not been met, and I understand that the Commissioner and the Governor have made efforts to have a stop-gap formula. And I think what we're talking about now is an anomaly, because it's not really the new formula; it's just basically trying to make up for lost time in terms of flat funding.

But I have to say, I do not represent an Abbott district. But having been the Chairman of the Education Committee, I understand the need to look at the needs for the entire state. And when I look at the amount of money that goes into some of the Abbott districts, as compared to, for example, Toms River, which is the largest suburban school district in the state -- 18,000 students -- they're spending less than half of what is being spent in Asbury Park. Other than Brick Township, they spend about \$8,400 a year to educate their children. They have a lot of kids with special education, special needs. And I know that special education, English as a Second Language are some of the criteria that will be included in the new formula.

So I think simply to come to us today and tell us we need more money, we've all heard that before. I think it's something that we understand. And this is probably the most taxing issue that the Legislature has to face. We're losing a lot of good members this year in the Legislature, both the Senate and the Assembly, Republicans and Democrats. And the majority of them are saying they're leaving because they're frustrated,

nothing is getting done. And I think we have an opportunity this year and the coming year to actually get something done, to correct this problem we've had for a number of years, so we can get it straight.

So I welcome the testimony of the people who are in the front line today. And I really think it's important that we listen to what they have to say, because their input was not necessarily heard by the Committee this Summer.

So I thank you Chairmen, both of you.

SENATOR RICE: Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: Thank you Chairman Rice and thank you Chairman Stanley for holding this hearing. I think it's very important that we have these kinds of dialogue with superintendents that often-- As my colleague Dave Wolfe, I don't represent an Abbott district, but I represent a district bordering an Abbott district. And Chairmen, thank you for putting this together.

My request to you, and perhaps Chairmen -- I came in late and I apologize if I missed this, forgive me -- I think it would be helpful if this Committee could also hold a hearing and bring in superintendents from non-Abbott districts who are experiencing, right now in their budget preparation process, a great deal of difficulties complying with their internal district responsibility to educate their kids, with programs like science and math, and prekindergarten, and kindergarten -- where some school districts are having to cut these programs. In two school districts that I -- one I represent, South Brunswick, and one that borders my district, East Windsor/Hightstown, are going through extraordinary difficulties right now. And I think, Mr. Chairmen, it would be very helpful if this Committee, as a

follow-up to today's hearing, could hear from those voices and those superintendents so that we have an opportunity to get a full picture, as this Committee always has -- get a full picture of the challenges facing schools in New Jersey from a financial perspective, both Abbott and non-Abbott.

And thank you, Chairs, for holding this hearing.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

We intend to do that. In fact, I don't know if the members are here, but at the last moment I invited the superintendents of Belleville and Bloomfield, which are my non-Abbott districts. Because when we had the initial discussion on the 8 percent increase, which all of us had fought for, these districts -- 6 percent in Belleville, 8 percent in Bloomfield-- You know, I've been around long enough, so have some of you, to know that sounds wonderful, but I say I question numbers. And that's when I found out that, contrary to my belief of the budget message, there were strings attached to the dollars. And it was very nice to say we're going to implement new programs with the money, but I know the pains in the non-Abbott districts, the borderline districts, are in programs they already have -- where the deficits are.

And meeting with the Governor, and others who have talked to the Governor, you read recently that there's more flexibility in the use of those dollars under some conditions. And that's why we want to hear more from non-Abbotts, because I recognize that in Belleville and Bloomfield -- that's who I'm more familiar with -- that even with the flexibility, I think we still have some problems and some questions that may be added to the ballot because of it. Whether or not we can cure those problems immediately, we don't know collectively. But what we do know is that if we

discuss school aid formula -- a new school aid formula, all this conversation and the information we receive, that is valid information, needs to be a part of those discussions so that that formula, whatever it looks like, can have some real merit and validity to it.

And so I want to thank you for the request. Let me assure you that in the next, hopefully two, three weeks or so -- maybe 30 days, with the holiday coming in -- we'll try to set that up. I just asked the members to show up for the meeting, because I know other things are happening.

Senator Bark, do you have any comments at this point?

SENATOR BARK: I really -- not much. Most of it has been covered. However, I would hope that we would put some real emphasis on trying to have people from the south here. We seem to get most of the people from the north. I do represent an Abbott district below Trenton, and I would like to also note that I have represented an awful lot of suburban districts that are south. And there's a whole different -- there's a different funding situation, as you go farther south. And I would hope we could get somebody maybe from Salem and Cumberland counties. I know those are almost foreign countries to some of you, but the fact is they're part of the State of New Jersey, and I think we need to hear from them.

SENATOR RICE: Senator, let me just say to you that Gloucester, Salem are not foreign to me. I used to go to the nuclear plant for PSE&G. I go there and hold hearings, when others don't travel. But with respect to the Committee, every Abbott district is always notified about the meeting. And so I'm going to encourage all my colleagues, when we have these meetings, you get a notice -- maybe your staff receives them, maybe they don't bring them to your attention until the last minute -- but

maybe someone in your office should be assigned to communicate with these superintendents and tell them then, "Look, you're here fighting for their needs." It's their responsibility to come forward to express those needs, rather than send a letter out with limited information and we can't really digest the real problem. And so as elected officials statewide, representing the districts, we have a responsibility to make those mandates on the people that we are providing the dollars and the services to. But we would do more; because I know this staff not only sent letters out, this staff actually called the superintendents.

Now, what we can tell them is that they may be Abbott and the Supreme Court may mandate some things, but if they don't start to participate and let us know what's going on, we will find a way to kind of overlook the mandates of their district. And I don't think they want that to happen, because then there's court battles saying we can't do it -- right? -- etc. But I hear you loud and clear, and the staff will continue to encourage all superintendents to participate.

SENATOR BARK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR RICE: Let me go to Senator Tom Kean; then we're going to go to Assemblywoman Voss; and then we're going to have a roll call. I was informally doing this, because I've seen members coming. And then we'll start the hearings.

Senator.

SENATOR KEAN: Thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you Mr. Chairman. Like a number of the other individuals on this Committee, I do not represent an Abbott district, although my district does border on one. I represent 16 towns across 4 counties whose budgets and property

taxes are obviously dramatically impacted by the lack of any additional school aid over the course of the last five-plus years, as it has hit the majority of school districts in this state. And it's caused real problems -- dramatic hardships for many, many people. And even, as we know, the School Boards Association did state that one main reason for the property tax increase over the last several years in many of the suburban communities has been the lack of an increase in the State aid, as per what the formula is supposed to be.

We all want individuals, children across our state to have the best possible education, which is why it is disheartening to me today, in that this Committee issued a request a good month ago to the superintendents of the districts of -- purview of this hearing, the Abbott districts. They issued follow-up requests, changes to the agenda, to the superintendents of the Abbott districts. And only 13 of the 31 of those districts, of those superintendents, even responded to the request of this Committee to hear about their plight. I praise the superintendents who are here today, who have come today to allow for those of us on a bipartisan basis to get a better understanding of the needs and the conditions within the school districts in which you have responsibility. But the fact that 18 of the 31 superintendents and their offices couldn't even deign to respond to the request of this Committee is disheartening, to say the least; especially when, as Co-Chairman Stanley said, for the majority, if not all of those districts, over 70 percent of their school aid/moneys come from the residents of this state.

I think it's very important not only for this hearing, but for hearings going forward, that these superintendents understand the

importance of this issue, and it is very important that they at least have the respect for the taxpayers of this state that they respond to the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. But to have absolutely no response from faxes and phone calls is incorrigible.

And so I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I want to thank you, as well, for your comments earlier about having -- and I do know that I have a number of districts in my district who would greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify before this Committee, to talk about the lack of additional school aid over the last several years, and the impact that that's had on their ability to deliver the services that they would like to be able to deliver to the children of their districts.

But it is, as I said earlier, disheartening that 13 of the 31 individuals who were invited showed up, and that the remainder of those individuals didn't even have the respect for this Committee, or the people of the state, to even respond to repeated requests for attendance.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Senator.

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: I just wanted to echo what some of my colleagues have said. I represent a district of 13 towns, none of whom are -- we're not an Abbott district. And I spent most of Saturday with representatives from boards of education from Bergen County -- we don't have any Abbott districts in Bergen County -- and they are so concerned about what is going to happen, because right now-- Representatives from every single board of education was at this meeting that I attended, and I was the only legislator who was there. And they were

just incensed at the fact that they're probably going to get 3 percent of whatever State aid they got last year. Well, 3 percent of nothing is still basically nothing. And they are very concerned about the Abbotts getting more funding, and they are just really having to cut programs and cut staff.

And I have another meeting with Bergen County education people on Wednesday evening, and they're going to be asking the same questions. So I hope that I can come from this meeting with some answers to the questions that they are going to be asking of me.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

Assemblyman Vas.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman; and Chairman Rice, as well; my colleagues this morning.

I just wanted to just say a few words on this topic. Because it's unfortunate that -- while this topic and this issue is probably the most important issue that we face, because it's really at the root of the property tax issue that everybody is talking about -- that we have been forced into a debate about this topic by pitting the poorer school districts of the state, that are labeled Abbott, and all other school districts in the state. When in reality, the issue of school funding and the quality of education, as it relates to it, is so important to the future of New Jersey. We have to focus honestly, analytically, in moving forward, in making sure that we are able to preserve and increase the quality of education in New Jersey. Because if we don't, and we don't maintain our intellectual might for this state, it's going to affect every other aspect of life. It's going to affect the economic life; it's

going to affect the quality of life for the 8-and-a-half, 9 million people that live in the state.

And it's unfortunate that this, in part, has forced out a substantial portion of the working middle class of New Jersey. Each day this state becomes more and more segregated in terms of its economic distinctions. You have some of the wealthiest people in America that live in New Jersey, and a growing number of poor people that live in New Jersey. And in part, what we have discovered in this additional school aid that's being dispersed this year, is that the vast majority of the new school growth in New Jersey, all over the state, are our poor families and poor students. And in places that you would never imagine, that perhaps you would think that they are middle-class school districts, that some nine out of every 10 new students coming into the school district, like in Woodbridge Township, qualify for the Federal Lunch Aid program; and places like Sayreville, with seven out of every 10. And I am sure there are districts throughout the state that would surprise every legislator.

And so we're back to this debate of 20 years ago about how we achieve quality education -- not how we achieve an equalized funding formula that helps non-Abbott school districts -- but how do we help all poor kids throughout the State of New Jersey? Back down to the fundamental debate -- that over 30 states in this nation have gone to their Supreme Courts to try to get an answer to -- and that is the issue of: What is adequate funding and what is equitable distribution? How do we make the best use of the massive amount of dollars that are being invested in public education today? This year, close to \$12 billion by the State, \$9 billion by local property taxpayers, another \$2 billion by our Federal

Government -- \$23 billion going into our public schools this year. And how do we make the very best use? And what is that magic number -- how do we find out what is really necessary? And this is not to single out any superintendents or any school district. Each school district and every legislator that represents that school district is looking at this very myopically -- how do I help my school districts, how do I help my district?

This is the issue where every legislator has to say, "How do we improve the quality of education for every youngster in New Jersey and look beyond our own school districts;" and say, "Listen, let's have an honest discussion about how we do that." Every school district that we hear from, whether it's an Abbott school district or a non-Abbott school district, has real issues and real problems; and in part there is a bureaucracy that manifests many of these problems within the Department of Education. And that has happened for years and years and years and years. It's been bipartisan in nature, hasn't changed when there's been a Republican or a Democrat, and we straddle our school districts, and all of our students, and so many of our faculty with this bureaucracy that makes it almost impossible to achieve real quality education. And hopefully, we can have that kind of honest analysis and honest debate here today.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Thank you, Assemblyman Vas.

I just want to first echo your opening message, which was that we are not here to pit Abbott against non-Abbott. That's not -- and to do so would be unfair to all the students in our state. And to those broader issues, as you know, we introduced -- well, we passed out of our Committee Assembly Bill 4060, which will hopefully, if we can move it and get it passed, will actually lead to a very, very thorough analysis -- an analysis that

could be impeccable with respect to its openness and it being able to highlight the various needs of all of our school districts. The subject matter of this particular hearing is somewhat narrow. But hopefully, Assembly Bill 4060 will lead to an open discussion, a very well-feted -- and a process that will lead to those -- the types of hearings that you've referring to, that will get all of the impacts, all the input from various superintendents throughout the state, the various stakeholders; and come up with a funding system that will allow every district, as Senator Bark and all of you have indicated, would allow every student an opportunity to get the thorough and efficient education that we constitutionally require here in the State of New Jersey.

And I also want to add that New Jersey is one of the best school systems in the country, as well. We talk a lot about how much we spend per student in the State of New Jersey, but we have one of the premiere preschool programs in the country. We have some of the best graduation rates in the country. And even with respect to low-income students, we graduate more and we send more to college than any other state in the country.

So I just want to make sure that we know we're getting a return on our investment. We can get a better return. We could see a little more -- a better distribution of resources, and that's something that we hope to accomplish in Assembly Bill 4060. Here, today, we want to make sure that the dollars that are being allocated and -- that these particular districts are in a position to implement their education programs with what they're getting now.

That having been said, Co-Chair, maybe we can bring--

SENATOR RICE: Roll call.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: First, we can have a roll call.

MS. SCHULZ (Executive Director): Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Here.

MS. SCHULZ: Senator Bark.

SENATOR BARK: Here.

MS. SCHULZ: Senator Kean.

SENATOR KEAN: Here.

MS. SCHULZ: Assemblyman Stanley.

SENATOR RICE: He's here. (laughter)

MS. SCHULZ: Assemblyman Baroni.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: Here.

MS. SCHULZ: Assemblyman Vas.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAS: Here, present.

MS. SCHULZ: Assemblywoman Voss.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: Voss. (laughter)

MS. SCHULZ: Voss (indicating pronunciation).

And Assemblyman Wolfe.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Here.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

First of all, let me acknowledge a good friend. And every time I have an opportunity, I'm going to acknowledge him, because I think New Jersey needs to understand, or at least recognize, the 20-year plus history of the New Jersey Black Issues Convention. Assemblyman Donald Tucker helped found, and sponsored, and took it to where it is. We deal with issues throughout the state that impact on the African-American community. And now the new President, Jerome Harris -- I just want to

acknowledge Jerome, because people need to understand that you and your organization -- knowing you're a large constituency group, and research group, and think tank. But you monitor meetings now because of the work that you have to do on behalf of New Jersey. And so I just wanted to acknowledge, and I want people on the Committee to get to know who you are. So would you raise your hands again and say hello, please?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

Okay, with that, why don't we call the first speaker up. And that's the superintendent from the great township of Neptune School District -- and that's David Mooij. How do you pronounce your last name, David? I can't make this -- is this an R-E or R-S?

D A V I D A. M O O I J: Mooij (indicating pronunciation).

SENATOR RICE: Mooij. Okay.

Would you spell that last name for us, on the record?

MR. MOOIJ: Yes. M-O-O-I-J. It's pronounced Mooij, like boy, only with an "M".

Good morning, and thank you very much, Assembly and Senate Chairpersons of this Committee, and members of the Committee. In my rush to leave this morning, I did not bring my prepared statements, so I'll just be working from some notes that I took while I was sitting here.

Neptune Township is a--

SENATOR RICE: Excuse me, I didn't mean to interrupt. I meant to say, in the opening remarks I made, if there's a superintendent here who is not signed up to speak yet, please move to the table and sign

up, and we'll take your form up here. There was criticism about superintendents not coming to the meeting; I know traffic has some. So please do that for us, okay?

Go ahead, sir.

DR. MOOIJ: Thank you, Sir.

Neptune Township is a mid-sized district in Central New Jersey. It borders Asbury Park. Neptune had the distinction of being the second lowest-spending Abbott district in FY '06. The comparative spending guide was just released Friday afternoon. I have not checked it for this most recent year, but we did find ourselves the second lowest-spending, per pupil, behind Garfield City.

I believe that the Abbott districts are being dismantled via a funding mechanism. Neptune Township was late to the Abbott scene. It came by legislation, with Plainfield, almost two years after Abbott was declared. And as such, Neptune had a slow start from a funding perspective. It did not have the initial start-up costs attributed via State aid to the district, and was not able to take part in many of the programs. As a result of that, it has always been a lean operating Abbott district. And as such, when there's been impact with regard to budget, Neptune has been one of the first to feel it.

Last year, in essence, we were asked to make do with flat funding, and we were able to do that. We did not appeal, and we moved forward. This year we, in essence, were asked to make do with what some people might think is flat funding; but in reality our State aid was reduced by \$1.2 million, and the local levy was increased by a mandated \$1.2 million. And that set our cap. We were not able to produce a budget that

met the educational needs, but we had to produce a budget that backed into a number. The district, in essence, was given a number by the Department via, I suppose, the Treasury, and we became a -- it became necessary to start to take apart some of the late reforms that Neptune saw.

As a result of this -- and increased spending, which I'll talk about in a minute, in other areas -- the district will lose between 24 and 30 positions this year. Some of them will be noncertificated, some will be certificated. It will have an educational impact. This is not a cry of blood in the streets, this is not a cry of wolf, this is a reality.

Our budget was due last week. And I don't know, Senator Kean, if that's the reason, possibly, that some superintendents are not here this morning. But budgets were due; and, I think, with all due respect, maybe some folks feel that there was not an opportunity here for any benefit now or in the immediate future to seek relief.

In that regard, that's 5 percent of our labor force. Now, operating -- I think Neptune is a good picture, operating as the second-lowest spending per pupil district of the 31 Abbotts; 5 percent of the labor force will be laid off.

There is a 3 percent settlement that was offered by the Department for districts that would not take the Department to court in order to get additional funding. And recognizing what happened last year, as Assemblyman Stanley indicated, for FY '07, it was the considered opinion in our district that it would not be worth the effort; nor would it meet the mandates of the NJEA contract of indicating to people whether or not they had a job as we move forward.

In Neptune Township there's actually no opportunity to raise a levy, because the max cap has been set by the State in requiring its fair share. Neptune, along with Long Branch and a number of other districts, have always felt that fair share was appropriate; and a mandated increase -- last year a mandated increase, this year -- eight last year, 15 this year. If you follow the numbers, as an old-time business administrator, it looks like they'll be 20 next year that will have mandated increases that will raise them to the cap level. This means no opportunity within the districts to ask their local folks to kick in and contribute over and above that 4 percent cap. I think that cap, by the way, is going to affect the suburban districts as well next year -- more so, because of contributed fund balance in the past and the inability to do it in the future.

So Assemblyman Baroni, I think you're correct in calling for all the superintendents to come before the Committee, because that is something that will impact all districts in New Jersey. I believe there are untold pitfalls in that cap that was produced.

