
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“The Committee will continue its discussion of virtual/blended learning
with presenters from various education organizations”*

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

DATE: March 19, 2013
1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Ronald L. Rice, Co-Chair
Assemblywoman Connie Wagner, Co-Chair
Senator Linda R. Greenstein
Senator Diane B. Allen
Senator Samuel D. Thompson
Assemblywoman Bettylou DeCroce



ALSO PRESENT:

Melanie M. Schulz
Executive Director

Sharon M. Benesta
Chief of Staff

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

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ASSEMBLYWOMAN CONNIE WAGNER (Chair): I'd like to call the meeting to order.

Please rise for the flag salute.

(all recite pledge)

Good afternoon, everyone. And I'd like to thank everyone for coming. And as you can see, in Trenton the sun is shining. (laughter) And I know that many of you traveled through snow, ice, and rain today to get here, but it must mean good things are going to happen here today.

I'd like to open up with two announcements. First of all, we're going to have one more hearing on online learning. Assemblyman Wolfe requested another hearing, and this will be devoted to autism and online learning. So therefore we will be announcing when we can get a date in order; everyone will know about it. But we will be having a fifth hearing.

And I'd also like to share a story with you. Because yesterday I happened to go to the Monmouth County prison in order to participate in a graduation. And I watched 10 people yesterday receive a GED diploma -- 10 people who were awfully proud that they earned a diploma and that when they are released from prison they will be able to earn a living. That's what it's all about -- taking people from prison, making sure they're rehabilitated, and out in the world. And I remember talking about rehabilitation from when I was a student in the 1960s in high school. And I finally saw it working.

And how did it work? It worked through online education for the GED. This was used as a tool. And how it was used is that there was a teacher for the online education, and there was a teacher right there in the classroom. And the young men and women actually showed me some of

the lessons that they were working on, and they were absolutely right -- that if some of us had to go back and take the GED, I know I, for one, would not be able to do the geometry portion of the problems. (laughter) But it was interesting because 150 people -- residents -- of this prison received a GED diploma in 5 years. And if I went back and checked the statistics before that, it was 1 person in 5 years. So therefore, I would have to say that this is a proven example of where online learning could work. And I was so excited about it that it made me smile all day; it makes me want to now go to the other counties and say, "Do this, because this is working."

We all know that they will face challenges as they get out into the real world, but this showed me that "I now have a piece of paper in my hand which says, 'I have command of skills and knowledge, and I am ready to be employed and I'm ready to go out there and get more knowledge.'"

And as I talked with some of them, each one of them had a plan. Each one of them had something that they wanted to do when they were released. That's what it's all about. That was success. And I just needed to share a good story for everyone here. And I just want to thank Tim and Sister Elizabeth for inviting me there yesterday. And I often say that I try to think of a gig that I'm going to do when this one's up. And that could be something that I could see myself doing because it was a positive result. The only thing is they'd have to give me lessons on the computer. (laughter) So there's that.

But, okay -- so now we're going to begin today's hearing with Joseph Ventre, who is the Chief Technology Officer at Monmouth County (*sic*) Educational Services Commission.

So Joe, it's all yours.

J O S E P H V E N T R E: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding blended learning and PARCC in New Jersey schools.

One of the issues of concern which the Committee should be aware of is the existing infrastructure in the New Jersey schools. I've reviewed the technology guidelines for PARCC assessments dated February 2013 and believe the biggest obstacles school districts will need to overcome is bandwidth.

If a district or a school was a town, bandwidth would be the two-lane road in and out of the town -- one lane in, and one lane out. Depending on the amount of people who live in the town, this one road may work just fine. However, as the town grows, traffic will build and getting in and out of the town will become a problem. Therefore, the road would need to be expanded to include multiple lanes in and out.

Some schools in New Jersey have roads with multiple lanes which, for blended learning and PARCC, put them in a very good position to support these programs. However, in your smaller schools, districts, and nonpublic schools, they may have a very small amount of bandwidth available. This is where you will have issues.

We need to keep in mind the total amount of bandwidth at these locations needs to be shared across the entire organization. Therefore, only so many students will be able to access PARCC and still leave enough bandwidth for other students to access the Internet.

Having spoken with and having been part of conversations with teachers, the Internet has become a major component in how they instruct their students. This could mean, depending on what Internet tools they are using, it could impact how they teach.

Another challenge for some schools would be the security requirements. While some of the requirements can be addressed by the operating system itself -- Windows, for example -- other requirements will need a third party application or tool -- for example, disabling screen, capturing, cameras, and application switching. This will be an even greater challenge for those districts and schools with a bring-your-own device policy. These are the schools and districts that allow students to bring their own laptops and iPads -- what have you -- and connect to the network.

Since these devices do not belong to the district, the district will not have control over what is loaded or installed on the device. We also would not be able to push the security controls to the devices, as we would not have the correct permissions which would allow us to install the security software.

All of these issues can be addressed with time, funding, and the correct resources. Unfortunately for some schools in the state, they are resource-poor when it comes to information technology. The move to a blended online environment is not to be taken lightly and the correct resources must be in place for a successful implementation. This has been our experience at the New Jersey Virtual School.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak. And if you have any questions for me I'd be happy to answer them at this time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Does anybody have any questions? (no response)

Joe, I just have a concern, and that is that as I travel from district to district -- and we all know that the PARCC test-- I mean, it's due to be implemented in -- what? -- 2014, 2015; and online testing. And so

many times when I talk to the administrators, I'm saying, "Are you ready? Do you have the technology available?" And they're shaking their heads: No, they don't. And I'm concerned, and I'm wondering when are they going to get concerned?

Do you have any idea what kind of cost we're talking about for a district -- low end to high end? And what it would cost to get it implemented -- the broadband width that you're talking about?

MR. VENTRE: It varies considerably, depending on the amount of students in the school and what they're doing in the school. And let me tell you what I mean by that. I've spoken to a few principals who were very proud of the fact-- And I think it's a very good thing. But in one school in particular they are very heavily engaged with social media. They use YouTube, they use Ustream, they use Facebook -- you name it, they use it. Those tools alone are what I like to call *bandwidth hogs*. So even if you have a small school, if they're using all of these Internet tools, you're going to need a fairly large bandwidth -- pipe, we'll call it, or road -- to satisfy just that. If you introduce PARCC, which has its own requirements and restrictions, then you have to look at, well, how many students do we plan on having use PARCC at the same time? And what else is going on in the school while they're doing that? Because we want to make sure that no one is sitting there watching the hourglass go round and round and nothing is happening.

So I wish I could say for this school with this many kids or this many students it would be *X*. There are a lot of variables you need to think of. And, on top of that, it's also hardware -- and I'm not just talking computers; I'm talking about the routers and the switches, which are

basically the components of the network that the devices plug into. I've seen quite a few schools that saved money by going out and buying the small devices that you would buy for your house. They're supporting their schools on these devices. So there's not a lot of bells and whistles in those devices, where, if they had purchased a business -- what I would call a *business-class product*, you could do things like -- and just as an example -- quality of service, where you can, say, "take these computers and when they're on, give them highest priority." So when they go to the Internet they get the Internet bandwidth first, and everybody else will get it second. I guarantee you that most of your smaller districts and schools don't have that functionality.

So to answer your question, there really isn't a hard answer I can give you. I can tell you that the routers themselves start in the \$4,000 to \$6,000 range. And then once you get into the switches -- that's another \$3,000 to \$5,000. It gets expensive just on the hardware. The bandwidth varies, depending on the size of the pipe -- the size of the bandwidth that you're looking for.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Joe, one other question.

Okay, let's say money is not the problem now. Time-- I just have no idea how quickly can it be done to make the school ready. Let's say if I have a school of 2,000 students. How quickly--

MR. VENTRE: If you said, "Start tomorrow," aggressively it would be 30 days.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay.

MR. VENTRE: That's very aggressive; 60 days is probably more the number -- to get the bandwidth in place, the devices you need, the

training. And that's-- And I mention that -- that's another problem that you're going to run into: Who in the school district is going to support all this, especially, again, in your smaller districts and schools? I mean, we've seen at New Jersey Virtual people who are the IT managers, but they're actually the teacher. Or, in one district, the BA is the IT person. So it's quite an endeavor to support this type of infrastructure.

You have to keep in mind also the larger the-- I just want to mention that the larger the Internet connection, in terms of bandwidth, the more attraction it is for hackers, because they like to steal your bandwidth. Because they want to get their garbage out, so they look for the largest pipe they can grab. And it becomes an attraction for hackers.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Now, remembering that I know nothing -- okay? Where would I start if I was a school? Like, who do I go to, to-- Okay, I have to get my school up to speed and I need to bring this in. Where do I go?

MR. VENTRE: I would bring in a consultant -- an independent consultant who doesn't have any ties to one company over the other, who could look at your current infrastructure and say, "You know what? Your hardware isn't so bad; we can make this work. You just need a bigger Internet connection." And have him or her contact the telecommunications companies and get some pricing on the Internet connections. That's how I would do it -- somebody who knows, somebody who can advise, break down the information into nontechnical speak so that the administrators understand what they're dealing with. Because I believe that that's part of the issue. It's not that the administrators are not concerned; I just think that they don't realize what they need to be concerned about. They see,

“Well, we just ordered 250 iPads. We just ordered 500 computers.” If you were on Gilligan’s Island and they gave you a Ferrari (laughter) -- great. but I can’t get off the island. So that’s kind of how to look at it. So I would bring in a consultant -- an IT consultant who knows infrastructure and could make independent recommendations.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I believe Senator Thompson has a question.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Listening to your comments there -- and you’re speaking of the problems that a small district might have and so on -- this might be an ideal case for looking at shared services, i.e., having the counties go out and work to establish the contracts and so on to make it available to the small districts. There would be a lot less work for them to do. And you’re talking about their administrators and so on. They could do the basic work out there, work up the contracts, and so on, and then the local districts could just join in. That might be one way of handling that problem with the small districts and such.

MR. VENTRE: Yes, I think my Superintendent, Tim Nogueira, he can probably speak much better to that than I can. But I think that’s a good idea, and I’m sure he can elaborate.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Is there anybody else here with any questions? (no response)

I’m just going to go with one more. You made a comment about the students bringing in their individual -- whether it be iPad or a Notepad or phone or whatever. And you mentioned that it might not be a good idea. I keep seeing this on the news, where kids are bringing their

stuff in. What would happen if the kids were told to bring their stuff in to take the test?

MR. VENTRE: Again, based on the guidelines, I know you can't use PARCC -- it's not supported on smartphones. but it is supported on iPads. Now, we've run into this-- It's been a topic of conversation when I had this conversation with NJPSA regarding social media and the law -- the bullying laws and whatnot. And the reason why it's come up in that conversation is because one of the reasons the schools like to own the devices is because we can control them. We can say this computer gets out to the Internet; we can say it doesn't. We can say it gets to this site but not that one. When you bring in your own device, and you're using Verizon's 3G, you can go wherever you want. We cannot control that. So it becomes a problem. If, for example, a student is cyberbullying -- yes, they can't use our device to do it, but if he runs into the boys' room and jumps on Facebook with his phone, there's nothing we can do about that.

So that's why I think it's been an issue -- because of the restrictions that PARCC calls for. They don't want the device to be able to do screen captures. What that means is while they're looking at the test, they would be able to, basically, take a picture of it and, say, maybe e-mail it to a friend. So they want these blocks put in place that are not native to the operating system -- what I mean is, not part of Windows. So you have to find a company that-- And they exist, but that's an additional expense. We need something that's going to lock down the computers so that it only allows them to view PARCC; they can't do this, they can't do that, they can't use-- I think they have to be able to use a microphone, but I think they want Bluetooth disabled because now laptops come with Bluetooth.

So there's some things in there that-- Again, if it's bring your own device, I'm sure a school district can put a policy in place that says, "If you want to bring in your device you have to go by our rules and regulations. And our rule is if you bring in your device, we get to do X, Y, and Z." But the issue is going to come down to, well, if it's their device, how far can you go? How can you force them to do something on something that they personally own? That's why I'm a little worried about that scenario.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Betty, do you have any-- Anybody have any other questions? (no response)

Well, thank you, Joe. Thank you very much for your testimony.

MR. VENTRE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Next, from Penns Grove-Carneys Point, is it Mahender Musuku and Soma -- Soma, you have to help me with your last name -- Gidugu (indicating pronunciation)? Did I do okay? Okay -- from Learnbeyond.

MAHENDER MUSUKU: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for giving us this opportunity.

Our presentation will be like two points: I am the Chairman and Managing Director of Learnbeyond. I (indiscernible) talk about two minutes about the merits of Learnbeyond, and then our presenters from the Penns Grove school are here -- Curriculum Director Joe Jones and Jennifer Rushton. They are here, and they will present the history of how they use it effectually in their school district, and how it has evolved, and how they're using the blended learning and online learning for the benefit of the public schools.

As you see, our company is built on the model of empowering public schools. We have been in partnership with public schools since 2004. And basically our tool is a complete online learning solution, and it has a solution for students, teachers, administrators, parents; and it also supports the Common Core Standards.

It is available as a cloud where you can (indiscernible) your operating system and other issues, or you can have it on stand-alone solution within your premises.

It has, as always online, easy access courses -- anytime, anywhere you have Internet. But the key is, it is controlled and managed by the teachers. So you are not just giving the easy access to the students, but everything is controlled by the teachers and it extends the classroom beyond traditional-- And it implements like a lot of the latest technologies, and everything that you want in a virtual application you have in this tool.

It is Web 2.0-centric. It has an e-Classroom; it has a whiteboard where teachers can write on the board and students sitting away, somewhere else -- they can see what the teacher is writing on the board. It has a patent-pending tool called CourseBuilder that enables the teachers or the curriculum experts to dynamically change the content, instead of waiting for the tool -- providers like us to come and change it. So they have all this access; they're allowed to change the content.

And the unique patent-pending analyses -- the facility based e-learning system. That means you can create your own facilities. A middle school can be one facility; a primary school can be one facility; a school district can be heading that. Sitting in Trenton you can see what is happening in all the 600 other school districts. So it is each facility, and

built upon it. So this is actually our patent-pending technology and we see that this is going to be very useful for the public schools.

It is very fast customization -- our maximum time for customization takes like three to four business days. It doesn't matter what level of customization it is.

There is very minimal training. It also has all the mobile learning. And it is iPad -- you know, Android, everything -- it supports.

It does a lot of collaboration tools for students and teachers. The goodness about this tool is it is developed hand-in-hand by the teachers so it always has a human interaction. So the tool, stand-alone as it is without a teacher, it is as good as not used. So we always would recommend teachers using it and the teachers have the control. It has 50 courses from grades 1 through 12, but you can get whatever course you want. It covers almost all major areas -- mathematics, science, social studies, English, and Spanish.

This is basically our tool. And now, if you have any questions, me and Soma will come back and answer. But I would like to invite Mr. Joseph Jones and Ms. Jennifer Rushton to come and present about what they're doing at the Penns Grove School District.

Thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you very much.

Just please state your names before you testify. That would be great.

J O S E P H P. J O N E S: Oh, okay. I'm used to being the guy in charge. (laughter)

Joe Jones, Penns Grove-Carneys Point Regional School District.
I'm the Technology Coordinator.

JENNIFER RUSHTON: And, hello. I'm Jennifer Rushton, the Supervisor in Math and Science for Penns Grove-Carneys Point Regional School District.

MR. JONES: The gentleman from Learnbeyond asked us to come and talk about our success with them. We've been using Learnbeyond since a grant came out from the State Department of Ed about -- almost 10 years ago, 2004, 2005 -- a Matrix grant. We had the privilege of winning it. And we were looking for a system that would allow us to fulfill the grant but also let us keep going. We looked at a couple other possibilities but they were so expensive we couldn't keep going beyond what the grant years were. We really wanted to continue it.

Up there are people who really helped us get this going, and Ms. Cobian and Ms. Rushton to my left, and myself and Dr. Massare. We looked for a system that would give us what we needed for the kids, and would have a lot of content and would allow the teachers to work with it. The beauty of the system is that you can't run this without a teacher. If you don't have a teacher involved in this, this falls apart. I often wonder about some of those where "you don't need a teacher," but, yes -- you need a teacher. Because one of the things the teacher does is ride herd on the kids -- which is kind of important. Whether you like it or not, there has to be somebody there telling them to get going.

We started out, with the grant, with a hybrid course. But then we realized we had a potential here to save money; in fact, we could keep summer school. If a kid can get through summer school, who was failing --

because we couldn't have summer school for a few years there, because it was so expensive. We figured out by using Learnbeyond and using online courses we could run summer school at a much more cost-efficient rate -- which most people don't realize saves you at least \$10,000 per kid. Because instead of educating a kid for 13 years, you can continue to educate a kid for 12. Because when a kid gets left back that means he's in the system for another year -- a possibility of two more years; it's a \$24,000 investment you're making. If you can save that, you're talking about real money after a few years.

We were able to personalize learning. We have a lot of-- It was beautiful for the teachers. Teachers were able to have office hours; teachers could work with kids while the other kids were working, because individualized instruction's much better. We found a lot of benefits to what we were doing and we continued to use it. And again, the beauty of it was the cost benefits, the fact that it wasn't really complicated to learn. And teachers really were-- I mean, the teachers involved with it enjoyed it. Jennifer will talk about the idea of how we're using it now, in a hybrid class, for our targeted assistance children.

MS. RUSHTON: Okay. I came along with the Learnbeyond system with our high school. Right now in our high school we have a high population of Title I students who need that targeted assistance, in addition to preparing them for end-of-course assessments and for the PARCC readiness assessment.

So what we did, we looked at what we're offering -- currently offering. And we know-- We saw that our targeted assistance students, our population was growing bigger -- sort of like a V. It was growing bigger and

bigger, so we had to come to the table and see what would best suit the needs of the students. So in our high school -- and I'll use Algebra I as an example -- our students have Algebra I in 9th grade, which is a State requirement. But in addition to the Algebra I class, they have an intervention class -- and that's specifically for targeted assistance students. So in the intervention class we use the Learnbeyond system. And the great thing about the Learnbeyond system is the students come into the class and they have a teacher as a facilitator. They come into the class and they take a pre-test. So the pre-test really specifies their individual needs. And, of course, the communication comes from the facilitator-teacher and the Algebra I teacher -- those additional needs. So once they take the pre-test, the system customizes what they need, and that's where their practice and remediation begins.

In addition to that, the teacher is there overseeing that they are attending to their practice. They have practice during the classroom time; they have practice at home after school if they choose to. What we're seeing in this classroom is the students are choosing to practice beyond the school day. They are choosing to practice at times where they can get the practice in online. They are actually turning in to self-assessors and they're looking at how they're doing in their class and they're saying, "I want to try this again -- to practice this skill more." And if you know, the summarizing assessment component, according to Marzano, is a top 5 strategy for students to learn. So the students are becoming more independent in their process of learning. So once they look at, on a daily basis -- they're learning they have a report card set up in Learnbeyond where they can see their progress at any given time when they are on the system. Once they do that,

they go back to their Algebra I class and they practice these skills and they're more successful. In addition to that, they're having more conversations with their teachers as to what they need, and they take it back to the other teacher to have that continued conversation of where they need to go from there.

So that's the success that we're having at Penns Grove. We also have the class in our English 9 and our English 10. For mathematics we have a classroom for Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. So we're really seeing success in the students. We're not just guessing on the skills that they need to practice on. We have a system that's telling us specifically this is how they're doing, this is where they need to go from there. And that's the great benefit of Learnbeyond.

We're looking to expand the Learnbeyond system. We're moving-- As a State requirement we have to have benchmark assessment in our courses. So instead of having the benchmark assessments where our district is creating, we're trying to eliminate the bias to make it more reliable and valid by having the system create the benchmarks in all nine content areas. So that's what -- we're looking towards Learnbeyond to do that. And we're in the process of designing that system for our school.

And there are some other benefits that we're looking at researching with the Learnbeyond platform. Because in Penns Grove we have-- It's a low socioeconomic area. We have over 60 percent free- and reduced-lunch. So our students-- They have the struggles that students in that situation would typically have, and we're trying to see what best meets their needs. And we found-- We're pretty confident that we found the solution to best meet their needs.

Our graduation rate-- We are below the State requirement in our graduation rate, so that's another system to get our students to be more in attendance, to have them -- to provide them with other opportunities for learning so that they are participants in a classroom.

Another great thing about Learnbeyond: We take our curriculum -- that is designed for Penns Grove, that is aligned to the State standards -- and we can load that up into the Learnbeyond system. So it's not that our students will be out of touch with what's going on in the classroom if they're learning from a different location -- they will have the same curriculum and the same requirements whether they're on the Learnbeyond system or they're actually sitting in a classroom on that day doing their work.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Senator.

SENATOR RONALD L. RICE (Co-Chair): Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to be here.

You started to grow the demographics of Penns Grove. What is the ethnic makeup of that high school? Do you have any idea of the percentage?

MR. JONES: Yes. I'm the guy who handles the data.
(laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Very good.