So what's driving the costs? I think every district is separate and unique. In Neptune, I know it's a contract that was settled at over 4.5 percent. When local boards of education, who are generally laypeople, have to negotiate with, in essence, the NJEA, you don't come out ahead locally. The NJEA is a very strong professional organization. They take great pride in bringing the best for their membership. And I think it's very difficult for local boards of education to, in essence, negotiate against one of the most powerful associations in New Jersey.

Special education costs, the out-of-district placements -- their schools are not being capped at 4 percent. We've seen increases of 12 and

15 percent. The special education cost to Abbott and non-Abbott alike are very, very difficult.

I was before this Committee twice before: When we discussed -- when the Committee Chairpersons listened to Schools Construction Corporation woes. Neptune is way ahead of it. Neptune fortunately has only one school left to be built, and the entire Abbott school construction program in Neptune will be complete. The long-range facility plan, just under review at the Department -- Neptune, we understand, will be the first to receive its approval for the '05 to '10 long-range facility plan, because the State has done it all already.

An issue that's confronting you though, as Assemblymen and Senators -- and women -- is that the new schools that have been constructed according to Code are very much more energy demanding, although very efficient. Although two of our new schools are Green, three of them are geothermal -- they operate with a tremendous amount of electricity. HVAC, up to current ASRA standards, produces a tremendous amount of air that we are enjoying in here right now, but is required to be heated or cooled. And that's electric. Our anticipated bill for electric for next year is triple that which it is this year. As it is, we have been having to transfer funds just to pay the electric bill going through this year. And we have, as we read the papers, as you do, budgeted increases of about 8 percent on an item that will cost our district about \$1.8 million. Great schools, and they are being run efficiently. However, they do cost more to operate.

So what's needed? I think if I were to say that there are three things, as far as the Abbotts and non-Abbotts alike-- There's a need to work collaboratively with the Department. There is a feeling that there is no one,

beyond the superintendent and the board of education, that a district can work with down in Trenton. There is the opportunity to come and present before you, but to a degree I think some of us might even feel that it's after the fact. And that's to our shame. But nevertheless, I think we need to have a more cooperatively or collaboratively structured Department, so that we can have people that we can talk to, so that we can have folks that we can rely on.

Neptune Township recently underwent two CAPA reviews. And we appreciate the things that were brought to us. However, folks from the Department on the CAPA teams did not know or were not aware of certain State Department of Education mandates that limited the ability of the district to implement the recommendations of this CAPA review team. And actually, in exit conferences, that became a focal point of them arguing with the district regarding the ability to implement changes.

I think there's a need to hold harmless the Abbott districts that have relied so long -- if in fact there is a dismantling that is taking place, be it through a funding formula, through Treasury, as opposed to an educationally equitable program. I think the Abbott districts need to be protected, because many of the safeguards that were put in place to keep our schools safe to address the social concerns of our students will be some of the first things to be let go.

And while the funding formula is being discussed, and while the difficulties that you wrestle with are being worked out, I would ask that you take particular care and concern regarding the children who are the least able to fend for themselves and the most delicately positioned. And I would ask that all of us, including the Abbott districts themselves, the

superintendents and boards of education, that we ratchet down the Abbott rhetoric; that we ratchet down the 101.5 talk; that we ratchet down us versus them, Abbott versus non-Abbott.

I believe the Governor is correct, and he says we need to address the needs of all of the children of New Jersey. But there are some that are poor; there are some that are more needy. And it is a scriptural admonition to all of us to protect the poor, to provide for the poor, to care for the poor, to feed the poor -- and the Abbott districts do that. There are other rim districts, if you will, marginal districts, nearby districts to Abbotts that suffer the same sorts of effects. And they need help, they need remedy, they need aid as well. But we have an obligation. We have a moral obligation. We have a humanitarian obligation, as we try to fulfill the educational needs of our students.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Thank you.

I just had-- Well, one thing, I want to just let you know that, as far as I'm concerned -- and I believe Co-Chair feels the same way, but he can speak for himself -- is there is no dismantling of programs concerning needy students. There's no intent on my part to see that happen. I don't think, and I would hope, there is no intent on anyone's part to see that happen. I noticed that the Department eliminated the -- perhaps you're referring to the Department's elimination of the Division I Abbott Implementation. Which, personally, I thought it was maybe a little counterintuitive to do that, in light of the fact that the Department is supposed to be doing an evaluation -- or having an evaluation done on the entire Department; and perhaps any changes to the Department should

have been made after that evaluation was done, as opposed to doing changes before the outside, independent evaluation is done. But that's another story. But certainly it is not the intent to have needed programs disassembled and eliminated. Because if we do that, we certainly face another court challenge. The idea is to come up with a funding formula that would, in fact, provide all the resources needed for the Abbott districts as well as the other districts, that would meet constitutional muster, as the Governor has mentioned on more than one occasion.

I had a question regarding the cap, and I just wanted to know if you could go into that a little bit further, with respect to how the cap impacts you -- last year to this year -- and the restrictions on your raising local levy?

MR. MOOIJ: I believe it's S-1 (*sic*) that had the 4 percent cap, is that correct? I may or may not be correct on that. But the 4 percent cap that was passed by the joint bodies of the Legislature and signed by the Governor is what I'm referring to. There is a formula that the State Department of Education, ostensibly the Treasury, uses to determine the ability of an Abbott district to contribute to its Abbott standing, financially. And in Neptune that particular formula indicated that the district should be contributing \$1.5 million. In reality, the cap law determined that that contribution could be no more than \$1.161 million -- rounded off, \$1.2 million. So the delta really is about \$350,000 to \$400,000, between what the State's own formula says the locals should be contributing, but cannot. Therefore, the local contribution, if it were available -- and I'm not saying it is or it isn't -- if it were available and the cap were not in place, we would be saving approximately eight to 10 jobs with that difference in cap.

What's unique this year is that a number of districts had their State aid reduced by exactly that cap amount. And our State aid was reduced by \$1.16 million, and our max cap on the local tax levy was \$1.16 million -- exactly the same number. I don't think that's coincidence. That seems to me to be a calculated dismantling. That's what I was referring to.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: You mentioned that your schools are going to take up more energy next year than this year. Do you have more schools that you're going to be supplying energy to? Is that what that situation is?

MR. MOOIJ: Same number of schools, larger schools, and up to current codes. Some of the buildings were 1927, that have been replaced. There was no ventilation other than a radiator. And now there's air coming into the room as we have here. And that's being powered by fans, and that's electric. We actually reduced our gas consumption by having geothermal installed, but it still requires electric to move the pumps, to move the water, and to move the air across those cooling coils. So it's electric that's going up, and it's triple what it was this past school year.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: But your overall energy -- is your overall energy bill going to go up, or is it going to down in cost?

MR. MOOIJ: It's triple. The overall--

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: So your savings on gas isn't compensated by your--

MR. MOOIJ: It does not compensate -- come close to compensating for it.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: All right. I guess the schools will be more comfortable though?

MR. MOOIJ: Yes. And quite frankly, we've done measurement analysis already, and we have better attendance rates by both teachers and students. There's less sickness as a result. The ASRA standards are correct; the Code is correct. It just requires more energy to do it.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Okay.

Assemblyman Wolfe -- I know he has to go. And then, Assemblyman Baroni, we'll come back to you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Yes. Thank you for your testimony. I've heard you speak before, and you have a very organized presentation.

What I really want to say to you is not directed at you; but as a legislator from Monmouth County, I used to represent a lot of towns in that county, but I don't any more. I only represent Manasquan. But from other administrators and other educators, I've heard the following comments -- and I don't know the whole story. You had some chairs that you wanted to give to one of the neighboring districts and you couldn't give them. They had to buy the chairs. Is that true?

MR. MOOIJ: No.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: No?

MR. MOOIJ: We gave them.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: You gave them, okay.

MR. MOOIJ: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Because I was told they had to buy them, okay? You may not be aware of what that was, but it was-- Maybe that's an urban legend.

The second is, in Long Branch, the superintendent of Long Branch -- I don't think he's here today -- is an outspoken, eloquent advocate for the Abbott districts, and I really respect his opinions. But I know that he, a year or so ago, was lamenting the fact that he just wanted some new windows in his school district in one of the buildings. And he was required to not only have windows, but air conditioning and all types of changes, which he didn't feel really were necessary -- but they were required, I guess, as part of the State construction issues. It had nothing to do with you, but that's something else.

And the other thing, directly with your district, is concerns that I have heard about perhaps over-engineering of your new facilities; whether an auditorium or an arboretum, or some type of structure like that, is included in your new facility. Is that true?

MR. MOOIJ: An arboretum?

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Right.

MR. MOOIJ: No.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Do you have an auditorium?

MR. MOOIJ: Neptune has its first-ever auditorium.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: A natatorium?

MR. MOOIJ: A natatorium, no. We don't have a natatorium.

ASSEMBLYMAN WOLFE: Okay. Well, those are three things that-- Again, I don't represent Monmouth County -- that part -- but those are things that had been brought to my attention. Perhaps from detractors from the Abbott districts; but I think that's the type of stuff that legislators hear.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: Thank you, Senator Rice.

And Superintendent Mooij, I must tell you -- David just said this -- you make an extraordinarily good presentation, and I mean that. You are an eloquent advocate both for your district and other Abbott districts. So please take my questions in that light.

Let me ask you at the start -- there's a purpose for my questions. I was very both heartened and intrigued by the philosophical commentary that you made, and agree with it. But let me ask you a couple things. Round numbers vaguely, how much do you spend per student in your school district?

MR. MOOIJ: Well, it depends on whose formula you look at; and yes, through the Department, there are actually three different numbers. But it's about -- probably around \$12,400 per student this year.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: Understanding that the *Abbott* district cases, going back to *Robinson*, have always understood that more money needs to be spent in Abbott districts, because the challenges that both the school and the community at large face -- so understandably, there's going to be difference between one district and another -- you made a comment in your presentation that we had a moral responsibility to educate children. I agree. And I think the court cases have agreed from the very beginning. I think, at its core, that is the basic non-legal core of the *Abbott/Robinson* cases -- that we have a responsibility.

I believe, however, that we have a moral responsibility not just to the kids, which we do; we also have a moral responsibility to the taxpayers to make sure that all 12,000, or whatever the number is, is not just spent, but spent well. And that's not a commentary on your district. I

think we have a moral responsibility not just to the kids, but to the taxpayers to make sure their money is spent well.

Here's my question: You said you spend about \$12,000 per student. I am not questioning what you're spending. In my hometown and home district of Hamilton, we spend about 8,500 -- not, again, questioning the difference. There's clearly reasons for differences. And I'm sure Howell and Freehold Township, and some of your neighboring communities spend less than yours, perhaps -- perhaps. What do I say to a parent who comes to a town meeting in Hamilton when they read in the newspaper -- again, not about your district specifically, just generally -- some -- including my colleague Dave Wolfe said -- perhaps urban legends? How do I respond when they say the money is not being spent well when you see jukeboxes being purchased and trips being taken and-- I agree with you, we need to have moral responsibility. But I also agree with some of my constituents who say, for example, in South Brunswick they're talking about getting rid of all their kindergartens -- they can no longer afford it. But they see these stories. And I'm certainly not blaming the press, but they see these stories. How can we both -- how can we be both morally responsible to our kids and morally responsible to our taxpayers?

MR. MOOIJ: I'll use your example as a parent coming to the Hamilton Board of Education: In Neptune, in Asbury Park, maybe in Long Branch, maybe in Keansburg, the parents don't come. Because the parents may not care as much as the parents in Hamilton Township or South Brunswick, or elsewhere. Many of our kids come to school hungry, because they weren't fed at home; the same clothes today because they don't have clothes to change to that are even clean or different from yesterday. Many

of our kids bring, if you will, baggage with them. I think a lot of the difference between the Abbott districts and the Hamilton Townships of the world, the East Windsors of the world -- who are struggling right now, as we can see -- is that there are parents at home, maybe -- probably two parents at home who are actively involved in their kids lives. And they take some of that baggage away from their kids at home, or the kids don't even have to pack their baggage.

In Neptune, in Asbury, and a lot of Abbott districts, those kids come and we try to get that baggage checked at the door, if you will. We use social workers, we use guidance counselors, we use child study teams within our schools. We have internal attendance officers. We have safety officers to provide a safe place for these children. I dare say that a Columbine could happen anywhere in the United States at any time, however there's a greater likelihood to have violence take place in the urban school settings. So I think it's a little-- There are more things that the Abbott districts are required, by their nature, to provide the opportunity for education. They have to do these auxiliary activities that are very costly in order to provide a setting in which kids can learn.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: And again, one final question. I understand that. And clearly, the '97 *Abbott* case, maybe more than any of the others, the Court directly addressed those issues. You call them auxiliary; they're clearly important to the nature of learning -- a child who comes to school, and as your phrase is, "hunger, same clothing," and rhetorically, "with baggage." I understand that. You make a very persuasive case, and I agree. But what about the stories day after day that we seem to see in the papers about waste? How do I explain to my

constituents, “You’re about to lose your all-day kindergarten, but ignore all of that”? Because how do you do both?

SENATOR RICE: Assemblyman, if I may -- and I hate to do this -- but I’m going to take the prerogative of the Chair. I’ve always referred to a question of that magnitude, somewhat rhetorical questions -- because this superintendent cannot explain how you explain in Hamilton. But let me give you some suggestions, some real life, Ron Rice suggestions.

First of all, I would explain to the people, as I do in my district, that you are correct. I read these stories -- some are urban legends, some are suburban legends; some are just plain, good old fashioned politics; and some are realities. And because we have 600-or-so school districts, I think as their representative -- in this case, you’re Hamilton -- that I’m going to look at the issue that’s brought to me directly relating to that school district. If it’s 10 districts, I will look at 10 districts to determine, number one, if the information is factual; and I will work hard to get accountability there. But I’m not going to paint all the districts the same.

And let me explain to you the difference between 12,000 in this district versus 8,000 in our districts. Because there are other districts that are paying more than 12,000 and others paying less. The difference is, if I go and take the time to do my homework, even though I work everyday and I’m busy, I find out that these are things this district has, in terms of needs, that we don’t have a need for. And I would explain to them, in Hamilton, every household is different, and we pay property taxes. But you’re not going to paint every household in Hamilton with the same paint brush because a couple of drug families, or gang members, decide to go wild. And so we have to travel. Unfortunately, most of our colleagues have other

employment that they have to commit to. But we're going to have to take the time and not listen to 101.5, not read the *Star-Ledger*, or the *Times*. Because, I used to see my name in the *Star-Ledger* when they wanted to create a controversy. See, all the good we do is never there. We have to take the time to say, "Well, I read the article. I heard 101.5." But like I did this Summer, I'm not going to go and play golf; I'm going to Whiting, New Jersey. I heard the Democrats in my Committee, I heard the Republicans in my Committee -- but there's something missing. I'm going to Whiting, New Jersey, and I'm going to hear from the people.

And so we have a greater responsibility, as well, to explain with information, and let people know that we are leading, that we are concerned. And explain to them: Don't pit this one against this one, because there are circumstances that are different; there are circumstances that are unique; and there are common grounds. And I believe that the majority of New Jersey, when you speak to them in that fashion, as long as you're sincere -- not you personally, *you* third person -- they understand that. But then they're going to hold us accountable for looking into what we say we're going to look into, and come back. I have yet to have a problem explaining. And I've been to Morristown, when Jack Ewing chaired this Committee. I've been up and down the state explaining to people what is really taking place.

If we're going to allow a thousand people to come into the room yelling and screaming, and not take control of the meeting where people can get real information and learn -- because it's always set up at these meetings -- then we're not going to be able to explain. And what we're going to do, we're going to do the apple pie, motherhood thing that

traditionally happens in Trenton, even on this Committee some times, calling everybody corrupt, saying most people can't manage. And if that's the case, you can get rid of all of the superintendents and bring in new ones -- we are going to say the same thing; and get all the teachers -- say the same thing.

And so we have a greater responsibility too, as elected officials; and let folks know that as long as I'm elected I'm going to represent you well, but I'm not going to buy into all the rhetoric I read and hear. I will go and find out for myself.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: And Mr. Chairman, I--

SENATOR RICE: And that's one way we have to do it.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: And Mr.--

SENATOR RICE: I've lived that life for 21 years, and I find that to be very effective in the community. Because people want real information, and they can understand real information. They may not agree, but they can understand.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: Mr. Chairman, I agree with you. And the reason why I had asked Superintendent Mooij is, he made an extraordinarily good presentation -- one of the best that I've seen.

SENATOR RICE: Excellent, best I've seen.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: But Mr. Chairman, my point is, I agree with the superintendent that we shouldn't be dividing Abbott and non-Abbott, and we shouldn't be-- But Mr. Chairman, if we want to bring New Jerseyans together, regardless of whether we live in an Abbott district or non-Abbott district -- which I think the superintendent certainly said it very, very well, and we all agree with-- Mr. Chairman, we're never going to

get people in non-Abbott districts to come to the realization that you want them to until we directly address the issue of waste. We're never going to do it. I want people to join in this moral responsibility. But how can I have them join in the moral responsibility, but at the same time say, "But the waste, don't worry about it." We have to worry about it.

SENATOR RICE: I agree, and I'm sure my colleagues agree. And Bloomfield is here, and they're going to speak next.

ASSEMBLYMAN BARONI: Thank you, Chair.

SENATOR RICE: They're non-Abbott. They do understand. And I think that's what the superintendent is saying. Let me tell you something: When I sit on this Committee here, and someone is saying everybody is corrupt in Monmouth County, or they have problems down there, that's politics. And I won't tolerate it without fighting back and holding them accountable. But when people read that and they believe in the person saying that in the district, then you can't talk to them. I will come to Hamilton and talk to the people if you want me to, with you, if there's a problem. I've gone up and down the state to do that, because I don't care if people yell at me and scream. I let them know I come to talk to you, if you want to hear you can hear. If you want to yell and scream, then we can put the meeting someplace else.

But the majority of the people want us to be legislators and give them facts. I've just come from that, over the Summer, with eminent domain, SCI investigation, and all of that condominium stuff.

And so, you are correct. We're going to be one New Jersey, and it's difficult bringing people together. Not because people won't come together and understand. It's because we have 120 legislators, and we're

sending different messages based on our ability to get elected, in many cases, versus the realities of what we should be saying and doing with people. That's the big difference. And I will come to Hamilton. I have friends in Hamilton -- a great mayor in Hamilton. And I will come down there and address the people any time you want. And that invitation goes to any member on this Committee. You don't have to take the heat. You don't have to be afraid to talk to people in your district when they yell and scream. They don't scream at me. I chair the Committee. I would explain the reality of life to them in any district in this state; and I've done that before, and I will continue to do it. But I just wanted to say--

Any more questions for him? I'm sorry.

Assemblyman, go ahead.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Thank you.

And actually, since you mentioned accountability, Assembly Bill 4060 has a very good accountability component in it as well, so that we won't be back here next year talking about how much it costs, whether costs are excessive, or whether there's not an accountability mechanism. So just since you brought it up, I figured I'd give a plug to A-4060 again.
(laughter)

SENATOR RICE: You have two questions?

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Actually, I think we covered my questions. I think some of the other members have questions.

Senator Kean.

SENATOR KEAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Mooij, I agree with the other members of this Committee that that was a very cogent piece of testimony; and a lot of philosophical things you talked about, many of us do agree with. I was a little taken aback because your response to my inquiry was not that individuals weren't here -- and I praise those individuals who are here in this room. My concern was for those individuals who are in leadership positions in the schools, who have a responsibility on a daily basis to look after the best interest of those children and those parents within that school district. Seventeen of those individuals who were invited -- 17 of the 31-- after repeated requests and invitations and follow-up phone calls, and faxes as well as phone calls, didn't bother to respond to the request to appear. I understand we are all busy. A number of individuals have been unable to attend because of scheduling conflicts, and they had the responsiveness and responsibility to respond. You were able to make it, and we are grateful for that as a Committee. But I think if we're talking about State aid, that individuals should at least be able to return a phone call, or respond to a fax, when we're talking-- So we can have insights, maybe at a future date, from those individuals. That was the area of my concern. We're trying to make the place where we're not turning individuals against each other within this community of New Jersey. We need to have all the information on the table.

Now, what I would like to get from you is, you stated very cogently some of the realities that you face on a daily basis that are different than some other school districts in this state. If I may ask, what are some of the best practices that you have experienced or implemented that may not be in place -- and since we are today talking about solely or

primarily, I think, Abbott districts -- that may not be in place in other districts, that are subject to the State's Supreme Court ruling?

MR. MOOIJ: First of all, my apologies, Senator Kean. Because it's one of those comments that I made in my introduction that I just said to myself, "I probably should not have said that." So apologies.

SENATOR KEAN: I just want to make sure we're on the same page; we both understand what we were both saying.

MR. MOOIJ: I understand. Absolutely, I understand.

I think the differences, if I may -- somewhat to the answer of Assemblyman Baroni -- I think the difference that an Abbott district, or our district might have, as opposed to another district or a number of Abbott districts: coaches, educational leaders within the individual school to work with teachers in teaching them the best practices; bringing the research from the central office level to the classroom -- the connection.

SENATOR KEAN: These are things that you have done within your district that are successful that may or may not--

MR. MOOIJ: These are things that came out of *Abbott V*, and similar decisions from the court, that have produced best practices scenarios, where you have instructional coaches who actually can teach a new teacher, or instruct, or share with a new teacher how to teach; as well as a senior teacher -- 20-, 25-year veteran. As research comes forward, new practices come forward.

Gordon MacInnes took a lot of flack from a lot of different areas, but Gordon brought together best practices in the Abbott districts, that took place in Union City and West New York, and said, "The scores are going up here, and here's what they're doing, and you should take a

look at that.” And he was able to manipulate, if you will, in a positive sense, a lot of the superintendents, a lot of the districts -- urban districts, to share those things for best practice improvement, if you will.

Quite frankly, when I talked about the collaborative nature of the Department that we need to have moving forward, I don’t think that exists really on any other level, district to district, sharing best practices. And that would be a good opportunity for us all to improve and maybe all to take down the walls.

SENATOR KEAN: But things that you are specifically doing in your district of Neptune--

MR. MOOIJ: Yes.

SENATOR KEAN: --that you would bring to the Committee, either now or do a follow-up response, that would say, “These are practices that we have found--”

MR. MOOIJ: To be beneficial.

SENATOR KEAN: “--that they’re beneficial, both to the student, as well as the finances of the district.”

MR. MOOIJ: Absolutely.

SENATOR KEAN: If you have some concrete examples that you have done under your leadership, I know that I, through the Chairmen, would greatly appreciate hearing some of your real life experiences that we could bring elsewhere.

MR. MOOIJ: We’d be more than happy to do that. In fact, Assemblyman, Chairman of the Budget, Lou Greenwald was down for about 3-and-a-half, 4 hours this past Summer just for that. He contacted our districts, saw our status of being the second lowest-spending, next door to

the highest-spending district in the State of New Jersey, and wanted to know what the differences would be.

And again, the answer to Assemblyman Baroni's question would have been, what are the differences? I can only speak, as Senator Rice said, for Neptune Township. I don't know about my neighboring district why, but I can tell what we're doing.

SENATOR KEAN: My question was to you, Neptune Township.

MR. MOOIJ: And if other people did that, maybe they could save some money as well. So we'd be available to do that, certainly.

SENATOR KEAN: Thank you.

Now, I will reiterate that I am disheartened that the other 17 of those districts are not here today; but I urge that they would be able to, for the record, get some of those responses back to us.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Let me thank you, Senator.

I'm disheartened also. I'm also disheartened because I feel that some of our colleagues aren't spending enough time communicating with those superintendents within the districts themselves.

The next speaker to come up, after the Committee is finished, is a new superintendent. And we sat down, from day one, in our delegation to find out what our problems are. We reached out, hearing those problems recently, and said please come to this Committee meeting, even though you're a non-Abbott.

And let me say for the record, people talk about changes. We don't know what the changes are going to be within the administration.

And if we don't like them, we're going to legislate and fight back anyway. So I wouldn't get as paranoid right now until we can determine -- and I'm speaking *we*, meaning the legislators, Chair of the Education Committee, Chair of the Joint Committee, and others. But we do know one thing. The one thing we've always discussed is the fact that there are Abbott districts, if they remain Abbotts as we know it, are going to be looked at. There are districts that are near the -- in a position that they may not be classified, under definition, as Abbotts any more; and there are districts that are classified as non-Abbott districts that may very well wind up being classified as Abbott districts. And so my colleagues need to be very careful about how you walk through this whole scenario, because those who claim -- allege and in reality do not represent Abbott districts right now may very well find yourself representing an "Abbott district." And so we've got to make sure this stuff is done right.

The other thing is, that I want to mention to you before I put the Assembly people back on, is we're going to be holding a hearing and we're going to call Commissioner Davy in, because the hue and cry of collaboration, that I hear from you, is not new to me. I chair a Committee -- a very important Committee. This is one of the most important Committees in the State of New Jersey. And we have problems and questions raised, and I don't get immediate responses. I expect commissioners to get on the phone -- if I have to take the time to call, I expect them to call right back. And so I understand that collaboration. That has never happened in the 21 years I've been here.

Commissioner Librera is going to call you one way or the other, whether we agree or disagree, to find out what the problems are. We have

mixed feelings about some of these people who are no longer there. Gordon is one, bless him.

But the thing is, is that this needs to be -- people are going to set down and understand what superintendents are saying, respectfully disagree and agree, and then find a way to move without threatening people, without pulling back. They're not listening in that Department. I was hoping it would get better. I'm going to respect the fact that the Commissioner is new. But some times I think that her response is based on the front office okaying the response. And I have to try to get that straightened out -- and I'm saying that for the record, because I'm not a happy camper with the kind of response we get from the Department of Education.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Let me--

SENATOR RICE: The 4 percent cap -- I'm sorry -- we're going to look into that. And I think that the Assemblyman needs to look into it even more so in the Education Committee, because I'm concerned. We learn as we listen that our 4 percent cap was the amount of aid that we were basically reduced by, and I've got to figure out what those numbers mean. Okay?

I'm sorry. Assemblyman, go ahead.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: I just wanted to mention that the list that -- Senator Kean, I hope is not gone for the duration -- but the list that he has does not include all the contacts that were made and the superintendents who responded. I know Dr. Epps, from Jersey City, initially said that he would be able to make it, but he's not on this list. But that he subsequently called -- had a situation in his district, and would not

be able to make it. So I just wanted to-- I didn't want people to get the-- Sometimes you hear the wrong thing enough and you start thinking it's the right thing or it's fact. The fact of the matter is, is that 18 out of 31 superintendents are not no-shows. That is not correct. So I just wanted to make that clear, so that the press doesn't think that that's accurate for the record.

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR RICE: Before we call up the next speaker, let me first of all, number one, thank you for coming. You're very articulate. And you know what? It wasn't up here. If anybody in this room couldn't understand what you were saying, then we need to talk in more sidebars and maybe get them some help.

The other side of this, the special ed piece, we've argued that case for years. Your teachers' unions have argued that case, that we can do a better job here. And we know the costs out of district is getting to be tremendous. And I know the Governor is very much concerned about that, and we're going to work with the Governor; as well as with Assemblyman Stanley and his Committee, and Senator Shirley Turner and the Education Committee in the Senate, to really try to address that. Because we do believe we can do a better job; especially, at the same time, save dollars.

The other piece is that, once again, the information that Senator Kean requested -- best practices or-- And we're not talking about best practices across the country; we're talking about best practices in your district. Your district's best practices may be some things that we can look at that work in some districts and don't work in others. And that's one of the problems I'm having. When people say best practices, what happens in

Union City is not necessarily going to happen in a bigger district, like the district of Newark. It may work in Elizabeth, but it may not work in East Orange. And so we need to get what everybody is doing, and have an opportunity to put together kind of a tool chest of best practices, if you will, with the options to use whatever best fits that district.

Once again, thank you very much.

I apologize to all the superintendents, because the Governor just gave his message. Everybody is moving on budget, and so this Committee is just getting an opportunity to call you in. What we don't get straightened out now, we still need the testimony, because we still have to do budgets between now and July 1; and you're not going to get a budget struck until after June the 5th. And if we're not here, you probably won't even get a budget -- the way everybody is quitting. But beyond that, we have to look future. So never think you're too late. You may be too late for the time, but not too late for tomorrow, if we can survive the times we're in.

With that, the next speaker coming up -- because I want to give an opportunity to hear the other side of it, which will be directly related to the next hearing we're going to have, hopefully, or one of the future hearings we're going to have, with non-Abbotts. But why don't we call up the Superintendent of Bloomfield?

Frank, are you still here?

Give your name for the record, Frank.

F R A N K J. D I G E S E R E: I'm Frank Digesere, and I'm the Superintendent of Schools in Bloomfield, New Jersey.

Excuse me? Push this? Is that better?

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Yes. Red is on.

MR. DIGESERE: Frank Digesere, and I'm the Superintendent of Schools in Bloomfield.

I guess, just get started?

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Please. Yes. The floor is yours.

MR. DIGESERE: Okay. Well, first of all, thanks for having me here today. I guess I'm the one non-Abbott district superintendent that's here. And I appreciate the invite from Senator Rice and Assemblyman Stanley.

I kind of feel a little uncomfortable because, obviously, some of the things that I'm about to say maybe look like, or could appear, that I'm looking at what the Abbott districts get and Bloomfield doesn't, and I feel we should. And consequently, it seems like it could be a me against them kind of situation. And that's clearly what I don't want to portray. What I want to portray here is just the needs of Bloomfield, and I get paid by Bloomfield and it's my job to represent Bloomfield. So consequently, that's what I care to do.

But I'd like to start out by just reading a school spending study, and this came from the Department of Education. It says that the Department of Education study, designed to determine just how much New Jersey ought to be spending on its public schools, found that roughly half of the State's school districts do not have adequate funding. The Department of Analysis says that on the average, the State's neediest districts, which receive extra State aid under the State's Supreme Court *Abbott v. Burke* orders, are getting what they need. Among the wealthiest communities, the study said that the majority are spending more, and even in some cases far more, than necessary to provide the teachers and services their pupils need.

But it found that many less well-off districts, which do not have high local tax revenues, but don't qualify for Abbott aid, are unable to adequately fund their schools. And I think that's the reason I'm here today.

I'm not saying what the Abbott districts receive they shouldn't receive. What I'm saying is that there are other districts that are in need, and we are not receiving the money that we need. In the case of Bloomfield, we're the lowest in the county. And the study that took-- They actually studied the '04 school year. Bloomfield actually spent \$55 million on education. We actually needed \$68 million. We spent 58; we actually needed \$68 million -- nearly 20 percent below what we actually needed. Now, I think that is a very relevant point: that we need to raise our per pupil spending based on the needs to adequately fund our educational system.

I think another point that I want to bring out is, in the year 2003-2004, Bloomfield had 942 students on free lunch, from the free lunch program. As of today, we have 1,562 students on the free lunch program. That's a 66 percent increase to our program. And through that whole time, we didn't receive any additional State aid. Now, this is clearly showing you what's happening in a district like Bloomfield. To quote No Child Left Behind, and use the terminology of economically disadvantaged, "Economically disadvantaged students are moving into Bloomfield at a rapid rate, and we are not receiving any additional help from the State of New Jersey in handling that." We're consequently having to tax our own people to handle that situation -- 66 percent increase.

I have had the opportunity to work in two school districts. This is my first year as Superintendent of Schools, and I'm in Bloomfield.

Prior to that, I spent 33 years working in the school district of Kearny, and I worked my way up from music teacher to high school principal, and then moved on to Bloomfield to be superintendent. Also, Kearny was a district in this fluctuation, where you would look at people coming into the town under the economically disadvantaged situation, as well as under the ESL and under the Special Education situations, that are really infesting many of our school districts right now. Kearny, though, had the opportunity to receive rim money at some point. I thought that was rather interesting: that rim money clearly looks at the fact that, if you are on the borders of certain districts you will be receiving certain students from those certain districts; and consequently, many of them, if they are Abbott districts -- and that's what rim money is all based on -- it's based on the fact that you border Abbott districts. When the students move into your district, you're going to need more money to handle the economically disadvantaged situation that they bring with them.

And I kind of found it interesting that Kearny, where I worked for 33 years, that it borders Jersey City, and it borders Harrison, and it borders East Newark. East Newark is like a one-school district, which is an Abbott district. And then I looked at Bloomfield, which borders Newark and East Orange. Geographically, it borders way more distance than Kearny does; and population-wise, I would believe it's much more. Consequently, we're not a rim district, because we don't have the fortunate situation of touching three borders; while Kearny, where I worked, has the luxury of touching three borders. And consequently, they can receive \$2 to \$3 million more in State aid than Bloomfield. The whole funding situation just seems preposterous for me. I don't understand it. I can't reason it.

I'm new at being a superintendent. But as I sit here, I say to myself, "It just doesn't make sense." It just doesn't make sense at all to me.

We're spending much, much less than we should. We have the lowest per pupil spending in the County of Essex. And I would think 20 percent below what we actually need is probably one of the lowest in the state. In the meantime, you're faced with not receiving State aid and an enormous amount of mandated programs. And your mandated programs that come in aren't funded, aren't funded to the level that they should be. So what do you have to do?

And I've identified this a little bit, and I guess this can be a little critical, but I'm here to speak my mind. I find this a little -- I guess the word would be *annoying*, if you really would not mind me saying it. I find it annoying that I have mandated programs coming from the Federal Government and the State; you do not fund them to the capacity that they should be, when everyone knows if you mandate it, you should fund it. And then, consequently, what happens after that is, you're telling me that I have to put these programs into operation. So consequently, I do. And the only way that I can possibly do it -- and that's by raising property taxes to the level that I have, to do it. And then you sit down here in Trenton and criticize me for raising property taxes. I find it hypocrisy at its highest. And I didn't come here to criticize, but I'm speaking my mind today. I'm insulted by that, that I have to sit here day after day and listen, coming out of Trenton, that we -- our property taxes are too high. It's the mandated programs that raise our property taxes. And it's the mandated programs that aren't funded that causes to raise our property taxes. And that's the bottom line here.

I mean, a couple years back, when I was a high school principal, I guess if I put 100 people in a room and I said to that 100 people, “Hey, look, wouldn’t it be a better thing for a high school kid to take three years of science instead of two years of science?” I would say that 98, 99 -- maybe even 100 out of a 100 -- would say, “Yes, every high school kid should take three years of science instead of two years of science.” And that would be almost to a rule, I would bet. Except for one thing: at the time, science was a two-year -- a two-year high school graduation requirement. When that law changed and it became a three year, which everybody would say is a wonderful thing, the one thing we all forgot to look at was we didn’t have enough science teachers. Nobody made any accommodations for that. We were running out all over the state picking up science teachers everywhere we could find them. Consequently, some of the more affluent districts, which could afford to bring ground-level entry people in, did.

Districts like I was in, where our pay scale wasn’t the same, we had no choice but to bring in what the higher-level people didn’t want at a higher rate. It turned out we had to accommodate this. Where my high school at the time only -- I would say about 60 percent of our students took three years of science, where the other 40 percent didn’t; which meant about 800 kids had to be accommodated for an extra year of science. Do you know what we discovered? We didn’t have the teachers and we didn’t have the science labs. So now what we had to do -- and especially knowing that science now is being put on us as a new graduation requirement from HSPA -- all of a sudden now we’re faced with building labs, hiring teachers, creating programs, and we’re not receiving one cent for it.

And at the same exact time, just about within a year of it, somebody else came up with the idea -- wonderful idea -- every high school student should take two years of a foreign language to graduate high school. They had it at two, backed it down to one; but the same fact was, it was never a high school graduation requirement. Now what we're faced with is running out and getting high school foreign language teachers. All this money -- your mandated programs: your ESL programs, your busing programs, your free lunch, your breakfast programs, your No Child Left Behind coming out of the Federal Government; all of these things. And then this year: A little bit extra State tax. But all of a sudden, we find that we have to put \$450,000 extra out to pay pension benefits for non-teaching employees. It just keeps coming and it keeps coming and it keeps coming, and the base stays low. And then you put a 4 percent cap on the district. Consequently, we can't even raise the money.

I'm saying that I'm \$16,000, \$17,000, \$18,000 less than what I actually need to run the school district. Well, even if the people of Bloomfield decided one day, "Hey, you know what? Tax us the \$18,000," you can't even tax it because of the cap. I can't even bring the current programs that I have right now, because of the cap and the lower spending base that I have -- and let's throw a couple defeated budgets into that. Because when you're taxing people that can't afford it more than they can afford, then they defeat the budget -- the only budget that they get to vote on. And they defeat it, and your base keeps shrinking and shrinking and shrinking, and that 4 percent means less and less and less, because you can't raise the money to the point of where you really want it, and you can't raise your budget to meet your operating expenses.

I have programs right now that I have no choice but to go to a second question. I have to go to a second question. And I'm putting programs like preschool, I'm putting programs like gifted and talented situations all in this second question.

Unfortunately -- I don't want to say this but, obviously, a couple of weeks ago we had a shooting on the streets of Bloomfield. I'm sure many of you heard about it, and it was a Bloomfield High School student, and one that was questionable Bloomfield High School/Newark; but it was a legal resident of Bloomfield. And there was a shooting that took place, and one person was killed in it and the second person was wounded. Both of the two victims were non-high school students and non-Bloomfield residents. But the one Bloomfield resident was a Bloomfield High School student. And now, of course, we're looking at security issues now. Security issues that we so desperately need and we should have had in place long, long ago, based on the concept of an urban district an -- urban-type district -- but the change that's starting to take place. So those funds -- I have to put a \$200,000 camera security system into the high school this year, specifically because -- not specifically because of this situation, but this has a lot to do with it.