MR. JONES: When I first started there 39 years ago, the makeup was about 60 percent white, about 30 percent African-American, and about 10 percent Hispanic. That is no longer the case. In Penns Grove, right now, it's almost, I would say, 40 percent African-American, 30 percent white, and the rest a breakdown between Hispanics; we have a lot

of Asians now. We're going through what every -- what most school districts on the East Coast are going through. There's a change in demographics. If people think things are going to stay the same -- no.

SENATOR RICE: Right.

MR. JONES: It's a change. And I guarantee you, in 50 years, it won't be the same.

SENATOR RICE: You mentioned that you're in a predicament that a lot of districts are in, in terms of what the State requires for graduation. Does that mean that, under the QSAC indicators, that you have come below 50 percent of any of those?

MS. RUSHTON: Yes. We are labeled as a *focus school* right now because we were unable to reach the 75 percent rate that was required by the State. We are at 74 percent.

SENATOR RICE: In what areas?

MS. RUSHTON: Well, it's the graduation rate.

SENATOR RICE: All right. What about the QSAC indicators that you are measured by?

MS. RUSHTON: According to the QSAC indicators our curriculum--

SENATOR RICE: Instruction programs, personnel--

MS. RUSHTON: Right.

SENATOR RICE: Governance--

MS. RUSHTON: Our curriculum-- We had lost some points with our curriculum. We lost some points with our students passing the assessment -- the HSPA. We also are trying to reduce our rates with the students taking the ASSA test to be promoted out of high school.

SENATOR RICE: So maybe on the evaluation the State has to do--

MS. RUSHTON: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: --under each category there are five indicators.

MS. RUSHTON: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. Did you fail Personnel, in terms of--

MS. RUSHTON: I'm not sure--

SENATOR RICE: --in terms of reaching the 80 percent? Did you fail Program and Instruction? Did you fail Governance?

MS. RUSHTON: We failed the Program and Instruction.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. What about Governance?

MS. RUSHTON: I'm strictly Curriculum and Instruction--

SENATOR RICE: Okay, so you--

MS. RUSHTON: --so that's where my eyes totally focus to. I can't answer for the Personnel and--

SENATOR RICE: Was Program and Instruction something that you just recently failed, or has it been for a period of time right now?

MS. RUSHTON: We recently failed Program and Instruction, and we have done the corrective action plan and we are currently working on our corrective action plan. In addition to that we just had our Title I audit, and we looked at our programs. In the middle school and the high school we weren't offering the correct intervention pieces; so we corrected that, and Learnbeyond helped us with the corrections as far as our students having the intervention in addition to the course required.

SENATOR RICE: Melanie, can you get me four or five indicators and the number of years that they've passed, versus the number of years that there have been actually -- where they are starting to come down? Because if, in fact, you just -- if you had your system for this number of years and you've been doing okay over here, and then you start having these declines and you look and see if there's a good marriage-- If, in fact, there were problems prior to and you started seeing improvements--

MS. RUSHTON: We're starting to improve.

SENATOR RICE: --we want to know that. And also I'd like to know if you're being treated -- if you're failing these things -- the way the other districts are being treated, okay?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: How long have you been utilizing your Learnbeyond?

MR. JONES: In what area? For summer school we've been utilizing Learnbeyond--

SENATOR THOMPSON: When did you first bring it in?

MR. JONES: We first brought it in, in 2004, 2005 for a Matrix grant.

SENATOR THOMPSON: So you've been using it now for eight or nine years or something like that.

MR. JONES: Yes. In fact it helped us-- When we first had the Matrix grant, and we had the-- With the influx of the Matrix grant -- that it did help the middle school finally meet AYP at the end of it, by using the hybrid of a teacher and the online course.

SENATOR THOMPSON: So you have been able to assess some impact of this--

MR. JONES: Yes.

SENATOR THOMPSON: --whether it's been a positive impact, no impact, or whatever?

MR. JONES: Yes. The biggest impact we've seen is with summer school, and the fact that we don't have as many kids failing. They're not getting stuck in-- What happens with a lot of kids is they fail, and then they, for some reason, start thinking they have to fail. They get stuck in that mode where every year they fail again, and they say, "Well, I can't do anything better; I can't do anything better," and they wind up spending two years in the 6th grade.

SENATOR THOMPSON: But you had summer school before you brought this in?

MR. JONES: No. We had dropped summer school for a few years because of cost.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Oh, okay.

MR. JONES: And this allowed us to bring--

SENATOR THOMPSON: So you can't compare how you do in summer school with this versus how you did in summer school with something else.

MR. JONES: Yes, yes. Because it was a lot cheaper to do summer school with this than it is to do summer school as shutting a whole school down.

SENATOR THOMPSON: But you say there is a significant economic advantage to doing it this way.

MR. JONES: Yes, yes. We figured out one time we were saving, maybe, \$100,000 a year -- because, again, you don't have to educate a kid for that extra year that he's failed. So a minimum of-- If 10 kids pass summer school, that means you don't have 10 kids going to 13th grade, 14th grade. So you're saving a lot of money that way.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Right.

MR. JONES: And that helps a lot.

MS. RUSHTON: In addition to that, with the intervention piece that we've been using, this is the first year; and so far we've had two sessions. We use another benchmark assessment in our district; it's called MAP -- Measures of Academic Progress. It's a separate assessment we do three times a year, and we're in our second session of MAP testing. And in this second session we have shown growth in our content areas for the high school.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Good. That's what I wanted to see, is some assessment as to how successful it's been.

MS. RUSHTON: Yes. So we use something in addition to the Learnbeyond assessment just to have our -- to check to make sure that what we're doing is working.

SENATOR THOMPSON: So you're saying it's been a good asset for your system.

MS. RUSHTON: Yes. In addition to that, if you look at-- I'm in the classrooms a lot; I travel throughout the district in the classrooms. And I see not only the academic component -- I see the social-emotional component. Because students are more interested in their progress. They're not just taking assessment and saying, "Here." They're not just

filling out worksheets, saying, “Here, I’m finished.” They get immediate feedback, and they want that feedback, and they’re reacting to that feedback.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I just have a few questions.

Would all of your Algebra I students be taught in the same way, with this hybrid model -- or, let’s just say, I don’t have a problem in math. Is there a different way that they’re teaching it? Or is this for all of your Algebra I students?

MS. RUSHTON: Currently we are using it for our intervention students. I would absolutely love to use it for all students because it is the way our children learn. If you look at the brain research of our children at this age, it is bringing the learning to how they want to learn, and it’s accommodating their needs. At this time we are not using it for all Algebra I students. We have different components in place, but the programs that I find are extremely expensive, and we can’t purchase them to have the online. The Learnbeyond system is affordable for us, and I’m looking at expanding it. I just want the research to come in for our students and I see, with the second round of the Measures of Academic Progress, that our students are achieving. So that’s why I’m working to expand it at this point.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Can you tell me how many students are in a classroom, and what is the function of the teacher in the classroom? Let’s say I’m having a problem--

MS. RUSHTON: I’ll paint a picture for you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay.

MS. RUSHTON: Okay. So I'm going to give you our-- I'm the math and science supervisor so I always go to math. I'll give you the Algebra I classroom again. If I walk into the Algebra I classroom, typically it's in a computer lab. Sometimes if the teacher needs to-- Say the whole class is troubling with one component, they'll go back to the classroom. But every day they're in a computer lab. I would see the students -- some of them will be working on their own; and the ones who need assistance, the teacher is usually sitting down next to them. Sometimes the teacher will bring a couple of them together and work with them if they're having the same issue. And I see the teacher working with the program, working with the students, sitting down and they're having those discussions.

The students also keep a notebook so they can write down -- they can keep notes on things they need to practice or on any additions that they need -- so they won't forget those things. So I may see students writing notes as they're working on the program.

But the beautiful thing about it is I see all the heads engaged. When I walk in the room I don't see someone talking to someone else about something that has nothing to do with the class -- which, you know, I typically see in a high school. I don't see that in this classroom because in addition to the content that's being offered, it's being offered in a format-- If you have high schoolers, their heads are always down doing something; they rarely talk to you. So I see the content offered in the format that engages them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Are all the teachers-- If you could comment, are all the teachers certified teachers? And how did you

train them? When you go out looking for teachers now, does it affect the way you recruit teachers?

MS. RUSHTON: Let me hit part of that, Joe.

MR. JONES: Okay.

MS. RUSHTON: And Joe is our technology person. He can tell you-- He does the training.

When I recruit teachers at this point, I definitely want to know how comfortable they are with using the technology, because I want to bring more technology into the school in different areas. So that is a part of the interview process at this point. Our teachers, in general, sit through professional development for a multitude of technology tools. Every classroom is set up with a SMART board. All teachers in the high school have access to laptop carts. We have our Wi-Fi access points that -- you know, our bandwidth -- and Joe can speak on these things, because I'm just touching on what we have. He can tell you the specific components to each.

MR. JONES: Can I be honest with you? You don't really need "young teachers" who are real comfortable with technology. Some of the best summer school teachers are my age. They've been at it for a long time. And the beauty of it is they're the people willing to spend the time. They'll typically come in during school -- I mean, not during school, because the way we run it during the summertime is that we open up a lab for the kids. We don't have to open up the whole school. We open up one lab and the kids can come in if they need to work -- if they don't have a computer at home. Some kids just need to go someplace to do their work. I've actually had kids work on cruise ships. That's a different story where a kid -- his

mother thought she was going to have to cancel a cruise and she made him pay for it -- lab time -- on the cruise ship. (laughter)

What you want, typically, is a teacher who is willing to try out new things. It doesn't have to be-- You'd be surprised who is willing to try out new-- You really would be surprised about who is willing to do this. Then the time training -- two, three hours, tops. It's actually pretty intuitive to use, and it's been written to be pretty easy for almost any teacher to pick up on.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Do your students pay for summer school?

MR. JONES: No. If they're residents of the school district, typically, no. Because I'll be honest with you, a lot of our kids are poor. I mean, I hate to say that. You may think \$300 isn't a lot of money; yes, it's a lot of money. We usually, typically, don't charge our students. If they're from outside the school district -- yes, we do charge because we do have to pay for the teachers' time. But the beauty of this is, is that a teacher-- Where the cost savings comes in is that it used to be, if you had summer school in a brick-and-mortar situation, you had to have one teacher for 6th grade, one teacher for 7th grade, one teacher for 8th grade -- now we use one teacher for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. We use one teacher for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade language arts. We use one teacher for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade social studies; one teacher for high school math. Because that person can handle all these different things happening at one time. It's just not sitting in front of the class instructing all Algebra I; she's working with Johnny Jones at this time of the day, or somebody else might set up an office one to talk with her to another part of the day. So she can handle

more than one-- That person can handle more than one subject. I sound very sexist saying *she*. (laughter) Yes, that teacher can handle--

MS. RUSHTON: She does a great job.