You're faced with, day after day, the running of your school districts and not the aid and the help that you're supposed to get from Trenton. And I don't want to handle this where they talk about the middle class always being the target. Well, I kind of think in the school district, we aren't getting any help, and we are the middle class district. I look at a place like West Essex that's paying almost 20 percent more in education than they need -- actually 25 percent more. Well, the people

there are wealthy people; they can afford to tax themselves into a situation where they have the ability to educate their children at the rate that they want to.

And as I said, I believe the Abbott districts needs every dollar that they have; because I have many Abbott students, Abbott students in my school district, and I know how difficult it is to educate them when you don't have the funds that are necessary to educate students with family issues, and special ed, and ESL, and economically disadvantaged situations. So basically, I think that there has to be a whole revisit to what is necessary. I'm, right now, very afraid that my budget is going to go down again, and my second question is going to go down again. I've been out every night pushing it, trying to at least let people understand why we're in the situation that we're in. So "Please support the budget; please support the second question." I don't know if they're going to, because--

I have a 79-year-old mom and an 80-year-old dad, and many people like to blame senior citizens for the school woes that currently exist. And my mom and dad live in Lyndhurst and I say to them, "Vote for the budget in Lyndhurst." And they tell me that they do. When they walk into there, but of course -- when they walk in there, I don't know who they vote for or what they vote for.

But I will say this. I will say this: My father was a plumber his whole life. He lives on a plumber's pension. If he voted "No" on the school budget in Lyndhurst, myself being the superintendent, I wouldn't blame him. I wouldn't blame him. The man has to make ends meet, and the man is trying to keep his home in Lyndhurst, and he's trying to do it the best way he possibly can. And the taxes keep going up, and I understand that.

It's a difficult situation to be in. You don't want to walk around saying, "Senior citizens shouldn't not vote for the budget, they should vote for the budget; and the people should vote for the budget." But people are having trouble, especially in a district that's changing like Bloomfield -- where that rim situation is a reality, and here are coming people into the district with economically disadvantaged situations who cannot make ends meet. And now we have to educate them. We have to make your No Child Left Behind -- not you -- our Federal Government's No Child Left Behind AYP. We have to find ways of doing this, and it's becoming more and more difficult. Difficult. I would say the word *difficult* is -- maybe near *impossible* is the correct word. If we don't see more funding, and if we don't see the things that we need, and if we don't see these mandated programs become funded as they should be, well then, I don't know where we're going to be in the future.

SENATOR RICE: Let me thank you very much for taking the time. I know you're very busy -- new district; you inherited deficits; the State is just making it worse for you, and you have to go out and meet your public to try to get them to understand. Let me also say, as was the first speaker, you are very articulate -- one of the best presentations I've heard made in a long time about the real needs, the real harm; not only to Bloomfield, but it represents so many of our districts. And you probably didn't realize it, because you prefaced your remarks saying you didn't want to be *anti*, you probably gave the best argument for Abbott, but at the same time identifying Bloomfield "as Abbott" in terms of needs. Unfortunately, when we say Abbott, people like to put a face to Abbott, and we don't like it. Because, at least in Abbott, they like to look and think that everybody

in the population is either dark or speaks a foreign language, and that's not true. They like to think that Abbotts are all poor people with no jobs, not working, the middle income people; not true. That's the stereotype and that's the people who never visit districts.

And so your argument was in support of Abbott in terms of need, and in support of those other districts that we don't call Abbotts that we know are, in their own way, Abbotts. We can call them *rim*. We can call them what we want. Based on need, we're in the same boat. And that's what this Committee has been arguing -- Republicans and Democrats -- to our colleagues and to the administration. We have to figure out how to strike that formula. And I continue to argue from a cost-benefits analysis -- a true cost-benefits analysis. Yes, we're going to have to find additional resources at the State to help. We can't take from Bloomfield to give to someone else, take from Camden and give to someone else. Get the dollars and we can manage them and oversee them, but we're going to have to bite bullets and look at our own priorities down here.

And so I'm just so pleased to have you in the district. I'm also -- just listening to you, I'm thinking this guy should be my commissioner. (laughter) But I mean really, because you understand it from the ground up. Like you said, you started in the classroom, you've been living this stuff, and you see what's happening. You've been seeing your old district change in terms of need.

I just need -- maybe the Co-Chair can tell me -- you know, he looks brighter than I am on this education stuff here; but it's the rim district piece that bothers me. Because you are right. I mean, I can touch five borders, and never maybe reach the same population with the greatest

number of needs if I only touch one border. And I know we all say out some stuff -- you know, call it *border* districts if it's not rim. But the thing is, we need to revisit that to figure out what all that means. Do we just say, if you have the need -- and that's where the Governor seems to be going -- if you have the need, you get addressed? Then the question is, what's the formula to address the need, without saying *touching three*.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Right.

Initially, the rim districts were going to be if you touched two districts, I believe; then they changed it so that you had to touch three districts instead of two. If you touched two -- ask Bloomfield (laughter) -- might even qualify as a rim. But because they bumped it up to three, then that made it a little different.

But one of the things that we did ask the Governor for, and I believe he complied, is that there would be additional dollars per at-risk students in the budget. And I see Jessica DeKoninck from the Department of Education is here. But I do believe that they -- I put her on the spot there, oh, gee whiz -- but I do believe that in the budget there is additional aid for at-risk student type of aid. And I think in Bloomfield, they qualify for that additional aid. And that's certainly a more equitable way to do it.

One of the problems, even if you're a rim district -- the Co-Chair brought the issue up in terms of need -- if you qualify rim, in other words you touch three districts, does that mean that you have a greater need? You know, you may have a greater need or you may not. But one of the problems is that if your budget fails -- and maybe you can elaborate -- if your budget fails, sometimes that additional aid can even be redirected into

tax relief, where you don't even get a chance to really spend that additional aid. It just becomes tax relief for individuals.

I think one of the most important things, though-- We had a tremendous presentation at the Assembly Education Committee, when we heard testimony on Assembly Bill 4060 regarding-- (laughter)

SENATOR KEAN: What number was that, Mr. Chairman?
(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: I wish I had the Senate Bill number for you. I'd give you that, too. (laughter)

But one of the -- testimony came from a person who had represented the South Orange/Maplewood School District for several years, and he talked about the transparency of the budget, of the school budget. And if people know -- and that's one of the things that we plan to work on, if we are able to get that bill passed and implement some of the changes that we want to do -- but we want to have transparent budgets so people see exactly what they're getting per student and what those costs are, so people understand what they're paying for. A lot of times people vote down budgets not because they don't want to pay the taxes -- well that's one of the reasons (laughter) -- I'm not living in a dream world. But one of the reasons -- and he really made this compelling argument, because they had budgets that failed. But when they developed the transparency in their budget, in presenting to the taxpayers they showed them exactly where every dollar was going. And taxpayers-- I mean, if you make the case -- I'm not saying you'll get 100 percent, but if you make the case and people understand where you're going and how efficient you're being-- I'm not

saying in all cases, but in some cases we could do a better job of making these budgets transparent.

Because I'll be honest with you, I look at school budgets and it is like-- It's almost -- you don't know where anything is going. All you see are these huge numbers, and you can't really translate them into what they're being used for or even outcomes.

But maybe you can touch on the issue of scale budgets and how that impacts you, and even the additional at-risk aid? I know there were initially some strings attached to that--

MR. DIGESERE: Right.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: --and then, subsequently, we got some of those restrictions relaxed. And I defer to Jessica again. I think some of those restrictions on the aid were relaxed and you had greater flexibility. And she's nodding her head in the affirmative, for the record.

MR. DIGESERE: Well, I think first we have to understand that we did receive some extra aid. At the same time, we received some extra benefit situations for non-teaching personnel, which ate up more than half of the aid. That's an issue I think we have to know. I mean, as one thing is given, something else is taken away, and that's almost on a constant basis. And I think we have to also look--

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: What restrictions were put on that? I'm asking because we're very concerned.

MR. DIGESERE: Well, no, that wasn't a restriction. That wasn't a restriction; that was another payment that had to come on, for nonpersonnel people, for their pension situation.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Okay. That wasn't tied to the aid, that was a separate issue?

MR. DIGESERE: Right.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: All right. But it impacts--

MR. DIGESERE: No. But tied to the aid, there was some restrictions on where you could use it and-- Well, that in itself was a whole adventure. My first budget that I ever had to put together like this, I found it to be an adventure, because we didn't get our numbers until the last minute. We didn't get our cap. When we did, we heard we were getting this; then we got that. Then we -- okay, sit down, redo it. Then they took it away and said you couldn't use it, except if you use it for that. Then we had to sit down and do another budget. And then we were told later on we could get it back, but with certain restrictions, so we had to sit down and do another budget.

That causes a problem within our own communities, because people felt -- not knowing, they felt that they weren't part of the process, where they normally should be part of the process. But how are you going to make them part of the process when you don't even know your numbers, when you don't even know what you're doing? And if you had the opportunity to go out and sell your budget and bring people in and say to people, "Hey, look, this is what we're doing -- be part of the formation of this, the creation of that, so that you understand, so at least you'll go out and support it." And you do that with your influential people. Every town has influential people that are -- either they're called influential or big mouths. (laughter) But either way, they're the people that you go after to

help you with this. This is the problem: You're not even getting your number at the right time.

Now, put that into another perspective. Let's take a look at facilities for a second. Up north, I mean, we built our schools when the community really didn't close in on them. We built our schools when people drove one car, if they were lucky to have it; maybe before some cars were even out there, at these points. Now, all of a sudden, you have these towns that don't have any land, our schools are 100-and-something years old, and they need work.

I'll tell you, like -- it's very easy for people to look over and say, "Well, why did you let that school fall apart? Why did you let that field fall apart?" It's very easy for people to do that and point a finger. I could tell you, I'm part of it too. Sit me in a room and then say to me, "Well, you just lost your budget, and they're taking \$1.3 million out of your budget. What goes?" So now I've got textbooks, blacktop -- textbooks wins all the time. I have teachers, higher class size; or I have windows -- well, teachers and the lower class size win all the time. And that's the situation that we're in. I don't think any board, or any superintendent, ever sat there and intentionally allowed a building, or a field, or a facility to fall apart. I believe it's the makeup of the whole situation, where you're getting defeated budgets, you can't generate the dollars that you need because of hard caps; and the bottom line is, your facilities are falling apart right around you. And you have to make those choices until finally the choice comes, just like it would in every one of our homes, our own personal homes, if you let it go too far; then it becomes too much of a problem, and then it has to be dealt with. Now the only choice you have is to go back to the people for

referendum. And then they're angry again. Now you're going into debt service, you're going into all the other things.

It's a vicious circle, ladies and gentlemen, and unless we start looking at people-- You know, we put together budgets -- to go back to your question, Assemblyman -- we put together budgets based on our needs. I need a new math program in my middle school. My middle school is in CAPA review. We haven't made AYP in math. Now, that's under No Child Left Behind. There's a reason why we haven't done it; our math curriculum is totally and completely outdated. Everything has to be standards-based today, because that's what we're dealing with -- we're dealing with standards. We're dealing with that type of educational approach. These are the skills the students must master, and my curriculum doesn't address that. I've got to come up with hundreds of thousands of dollars for new textbooks. I need reading programs. Everything is reading, writing, reading comprehension, writing. And our textbooks need to deal with that. We're changing the rules as we run. We're changing the curriculum as we run from who's giving it to us from Trenton, and who's giving it to us from the Federal Government. We have to adapt to all that or else we get these CAPA reviews, State takeover, all this other thing; which just makes the people lose more and more confidence in your school district, and think that you're not doing your job, and think that all the things you're trying to do are probably the wrong thing to do. And everybody keeps throwing these punches and you keep ducking.

And in all respect, I've got to tell you something. The way things are going, I'm kind of happy I'm 56 right now. (laughter) Because I

wouldn't want to be a new superintendent at 46, because I don't know if I could take, you know, up to retirement age of it. I think a couple of years and out might be the -- because I don't like you're A-4 bill either. While I'm here, I might as well say that. But that's just something else. (laughter)

But the bottom line is, we're just trying to do our job. That's all we're trying to do; we're trying to do our job. And I've got to say, it's becoming more and more difficult to do it.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Yes. Thank you.

And I just wanted to add one quick thing. And that's that we're hopeful that, when all is said and done and we do have a new formula, that there will be a process -- I mean a true process, for superintendents or the business administrator to come and make the case for additional aid, if districts don't have sufficient aid. Because the bottom line is that districts ought to be able to fulfill their constitutional obligation to their children, regardless of what district they're coming out of. So that's one of the things that we expect and hope to be able to do.

But if you have a good funding formula or have a very good, solid funding formula, that shouldn't be necessary. People should be getting what they need.

Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN VOSS: You were very eloquent.

Barbara Horl, who is in the School Board Association, and I were at a meeting of Boards of Education on Saturday, and you presented everything that they presented to us, and very, very well. And if you see me nodding my head up here, I spent over 40 years in education, and decided I

didn't want to be superintendent for exactly the reasons that you're stating; because it's been almost unbelievable, the pressure that's brought.

I discuss frequently with people, how can we make the funding of education better? And everybody says the money should follow the child. So that if a district has many, many low-income children, they should get money in proportion to the number of children, so that it would kind of take the adversarial situation of the Abbotts versus the non-Abbott out. And I agree with you 100 percent, because the rim districts were receiving aid; but the formula -- like you had to border on three Abbotts -- is not a viable formula, as far as I'm concerned.

I also agree with you on the fact about the mandated programs. And if the State's going to mandate the programs, they should come up with the money; and the same thing with the Federal Government. I sometimes subscribe to the idea that the government that governs least governs best. And I think that the intentions of many legislators to mandate certain programs was with very good intentions, but the implementation of them sometimes is not something that is easy for a district to do. And I think we've mandated way too many things for the districts. And having been in the classroom for a gazillion years -- I've seen mandates come, and I've also seen mandates go -- and I think we have to revisit some of the mandates.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but No Child Left Behind really doesn't give very much money, I don't think, to the State of New Jersey. And I think that we would be able to opt out of the program with, really, losing very little revenue and not having to come up to their standards. Because I've had schools up in my district where, because of one child-- I

mean, the formula that they use to say that the school is in dire straits or the school is viable is not a very good formula, because I have-- I think if you have a population of less than 500 students, you can fail everything and nothing happens to you. But if you have a population of over 1,000 students, if one child does not conform or isn't able to pass-- And they also have these restrictions on special ed, which is just absolutely ludicrous.

So I think that we have to look at not only what the State mandates, but also look at whether or not we want to stay in No Child Left Behind, in terms of, is the funding that we get in proportion to the aggravation and the pressure that's put on our school districts.

And thank you very much, because as I said, I'm sitting up here bobbing my head and agreeing 100 percent with what you said.

MR. DIGESERE: Well, it's always nice to see someone bobbing their head when you're (indiscernible), than it is when you're (indiscernible). (laughter) So I appreciate that, I really do.

I'd like to also say that the-- I think it's important to understand that I've heard this about the No Child Left Behind and the Federal funding, and how much do they give us, and do we have to meet the terms and conditions of that. I really don't know. All I know is, I have the job of following the laws and the mandates that are put before me. I see some good in No Child Left Behind; I really do. Most people like to take shots at it and say that it's a bad law. I think anything that makes us accountable in education today is good. I'm not looking not to be accountable to do my job. I'm looking to be accountable, but I just want to be able to have the tools available to do it. I think that that's the situation.

I'm not afraid of No Child Left Behind, and I'm not afraid of the mandates that are put on No Child Left Behind. I do think, maybe at times, I would like to take the person who thinks that you could take a kid who doesn't understand English, put him in a room, and tell him to pass an English-based test -- I'd like to put that person, maybe, in Pakistan or something, and say, "Now you pass a test in Pakistani, and if you don't, you'll lose your job." I might want to do that, but other-- We take away from that, I think most of No Child Left Behind does make sense to me. I think special ed students can learn, and they should be put in a position where they need to learn. I think we have to figure out the ways of teaching special education students in a different way. I mean, anyone that doesn't -- that thinks that economic situations do not enhance education really are missing the whole point. We have an economic disadvantage bracket. It should exist. We should have to deal with ESL. All these things are part of what we're dealing with here in New Jersey, but we need the tools.

I don't think it's any secret that, if all of a sudden you have a school -- and I can prove this -- you have a school of two ESL teachers in a high school, and you're not meeting AYP and they're failing high school; and all of a sudden you increase your staff to six or seven ESL teachers, now, to teach science, and math, and social studies, as well as English, to a non-English speaking student through an ESL process -- that all of a sudden your test scores go up. I don't think that's a miracle. The difference is two teachers versus seven teachers. But how do you get the seven teachers? How do you hire the teachers to meet the AYP mandates that you have, if you don't have the money or your cap won't even allow you to do it, even if you could? And that's the situation that we're in.

I can't even see us -- I mean, I have a high school that's in CAPA -- I'm a first year, so I don't get the blame for that -- but we have a high school that's in CAPA review. We have a middle school that's in CAPA review. But I don't think my predecessors could have done anything different. They're locked into all these other things that are happening -- as well as trying to maintain the school district, to maintain security, and keep the tax rate down for people who can't afford the tax rate -- and do all the various things that they need to do to make the program work. It just seems to be almost an impossible situation.

SENATOR RICE: Let me thank you, in case they have questions. The No Child Left Behind arguments I've heard throughout the country -- and I've traveled even on some occasions with Commissioner Librera when he was here -- it's never been the argument of some of the standards, the frivolousness of it, and the joke about it under the administration. This is a good thing, and there's some good components. The argument has always been funding.

MR. DIGESERE: Exactly.

SENATOR RICE: And that's been the hue and cry from every school district that I'm aware of throughout this country, and it's something the Federal Government does not want to address. The burden becomes our burden, and I think that part of the problems that we're having economically is that we get blamed at the State level for the mandates that are placed out by the Federal Government, who don't properly fund them. And the reason we're blamed is because we can't come up with the funding. An example is affordable housing -- they've cut housing subsidies and we've

got to hold up the budget for 25 mil, which doesn't really help a lot of people; but where do we get 25 mil-plus? So we're in the same boat.

And I want to say it for the record: I'm concerned, too. And just parochial-- We're going to be talking some more. Some may not involve -- about your budget; we'll still be going. Because I'm concerned about districts throughout the state -- non-Abbott districts, in particular. They have to go to question, primarily because -- it's my understanding that Belleville is in a similar boat that you are. Even though there's flexibility in the one piece, there's going to have to, probably, be another question put out there. You know, what do you really cut and what do you really keep? Again, the taxpayers -- will the taxpayers absorb it? Belleville is a working class district, stable district, older community. The concern is that-- My understanding is that they have not passed a ballot question. I think they passed one of the 29 last questions that went out there. Which -- that law of probability -- if my math is correct, growing up in an Abbott district -- that the law of probability is always 50-50, but one out of 29 doesn't give me a lot of hope, if they go out to question. So I just wanted to indicate that to the Committee, because that's got to be reflective of districts that are not here, that are non-Abbotts and others. Okay?

I don't have any more questions.

Anyone else? Okay.

Let me thank you once again--

I'm sorry, Senator. I see you over there.

SENATOR KEAN: Thank you for your comments; and I hope that we will see you and many of your colleagues at a later Joint Committee hearing, so we can delve into some of the issues that you brought forward

today and we can discuss that in greater detail. I, like you, had a great deal of concern about the way they define rim districts. It wasn't based on, certainly, educational rationales. And the four districts that received the initial \$20 million didn't have concerns that weren't felt by many, many other districts throughout the state; and that was carved up in a way that was extraordinarily artificial.

MR. DIGESERE: Right.

SENATOR KEAN: And I think that it was done, and the end result being, actually, to the detriment of other districts and other students. I do want to thank you for your cogent argument on the (indiscernible). It's always a guarantee that I'd vote for the school budget in my town; because and my daughter always comes with me, and she's in the public school system. So she always knows where to point and to push the button.

But I do want to thank you for your testimony. I hope we can follow up at a later Committee hearing.

Thank you.

MR. DIGESERE: I'd be happy to.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Thank you, Superintendent. I appreciate your testimony.

MR. DIGESERE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Next we have the superintendent from my hometown, actually, Irvington Public Schools -- Ethel Davion. Welcome, Ms. Davion, always good to see you.

E T H E L W. D A V I O N: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: We go back a number of years.

And if the red light is on, you can proceed. (referring to PA microphone)

MS. DAVION: Good morning.

I'm Ethel W. Davion, Superintendent for the Irvington Public Schools. Thanks to Senator Rice and Assemblyman Craig Stanley for the opportunity to speak before the Committee today; and good morning to the Committee members as well.

I am not here to beg for money, per se, today, but I am here to share with the Committee some of the major concerns that I have in terms of the impact that a flat funding or budget will have on the Irvington Public Schools. I'd like to begin by asking you to use your imaginations for a moment. Imagine it being the weekend and you receive a call from the person who is in charge of the fiscal operations of your school district. You are a superintendent of any school district, not necessarily Abbott nor non-Abbott. The message that is left on your phone says that, "We have a problem. There is potentially anywhere from a \$5.9 to a \$8 million hole in your budget." Subsequently, the caller says, "Have a good weekend." (laughter) Well, I haven't had a good weekend in quite a while, because I do have some major concerns about the problems that we face as a result of the flat budget.

First of all, it has already been articulated by my colleagues that in Abbott districts we are expected to implement certain mandates and initiatives that may not necessarily be required in other districts; based on the New Jersey Department of Education directives regarding the two-year instructional priorities -- the 2006/2007, that's this current school year, as well as the 2007 and 2008 professional staff development plan. This costs

money. The capital recommendations -- we had a capital review team come in and make recommendations. Those recommendations must be supported with budgetary -- or with money.

We also had a report from our face-to-face meeting; there were recommendations made there. This costs money. The professional learning report, an analysis of assessment, and Federal recommendations under the No Child Left Behind -- that certainly costs money. One of the things that we're concerned about in Irvington, under NCLB, is the mandate to have highly qualified and certified staff. And we certainly believe that our students deserve no less than that. However, in order to get highly qualified and certificated staff members, it will require that we have the appropriate funding to do that. So all of these plans require the employment of staff, highly qualified and certified, to see that the activities are carried out and that my major thrust -- that's teaching and learning -- occurs by bringing in qualified presenters to the district. These professionals, who have the intellectual rigor and can provide the district with data analysis, research-based practices that are both reliable and valid, would be too costly for the district to afford otherwise. Therefore, sending teachers out to national and, also, to local organizations and conferences would actually be more cost-effective.

One of my major concerns is being able to sustain some of the partnerships that we have already started in Irvington. For example, the superintendent's Star School Initiative, where we are looking at those schools in need of improvement, and analyzing the data and trying to find other ways of raising the level of student proficiency. We started that in partnership with the Millennium Group. Also, as the Superintendent of

Schools, I am really concerned about our educational leaders -- that is, our principals being educational leaders, and not just managers. The research clearly shows that educational leadership does make a significant impact on student achievement. For this reason, I have chosen to partner with AIR, American Institutes for Research, who are providing the appropriate training for our principals.

You must know that, at times, in a leadership position you inherit people. And individuals have tenure, and they're not easily gotten rid of, so you work with those people. You provide for them. We're always criticizing individuals, but it behooves us as leaders to try to raise their level of competence and performance. And I have selected to do this by partnering with AIR, who train them. And they take our new principals and provide leadership for them, as well as mentoring. So that's something that I think is very important, that will ultimately figure down to our students.

Teachers are also required to work collaboratively, and they do that by together devising pacing charts, writing curriculum. And this, of course, costs money. Curriculum writing is done during the Summer or it's done after school. And it's a part of their contracts that they are paid appropriately. So that's very, very important to us.

One of the things I'm concerned about are the vacancies in terms of our supervisory positions and other positions, but in particular in our supervisory positions. Those positions will not be filled because, again, you have to make choices. So that is going to impact teaching and learning also. I'm very much concerned about those positions not being filled.

In our district, we have continued programs that started the year before last that have met with success. And one of those is called the *SuccessMaker*, which requires additional funds in order for us to acquire more licenses to operate the program broadly and expansively across the educational curriculum areas, for example in the areas of special education, ESL, and other areas. SuccessMaker provides students with opportunities to practice items that they would have to demonstrate proficiency on in a test-generated setting. It helps them to develop competence and a level of comfortability; because like you and like me, if the students have seen it before, they feel a lot more comfortable with it. This is something that we would like to continue, but we know that we may not be able to do that presently under the new funding.

One of the other concerns that I have is with our partnerships with advisory committees. We have a fantastic program called CUSH, C-U-S-H, Children United Stand Higher. We're all concerned about what happens at the secondary level. We want to do better by our secondary students so that, when they leave us, they are able to go to institutions of higher learning. The CUSH program is a partnership with Dr. Gwendolyn Ames, who has helped our students, on Saturdays, go to Montclair State, and just mentor them so that they will know what the requirements are for attending colleges. Too many students are disappointed when they don't get into the colleges that they have selected. But this program mentors them all along and let's them know what the expectations are, and let's them know that they need to say that they want to do more than become a doctor, or lawyer, or teacher -- that everything is preparation toward that

goal. So this is what the CUSH program does. And I certainly hope that we will be able to retain that.

In addition, in analyzing data and the trends that affect our school district, it was discovered that the migration that occurs -- with students into our district after the Fall survey count -- often comes with records where we have no idea of the academic progress that they have made prior to getting to us. So the district has decided that the best way to handle this would be to provide them with a reading assessment, entry level. That way, we could identify the deficiencies and then provide for them some type of treatment. That's very, very important, but it's very, very costly.

So in sum, it is my desire -- my passionate desire -- to deliver quality services to the Irvington Public Schools. I believe that our children deserve no less.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Thank you, Dr. Davion.

One of the questions that I have -- and I don't know whether you have it prepared or not. But the demographic data for the school system -- and I didn't ask anybody to come with that. But there was an interesting article in the newspaper on Sunday regarding the fact that New Brunswick -- some of the programs in New Brunswick are making a difference. But you have to look at it in the context of the demographic data. Like if you have an influx of English learners, certainly you would feel that perhaps your scores would go down. But even to keep your scores at the same level shows that you're actually bucking a trend. Because, generally, if your economic data shows that you have poorer, more disadvantaged students moving into a district, your scores would go down.

Do you have any of the demographic data that shows what kind of -- how your population has changed, let's say, over the last two to three, or four, or five years?

DR. DAVION: Well, over the last two to three years, we have certainly had a large influx. I don't have the percentage -- I can get that information to you, Assemblyman -- of immigrant students. We are very pleased that, at the elementary level, all of our students met AYP in mathematics, with the exception of one of our schools. And those students very easily made safe harbor. So despite those issues of trying to educate students who the English language is not their primary language, I think the district is making significant gains. But those significant gains are being made through partnerships and other programs, which we will not be able to sustain at the current funding rate.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Have you requested a review with the Department of Education? Is there a process in which you can ask for additional dollars, currently? Has that been offered? And have you--

DR. DAVION: No, it hasn't been offered, but we plan to ask.

This is the thing that bothers me more than anything else. We took these jobs, in the first place, to help young people. And sometimes I think people lose sight of that. I wish that there was much more collaboration and a little more talking to the superintendents and the districts about their needs before just imposing a flat funding on everyone. Because as it has been indicated here today, there are specific needs for specific districts.

I think that my comments today could be applicable to schools anywhere, where the main thing is teaching and learning, and you want

students to succeed. Those are just research-based good practices that would elevate the level of student performance.

But, yes-- To go back to your question, yes, absolutely. I believe that if we were to collaborate and bring forth some of these specific needs, perhaps they would look at it differently.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: So what is the only opportunity for a district such as Irvington now? You can't appeal to the Commissioner. You would have to go to court. Is that what it would be?

DR. DAVION: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: You would have to go to court in order to get additional--

DR. DAVION: Basically.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: --additional resources.

DR. DAVION: In Irvington, we have a fiscal monitor. Of course, that's more money that comes out of our budget that we have to pay -- \$650 a day. In addition to that, we have-- We are now undergoing an audit procedure by the State auditors. And we have one person that we are linked with at the Department of Education. I guess you could call that person our liaison, who offers us advice and tells us -- provides advice and recommendations on certain aspects of the budget. But, yes, we'd have to appeal.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Okay.

Any other questions by any of the members? (no response)

Thank you very much.

DR. DAVION: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Oh, one second.

Assemblyman Vas.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAS: Mr. Chair, just one quick thing.

How do you enjoy working with Councilman Frank Sinatra?

DR. DAVION: I beg your pardon?

ASSEMBLYMAN VAS: How do you enjoy working with Frank Sinatra?

DR. DAVION: I enjoy working with him well.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAS: Send him my regards, please.

DR. DAVION: I certainly shall. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Superintendent, let me thank you for coming. Let me apologize for going in and out.

DR. DAVION: That's okay.

SENATOR RICE: But we can hear in the hallway. At least I could.

The issues that you raised-- Now, you're going to appeal your budget, and you're going to be in touch with us to let us know what those bottom lines are?

DR. DAVION: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Because you're still working those numbers? Is that correct?

DR. DAVION: We're still working the numbers, yes; still making decisions -- budgetary decisions. But I will be in touch, yes.

SENATOR RICE: All right.

And then we have to get back up to date on school construction and things of that magnitude.

Plus, I don't know if you expressed it-- But one of the problems with your budget is transitioning, when we have a problem in a school and in the district, and you have to move the students to another building or something like that.

DR. DAVION: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: That creates additional problems for you. And I know we just came through a problem that someone has to pay for. And the question is: Where are the dollars coming from?

DR. DAVION: Absolutely.

SENATOR RICE: And no one takes that into consideration.

DR. DAVION: I didn't get into that today, because that's a whole other dissertation. I just focused today on the academic part, because everything else supports that. But, yes, we have major issues. We've had mold problems. These are-- We've had emergency situations that we didn't count on. So all of that has to be taken into consideration.

SENATOR RICE: Right, because that's another dollar.

DR. DAVION: That's another dollar, absolutely.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

DR. DAVION: You're quite welcome.

SENATOR RICE: Next, we have Michael Glascoe, Paterson Public Schools. And after Michael-- In fact, why don't we do it this way?

Michael and Dr. Horton (*sic*)--

MS. SCHULZ: Lofton.

SENATOR RICE: I didn't write this. (laughter)

Come on up, sir. Forgive me on your name. I'm going to let you know, I didn't write this. That looks like an H now.

Who wrote it, you?

MS. SCHULZ: No, I did. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Good afternoon.

You can hit the red button over there. (referring to PA microphone) And either one of you can start.

M I C H A E L E. G L A S C O E, Ed.D.: Good morning, to everyone.

I've been invited to talk to you about the effect of today's--

SENATOR RICE: Excuse me. Identify yourself for the record, because I have two supers here.

DR. GLASCOE: Yes, my name is Michael Glascoe. And I've been serving as State District Superintendent in Paterson since July 2005. And thank you for inviting me to be here today.

Let's take a quick look at the dynamics of the Paterson district, followed by several ways in which the decrease in funding has adversely affected our efforts to ensure academic success for every Paterson student.

The majority of our students -- 95 percent -- are minority, and over 90 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch program. Demographics like this begin to indicate challenges with language and mobility. That's true in Paterson. Over 10,000 children -- that's 40 percent of our student population -- speak a primary language that is not English. Imagine the costs associated, alone, with our bilingual program and the additional instructors needed to simply try and provide a fair and equal education. It's astounding. Altogether, 37 different languages are spoken in our district.

Paterson Public Schools has been under State operation since 1991, without a comprehensive plan for returning the district to self-

governance until now. Regardless, we are continuously blamed for budgetary indiscretions, including \$50 million that went missing more than three years ago. In Paterson, we define accountability as our responsibility to meet the educational needs of our children. While I am a huge proponent of accountability from the top down, in some instances that top starts at the State level.

You would be hard-pressed to find a harder working district than Paterson under my leadership. We have new administrators and principals training and working around the clock to use data, for instance, to drive learning and instruction. Many of our schools and students have success stories that I will share later. The bottom line is, we've been cutting back for the last two years, and there's literally no more so-called *fat* to trim. So I come to you with some very serious concerns. Let's talk about some perceptions that exist about Paterson and the actual realities that our youngsters live with each day.

One common perception is that the Abbott districts, like Paterson, provide adequate facilities and programs for their students. Therefore, the State has decided that it's time to share that money with other districts. I'm not opposed to sharing at all. But the reality is that we have tremendous challenges in terms of facilities. And this is a very costly problem. Twenty-four of our buildings -- that's 65 percent -- are now over 75 years old. Many of them are over a hundred years old. To date, not one building has ever been renovated. I can describe two elementary schools with one toilet for boys and one toilet for girls. This Winter, our children suffered from enormous heating and plumbing problems, to the point that one of our high schools lost two days of instruction due to heating

problems. Come and see for yourself. No American child should experience what our Paterson students endure regularly.

The second misperception is that our teachers and administrators are handsomely paid at the expense of other districts in the state. Let's look at some of those salaries. In Elizabeth, a first-year teacher will receive \$49,000, roughly the same as Newark. In Westfield, that same teacher would receive \$53,500. While we try to recruit great teachers and stay competitive, our top figure in that category is 12 percent less than Westfield's. Paterson teachers work hard in a challenging environment for less.

Another perception: As an Abbott district, Paterson is able to offer a bevy of programs and activities for its children. This is sadly untrue. Approximately 20 of our 30 elementary schools have been identified as *schools in need of improvement*. CAPA recommendations for just eight of those schools amounted to over \$3 million, which we clearly do not have. State recommendations for curriculum, facilities, after-school programs, and professional development may have to be set aside.

By the way, we're -- you probably are aware that 20,000 of our students are entitled to supplemental educational services. Currently, Federal funding provides support for only 2,000 of these children. The remaining 18,000 students depend on support from us, which we currently are unable to give. Eighteen thousand children who are entitled to supplemental educational services are going to go without.

Here's a perception that we often hear: The implementation of the Abbott system has leveled the playing field, in terms of equal access to educational facilities for all children. Let me ask you this: When you went

to school, did you eat in a cafeteria? Did you have gym class in a real gym? What about science laboratories? Many of our students go through their entire educational experience without any of these facilities. Out of 49 school sites in the district, 16 schools do not have a gymnasium. Most of our high school academies do not have a bonafide gym, science lab, or cafeteria.

Finally, the last and most pressing perception is that the State's 3 percent increase will help account for increases in wages, expenses, and allow us to continue programs aimed at student achievement. Flat funding is impacting valuable programs, student safety, and our efforts to ensure an orderly academic environment. Literacy programs that were implemented by State directive require staff, training, and supplies that we cannot afford. A \$500,000 reduction in security is impacting efforts to increase student safety. Finally, the school maintenance budget, already an issue, has been reduced by 30 percent. This is the tough reality our students will endure.

Finally, we hear that districts like Paterson have been allowed to spend freely without accountability, self-monitoring, or limits. That's why the State is putting fiscal monitors in and will continue to do so. The reality is that this may have been the case before I arrived. But prior to the auditors, or State monitors, I increased accountability measures and standard operating procedures to save the district over \$20 million last year alone. Yet, despite those savings, our expenses soar. Salary and health benefits approved by the State are costing an additional \$30 million. What do we do? We reduce or completely eliminate programs, staff, resources, or security measures.

Now, we do have some great news. Many of our schools have achieved proficiency and are no longer considered in need of improvement. We have the highest number of tenure cases brought to an end in this state. Children in our schools are interning at UMDNJ over the Summer, and they are singing with the Metropolitan Opera. Our sport teams are competitive at the highest level. And one of our top elementary schools is vying for a national Blue Ribbon award.

My primary concern is that the district's need to aggressively reduce spending is taking valuable time away from teaching and learning. This has been our focus for nearly the entire 20 months since I arrived. We are dealing with auditors, monitors, and budgetary memos every moment. And it's difficult to fully implement some very promising programs that are designed to provide every child with the chance they deserve for a bright future.

Nevertheless, we are here to talk about money, which is a subject that most children -- even Paterson's, who happen to be very savvy -- really don't understand. We can all do the math. For the next school year, Paterson faces a \$30 million increase in salaries and benefits, both State approved. We need an additional \$3 million for CAPA recommendations. That's \$33 million in additional costs, minus the \$11 million we will receive from the State. Bottom line: We begin at \$22 million in the red, and that's really not flat funding.

And keep in mind that we have not had an opportunity to have any of these in-depth discussions with the Department of Education. As I've been told -- or as I certainly have learned in my experiences -- educators collaborate to solve problems. But yet we have not been able to do that.

When I visit schools, the children ask me, “Why don’t we have science labs? Why don’t we have gymnasiums or cafeterias?” What do I tell them? What do I tell the children of Paterson?

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

Mr. Lofton.

R O D N E Y L O F T O N: My name is Rodney Lofton, Superintendent of Trenton Public Schools. I’ve been in this position for approximately six months. And I have to tell you that it was very disheartening to know that the Capital City of the State of New Jersey was in the condition that it was. As a matter of fact, in my first week on the job, I was told that we needed to cut \$23 million in the budget because of flat funding. Boy, was I surprised.