MR. JONES: She does a great job; she really does.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Are the teachers jumping for these job opportunities in the summer?

MR. JONES: Some people are afraid. They're afraid because, believe it or not, there's actually more work involved. You have to be-- You still have to do everything you did during the school year. You still have to call up the kids and say, "Hey, you're falling behind. You're not doing this. You're spending too much time on the Internet." You still have to be that-- If you ever taught, you know what it's like. You're the pain -- torturing. And any kid needs to be tortured. (laughter) When my daughter entered college, I was still getting phone calls at night. It's hard work. It's not as easy as you think it is because you're still doing everything. You're still grading. You're still checking all their work, you're still checking all their time, you're talking to them, you're communicating with e-mail, you're making phone calls, you're stopping in. So it's work, and some people don't want to do the work that's required.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Is there a set time in summer school that they have to complete the work? Or is it, "If I'm not, do I get more time?"

MR. JONES: Yes, we give them-- We follow the rules and regs of the State -- 60 hours -- and the system keeps track of that for us. And we usually give them 6 weeks. We don't care when they do it. I've had kids do all their work on Saturday. They do 10 hours a Saturday. You'd be

surprised. Teenagers love to work -- I don't know why -- at 3 o'clock in the morning. If someone could explain that one to me; because at 3 o'clock, I want to be asleep.

MS. RUSHTON: Joe, I can speak to that.

As a teacher, I probably would never have signed up for this. But now I'm a student in addition to a school administrator, and a mother of a 20-month-old. I'm a doctorate student and it's all online. I did my bachelor's and my master's going to the brick-and-mortar, but I'm doing the doctorate online and it is such a wonderful experience. I would jump at a chance to teach children in this format because I have more of a voice behind a computer -- to speak to my needs, and talk and have conversations and put what I think out there -- more so than you would do in an open forum with your peers.

MR. JONES: Yes. Going back to your-- For summer school we do give-- There is a set -- it's six weeks, usually. But if they need more time with this, guess what? If a kid needs more time, if something happened, there's that one kid who needs a little bit extra tweaking -- the beauty of this is that you can give them that little-- You can make it more individualized. They might need a little bit extra time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I don't know if you'd like to try this one, but why do you think it's such a threatening experience for some?

MR. JONES: For teachers?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Yes.

MS. RUSHTON: You asked the wrong person. (laughter)

MR. JONES: I started back in 1974 teaching. I started out as a math teacher.

MS. RUSHTON: You have to behave yourself, Joe. (laughter)

MR. JONES: I have to behave myself. Do you know why it's so-- Because teachers-- When computers first came out, it was given the impression by the techies who were writing the programs that eventually you're not going to need teachers. When I first started, "Oh, the computer will teach the kid. The computer will do this, the kid will just sit there in front of the computer." And that got into a mind set, I think, with the teachers. But you can't do this without a teacher. You still need that human element. There still needs to be that voice, whether that voice is in the classroom talking to you over your shoulder or that voice is on the phone going, "Hey, you're falling behind," or "Are you having trouble with this? Do you need a little extra help?" And I don't think teachers understand that the computer's not replacing them; the computer is just the new blackboard, the new overhead projector they can use. It's not replacing them. Somebody told me one time you have to think of it as the teachers becoming the guru of the classroom. You know, you still need that mentor, you still need that teacher; you still need-- Kids still need that person saying, "Hey, get to work."

MS. RUSHTON: But with the accountability measures and the additional requirements placed on teachers, they need something extra. You know, the teacher 10 years ago was not the teacher of today. The things that teachers have to do now I didn't have to do as a teacher. And they really need something extra, and this provides that for them because they really customize the education for the students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Anybody, any other--
Senator, how are you? Senator Greenstein.

Yes, Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Oh, I thought she had a question.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: No, I don't. Thanks.

SENATOR RICE: First of all, to Melanie and the staff, I need you to make a note (indiscernible) legislation for us -- and I hope you took a note on that -- but take a note, a good note; we need to know in the Committee an update on all these school districts that are responsible for -- not just the Abbott districts -- how many are holding summer schools, how many are not, and how many people from those districts are registering for summer school but they don't have space. It just reminded me of a few years back when Newark wasn't holding summer schools and they had to (indiscernible) them. Then I think they wanted everybody to pay and nobody could really pay. And then all of a sudden I think they opened up a couple, so if you didn't get your application in by a certain date you couldn't go to summer school. That doesn't make any sense to me. Because what I'm hearing here is that -- we're the legislative bodies, and the Governors -- not just this Governor, but all (indiscernible) said the same thing -- how poorly we were doing in our school district. Which, number one, I disagree with some of that; I don't know who was doing the measurement of what you call success and then what you call improvement. But by the same token we're saying that we know, as human beings, you don't have to be a rocket scientist; that a lot of this stuff is subjective. And there is going to be individual needs, and everybody can learn -- at least they have the ability to learn if someone wanted to change, but it may take

me a little longer to grab it than someone else. But then you tell me I don't have a backup system -- a backup system is summer school, where your parents made you go to summer school. That was before technology -- they made you go -- summer school and Bible school. So you always opted for summer school rather than Bible school, because you know it's a little different.

And so we need to have that information -- that's number one. Number two, the question to the speakers: I've heard you say over and over -- which is a good thing -- that this is affordable, this is what you could afford; and it's affordable and it's what you could afford, but you looked at systems. So now, in this case, what you couldn't afford -- are they better than what you can afford? In other words, how do you-- Does affordability mean, in this case, something less; that you're doing a good job, that you're trying to tweak some things, you're trying to retrofit some things -- that you've indicated you want a different kind of backup of measurement or something. Can my geek tell me about that?

MS. RUSHTON: We actually have a different measurement system that we currently use. Not just that this system is affordable, we can customize it to meet our needs. We don't want our students to have one curriculum and then we have a system that's offering another curriculum. So we can place our curriculum on this system.

In addition to that, we can pick and choose what we need from their curricular materials. So we don't want to have too many things going on at once. So this system is not just affordable -- it meets our needs. It is more productive for us to use than other systems.

The problem that I've been having in the past with using different technology systems is I would purchase it, the teacher would love it, and we would train the teacher; and then I would go on to usage, and I see no usage from the teacher. And the teacher would come back and I would ask, "Why aren't you using this?" And the teacher would say, "Well, this worked out better. They didn't have what I needed for this lesson." Or, "This activity didn't align to the standards, and it wasn't what I needed." So now I see more usage, in addition to the system being aligned to the Common Core Standards. So it's more efficient and effective.

SENATOR RICE: So technically what you're telling me is that you said there are expensive systems. They're kind of the systems with everything in it.

MS. RUSHTON: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: This is kind of what you can use and you can build it up to whatever that other system is, based on what you need.

MS. RUSHTON: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: It was like when I bought my car, I didn't want the GPS and they told me I had to get it if I wanted the moonroof.

MS. RUSHTON: Exactly.

SENATOR RICE: And I couldn't get this without this, so I just bought the whole car. And I don't use most of it.

MS. RUSHTON: Exactly. And it's sort of like textbooks. Textbooks cater to Texas and California, and so you have to pick and choose what you need in a textbook.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Senator, I noticed the chap from Learnbeyond--

SENATOR RICE: Yes, I saw him back there.

MR. JONES: Okay, but may I just say one more thing?

One kid up there -- see that one quote? I wanted to bring that up there -- Craig. He was in our first summer school. And we thought Craig was never going to get out of school -- I'm going to be honest with you. I just want to mention him. We thought he was never going to get out of school. So when we first started summer school, he passed, and he eventually graduated. And we never thought that was going to happen. That's what this did for us.

SENATOR RICE: Is that because -- and I'm going to just be-- Just give me one moment, okay? You don't mind, right?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (off mike)
(Indiscernible).

SENATOR RICE: I'm Co-Chair. Yes, that's all right. Hang on one moment.

We were having a kind of informal sideline discussion here about the youngsters in summer school -- how you said it just seemed to, like, just spark out. And I think you alluded to-- Is that because you're not going through the whole -- everything you go through in the normal school year, and therefore-- You're dealing with technology and most of these young people start to find technology like a game, not like -- nothing strange to them. So is it like I'm going to play today? I mean, do you think that has something to do with the mindset of some of these youngsters?

MR. JONES: No. You know what we found out is that a lot of times it's, with summer school, it becomes even more personalized. They're having a more one-on-one contact with the teacher. The teacher had to sit up in front of 20 kids and deal with 20 personalities at one time. When she's dealing with that she's dealing with that student, she's dealing-- When a student needs the teacher, it's one-on-one. You're just dealing with one personality. "I'm not trying to get-- I'm not holding back, because I don't want anybody to think I'm stupid. I can ask the question I need to ask. The teacher can spend the time with me on the phone -- whether it's through e-mail or on the phone or in the forum. And I can get what I need, and I can take my time and I don't have to feel like I'm keeping up with 20 other kids." I think that's more of it than anything -- that you're getting that one-on-one.

SENATOR RICE: What's your student population?

MR. JONES: In the school district -- 2,350; two thousand three hundred and fifty kids.

SENATOR RICE: So does every kid who wants to go to summer school -- they really want to go now--

MR. JONES: Any kid who fails--

SENATOR RICE: You open it up?

MR. JONES: We open it up for them.

SENATOR RICE: What's that population again?

MR. JONES: Two thousand three hundred fifty kids from grades pre-K to grade 12.

SENATOR RICE: That's the total school population?

MR. JONES: That's the total. You want to know how many are in high school and middle school?

SENATOR RICE: No, I mean the total school population -- like Newark has 20,000 students.

MR. JONES: Oh, I just gave you the district. The middle school has approximately 490 kids; the high school has 603.

SENATOR THOMPSON: And the elementary school?

MR. JONES: Excuse me?

SENATOR THOMPSON: And the elementary school?

MR. JONES: The elementary school -- the Carlin School, which is our 4/5 school, has 384 kids; Field Street School has 535 kids; and Lafayette School has 384 kids. I'm the guy who does the data. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Are you using any of this hybrid learning in the middle schools?

MR. JONES: Yes, yes. In fact, that's where we first cut our teeth on this. We first cut our teeth with the Matrix using hybrid learning, and we also -- when we started out with summer school, it started out primarily as a middle school situation. But when we started seeing the success of it we knew we had to expand it. And every year we've been adding courses and we've been expanding it. We started out with just English and math, and we expanded it to science, and we expanded it to social studies. So yes -- it's getting bigger and bigger.