What that meant for us was 147 positions that needed to be cut. And figuring out how to do that was a momentous situation. Luckily, I was told by the Board that I did not have to jump into that right away, and that the administration that was still there would be working on that. That meant 37 facilitators, 16 tutors, 27 custodial workers, all of our after-school programs were cut for K-8 programs for last year, and that our fund balance was held at 1 percent.

I look at having this job as a challenge. I see this as running a \$280 million business. And part of running a business is, we need to become efficient and effective. And so part of my job was to look at neighboring districts, and also districts that are not as close but are Abbott districts, to see the districts that are successful -- the things they do.

One of the major things that I found, in being a successful district, was teacher quality was one of the most important features. And I heard it earlier -- and one of the key components is having coaches in every single building, or at least coaches throughout your district. So what we're doing this year is looking-- Because, again, we're at this point of having only a 3 percent possibility of increase. That was going to mean another \$3 million cut in our school staffing. And that is going to lead to 21 additional positions that need to be cut in our budget for this year. So, again, we have to be efficient.

But the most important thing -- I heard it constantly, also -- is working collaboratively and working in cooperation with everyone. Being new here, it was really interesting to go to a superintendents' meeting to see superintendents fighting amongst themselves, battling amongst themselves, dealing with the non-Abbott and Abbott. And it was very interesting to hear the State representatives sitting in those meetings and basically in constant battle, verbally, with each other, with the State, dealing with the Abbott districts. And I found that the support was not there. And one of the major things I asked for is: If you're a district-- And the State is all about monitoring and making sure we're doing the right things. I'm looking for -- because coming from a different state, I constantly saw a state being effective, and helping us, and supporting us, with regard to giving us some recommendations for the future.

But what I'm asking for, and what I'm looking for is to be fair. And I'm hoping that the formula that they come up with will be a fair formula, something that at least I would have an idea from year to year about what to expect, so that I'm not surprised when it comes to budgetary

time. Because I will deal with the money that's given to me, and I'll look for the programs that are inefficient and make sure that we cut those. But I can't continue to be surprised, as I am again this year, by what numbers we're given and having to cut 21 positions.

I think that we, Trenton Public Schools, need to be representative of being a capital city. We believe that we have an idea of what it takes to make that change. And I think that working collaboratively and having this opportunity to speak to you will make those changes happen.

Thank you very much.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

Let me just indicate, first of all, welcome to the state. You're going to find, in the future, that you're not going to make the dollars work that we give you on all occasions. You will manage them, but on the other side of that, you're going to catch some real pain and hell. Because one thing about New Jersey is, it's a very interesting state. It's small, very dense, a lot of school districts. And when you look at your districts-- I think that the Superintendent of Paterson raised the issue correctly. When you don't have enough resources -- not windfalls, but needed resources -- you can manage the money. I can manage any money. The question is: What do you cut? Do you cut science labs? Do you feel that schools shouldn't have track and recreation, which we always had as part of a system to us? What do you cut?

But we're going to be there to work with you, meaning those of us in the Legislature. We have a good relationship with your Mayor and others here in the State House -- in the Capital City.

But, just, welcome.

Now, you indicated that when you arrived, some of the concerns that were raised -- other people addressing. Is the "administration" in place still addressing those, or you have actually taken over your district now?

MR. LOFTON: No, I've taken over the district six months ago. What I was saying was, when I arrived in the district, they had to cut the budget by \$23 million. And so the administration that was there prior to me was able to do that before I actually had to take over that. But it was still going on while I was hired.

SENATOR RICE: Did the \$23 million that was actually cut-- I don't know. I don't want to speculate, because every district is different. Did that leave some inherent pains for you, in terms of the district needs?

MR. LOFTON: Oh, absolutely. One of the things that was real important to me was our after-school programs. From K-8, we had absolutely no after-school programs this current year, outside of some competitive grants that we had. But as far as our in-house budget, we didn't have any programs.

SENATOR RICE: Well, we're working on that through legislation. We need to address that in another way, because you're going to-- I don't know where you're from, but the majority of our colleagues are suburban.

MR. LOFTON: New York State.

SENATOR RICE: Well, the majority of our colleagues are suburbanites. There's no use in me lying about that. And that's not to put them down, God bless them -- or shore community. They have a lot of

activities after schools. They think that activities in Trenton and other places -- gang activity -- they think that's a good game to play -- Russian Roulette. And so we're going to have to take that on ourselves. But your needs need to be submitted through the Chair, to this Committee, so that we can kind of allay the "new superintendent pain" that was inherited. You don't have to take the heat for it. You'll take the heat for not improving it.

MR. LOFTON: Right.

SENATOR RICE: And getting it, okay? So we can see what that means as we continue to talk about formulas, and budgets, and needs like that.

I also know that if we don't take a look at it early, Mayor Palmer is going to come in here and make sure that we do.

In terms of the presentation given by our good friend from Paterson--

And let me commend you on the job you're doing up there. We have a lot of newness in our state. The newness is basically in the districts that we represent, that are Abbotts and urban. And it is challenging to have someone say, "Come on in here. We have some real problems for you to resolve, and we're not going to help you." So that just goes to show we're strong-willed people. And people always expect a lot more from us. And I'm speaking, now, from kind of an ethic perspective, too.

But in terms-- We do have some information here from superintendents who couldn't make it. And I just want to indicate, for the record -- and I'm going to ask staff to do some things with this. East Orange district -- they're looking at this whole piece. And they may be

looking at a \$20 million deficit, because of the budget message that went out -- information they had received. And so that has to go on the record.

We were talking about Paterson -- we just finished talking about -- which is actually a net of a \$22 million deficit after the 11 is out, or something like that. And then we also have, coming in from Gloucester City School District -- the number of positions that are going to have to be removed, and the necessity of cutting \$7.2 million in educational programs, and staff, and dismantling the Abbott district.

And so the concern I had -- and I spoke to my Co-Chair about it, which he has the same concern -- is that we're going to work with the administration to try to help the Governor reduce property taxes in this state. And we're going to work with the educational piece to try to make sure that we're not spending dollars unnecessarily or having them abused in districts. But we were concerned about just what the message looked like and what the formula looked like. And we were hoping that *flat* meant not what it meant the last time; where it was flat, but then you had to not take in COLA and some other things. We were hoping that the districts that had the minuses in the Abbott districts -- and I have a whole list of them here -- weren't going to have substantial harm done. And that doesn't appear to be, from the testimony this morning, the case. And I would like to think that even though we didn't have 31 people respond, it's a good poll in our measurement of what's taking place.

So I'm going to turn this over to the Assemblyman to raise some questions. But I want you to know that I'm asking staff to take the comments we have in writing, and others we receive, and get it over to the Department of Education and the administration, and tell them to respond

to us, as well as to the Education Committee -- and I think that's important, in both Houses -- because we don't have a lot of time, as to those concerns. Are we really looking at \$22 million? And if so, why? Are we really looking at \$30 million over here? We need to get answers, because they're going to come back and we're going to address audits soon. And I don't want them playing with audits. See, audits, to me, need to be addressed; but audits, to me, also can be used with inaccurate information to make it a barrier to giving or providing what needs to be provided. And when the media asked me about Commissioner Davy not being here today, we knew that this testimony would take a little time; and we wanted to make sure we kept a thin line between those conversations versus these conversations.

So I just wanted to thank the two of you.

Let me turn it over to the Co-Chair.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Just briefly. I'm trying to hang in there. I've got some things that we prepared back in the district.

But with respect to the fact that you're going to have to lay off personnel if you're not allowed to have the budget as you submitted; or in other words, if you have to implement these cuts, what's your option? I mean, do you have an -- do you get a chance to go to the Commissioner and say, "This is what the impact is going to be of this cut? And so, as a result of that, in order to keep our district moving in the right direction, we will need additional dollars." Do you have the option to make that case? What's the response that you got?

MR. LOFTON: It's very interesting the way they write documents. They basically said, "You either accept the 3 percent-- And if

you feel that you need more, you can apply for more.” But they make it-- They lay it out, so they basically say, “If you apply for more, you run the risk of not even receiving the 3 percent. You run the risk of receiving nothing.” So they will use some of the information from the audit that we are now going to, right now, determine whether or not you should get, if that, more than 3 percent laid out for you, or even less. So it’s one of those risks that you take with no promises there. And if we even go lower than the possible 3 percent, we would really be in dire need. So it’s really difficult to say, “Yes, I’m going to apply and go for it,” because, right now, I have not made any motion to do that.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: So, in other words, it’s like a gambling proposition.

MR. LOFTON: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: Either you take the 3 percent, or you go for additional funding based on the fact that you’re going to have to make cuts. And if you don’t get the additional funding, there’s a chance you lose the whole kit-and-caboodle.

Yes.

DR. GLASCOE: Assemblyman, if I may.

Also, it was made very clear to us that if you would choose to go for additional funding, the task and the documentation-gathering process would be much more arduous than it would be if you would take the proposed 3 percent. I looked at that situation, knowing full well that our district is lagging so far behind. And each time that we are delayed in our initiatives in getting the school district off on the right foot initially, and

not being immersed in document-gathering through the months of October and November -- that was the decision before me.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: And this-- It's almost criminal to me, the way this is being proposed. And I can't put it any different.

Here you're put in a position -- put in a situation where you have to either take the 3 percent and go home, or risk -- or not risk -- being really put through an arduous sort of procedure, which is going to tie up administrative staff, obviously. And everybody's been pointing fingers, in terms of administration. So you're probably almost at a skeleton crew with administration anyway. So you're going to tie up these administrators, and fiscal people, and financial people trying to make this case, which they've already told you is going to be-- You're going to be asked to produce a lot of very litigious types of details.

And so it's almost-- It sounds almost, to me, as if you're caught between a rock and a hard place. You're going to either take the 3 percent that's being offered and go home, and get it -- and just try to do the best you can with what you're being given; or you're put in a situation -- almost a no-win situation up against the State, and trying to produce all the documents, and so forth.

To me, it would seem more productive if the Department just had a list of questions and documents that they are going to -- that you're going to have to provide, and then say, "Look, if you have that need, then you're going to get the extra dollars," as opposed to making districts go through this sort of, I guess, gamble, if you will, or even-- And many superintendents seem reluctant. Is there any intent on your part, or you

haven't decided, whether you're going to push for additional funding on either one of your parts?

DR. GLASCOE: Well, I haven't really decided. But I'm certainly leaning towards trying to keep some semblance of order and consistency in our district, which means we need to continue to move, even though it's bare bones.

We're not-- At this point in time, we're not seeing a situation where we may have to lay off staff. But those key positions that came about per DOE directives -- such as academic support teachers and instructional coaches -- they're going to be decreased tremendously. And that will happen. So that when we have breakage, we can move those folks into the positions that folks may vacate as a result of retiring. So we won't have to lay anyone off. So even if we go forward, it will not be as full steam ahead as we initially started out two years ago.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: One of the other things--
And feel free to respond to that question too.

MR. LOFTON: We've decided to accept the 3 percent, because it would take a person to spend days to get the kinds of documents that they needed. And we're in-- They did-- It was systematized, because we're in the middle of budget time. So we're trying to prepare the budget. And it would require somebody with that background to be able to get the documents ready for them to have. And so we just don't have the personnel to be able to do that.

In addition to that, they made it clear that the total number -- amount of money that they were going to reserve for the Abbott districts was -- I think it was \$134 million. And so it just really didn't make any

sense for us, at this time, to take away from somebody. And we're going through an audit at the same time. And we're going through an audit, which means, again, that's the personnel that's needed for the purpose of doing this audit. So we really didn't have the staff to do it. It's not that we couldn't do it, we didn't have the staff to do it.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: And, Assemblywoman, this is -- Senators, this is a very interesting situation, because-- I mean, because the fact of the matter is that, technically, one could state that the Department is putting superintendents in a position of not fulfilling the requirements of a constitutionally required thorough and efficient education.

And I have-- There is a serious issue here. And we've really-- And I'm going to intimate to my colleague, Senator Rice, that this is very, very, very troublesome. I mean, I don't know how to put it other than to say that what we're engaged in, perhaps, is not just deception, but might even be considered criminal. And I really don't know what to say, because it's not the superintendents' fault, it's not the districts' fault, it's the culmination of a number of different issues and directives that is putting us in a position where-- You know, who is going to raise the issue of whether these students are getting the education that they need if the requirements are such that we sit here, really, in a quagmire of sorts? So I'm very concerned about that.

An issue that's been brought to my attention-- One of the things that we talk about a lot is parent involvement with education and making sure that parents understand. Because that's-- To be honest, if we had-- Someone raised the issue of parent engagement in suburban districts

and some of these other districts. As a matter of fact, Assemblyman Baroni said, "What do I tell my parents?" Well, he has parents to tell it to.

In many of the districts, you don't have that kind of parental engagement. And so some of the things that we try to establish are programs that would actually help motivate parents and also empower parents with the information, in terms of-- Because sometimes you need the parents to really stand up and say, "Look, this is what -- this is the position that the State has put the superintendents into," or "This is the situation in the district," and mobilize parents. And many people say, "That's why you have different outcomes in some districts, as opposed to other districts."

And I heard something that was troubling to me, and I just thought about it. And I apologize to the Superintendent, because I really meant to call her -- the Superintendent of Irvington -- about it. But it wasn't just Irvington. I get calls from all over the state. And that's about the parents' conference. There's usually an annual parents' conference. And I want to know, were there any directives given, in terms of how many parents you could send or -- whether the fact that that would be something that would be considered negative, with respect to sending parents to the parents' conference? Was there anything that was issued?

Thank you.

DR. GLASCOE: Assemblyman, I will answer that. And I think it was probably directed to me more than anyone else. And absolutely not. If anyone would check with my track record in the last 20 months, I'm all about parent involvement, and have brought a measure of that to the district that has never been there before. The situation, as it stands now, is

that we have a State parent conference. And we are cutting our budget. We are cutting bare bones. We initially were looking at a request for 300 of our parents to attend. We cut that number to 200. And therein lies the problem -- that we cut back from 300 to 200. That was not done, in any way, to diminish the conference and the efforts of our parents in the district. But it was done in a way to be fiscally responsible, as we are trimming our budget to the bare bones. It's the same situation that I look at in moving academic support teachers into vacant teacher positions, which means a school that is struggling academically, instead of having three academic support teachers, will now have one or two.

ASSEMBLYMAN STANLEY: It's just the adverse impact of these cuts, and the way that they're -- not the way that you're metering them out, because you have to cut where you have to cut. But the problem is that you -- is that these are things that we need to be sustaining and even increasing, as opposed to cutting. And that's where my problem lies. It's not in the superintendents' decisions, it's in putting superintendents in positions where they have to make these kinds of decisions.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

SENATOR KEAN: Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR RICE: Senator, you want to speak?

SENATOR KEAN: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Hang on a moment, gentlemen.

SENATOR KEAN: I'm sorry.

SENATOR RICE: I know that one of the Superintendents is running late there.

But go ahead. Because if he runs--

SENATOR KEAN: Well, if I may ask, which one is running late?

SENATOR RICE: That's all right. He needs your vote for his budget, so you just take your time. (laughter)

SENATOR KEAN: Dr. (*sic*) Lofton.

MR. LOFTON: Mr. Lofton.

SENATOR KEAN: Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Lofton.

Welcome to New Jersey.

MR. LOFTON: Thank you very much. (laughter)

SENATOR KEAN: I'll be very -- I'll try to be relatively brief then. Coming from-- Where were you in New York?

MR. LOFTON: I was in New York City as a principal, and in Mount Vernon, New York, as a Deputy Superintendent.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. What are the best practices that you saw happening in your previous employs that you could bring to New Jersey as an example, that you may be looking to implement in Trenton?

MR. LOFTON: I would say three major things: coaches in every school. Teacher quality, as I mentioned earlier, was one of the major components of transforming districts. And so you give them support by way of coaches, mentors, and also professional development.

Number two is a parent liaison in every building. A parent liaison would be somebody -- as you heard earlier, talking about parent engagement -- but that would be someone who would basically try to get

parents involved in the activities of their child. And when I say parent engagement, it doesn't necessarily mean a parent coming to a parent meeting. It could be many different activities that a parent could be involved in, because some parents can't make it to parent meetings.

And the third thing would be -- and this is one of my key things with regard to Trenton -- is safety, and having school resource officers. Those are police officers, particularly in the secondary schools, trained and also, basically, identified -- both by the police department and also the school district -- to be a police officer that would be able to develop those relationships, with regard to where students are concerned.

And those would be three things that I would say need to happen with -- what I'm trying to bring into Trenton; and I saw as really key, clear practices that happened in New York, where I was previously.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. I've had a bill in for a number of years -- as long as the Chairman is going to talk about bills -- regarding the parental orientation program that would help, and be flexible enough. As you said, not everybody can make a program on a particular evening, because of their work schedules probably, or a variety of things which aren't electable. So I'd like to be able to -- if you agree with some of these principles -- work with you, through the Chairman, on those types of issues.

MR. LOFTON: Sure. And one more thing: school resource officers that are paid by the State.

SENATOR KEAN: I'm sorry? School resource--

MR. LOFTON: School resource officers that are State-funded. So these are police officers that are in our secondary schools -- middle school and high school.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. And you're calling those, through the Chairman, *school resource officers* -- is a term of art in New York State. Can you delve into that for just a quick moment? I know you've got to go.

MR. LOFTON: It's a police officer that's trained in working -- a local police officer, but they have a specialized training in working in school districts. Some school districts have it here.

SENATOR KEAN: So it would be a Trenton city school officer that would--

MR. LOFTON: Exactly right. And there are many districts here in the State of New Jersey that have them. But they are paying for them themselves, because the Federal grants have run out. And it would be great to have it funded by the State.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. Thank you for that.

I do have some further questions for your colleague there. But I will not hold you up for your next meeting.

MR. LOFTON: Thank you.

SENATOR KEAN: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: If there's a problem at the next meeting, let them know the Senators had you. And if you need an excuse, we'll write you a note. (laughter)

SENATOR KEAN: Don't come back, he's saying.

Dr. Glascoe, asking the same questions of you: What are some of the best practices that you would look to bring -- what you've tried to do, and looked, potentially, in other districts.

DR. GLASCOE: Well, much of the same. But I look to leadership and database decision making. And as I mentioned before, we're embarking on a tremendous training program that is making sure that our principals and assistant principals are truly instructional leaders, and using data to make program decisions for students. Also, the support of academic support teachers and coaches that model lessons for staff. And we have a-- We're developing a system of doing learning walks that will help staff improve their instructional practices.

We're also looking at bringing in different programs, like Navigation 101. And thanks to our Paterson Education Fund, that is helping us finance this, this is an opportunity to really push and blossom the secondary education initiatives program, which is mandated by the State. And it starts in sixth grade, and it is a process by which you personalize the educational environment and the education for children. And we know that many of our children -- especially minority children -- learn best when there is a tremendous relationship between the teacher and learner. So those are just some of the things that we're doing.