And I guess you want to talk to those gentlemen there.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (off mike)
(Indiscernible).

SENATOR THOMPSON: I think you have to use the microphones. (referring to PA mike)

MR. MUSUKU: I just wanted to answer the question you had there for affordability -- and you think, like, this tool was affordable because it has some features which -- may not have the features that the other more costly tools have.

This tool has-- We have a comparison analysis which we would be happy to share with the Committee; we can send an e-mail to Melanie. It has every feature that any of -- the most expensive tools in the world you can find. It has the whiteboard; it has a camera, a video camera where you can see the teacher. It has a whiteboard where the teacher can write -- sitting here and all the people sitting in Trenton, sitting in Newark, sitting in somewhere else -- in Cape May -- they can see the teacher writing on the board, which is a very expensive tool. Every collaboration has charts, it has e-mail -- which is controllable -- from the highest level to the teacher level and administrator level.

And why it is affordable is because we, our company-- My father was a headmaster for 30 years. And he returned as district administrator for a particular district, and 450 schools were under him. And from day one this tool was being developed in view of the public schools. It was one of the first to access (indiscernible). You know what I say -- this is -- the (indiscernible) cloud has come to be known about three years back, two years back -- people started acting more cloud (indiscernible). This tool-- In 2004, this tool itself was in the cloud. It was way ahead of the technology and the system (indiscernible) went out and nobody was ready to accept this. So bits and parts -- like Penns Grove,

maybe it has been helping them. And now it has been a while. Basically looking at-- If you see a school district like Penns Grove can afford it and can solve its problems -- you heard testimony of what problems they're facing and how it is being solved. So it should not be taken that it is some kind of a cheap tool. If I sold it to a private school, I can charge much more than what a public school can afford. There are some times we go to Penns Grove just for the -- free of use because they needed it. And now, when Penns Grove was ready to pay for it, we're asking them to pay for it. So there's nothing like-- The features were the (indiscernible) technology, which is the latest current technology and it works platform-independent. It works even on the cheaper-- We use Linux, which is very cheap for a school district to offer. It is not expensive -- (indiscernible) or any other operating systems. You can simply use a Linux server and put it-- If you do not convert it, then we have our service in New York, which is like cloud servers -- you can host it on the cloud, too.

So every other feature in the world you want-- And it's very-- Another reason why the teachers love it -- it's affordable because of the CourseBuilder function. Most of our competitors, some of them, even they give it as a free tool; but the charge is a consulting charge when they want to do changes to your system. One company charges \$200 per hour to load your courses. Our CourseBuilder tool gives access to your teacher; within no time they can load your course or the teacher looks at the course and sees what they want to teach. Say a geometry teacher wants to teach in a different way rather than the traditional way. She can simply log in and change it how she wants to teach it without any consulting charges, without doing anything.

So that's how it is made much more affordable, because one time they pay for (indiscernible) -- that's it. And another thing we are trying to do is to give a school (indiscernible) capability free of cost to load for them and leave it. And the school pays us only when they enroll a student. So we can load it and leave it there. If they start using it, then we can-- So we wanted to work with the public schools and work with the public-- That is what the whole company motto is. That's what we wanted--

SENATOR RICE: Did I hear you say you manufacture this? Your company makes this -- this equipment?

MR. MUSUKU: This is a software tool -- yes. This application is developed by us.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. Where did it start?

MR. MUSUKU: We didn't make the hardware.

SENATOR RICE: Where did it start? Did this start here, or did this start--

MR. MUSUKU: It is a New Jersey-based corporation. It was (indiscernible), developed, customized -- everything was done in New Jersey. So it's purely a New Jersey-- And we are proud to say that there is only one more company in New Jersey that does this kind of thing. Every other company is outside.

SENATOR RICE: Just a slight deviation; two quick questions.

Is this associated with GEMS consultants -- Education services?

MR. MUSUKU: What is that?

SENATOR RICE: GEMS Education service, or any relationship with Sunny Varkey?

MR. MUSUKU: No.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. You know Sunny Varkey?

MR. MUSUKU: No.

SENATOR RICE: You never heard of him?

MR. MUSUKU: No, I never heard of him.

SENATOR RICE: Okay, no idea? Okay -- just wanted to be sure, okay.

MR. MUSUKU: Maybe I will go and Google him.

SENATOR RICE: No, I'm just looking for a connection to the Commissioner. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay, thank you very much. We appreciate it.

MR. MUSUKU: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: We're going to go a little bit out of order now because I have some young people who need to get back home. So I'd like to call up Esthere Tolbert and Micah; and the parent, Stacy Raheem. You may all come up.

And once again, just state your name and then you can begin the testimony. If you want to go from left to right, or if Micah wants to take the--

S T A C Y R A H E E M: No, I will be starting first.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay.

MS. RAHEEM: Stacy Raheem.

Good afternoon, Joint Committee members. I am speaking in support of Newark Prep and its blended learning model. I am also speaking

in favor of parents having public school options in New Jersey that are best suited for their children.

We all know that not all children learn in the same way. Some children are able to learn in a traditional classroom setting, while others may learn in a classroom not restricted by walls. I believe it is important to gather all the information available to provide my children with the best school option. School choice is vital and it is a right that all parents share. This is why I am joining with New Jersey Public School Options to help give all parents the choice to decide what educational setting is best for their children.

As a mother of children who have taken advantage of all the public school options that are available in New Jersey, and through my 15 years of experience, I have a great awareness concerning the educational avenues that are best for my family and my children. I have a child who has graduated from a traditional magnet high school in Newark. I also have a child who was in the first graduating class from North Star Preparatory High School -- the first charter high school in Newark; a child who graduated from one of the best charter elementary schools in New Jersey last year; and a child currently in the 3rd grade at Robert Treat Academy.

For my son, Siraj, Newark Prep and its blended learning model is the best school option. My son is not a traditional learner, and in his prior school he did not do as well as we had hoped. Nevertheless, he passed the standardized test with proficiencies in language arts, science, and advanced proficiency in math since the 1st grade.

Through various assessments it has been determined that my son is a visual and auditory learner. Newark Prep's online curriculum,

combined with the small group instruction, has been very successful for my child. Heavy book bags and missing/forgotten homework are things of the past. With online schooling, books are available with just the click of the mouse, and homework is immediately drop boxed as soon as it is completed.

In his previous school, not being prepared with his classroom materials and misplaced homework were some of his obstacles blocking his success. Online schooling has virtually eliminated that barrier. As a parent, unlike never before, I feel more connected to my son's school community. The online parent portal is structured in a way that provides parents with a great deal of transparency. I am able to access communications between teachers and my child, able to see immediately how my son is doing in a particular class, and even view test scores in real time. In his previous school, I would not receive information until there was a problem or midway in the cycle -- sometimes too late to make significant change to his already-failing grade.

Newark Prep has made home life less stressful for me and my child by providing a system of accountability. Through accountability, my son has become more productive in his schoolwork, sometimes completing assignments beforehand -- another plus. Students can also go at their own pace.

School choice for parents means that your child will have the greatest opportunity to succeed within a learning environment that is decided upon by the parent -- what is best for your child. I would appreciate your support and careful thought to this issue.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Any questions?

Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Yes. First of all, thank you for taking the time to come down. And you may of, in fact, mentioned Newark and all those schools in Newark where I've been for the last 50-plus years. It's good to see you.

But you said some things that caught my ear that many of us have argued, that we never hear the parents argue, that could be very helpful to the 40,000-plus students who won't wind up necessarily in some of these schools that people want to continue to open -- whether it's Steve Aduvato or whether it's North Star or whoever. We just run, you know? That's just the nature of black folks. We run to something new because this isn't working. And that's not a bad thing sometimes if you're willing to come back home. The come-back-home question is to you. We argue that traditional public schools is where the majority of our students are going to go. And the question is, we're spending money; and to us money is no longer the issue -- it's accountability. But we also said that charter schools were an experimental -- they were supposed to be an experiment when they were started. You may not know that. But they weren't supposed to close down traditional schools and keep opening new buildings and come in and privatize. It was supposed to give us the information that you were giving us. This is the first time I've gotten the information from a parent -- particularly in Newark.

What I hear you say is that the traditional school that your kid went to could probably work if, in fact, there were some components that were put inside that would give you the ability to access information when

needed. It would give them some independence and freedoms to do some things. The one child you have is best at vision learning -- and I was kind of that way. You know, you give me an essay, I was good to go. You give me that check A, B, C and my eyes are, "What?" But you know, C was not the best answer sometimes. And so I get that. And I raise that to you. I guess the question is-- We're not going to talk about charters or private schools -- which one is necessary. We're going to just talk about what has always been; what you went through, what I went through. Because obviously it worked for you and it worked for me. There have just been some changes someplace down the line.

Is there a list of things that parents like yourself could maybe -- you don't have to do it today; you may want to talk with a couple of them -- I wish you did -- and can share with us and say, "Well, these are some of the things that the traditional public school are lacking, basically, or not lacking." You see, I never asked a parent to kind of do those analysis to where you did, because you've actually had children in different places. You can say, "Okay, I get it."

MS. RAHEEM: Right.

SENATOR RICE: "Regardless of where they go" -- forget about what you call it -- "these are the things that are needed, and each of my kids are different." Is that out there for us?

MS. RAHEEM: I'm not sure. I mean, I can look into that. But I think that, as a parent, you know your child. And I think they can fit into a cookie cutter school -- you have to find out what's best for them. And so I don't know if there's a program or if there are a group of parents looking into, I guess, making a traditional public school better. I just know

that's for my child -- we don't have the time. We need more choices. That every child is not the same and they don't learn anything.

SENATOR RICE: So the key then -- let me use the word the way I use it -- is choice. Choice doesn't necessarily mean another building -- take out of a building just because the kids aren't learning. I think you'd close the building when you have a code violation and they can't go to school. In this case they say nobody's learning so they're just going to close the building and give it to someone else.

So choice, the way I defined it -- because I agree with choice -- is choice within the system, whatever that system is. It can't be cookie cutter.

And Melanie, what I'm going to ask the staff to do through you, Madam Chair, is-- We were supposed to have this information before, many years ago, when we had (indiscernible) involved. Someone has to tell us -- and maybe we should call another meeting -- we need to know what's happening, and that's why I want more clarity on charters. We need to know what's happening in the charter schools we have, in terms of what they're doing. When I say *doing*, the choices they're offering. And then we need to determine are those choices working. And then take the pieces that are working and find out if, in fact, that information is being shared throughout the districts and throughout the state. Because what they're not telling you -- telling parents -- is that charter schools were actually started by a sister in Milwaukee, who left the movement because it was taking over for a different reason. The idea was to go over here and bake a cake differently than how we bake a cake, and kind of put some blue stuff in it and see if it tastes better, and then give it back to us and we all bake

the cake using some of those components. So it was supposed to have been an experiment to tell us what you were telling us -- that we found out that a kid will learn better, if they are like my kid, from visual. But this would happen here. It wasn't about building a lot more bricks and mortars until they were necessary. It wasn't about pitting parents against parents, teachers against politicians and elected officials. It wasn't about changing test scores just to look good and then say that the whole system looks better.

So we need to have that information. That's why, madam Chair, I raised that question. And Melanie, I'm real serious about that information. And if anybody doesn't want to provide it to us from the districts and the charter schools, we need to know exactly which schools are saying no. We need to know if the Commissioner is saying no. And I would expect the Republicans and Democrats are coming together on this and insist that we get the information.

Now, what it does is helps us to look at, as a Joint Committee -- which is our responsibility to make recommendations -- how to kind of retrofit internally. And I'm not talking infrastructure-wise; that may be necessary, too. Currciculum -- that's what this whole thing was supposed to be about. I mean, there may be a place for virtual learning, but it may be very well in pre-school to give the cognitive skills. It may be very well in the summer schools where we're not getting enough kids in summer schools who need some help. At least get them -- osmosis or something -- to education. And so that becomes a priority from my perspective as Co-Chair, Melanie and staff, for this Committee.

Okay, thank you very much. That was very helpful.

MS. RASHEEM: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I would just like to comment that you've found a place where your son could obviously learn and seems to be progressing. And you're happy because you have input into it.

And I guess while I was listening to you I was thinking, "Wow. You were more interested in the method of learning, and that's where I-- You know, when I think about this, we've started out with some of these pilot charter programs which are teaching us lessons that maybe we should all be using everywhere. And that's what I'm starting to hear right now. And, listen -- I went into Newark Prep, I did visit. And my only question -- which I'm hoping that maybe you can enlighten me with -- is that when I talked to several of the students -- this was my only reservation -- "Okay, well now when you're going to go home, what book are you going to read? What are you excited about? What novel do you want to read?" And I wasn't getting an excitement to, "I really love this, and I'm going to pursue this," or "I really want to read this novel." I'm hoping that you're going to tell me that you're starting to see it now that it's the springtime. I was there in October. So when I talked to several students it was like, "The day's over, the day's over. I completed my work right now. I'm not doing anything." So I'm hoping that you can tell me that you're seeing this.

MS. RASHEEM: Well, I think so. You're also dealing with a population of 9th graders -- first time in high school. So I think that may have been a problem that you were having; that they just didn't know how to fit. I believe all 9th graders go through that when you're first in high

school -- trying to fit into what you want to do, what you want to study, what interests you. And I think that's what you saw.

But in my son -- I do see differences. He just started tennis, so he's interested in that. He read *The Outsiders*, which was very -- he got a lot out of that. It was almost like a real world -- what he's dealing with now. I think it's coming along very well. They've read Shakespeare; he just got finished reading *Julius Caesar*. At the dinner table we enacted the Marc Anthony speech. So he was very interested in that. So I just think it's coming along. He's 14 -- well, he just turned 15. I just think it's the beginnings of high school and just trying to figure out what's going on.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: What made you apply to the school in the first place?

MS. RASHEEM: Because he's a different learner. My son graduated from Robert Treat, so he had lots of options -- to go to private school; he got accepted into a magnet school in Newark. But we chose Newark Prep specifically for the online learning and for the transparency that I spoke about. There have been times that my son wasn't as determined to get a good grade, not that he lacks the ability. And sometimes you just need to crack the whip. I remember when -- someone just spoke who said people were hesitant of online education because they feel like the teacher does not exist or it fades out the teacher. No, teachers are needed. But parents are also needed. Parents are the first teachers. And so if a parent is there looking over their shoulder, making sure that work gets done, they will be successful -- along with the teachers. It's just a combination between the two, in my situation. It's a combination between the two. The transparency was really important. I could see when things

are due, how he was doing, if he needed extra help -- just little things like that. That was important for me for choosing Newark Prep.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Could you see those methods -- the transparency -- could that not occur in another setting?

MS. RASHEEM: I'm not sure. I could go with my older child, who did attend Technology High School. And I guess I'll do a comparison -- which you should not do with your children -- but I'll do a comparison between my daughter who went to Technology High School -- a magnet school -- and North Star High School. They are two years apart -- the two girls. What I saw at Technology, it was more-- I guess teachers not going the extra yard, if you will. Just wanting to-- I guess, 3 o'clock and they leave. As far as college placement, that was almost nonexistent in the public school system. Guidance counselors-- I really didn't know what they did. And at North Star they will stay after. It's a longer school day. If my daughter was struggling with something they were there. That's just from my personal experience. And the college placement -- they were very aggressive in college placement. At Technology High School, and even though it's a magnet high school, they get good test scores but they weren't as aggressive in helping my daughter to apply to college. We had to do most of the work. Not that a parent-- I don't want to say most of the work because I'm a hands-on parent and I want to make sure, but it was a little bit more difficult because we didn't have the tools, and North Star seemed to have the tools.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Any questions?

SENATOR RICE: Madam Chair, through you, and the comment is that that's the one component that seems to have been a

problem for a number of years -- not just in the Newark Public School system. I've traveled this state, and we're legislators and I can tell you, Republicans and Democrats -- and I'm sure my colleagues would agree with this -- we get phone calls all the time from parents saying, "Are there any scholarships? How do I get a scholarship? How do I apply?" And to be quite frank about it, my son went through the Newark Public School system -- that's Councilman Rice from the West Ward. And then in 7th grade he was gifted and talented. They said, "Want to take him out?" And I said no. But my wife said yes. Anyway, he wended up at Pingry--

MS. RASHEEM: Pingry -- I know your son. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: --with Tom Kean Jr., who is a Senator now -- Senator Kean, okay? And he was basically an A-B student -- he was an A student -- he was good. They were all the same, okay? That's why they wound up there. He never got a scholarship. And what happened was, I said, "Well, hold it. I know there are scholarships out there." I said, "Well, did they look at--" There weren't that many minorities there at the time. I said, "Did they look at the black scholarships? There are special categories for scholarships." And there was none. But most of his class got scholarships. So that seems to be a thing, regardless what the school is, and I would suspect that with North Star not being a huge system, and the way it is set up, they can do that. I know that Robert Treat -- Steve just used relationships and politics, and other areas -- which is fine. You don't care -- any means necessary to get some people in schools. But that's an area I think the State Department of Education needs to be looking at. Because if we start talking about accountabilities, accountability in the classroom is one thing. And I do visit these schools, and I do see teachers teaching.

And I also see students who are disruptive for a lot of reasons, so I'm not blaming the teacher for that. What I do know is that, where a student is connecting academically with the teacher, there's supposed to -- and I've been saying this for years -- be counselors who, number one, know what it is they're talking about and constantly developing the resources out there in terms of those relationships. And I also think the State needs to do more, the school districts need to be doing more to be developing, like colleges do, relationships upon themselves. Say we're going to graduate some students. How can we develop relationships, besides telling me that I've got to be an A student? No, no, no. All my students aren't going to be A. No, I'm not going to play football; I'm not going to play basketball. What kind of relationships can we develop where it's kind of a semi-open door policy?

Because I know there are students coming your way with skill sets -- they just decided to have a good summer last year and they didn't do as well coming back. I mean, that's the kind of thing I believe that this Committee and the State Department of Education needs to be drilling -- if we have to legislate it in some kind of way. I'm not sure how. We have academics to do that for us here in the Legislature. But I think we need to look at that, because I'm getting a lot just from this conversation. It kind of reinforces what I've always said and thought, but I wasn't hearing it on this side. I hear it on this side, but not that side.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I just feel like I need to comment, since I was a counselor for over 30 years and I feel like I have to say something.

What I've seen so many times on school budgets is that the first thing you go to cut is someone in the counseling profession -- which,

sometimes, boosts up the number of students that you have. But I also understood that I, as an individual, could not know everything about each and every school and each and every scholarship. So that's where some of the technology programs and the computer programs which we brought in our kids to embrace from 7th grade on up -- these are your strong points, these are your weak points. And then we connected up with schools. These are the offerings. And we brought the parents in on this so that it was the responsibility not only of the counselor and the student, but the parent was brought in on it also.

So I think that can be done and I think that has to be done, because we can't be the only one responsible for directing a child. It has to be part of the family. And that's where computers, and technology, and programs are certainly an asset, and I think that all of the methods that I'm hearing about right now. It also comes, in my mind, if there is so much money, where are we putting the money and what are our priorities? And I think that's what we're hearing right now, is "Where do I put the money? Do I put it here, do I put it here, do I put it here? Where does it go?"

So you know what? You helped enlighten us as to what you think is very important.

So now we'll go for our next person -- and who's that? Who's coming up next?

E S T H E R E T O L B E R T: Good afternoon. My name is Esthere Tolbert, and I'm here to speak in favor of virtual schools for the State of New Jersey and in support of the development of NJPublicSchools.org.

Before I begin my story as to why I have chosen to educate my child through a virtual school curriculum, I have a couple of questions for

you all. Have you ever tried on a suit or a dress that you think is the absolute bomb, only to find out that when you put it on it didn't quite fit? You pull, you tug, you tuck, but no matter what you do it still doesn't fit. You know that you probably shouldn't buy it, but you do anyway, thinking, "I'll have that thing adjusted later," or "You know, I'll fit into it some time." Well, after a few months of collecting dust in the closet, you finally resolve to have it fitted and altered. It turns out acceptable, but it's not quite right. Then you suddenly realize, "Wait a minute. I can do this myself. I'm more familiar with all the ins and outs of my figure than anyone else!"

Well, this is exactly how I feel about the responsibility of the education of my child. I know my children better than anyone else, and no matter how well intended an educator may be, I know best their ins and outs, their nuances, and their learning styles. The only difference here is that I can't allow my children to sit in a closet and collect dust while I attempt to find the right educational fit.

With virtual academic programs I don't have to make all those unnecessary and timely adjustments. Virtual education allows me to be the in the driver's seat with my children's education as they progress at their own learning pace through the curriculum.

My first experience with virtual education came as a result of my older child's educational struggles. After several years of pulling, tugging, skirting around issues, glossing over educational roadblocks, and a slew of private tutors, I was desperate to find a suitable educational system congruent to her learning style. My daughter, who is extremely bright, dealt with a daily barrage of bullying and teasing for several years at both public and private schools that significantly hindered her learning process. This is

when we decided to try a more personalized educational system for her through virtual academies. She rapidly advanced in her grade level and beyond, and I am happy to report that she is now in college and well on her way to a budding degree.