SENATOR KEAN: How do you get more parents involved in school?

DR. GLASCOE: Well--

SENATOR KEAN: Not necessarily going to meetings, but involved in--

DR. GLASCOE: Yes.

SENATOR KEAN: Because one of the things that happens, as we know, is many parents are foreign-born, many parents may not have gone through the education process in New Jersey or in other parts of this

country. What are the ways-- And others, as you know, are working multiple jobs. And so it's very, very difficult to involve them.

What are the ways we can get more, not only orientation, to begin with, so the parents have an expectation of -- so that when their child or their grandchild does come back home in an evening -- or their younger sibling -- so that they know that there's an expectation of what is expected -- on either a monthly basis, or a yearly basis, or a semester basis -- from them, from that child, so that child can't simply say, "Well, I don't have--"

DR. GLASCOE: Well, we have to be very careful, because when you say *parent involvement*, it has many connotations. One might think in terms of the parent who comes to the school, and bakes cookies, and goes on field trips, and things of that nature. And you just described the situation where that may not be the case.

I talk more or less about parent engagement. We have--

SENATOR KEAN: Well, that's-- My intent is engagement. And involvement and engagement, in my view, are not hugely exclusive.

DR. GLASCOE: It first starts with us. Our schools have to be much more user-friendly to our parents. If we have a high-powered instructional program, and students are excited about it, and they're learning, that excitement is taken home and the parents see that.

We want to make sure that each and every parent has a connection, or some connections, inside the school, whether it's a classroom teacher, guidance counselor, principal, cafeteria worker, or someone who could advocate for that parent. I'm a strong advocate for parent advisory groups. We are working with the NAACP, in our city, and we're working with the Pastor's Workshop, to be advocates for parents and to help them

navigate the public school process. And so that way, if you create this user-friendly atmosphere for our parents, you'll have more parents who are engaged with the school district, who know exactly what their children are doing. And if they don't know, they will feel comfortable in approaching the school in any way that they can.

SENATOR KEAN: If we're looking to create areas of academic excellence within each of our schools systems--

DR. GLASCOE: Yes.

SENATOR KEAN: --and throughout the school systems, and make every school an area of academic excellence, we need to obviously work to harmonize that result.

If that's the case, why in your school system -- you dismantled the Learning Academies.

DR. GLASCOE: I'm sorry?

SENATOR KEAN: My understanding is, within your school system, you dismantled what is known as the Learning Academies that were implemented first by former Superintendent Duroy.

DR. GLASCOE: We have not.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. Those are still ongoing?

DR. GLASCOE: Yes.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. Thank you.

The second question I've got -- in your school district, the labor relations expense -- it seems to be a very large component of your budget each -- in the last couple of years. And can you explain why that is such -- that seems to be an outlier compared to other districts.

DR. GLASCOE: You'll have to forgive me, because it's been a strong source of, I guess, financial situation for the school district for many, many years. I can speculate. I mean, we're the third largest school district in the state. And it's the NJEA-- And so you have many, many members. You have an aggressive negotiations process that goes on, which has gone on for years. I have not experienced that yet. I'm getting ready to get into the fray come this Fall. (laughter) So I really can't put my finger on anything other than: that has been the mainstay in a district like Paterson for many years.

SENATOR KEAN: Okay. Because when I look at this, the average grievance rate of winning is, by the plaintiff, shall we say -- the person who brought the grievance -- is about 40 percent. And in your district, it's approximately 70 percent, when these grievances -- according to the statistics that I've seen.

DR. GLASCOE: And that time period covers-- I mean, what is the time period that that covers?

SENATOR KEAN: I've got over two or three years.

DR. GLASCOE: Okay. Well, you'll begin to see that go down. I've only been there 20 months. And we've been trying to work with grievances on the lowest level possible, so that they're not ratcheted up to the highest level, where it becomes costly. But we do take an aggressive approach to staff members -- teachers, if you will -- who are doing things so inappropriately that we have to sever their ties from education.

SENATOR KEAN: But I'm just concerned about -- at least the averages that I've seen -- that when 70 percent win the grievances, I was concerned.

And the final question is on the administrative costs. Bureaucracy has increased within the district since you've taken over.

DR. GLASCOE: It's the same.

SENATOR KEAN: Why did you increase the number of superintendents -- assistant superintendents, for example, from -- nine versus four?

DR. GLASCOE: Well, first of all, we had a school district that is in need of improvement. We had a school district with very little standard operational procedures. There was no accountability for our schools. Principals were left with managing their schools, rather than leading them or being instructional leaders.

Now they're moving to a point where they are instructional leaders, because they have a direct link to the superintendent's cabinet, with their assistant superintendent, who is not there for what I call *supervision*, but to really supervise, and monitor, and develop. And those assistant superintendents take a lot of the minutia away from those principals so that they can do their jobs. They're no longer chasing toilet paper issues and other maintenance issues during the day. They're now chasing down instructional issues; or if there's miscommunications with parents, those assistant superintendents are troubleshooting, again giving the principals and the assistant principals an opportunity to lead those schools, rather than just to manage.

SENATOR KEAN: Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

Any questions from Senator Bark?

SENATOR BARK: I don't think so.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

Thank you very much.

DR. GLASCOE: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: The next two speakers I'm bringing up are John Rodecker -- is that correct?

J O H N M. R O D E C K E R: Rodecker (indicating pronunciation), Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR RICE: Rodecker, okay. Forgive me, I'm not good at names. Give me Johnson, Brown, Rice. (laughter)

But I know you're the Superintendent of Perth Amboy.

MR. RODECKER: Yes, sir.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. Good man.

This guy's doing good things down there.

Then, also, I want to bring up Nathan Parker.

Is that right?

N A T H A N P A R K E R, Ed.D.: That's right.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

This is my neighbor, the great city of Orange.

Okay. Let me apologize for the long day. I guess the bad thing about it is that you're at the end. That's just the ways things came into us. The good thing about it is, we love both of you. You've been through the routine so much, that we know you have something to offer.

Either one of you can start.

MR. RODECKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon.

My name is John Rodecker, Superintendent of Schools in Perth Amboy, one of the 31 Abbott school districts in the State of New Jersey.

I'd like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to present testimony regarding the issue of funding to Abbott school districts. The inception of increased funding to Abbott districts began in the late 1990s, following the Abbott IV and V decisions. Since that time, Perth Amboy has attempted to utilize the increased funds to provide a program which meets the educational, social, and physical needs of the children entrusted to our care.

It has not always been the most popular position to support increased funding to Abbott districts, given the fact that the instances of misspending have garnered far more headlines than all the good work which is taking place in the Abbott districts statewide.

It is important to remember that the population in the Abbott districts represent the most economically disadvantaged in New Jersey. And while the argument can be made that wealth does not ensure quality education, it needs to be emphasized that wealth is a barometer of the population which typically lives in inner cities. Abbott districts are cities of immigrants, as well as low-income. The majority of students who attend public school in Abbott districts come from families who may have recently relocated to this country, or are parented by individuals who do not possess the knowledge provided by formal education.

In order to do our work, it is necessary to provide the assistance to our children which other districts in the state might normally find happening in the home. It's not just our job to provide education. We must encourage and provide instruction to our parents. We must care for

the social, health, and nutritional development of our students; and we must provide the fundamentals of education which other districts may find are being developed by parents at home.

I do not feel that it has been a waste of money to provide increased funding to Abbott districts, given the needs of our student population. In Perth Amboy, we recognize those needs and strive to fulfill the gaps which are needed to develop the whole child.

We have seen success since the inception of Abbott funding. Perth Amboy has consistently impressed visitors to our district with our comprehensive program offerings and the effectiveness of our instruction. State Department officials, including Gordon MacInnes, Fred Carrig; Middlesex County Superintendent Patrick Piegari, have been suitably impressed by our efforts. This past year we have had a delegation from Washington, D.C., observe our preschool program in three separate schools, and they were in awe of our program. Last year, an assistant commissioner of education from New Zealand viewed our bilingual program, which has been identified by the State Department as a model, and came away with rave reviews.

Although Perth Amboy, until last year, has never asked for supplemental funding, we have always tried to spend every dollar toward the care and well-being of our students. It has always been our belief that our children can be successful given the proper tools for achievement.

Today you will hear testimony from numerous individuals representing other Abbott districts throughout the state. My responsibility is to one of them. And it is difficult to make the argument that Perth Amboy's needs are greater than other Abbott districts. I can only tell you

what I know about our town and its student population. As previously stated to this Committee, over 66 percent of our students have a native language which is other than English. Many of our children's parents are immigrants who have come to us from a variety of countries, most of them being Latino.

Despite our best efforts to transition our students into the English language, they still return to their homes each day in an environment where Spanish is the only language being spoken. We do not flee from that responsibility. We just ask that you take a moment to reflect on what that represents to us as a public school organization.

Another factor which dramatically impacts students' readiness for education is the home environment. As stated previously, most of our student population comes from poor households, where parents work multiple jobs in order to meet living expenses. In Perth Amboy, over 85 percent of our students qualify for free or reduced-priced breakfasts and lunches. Often, children do not have the nurturing needed to prepare them for formal education, because their parents are busy trying to earn sufficient money to provide food and clothing to the household. Many of our students come from single-parent homes, where oftentimes the parents themselves are not that far removed from the age of our high school students. And yet, despite hardships, the students in Perth Amboy are resilient. Every year we have multiple success stories of children who graduate from our high school attending the most prestigious colleges and universities in the country. But that is not enough. Success stories must be increased if we are to continue to meet the needs of our student population.

It is apparent that this Administration is attempting to get out from under the responsibility of Abbott funding. The office in the Department of Education which has been responsible for Abbott implementation is being disbanded. School funding formulas are being proposed which would eliminate the designation of Abbott altogether. Funds which have been provided in previous years are talked about being withdrawn from Abbott districts and redistributed to other school districts in the state. For the second consecutive year, our local tax levy has been mandated to increase, while a corresponding amount has been reduced from our State aid.

Over the past five years, Abbott districts have felt the impact of decreased funding. Categorical aid such as transportation, special education, and bilingual education aid has been frozen. Funds dedicated for adult education have been redirected. Increases in parity aid have become minimal, without keeping pace with the cost of living, which all of us need to be concerned with.

In 2006-2007, Perth Amboy, for the first time since the increase in Abbott funding, was forced to cut back on its program offerings. Just over \$3.3 million was cut from our 2006-2007 budget, and included the elimination of six technology coordinators, six Whole School Reform facilitators, 30 para-professionals, five custodians, and three security officers. In addition, elementary Summer school and field trips were eliminated, as was \$467,000 earmarked for replacement equipment.

The issue of whether the increase in Abbott funding has been effective is complex. It is understandable to expect improvement immediately in order to show a return on the investment of billions of

dollars. Done correctly, however, changes which are taking place in Abbott districts will show results going far into the future. Changing the way a child is introduced to education, for instance, by providing a full-day preschool program for 3- and 4-year-olds, can only strengthen the fundamentals needed to be successful in later grades.

In Perth Amboy, we are seeing an increase in our standardized test scores in our elementary schools, some of which can be attributed to the implementation of a preschool program; some of which can be attributed to the change in the method of delivering instruction to our students, through the assistance of specialists and coaches who are available to both teachers and students.

No Child Left Behind legislation does have its drawbacks, in that it can be too aggressive in terms of expectations for students with limited English abilities or learning disabilities. However, this law has caused districts to take thorough evaluative processes of the way they do business and, in some instances, have found that we cannot have business as usual.

We have seen an increase in State aid in Perth Amboy for 2007-2008; however, not nearly enough to meet our expenses. We have historically been over-reliant on appropriations of surplus funds in order to keep our program intact. These funds will not always be available and, once fully utilized, will mean even more drastic reductions than spoken of earlier.

Faced with our anticipated revenue, the district is looking at possible reductions which will truly have adverse impacts, including parent coordinators, athletics, nurses, guidance counselors and social workers, para-

professionals, teachers, administrators, secretarial staff, and our adult school, which has been servicing adults in Perth Amboy for over 30 years.

The addition of funds and programs in Abbott districts did not occur overnight. As it was stated previously, the increase in the State aid started as far back as 15 years ago, and yet we are being faced with the loss of millions of dollars virtually overnight. Due to the lack of funds to support innovative programs in Abbott districts, the whole process will begin to unravel, until all of the innovations that have proven successful will eventually disappear.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

Sir.

DR. PARKER: Good afternoon.

SENATOR RICE: Good afternoon.

DR. PARKER: My name is Nathan Parker. I'm the Superintendent of Schools in Orange.

I have a little-- I have an experience -- a set of experiences, I think, to open some of the light on the whole Abbott question.

I've spent-- One of the earlier presenters said if he started being a superintendent when he was 46, what would he look like at 56 or 61? Well, I started at 46, and now I'm 61. So this is what you look like.
(laughter)

The challenge -- and I'm sorry Senator Kean is not here because I made a real special effort to be here this morning. We had a power outage over the weekend. I took 13 phone calls in the car coming down here just to make sure that I was able to be here. So the implication that Abbott

superintendents are not concerned about the students that they serve is erroneous. And it's the kind of tainting of Abbott school districts that persists and continues to be used to make political hay. And I think it's highly inappropriate.

I don't know that-- I'm sure that's not his motivation. He's looking to get good information. But unintended consequences of one's actions, sometimes, are sometimes quite destructive.

I spent 12 years as Superintendent of Schools in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, which is arguably, I think, one of the highest, if not the highest, achieving academic school district in the state. And for the last three-and-a-half years I've been Superintendent of Schools in Orange, New Jersey.

Let me just say that Orange -- when I became the Superintendent of Schools three-and-a-half years ago, there were 31 Abbotts. We were 29th at the fourth grade, in terms of student achievement. Now, at -- 29th among the Abbotts, which made us one of the lowest-achieving school districts in New Jersey. Abbott funding does make a difference. Because now, at this point, we are sixth among all the 31 Abbotts, in terms of student achievement. And some of the Senators in the State of New Jersey are unaware of this, and have grouped Orange with other districts which have not shown significant changes. But we are now the highest-achieving, majority African-American district in the entire state. And that's in a relatively short amount of time. And without the kind of--

And the only reason I took the job, frankly, was because -- for the only place in the entire world, I believe, was there some chance to overcome the long-term-- And I come from Atlanta, Georgia. I come from

a small rural town called Norcross, Georgia. And I grew up in the time during segregation -- and when it was legal segregation. And I never went to an integrated high school or any school. So I have some kind of historical view of why this is a very, very critical piece of legislation.

But basically our task is real complex and real challenging, but real clear: which is to overcome the long-term effects of poverty and, if you will, erase racial discrimination. And I think it begins to raise the question--

I mean, last Monday, my business manager-- We were expecting the auditors -- the four auditors from KPMG. We had a budget deadline. And on my -- walking to my office was a young man, who is a senior in the high school. And he was coming up to the office to talk about his fear, because he has-- His mother had been shot on Saturday. And he was just so horrified by the blood that was in the snow outside of his house. And he was fearful for his own safety. And that kind of a story never happened in my experience in Upper Saddle River, it never happened in my experience in Bedford, New York, it never happened in my experience in Nyack, New York.

The challenges and the circumstances that our kids have to overcome are enormous. I have lunch with five seniors every Wednesday -- five different seniors. Typically one or two of the young women in the group has a child at home that they're taking care of. And they're coming to school to graduate. And they're proud. I usually ask them a question: What are they proud of? They're proud because they're going to be the first person in their family ever to go to college -- not just their immediate family, but their extended family. So we serve a very, very unusual

population where we can do a lot, very quickly, if given the opportunity to do so.

I'm going to give you three quick examples, Senator, and Senator, and Senator, because they kind of illustrate the dysfunctionality that we, as superintendents, face. I mean, to have a new superintendent coming from New York State -- Mr. Lofton -- and to have to suffer with what he observed-- And, frankly, because I spent 13 years in New York State, I kind of know what he is talking about, where there was a sense of collaboration and cooperation.

And, honestly, when I became a superintendent in an Abbott district three years ago, I sensed that collaboration. You were talking about Fred Carrig. Some of the stuff that Fred Carrig and, frankly, Gordon MacInnes -- bless him on his way. But the fact is, he really kept a focus on intensive literacy, kept things simple. And, I mean, what hasn't happened is really an assessment of what works and what doesn't work, which really gets to the question that Senator Kean is really raising, because--

Am I saying his name right?

MR. RODECKER: Kean. (indicating pronunciation)

DR. PARKER: Because Senator Kean raises the interesting question. And part of the Abbott mandate, in the case, was that we're supposed to look at what's working and what's not. And if you ask my why this bar graph of student achievement looks this way, I'm not real sure. I mean, there's tremendous improvement, but it would be of very critical importance for somebody outside of Orange to have been tracing what's happening here, to really identify what are the key antecedents of this kind of success. Because that kind of success-- It's not like rocket science, I

don't think; but there are things that had to be done to make this kind of change take place.

Let me give you three financial issues, which really illustrate some of the dysfunctionality which is going on at the present time. Number 1: We boldly said, "Well, we think we can--" Last year, when they said, "You're going to get a flat budget," we said, "We can't really serve our students' needs. We want to maintain this kind of progress over time. And, really, we need certain needs." We were confident that we would be able to get additional funding, because we didn't feel flat -- flat funding was going to-- I had to reduce my literacy coaches, and my math coaches, and my facilitators, my parent liaisons, social workers. I was reducing all these people, and I thought, "Well, maybe I will be able to make an argument." Well, I thought I would be able to make an argument easily. Frankly, I had never lost a budget argument when I even fought with and persuaded, you know, the people in Upper Saddle River to vote for 11 straight budgets. So I always thought that I could make the case.

But, honestly, we have kept making the case. The budget auditors came in. And, basically, they said that we're going to be able to carry over \$3.4 million, when the fact is we told them we had to pay a retro with our teachers who hadn't had a raise in two years. And we also had to -- other factors that have already been mentioned about cost drivers. And we thought we were going to have about \$1.5 million to carry over. They said, "You're going to have \$3.4 million." Well, what happened is that we had about \$1.5 million. And what happened is that it drove us into deficit. So not only did we have flat funding, but we had to further reduce by another \$1.5 million.

And they would say -- they would look at different aspects of our budget, and they'd say, "Well, we can find-- We think we can find this amount of money." "Well, all right, we'll grant you that." But once they found that -- once we showed them the reason they couldn't take that, they would go to some other aspect of the budget.

I think the camel that really -- I mean, the straw that broke my back was this most recent one, where the Board of Education -- and my Board Vice President is behind me. He's been in charge of the Facilities Committee for 15 years in Orange. The Board decided, last April, that the football-- Our new athletic director had come in; and he was talking to the officials in the county who said our football field was unsafe for kids to play on. So we tried to get the football field prepared for the Fall, but it wasn't practical. Because we actually had some money left over from a bond issue from over 10 years ago, the Board of Education decided to use that \$768,000 to resurface the field. That's just to resurface the field. That's not to put new stands in or anything like that.