When I moved with my family from Washington State to New Jersey, I must admit that I was very surprised to learn that New Jersey was not as forward-thinking as I had expected. My son, who had just finished the 3rd grade at the Washington Academy of Virtual Studies -- WAVA -- was expecting to continue virtual schooling here. He had already far surpassed his grade level, taking in immense amounts of information on all sorts of topics. We were exceedingly disappointed when we were informed that virtual academies were not to be State supported as every other public school is. Regardless, we were determined to follow through with our virtual academies and we have done such.

Whenever I speak about virtual education, I am always asked about the social aspect. I am amazed as to how many parents pose this question first, rather than inquire as to the quality of the education being offered. In my opinion, I believe that social skills are also the parent's responsibility to develop and flourish. In my personal experience, I had one child that was an introvert and the other the exact opposite. And no amount of public or private education will encourage a shy child to become less so, as was the case with my daughter and also myself. It has to be a learned skill that is practiced on a regular routine.

Virtual academies provide an unrestrained, stress-free, no-worry, non-violent, non-bullying, no-snow-days, transportation free, at-your-own-pace, homemade lunches, seize-every-moment educational

opportunity environment that becomes immeasurable when, at the end of the day, you know your child has gained the knowledge and confidence necessary for their successful future. And it was all because of my concerted effort.

I am here to respectfully request you to allow us the freedom of choice for our children's educational needs, and to ask your support for approval next fall.

Thank you for your time and attention.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you. May I come to your house for lunch? (laughter)

MS. TOLBERT: Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Do we have any questions?

SENATOR RICE: I just want to emphasize for the record, because I'm probably talked about behind closed doors at most of these schools. I know it because the parents tell me, because the parents are very supportive of me because they think I'm right -- including those in my city's charter schools. They go to charter schools primarily because there's no choice within-- There are not enough choices, if you will, within traditional public schools. And that's been our plight.

Many of the parents understand that there's a privatization movement. There are people taking advantage of parents who feel that they are being deprived, who want choices. And that's no different than when they took advantage of us when we were struggling during the civil rights days and things like that. When we were marching for rights, they just took advantage, made it sound good and we went with it, even though we knew there was a lot of negative things happening to us.

And so I just want to be clear that it's good to know that the conversation is about giving parents choices. But I don't hear choice saying, "I want it with the charter schools," even though that's where you may wind up. "I want it with the virtual school." You're saying that, "You need to give us some choices and tools. You're not giving us enough tools." And that's what I hear, in terms of options. And I think that that message has to become the primary focus of the debate with the Legislature so we can get out of these divided communities -- because the dividing of the community is documented in the privatization movement. They said, "Go in and divide the communities. Prey on urban cities in particular. Prey on people who have the least income who want something better for the kids." And they tell you that in black and white. Most of my legislative colleagues don't read it, and the ones who I sent it to won't read it. And the ones who read it act like it's not happening because of the politics of contributions from hedge funds people, etc., okay? I'm being honest about that. And I'm not going to stop telling the truth about it.

Where I am a champion is the champion of good quality education for all students regardless of income. And there should be choices. And the education people -- who some of them our legislators and Governor knock around -- they do believe in choices. The educators in this state -- and I've been here since 1955 -- have always believed in choices. But choices mean that we have to provide resources to make those choices available as time changes, and not fight over it. That's where the fight has been. The Abbott district decision -- which we oversee -- those court decisions were very important to struggling districts. Whether it's a district down in South Jersey, in Penns Grove or some other, it was very important

because they are saying we will make sure the resources are there; where there's parity. Now the Assemblywoman and Co-Chair is saying, "Yes, the money is supposed to be there. Now, what's happening to our money?" That's the real question that we should be raising -- is the accountability. Not beating up on the teachers, not beating up on the principals, not talking about tenure -- because you can remove a teacher who has tenure under the law. I don't know if parents know that. I will give them law. People have been lying to them. You have to do what's right. You don't want anyone to take your job; just come in and say, "You're fired." You didn't do anything wrong. There's a due process to the process.

And so we have to correct that. Parents have to help us correct that. I'm going to talk to you more because I think you can really educate me and some other parents. Because I'm going to fight for whatever you're getting -- I'm going to fight that that be maintained in the system. Because your kids are going to grow up soon, but there are kids coming up behind and maybe your grandkids. But 90 percent of the kids in these states go to traditional public schools. And so we're never going to build 90 percent of charters and virtual schools for 90 percent of the population. That isn't going to happen, and it shouldn't happen. But what we can do is go back to basics. Under the Constitution young people are entitled to a thorough and efficient education through the public school system. We will make sure that the right that we fought for, particularly those who are women and minorities -- we fought for those rights to be applied to us. Public schools now need to fight to have choices within the public schools -- don't need a bunch of outsiders coming in. We need our money to go directly where you said it should go in that school.

And if it is not happening, then we need to hold whoever is in charge in that district or that classroom accountable. And maybe we have to tighten up where we say, “Hold it. We’re not asking you to have this in your classroom. You know what? We’re telling you, by law -- you will have it. And if you don’t know how to use it, get out of here. (laughter) We’ll bring someone in who can use it.” But it’s going to be within the tradition of education for struggling people, working people, and those who have the least.

So this is very fruitful to me. I’d like to hear from the little guy because, you know, when you talked about the free lunch he had a little smile on his face. (laughter) You know what I mean?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay, next-- What year is it that you will be President?

MICAH TOLBERT: In 2036.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: In 2036. It’s your opportunity; this is-- You’re starting today. (laughter) So it’s all yours.

MR. TOLBERT: Hi. My name is Micah Tolbert and I would like to tell you why I like learning with virtual academies.

It’s simple -- virtual academy is fun. Every day I actually look forward to learning and what new and exciting activity I get to experience. Sometimes in history, and even math, I can’t wait until the next day for the new lesson, so I go ahead and do extra.

There are great learning games that help me remember math operations, and entertaining cartoon animations that show me how math works.

I have read several books this year already, like *Robinson Crusoe*, *My Side of the Mountain*, *Tuck Everlasting*, and *The Time Traveler* -- just to name a few. Reading helps me a lot with my spelling, grammar, and vocabulary skills.

I mean, literally, I feel like I have traveled all over the world because of all the different places I have seen and studied. I have learned so much with virtual academy, since I started, that contributes to my everyday life. I can't tell you how many times that I have heard or seen things that are familiar to me and that I can understand because I've already studied it. It makes me feel like I am closer to the world. I think learning should be fun for everyone.

To quote a famous line from a song in the story of *Mary Poppins*, "Just a spoonful of sugar makes (*sic*) the medicine go down in the most delightful way." To me, virtual academy is like eating a bowl of chocolate ice cream -- it's sweet, and creamy, and delicious.

I would greatly appreciate your support in approving Virtual Academy so that everyone who wishes can enjoy the freedom of choice in their education and have an awesome time learning -- just like me.

Just to let you know, my goal is to be President of the United States in 2026.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: All right, Micah. You did a phenomenal, phenomenal job. And you are a very bright. You told me you were 10, right?

MR. TOLBERT: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Wow -- if I could only do that at 10.

But Micah, I'm going to ask you a little bit about your childhood. Can you tell me a little bit about when you fell in love with books? Or can you remember anything, like when you were 3, or 2 even? Tell me what your parents did for you.

MR. TOLBERT: The way I actually started doing homework was -- I actually saw my sister starting to do homework at our house. And I said, "I think I want to start doing a little bit of homework and start learning a little bit about history and stuff like that." And so that's really how I started learning. And that was probably at 3 or 4.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Did your parents read to you, Micah?

MR. TOLBERT: Yes, there were a few things we did like math and the alphabet and stuff like that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Can you remember any of your favorite books when you were younger?

MR. TOLBERT: I don't remember any certain books, but I do know that I read some books -- I'm not sure what they were called, though.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Well, Micah, I have to tell you. See, you're the one example, now, that's coming to me because I do see an enthusiasm for learning. And I'm glad that I met you today because you're a person who is saying to me, "I like to learn."

When did you realize that you liked to learn?

MR. TOLBERT: About 4.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: What do you do in your free time?

MR. TOLBERT: I really like to try to do a little bit of extra homework to either catch up or get ahead. And, you know, some things are easier than others and some things I need help on. But in free time I like doing a little bit of homework and try to get ahead.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay. Now, you heard us all talk about kids needing time to be with kids -- and to talk and to play and have some fun. So tell me how that works out in your schedule -- in your day or week or year. (laughter)

MR. TOLBERT: Well, I do baseball, so I get a little bit of time with other kids there. And I go to religious school, so I get a little time there as well. I think that would be about it. Oh, and Cub Scouts.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay, now the big one: When did you start your use of technology? How did you know how to work that computer?

MR. TOLBERT: To be honest, I'm not sure myself actually. I just, kind of--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: It came naturally?

MR. TOLBERT: I just started learning, basically, I guess.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: You continue to impress. And I just wanted to make sure if you're going to run for President that you can handle some of the tough questions that will come your way. And you've done a very, very good job today. (laughter)

Does anybody on the panel have any questions for Micah? (no response)

Okay, Micah, then you're going to get another round of applause.

SENATOR RICE: I'm going to ask him a hard question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Oh -- here it comes, here it comes.

SENATOR RICE: I'm a hard questioner.

Are you a geek? (laughter)

MR. TOLBERT: No.

SENATOR RICE: You know what that is, right?

MR. TOLBERT: Yes, I do.

SENATOR RICE: All right, the final question is, can you expedite the presidency thing? Because I did the math -- it wasn't virtual though -- I had to use a pen. But in 23 years I'll be, like, 90. (laughter) I want to be around to give you an opinion, man, you know?

Okay -- very good job. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Very good.

Okay, next we have Arthur Lang. And Arthur, there's no way that you're going to give that testimony -- it's that big. (laughter)

ARTHUR H. LANG, ESQ: (off mike) No. No, (indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Welcome; it's all yours.

MR. LANG: Okay, I was hoping that--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: They're coming back.

MR. LANG: --they'll come back. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: It's proper nutrition, so they need their little break right now.

MR. LANG: Okay. Should I start?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Go ahead. They can hear you.

MR. LANG: My name is Arthur Lang. I've been a public school teacher at Lakewood High School for 10 years.

I ran our virtual program that awarded credit in about a thousand courses. Some students took their full load at home under Option 2 of the Administrative Code.

But I'm not here to tell you about the virtues of virtual education. I'm here to tell you about need.