Well, lo and behold, I get a letter in the last aspect of the budget, in terms of closing the deficit-- The State Department of Education tells us to, "Take that money that you're going to use for resurfacing that field and use that money to reduce the budget." Now, this is a football field which couldn't be played on the whole season. We didn't have one home game.

Again, I ask-- I wish the Assemblyman was over here. Because, I mean, would the people in Upper Saddle River allow you not to have a homecoming on their local football field? Would they allow you to close a

football for (indiscernible)? Hell no, they'd be down here screaming at you guys. And you'd hear about it. The people in Orange--

I was talking to Mr. Griffa. (phonetic spelling) The people in Orange don't have the kind of political sophistication to make those kinds -- to pull the levers, like were pulled a couple of weeks ago; when all of a sudden, the funding thing that just got -- what people were talking about -- got reversed where-- If you get this extra-- If you raise your taxes, you're going to get a reduced funding. You know, a couple of superintendents from non-Abbott districts raised their voices. And all of a sudden, before the sunset, that got changed. That kind of thing just doesn't happen typically in an Abbott district.

But here we have a football field-- What I'm just trying to say is -- to illustrate the differences and the similarities, because I speak from very direct experience about it. So here we are. We had to take this \$768,000, and we've had to reduce our budget by it. So now what I've done is-- Last week, I just told the district not to spend anything except on absolute emergencies for the rest of the year, to try to make up for this loss, which creates an enormous deprivation when you're trying to do new and creative things.

Number two: This is caught between two dysfunctional bureaucracies: the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation and the New Jersey Department of Education. You have a situation where the New Jersey-- We have-- We're building-- We're renovating and expanding two new facilities: the Park Avenue and the Lincoln Avenue schools. Well, all of our students in Orange are walkers. So all of those students walk. There's no transportation cost. Well, each of these schools are going to be-- You

can't inhabit them during the construction and renovation. So basically they're going to be going to two different swing spaces. Well, the swing spaces are too far to walk to. So we have to buy buses. We have to have bus service. It's a cost directly related to the construction.

Well, would you believe that the New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation told me that the Department of Education told them, five years ago in a meeting where there were no minutes kept, that they were going to pick up that kind of cost, because they had a pot of money? Of course, the New Jersey Department of Education said, "Well, that's a related cost to construction. The New Jersey Schools Construction Corporation should be paying for it." Well, this semester, we're paying \$237,285 for transporting the kids for a half-a-year. And, next year, the projected cost is \$1.08 million, because we're going to be transporting kids from two schools.

Now, the 3 percent is \$1.7 million. So here we go, \$1.7 million -- I'll lose a million dollars right off the top just for the-- And that doesn't even include the-- I had to pay teachers over Christmas break to pack up boxes and unpack, which was another \$30,000 or \$40,000. We haven't got-- You've all moved from a house. When you move an entire school, you've got to move all the desks, you've got to move all of the stuff. I mean, it's a huge operation.

Number three: Another remarkable level of dysfunctionality -- the State Department approved a school called the Pride Charter School. Now, the Pride Charter School's founders presently are high-level or-- Well, they're coordinators -- they're not the principal, but they're sort of just underneath the principal, of a school called Lady Liberty Charter

School, in Newark. Now, guess how well the students achieve in Lady Liberty Charter School, in Newark? Well, they achieve much worse than any of the schools in Orange. And yet, believe it or not, in a school district which has shown this kind of achievement over the last four years -- relatively small district -- they approved this Pride Charter School, which will take another \$810,911 off of the top of our budget.

Meanwhile, I mean, the most remarkable thing is that the NJSCC identified the school that the Pride Charter School wanted to rent for their charter school. And believe it or not, we had the NJSCC competing with the diocese for the same school that the Pride Charter School-- So it drove up the price that the NJSCC had to pay for rent. So when we talk about cost drivers-- I mean, here you have two agencies that aren't even talking to each other and are doing things that are counter to, really, the mission of overcoming the long-term effects of poverty.

Here are three quick examples which are truly remarkable and truly exhibit the kind of dysfunctionality, which hopefully the Assembly and the Senate can address in some of their work in the future.

I know you didn't expect to have this kind of barrage at the last speaker.

SENATOR RICE: No, no. Let me tell you, it's what we need. I'm hearing it all the time. And I'm just sitting here, and I'm listening, and I'm smiling with some degree of anguish and anger. Because while you are speaking, I'm thinking about my Superintendent, in the back, in Irvington.

There aren't communications. We have a team that went to the top. I've always argued that recreation and those kinds of things are very necessary for our students. You cannot educate a youngster who

doesn't have a healthy body. You can't have a healthy mind. And we know that we didn't build playgrounds and activities at schools, years ago, for the State to say -- as Commissioner Ellis said years ago -- he doesn't believe it's the State's responsibility. But they weren't built as parking lots; they were built for other reasons.

But it's interesting, because we have the same problem in Irvington. It's a health-safety issue. But the State, because it's two different departments, are defining it as something else. We're not even talking about a new field. See, we're arguing about what schools should actually have, on the capital side, to enhance opportunities in education and academic growth. So if you argue the case: Should there be a swimming pool? I think so. But if you want to argue the case, there is not a need. And you could go back and forth. "There should be, but we don't have the money."

But when you say there's a field actually sitting there, that's been there for years, can't be utilized, and it needs to be fixed -- call it *new construction*, call it *fixing*, call it *repairing* -- and then the SCC recognized that it is important, it is a health-safety issue that we, at the SCC, are going to be addressing; and then DOE sits at their desks and say, "It's not a priority. We don't think that we should pay for it." There is failure to communicate.

And we're going to address that. And I have a real problem with that. And that's why I want the Commission to come before us. Because they're good for doing audits, and I think they should. They're good for calling everybody up and accusing everybody of a lot of things in the Department of Education. And I think that they're right. They should make that publicly -- awareness. But then they are also even better for

denying things they know we need and finding excuses to deny them. So that needs to be addressed.

In terms of the charter school scenario: The reality that we have charter schools, and we have to make the charter schools that we have -- since we approve them -- work. We have always argued, in the Majority -- at least in the Democratic circles -- that while we are doing this charter school thing, we give out applications like they're water. And there are several bills that never get moved in the Education Committee that say that we should put a moratorium on them. Let's try to get the facilities that we have to work. And we can't take dollars away from one part of the system; we have to find additional dollars.

We're back in the Abbott scenario again, where we said we have to deal with the rim districts, the out-districts. But you can't take from what is mandated and needed just to deal with that, because you're diminishing your real needs on this side. And that's smoke and mirrors.

But the charter schools are in the same boat. I mean, it's nice to say the money should follow the child. You put a charter school up over here. Yes, the money follows the child, but that classroom is still that classroom that needs light, and heat, etc., regardless of what that population is. So it's not as simple as folks like to articulate it, legislators like to sell it to "their communities." And studies show across this country that there are some good charter schools, but the majority of them fail. And you expect them to fail where there is no real oversight, like public schools.

And so I need to know from you-- If you don't have with you-- Your testimony was so powerful -- both testimonies. And I have a copy of yours. But if you could leave us a copy, or get us a copy; because there are

some issues in your testimony that need to be raised when we call the Commissioner of Education before us.

And, initially, my whole idea was to have the Commissioner of Education come before us. But it appears as though I may have to get SCC and the Commissioner to come together, because I have not had them at the same meetings on the same subject. Someone has to answer to us as to why -- the lack of. And I don't care what anybody says about the SCC, there is a funding problem. I respect that. And we have to address that from the legislative side. But Mr. Weiner and others are really trying to bring this thing around and understand the needs, and they're arguing the case for the needs.

And when I see things that get approved on one side, and get hung up on the other side, I have a problem with that. I don't know how the Department of Education comes up with their conclusion that you don't need your field. If we can identify the real needs--

See, everybody is going to need the field, if you want to argue that case. So we've got to look at them subjectively. I mean, what gets thrown in my face all the time is Perth Amboy. People say, "Well, I don't understand this. We have a field that's been here. It needs fixing, etc., etc. And you know what? They move so slowly. Down there in Perth Amboy, Mayor Vas down there just took -- got a field. It's up and going, nicest thing in the world." Well, that's a compliment; but it makes us look like jerks on the legislative side, as though something is happening here that shouldn't be happening. That's not true. And so that's got to be addressed.

I also want to commend you, because all of you-- It seems like a lot of people here could be commissioners or take Gordon's job -- one or

the other -- because you do understand across the board. We have a lot of experience coming from a “wealthy” district, or upper-income level wealthy district, to poor districts. And so you see the balance.

Your experience is extremely important to these conversations, because-- I’m from the racist South. We’re the same generation. My mother is from Swainsboro, Georgia, out in the country. It’s still country, you know.

DR. PARKER: Norcross is no longer country, unfortunately.
(laughter)

SENATOR RICE: I know.

DR. PARKER: I was just down there this weekend.

SENATOR RICE: And I was there when those signs were still up. And I was there when it was separate but equal, and then Brown came along. In fact, I came to New Jersey in ’55, in the second week of January.

And so you bring the perspective, because you do understand what that fight was all about. Whether you agreed or disagreed, you understand it. Then you can come to a state whose history is supposed to be one of diversity and a little different, even though we know the difference. And then you get a district where you say people understand you have to have recreational fields someplace, you have to have other kinds of things someplace. But yet, you come into another district where you see things are starting to get better, with everybody trying to pull together, and yet they’re saying that those same needs aren’t necessary.

And I know both of you must get confused, because you’re saying, “Wait a minute. I know that this only works because this is with

this. Now, in another district they tell me they get the same results without this, and it's supposed to work." And so there is confusion.

And the Governor is going to have to understand that if, in fact, we're going to reduce property tax in New Jersey-- And the media can write this. Let me give you the academic side of it. I'm not Wall Street, I'm a realist. If you're going to reduce property tax in New Jersey, the best way to do it is to supply the dollars necessary, across the board, for education. That's my quote. And I can give--

DR. PARKER: Could I just comment?

SENATOR RICE: --you the benefits. And then I'll let you comment. I can give you-- I can cite that. Because when you look at the things that happen, across the board -- when you don't educate people and teach them right from wrong, and teach them how to get other opportunities, teach them how to be families -- then we're always going to put more money into Human Services, and Criminal Justice, and other places.

So you can go ahead and respond. I just wanted to at least get that on the record.

DR. PARKER: I just wanted to kind of build on that a little bit. Because when I went up to Upper Saddle River, the budget had been defeated five years in a row, student population was declining; house values, even in Upper Saddle River, were kind of flat to going down. And by getting the budgets passed, and started raising achievement -- because the achievement wasn't popping, although most people think in a high-wealth district it's always popping. And I think that average houses were about

\$280,000 or \$300,000 in 1991. When I left in 2002, the average house was \$750,000.

The biggest argument I made was, if you improve the quality of your schools, your values are going to go up. And I think that you could probably do a study like that in some of the Abbotts right now, where you do have increasing housing values in Perth Amboy, and even in Orange. There's a connection between the people who are staying in the Orange public schools now, who weren't staying there five years ago, because there is a hopeful sign when they see their middle school -- which had 14 principals in the last 22 years -- featured on the front page of the *Star-Ledger* on Monday, about the kind of changes that are taking place.

But I think that Senator Kean's questions about the effects-- What are the best practices at work? That's the part that David Sciarra keeps asking about, from the Education Law Center, about one of the chief mandates for-- I mean, we could have the lessons learned in the Abbott districts, because there are some that are functioning very well, some that aren't. Perth Amboy is one you could study that's made dramatic changes over the last number of-- But if we figure out what actually is causing those changes, that's really critical information.

And I just have to comment on your -- on the charter school. I mean, I think charter school-- I mean, the whole notion of competition and, kind of, creating opportunities for students where they don't exist, and creating opportunities for innovation-- But this whole thing in New Jersey of where the charter school funding comes directly out of the local district -- that makes no sense at all. What that does is that it backs everybody up.

So even if you learn something new in the charter school innovation, you couldn't really implement it, because you'd be losing the resource.

Senator Rice, what you say is, it's not all-- If I lost-- Like, for example, if \$810,000 comes out of my children's budget in Orange, then I can't reduce 810 -- that's 80 students. I can't-- With 80 students, I can't reduce -- I'm not going to be able to reduce 10 teachers.

SENATOR RICE: Liabilities by that much.

DR. PARKER: It just doesn't work that way.

SENATOR RICE: We're going to conclude in a moment. But I just want to indicate that the speakers here this morning -- I thought you all did a great job.

I see Neptune -- this change in the State aid is a minus 3.1 percent. Interestingly enough, Perth Amboy is a plus 3.4 percent. But yet, both towns are feeling the impact on "funding." And so that's the issue that has to be raised. And then when you look at Irvington, there's "no increase in fiscal 2006-2007." They are 0-0. And they are going to remain in the hole, but yet they have a deficit.

I mean, there's something clearly wrong with the math or the definition of cost benefits -- or cost-benefits analysis, on the administration side, that someone couldn't pick up what is obvious in terms of this formula. How are we going to straighten it out, moving towards budget, I'm not sure. We're going to do the best we can. But I do know that we can't go into another school year -- if we can survive this one, some kind of way -- thinking the way we're thinking on the administration's side. And we certainly can't go in there with my colleagues playing politics, pitting

one group against the other, in terms of where we live and our income; and in many cases, racially, by way of perceptions.

You see, some of my colleagues won't say the word. But I've been here long enough -- and they can print that too -- been here long enough to know when they think the word. Okay? But they have these fancy lawyer terms and things, and they put it into an economic piece, but we know what they mean.

Don't we, Senator?

SENATOR BARK: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: She's on our side. She's a fighter for education.

But the thing is that we're going to have to move forward.

So let me just let the Senator raise some issues with you that I believe she may have, and then we'll move to adjourn.

SENATOR BARK: Well, I don't know whether I want to raise so many issues. I'd love to just sit and chat with you, because you both have very interesting ideas.

And certainly one of the things that has always bothered me is that, very often, those who sit in Trenton do not necessarily know what's going on in the field. And they make some pronouncements that are -- that can be extraordinarily difficult. And the other thing that they assume is that every school district is like every other school district, and they're not. And that's why I think it's so very difficult for legislators -- myself included -- to sit and say, "We need this kind of a law." Because it may work well with some of the districts, but it doesn't work well with other districts. And I find it very interesting that we, in Trenton, sometimes do that.

I have learned a great deal this afternoon -- or today. And thank you very much for having this meeting, because it's always very interesting to hear from those people who are on the front lines and are doing their job.

And I thank you very much for taking the time. And I'm sorry you had so many difficulties in your district. But I still appreciate the fact that you came and you shared with us some of the things that you see. And, yes, I do think sometimes we get very bureaucratic in Trenton, and have this funny feeling that somehow we are in the Ivory Tower and we have every right to tell you what to do; when, ultimately, you need to tell us what is the appropriate thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

Let me say to those who are still here and to others -- is that we are going to call in the -- invite in the non-Abbott district superintendents. Now, understand there are only 31 Abbott districts in New Jersey. And so we're going to send invites, but we are not going to take testimony that day from 500 and -- whatever the numbers are. (laughter) But we need to hear. And I think the way we need to do this is, maybe, to our advantage is to--

I want the staff to identify the Department of Education, what we call, maybe, the rim districts and those other non-Abbott districts that are getting painful; and then ask the members on this Committee to invite any others that they believe should be here. This way, we have a manageable type of group.

SENATOR BARK: I have to repeat again -- once again, let's go far South. The districts that occur in Cumberland and Salem counties are just so different--

SENATOR RICE: Yes.

SENATOR BARK: --than the highly urbanized ones. But I think that at least one of them should be heard from.

MS. SCHULZ: You'll help us get some?

SENATOR RICE: Sure.

SENATOR BARK: Yes. I would encourage you to do that.

SENATOR RICE: What I'm asking staff to do--

Give me a list of the districts, and those areas in particular, Abbott and non-Abbott. We're going to send them letters, we're going to insist they be here. I'm serious. And just put on there, "Fine, if you don't want to come to the meeting, don't expect any help from me, as one Senator, etc. Your colleagues are calling out for you. If people can travel to the State House from the other areas -- Sussex County and others -- Hillsborough -- you can travel up here once in a while."

I don't mind going there, Senator. The problem is that I can guarantee you I'd be lucky if I could get one other member, versus you, to go, because I've tried that with other committees.

SENATOR BARK: No, Trenton is fine.

SENATOR RICE: But the thing is, we need to insist on that. And I think that we need to send them letters this week, and let them know that we know everybody is busy, but their representatives are very much concerned why they never come. This is not the first meeting. We've had meetings. And so we need to address that.

But, once again, we need to have the non-Abbott district meeting. We'll set it up. But I want staff to make notes, because I'm getting a little old, and I may forget -- that we're going to invite the rim-type districts, and the border districts, and the South Jersey area districts. And you're going to ask my colleagues on this Committee -- all the members -- to let you know who they want to invite.

And then we'll do our regular process. We'll fax them, mail them, and call them. And then it's up to them to be adults. And if they don't want to respond for the district, maybe they shouldn't be superintendents. That's the bottom line. (laughter) I'm being honest about that. Okay?

SENATOR BARK: There you go.

SENATOR RICE: And I think the final thing is that we're going to ultimately have the issue -- and the superintendents need to understand this -- the Assemblyman, my Co-Chair, is concerned about hearing from Commissioner Davy as it relates to the audits. And so I don't know what all of that means, but I know we have to hear and see where we are with those. So you need to brace yourself for that, if you've been audited or going to be audited.

And the final thing, for the record-- You know, we've had a lot of testimony throughout the course of the years relating to Abbott -- what's Abbott, what's not Abbott, and funding. I want to remind everybody, one reason that I sponsored QSAC legislation was because we're not going to take over school districts the way we used to take them over; because the State can't run education. But we're also smart enough to know that there are wealthy districts out there, that some of my members represent -- that

always protect and think they're doing so wonderful. Maybe their test scores are okay; but some of the financing, from some of the indicators, is not okay -- the way they're handling the management. And QSAC is really set up to get us into those districts, because we're smart enough to know they have so much money -- the politics are so great and tight -- you can't go in and take them over anyway, unless you get in there and see what's going on.

So I don't want everybody to think that it's just Abbott, and border districts, and rim districts where there are problems. I like the fact that you talk about us. I don't like it because it's negative, but at least New Jersey knows that whatever it is that we're doing is in the open. Whatever problems we have are in the open, and that we're trying to fix our problems. The worst thing that can happen is all those wonderful, green-grass districts -- to have problems, and nobody is aware of it, and they keep paying high property taxes.

I thank everybody very much.

This meeting is adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)