Lakewood, New Jersey, is the fastest-growing city in the United States. Its population is projected to reach 230,000 people by 2030, of which over 100,000 will be school age children. Many of the 28,000 K-12 children currently in Lakewood will become our future political and business leaders of New Jersey. Over 80 percent of these children -- a whole class of citizens -- are de facto excluded from the public schools. Most of them will not receive a diploma and have no effective access to authentic secondary education. Moreover, Lakewood schools are among the worst performing in the state. If there's any reason for virtual education, this is the reason: to bring justice to this population.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Hold on a second.

MR. LANG: Very few people know about this situation.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Did you say 28,000?

MR. LANG: Twenty-eight thousand, right now in Lakewood. Actually, the numbers-- They are updating the numbers; I had the numbers from two years ago -- it's 24,000 total. But there are 4,000 births per year.

We're going to surpass Newark soon. We'll be one-tenth of the state population soon, probably.

Okay -- should I continue?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Yes.

MR. LANG: Okay. All right.

This Lakewood population that is effectively excluded from the public education is diverse. The community is the home of young people from almost all 50 states and several foreign countries. Most members of this community come from families with parents who are professionals, doctors, engineers, teachers, lawyers, architects -- the quintessential American families, with fathers such as mine who was an oil executive in Houston, and my friend's father who was an auto executive in Detroit; leaders in academia and government. Others grew up in Lakewood and received no secondary education -- because that's what goes on in Lakewood. While an extremely, extremely small minority is Hasidic, many of whom are natural autodidacts, what they have in common is their love for Lakewood and the ideal of a community of people who care.

Currently, there is an estimated 4,000 births per year in Lakewood. The latest numbers I have are 3,746 in 2009. We're expected to have more children born per year in Lakewood than in Newark, New Jersey -- which has only 4,832 -- soon.

Eighty percent of Lakewood's 28,000 K-12 children attend religious schools but, like I said -- these are regular, normal, American kids -- many of which offer little or no secular education in the higher grades. The average family -- 34 percent of which are below the poverty level -- can barely afford their religious education for the 6-12 children; math, science,

history and English is just low priorities. There are about 70 schools in Lakewood -- none of them offer a secular education. At least the boys-- Well, a rigorous-- I'll get to that.

Hasidic demographics that I put in the appendix: 13,244 out of 19,045 students in the non-public schools; 70 percent are Title I eligible. We're talking about a very, relatively poor community. Of the 23,000 students, only 6,000 will have access to algebra in high school and other core curriculum subjects; less will attain a diploma; 3,000 will drop out of school entirely for religious, or whatever -- or they'll just be on the streets or whatever; and only a handful have access to calculus. My own daughter, in 12th grade, she couldn't take calculus -- she was a math whiz -- because, you know, her school only offered Algebra I. The girls are able to get an education, but not as good as the public school.

Parents simply do not have a choice in educating their children. Sending their children to a brick-and-mortar public school is just completely out of the question for all members of the community. Moreover, of the 4,547 Lakewood children with IEPs, only the 750 in public schools and 426 others who are not in public schools receive special services. We're talking about 4,000 kids -- or 3,500 -- who don't get the services.

Parents who want an education for their children are on their own in providing education to their children because, no matter what non-public school they send their children, no matter how much they are willing to spend, they have no access to genuine education -- so, so much for what Milton Friedman says.

By bringing access to education to this multitude, which is going to be potentially 10 percent of New Jersey's school-age children in 20

years -- this is the greatest civil rights issue of today. I can't think of anything more. Accommodation of this population with so many children with so much aptitude and so much scholastic ability, by bringing the school to the child -- which is exactly what we're talking about here -- rather than the child to the school, is the most compelling reason ever for the State of New Jersey to charter a virtual school.

When the children of a whole class of citizens -- a whole class, a class that actually makes up the vast, vast, vast majority of residents -- are reasonably accommodated so they, too, have a stake in public education, then there will be equity and then we'll see the turnaround in Lakewood that everyone is talking about. Lakewood High School, where I taught for 10 years, will turn around because public education will be meaningful to the citizens. Right now it means nothing. It's just when you limit it, try to cut the taxes -- that's the only reason why we have a school board. That's the attitude.

Then the children in the public schools will be able to hold their heads high because they will belong to something important and relevant to the people. As long as your child wants an education but cannot access it, and as long as any child is denied an opportunity, the people will not be stakeholders. Outsiders to Lakewood don't know -- do not know that there is a whole world of children -- 23,000 -- who have little or no access to education. Nowhere in America today exists a greater vacuum, as much potential for as grand a turnaround as in Lakewood, where so many children possess thinking skills of the highest order, including analysis, synthesis, and judgment, from a lifetime of Talmudic study but have no access to a rigorous, regular education.

This neglect is why Lakewood fails. The public schools are irrelevant. How can the people support the public schools when their own kids cannot get any education, no matter how much money they're willing to spend, no matter where they're sent? Their school is just not available.

The State has been slow to adopt virtual charters. For the sake of Lakewood, it has to consider an alternative to the brick-and-mortar public school. All children have a right to learn. If helping just one child without opportunity to access education is worthwhile, how much more so this huge portion of the future adult population.

A virtual charter will demonstrate to the voters of Lakewood, and the citizens, and their board of education that public schools can serve the people. It's not just something to put on a sign. Over and over again, district administrators have shown their indifference to the Lakewood population with a cliché saying that "It's a matter of choice. They choose not to send their children to public school." But this is entirely false and patronizing. It downplays the significance of the fact that out of 23,000 children from the majority class, none -- not one -- attends the public schools. None of these Lakewood families have ever been confronted with the decision of choosing whether to send a child to a public, brick-and-mortar public school or a private school. The only decision was which religious school to send the child, with the just the hopes that their kids will get a regular English education.

The end result is that nobody, not even the kids who attend the public school, gets a good education in Lakewood. The situation in Lakewood with respect to official indifference comes as close as anything today to the *inexorable zero* -- the language of the Supreme Court when

dealing with disparate impact, if not invidious discrimination. There has to be some kind of justice. And I think that this is the model that will be acceptable to the people, and this is the model to bring salvation to the children of Lakewood.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Mr. Lang, I promise you, first of all, that I will read your full report--

MR. LANG: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: --because you have some alarming statistics in this report.

Have you spoken to the Superintendent at all? Have you sat down? Have you--

MR. LANG: This is a mission that I've been on for years and year and years. I've studied the situation in Lakewood. I've been a teacher there for 10 years. My second year, right away-- I came to Lakewood to learn in the great Talmudic school here. I spent nearly 20 years. When I was 41 I became a public school teacher. I taught in one of the afternoon schools, in the English program, but it was in Belmar. They bused kids to Belmar. And it had a decent program there; I taught there in the afternoon while I was studying full-time. I mean, the kids would learn, maybe, three hours, two hours, in 10th grade; and maybe one hour secular studies in 11th grade; and a half-hour in 12th grade.

But I became a public school teacher, and then in my second year I started studying educational administration; and then I went to law school and now I'm a lawyer. And over all that education I studied the situation in Lakewood, I studied the -- and how to improve the public schools and also how to bring access to the children who have no access,

including my own. And I've been talking to them, talking to them, talking to them. I've just-- Everything -- I don't want to knock anyone, but it just falls upon deaf ears.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So you're saying that the virtual learning or online learning would provide better availability for courses that are more rigorous, as well as to meet the needs of special ed?

MR. LANG: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Are you saying that the needs are just not being met in the private sector--

MR. LANG: Exactly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: --as well as the public sector?

MR. LANG: Yes, yes. And we're not even talking about, here, the choice between virtual and regular education. The studies show that probably regular classrooms are better, I mean, overall. They say the blended might be just as good. There was just an article in *Education Leadership* about that two months ago.

But we're talking about people here who don't have the luxury of a choice. I mean, it's either this or nothing. I can't think of another model that would work. I think that the virtual model, where you bring it to the student wherever he is, is the solution. It's just not available in New Jersey right now. I tried to do it through the district; I'm still pushing the district. The poor President is promising me that he's going to meet with me. But this has been going on for a year now. Nobody's ever talked to me.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: And you know I do hear, also, you talking about the costs of the private school and they cannot afford it. And you know we have a town in our district that was sort of falling into this model. And we've begun talks between the public sector and the private sector of sharing services so that, you know, maybe we could bring the students to take an advanced math class or an advanced English class or a special class here, and also have the benefits of some of the creative arts, some of the music -- which they did not have access to -- and coming together. And it's the first time that this has ever happened. I'm sort of excited, and hope that I can finish my term before it becomes reality. But it's -- at least we're talking about it now. Have you tried that? Have they tried--

MR. LANG: Yes. Yes, I'm a big advocate of that. I am pushing that. Unfortunately, I've been pushing-- We used to have a beautiful auto shop and woodshop and metal shop in Lakewood High School. I wanted to open that up in the afternoon for nonpublic kids. And, unfortunately-- And I'll tell you, the Lakewood High School kids-- The regular public school kids, they love those things -- we had a brand-new car lift -- they closed it down.

So I've been campaigning for about a year-and-a-half now to get them reopened, but then I'm told it would be very hard because finding an auto shop teacher with appropriate certification -- the old one was grandfathered -- it would be difficult. But to make a long story short, the board's moving its offices. They just announced it last week. And I'm really up in arms about that, but there's nothing I can do. They're moving their offices into our D Building where all our vocational shops are. It's

just-- You just watch here-- As a teacher, you're on the inside and you love your school. I've worked at Lakewood High School for so many years, and I've seen from the beginning that the solution is to make it available to the general population. Let the kids come in, in the afternoon, and take driver's ed. Let them come in and take the vocational courses. They have culinary arts. The principal-- All right, I guess this is off the-- I guess it can't be off the record, but they were talking to me about doing the culinary arts. I think that's a great idea and I've offered to the board that, "You know what? I can supervise the whole thing, because I could make a kosher kitchen. I could supervise that; I'm an employee." They wouldn't have to bring someone from outside -- a religious organization or anything like that. They could teach kids how to cook; community members, how to cook. But nothing ever moves. The Administration would love to see these things happen.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: You know, listen. I hear your passion and your love for education. It's obvious; you're there and I think you're thinking out of the box; which is, I think, what we all have to start doing -- is thinking out of the box on how we want to offer education to make it affordable and accessible to all. I think everyone here believes in that.

And I truly do mean this, and I don't know if you had an opportunity to sit down with Assemblyman Dancer, but he is certainly somebody who I would suggest that you sit down with and share these thoughts with. Because we're now becoming involved in our district -- in a town -- because the people have come to us; and we're listening and we're bringing the parties together. And I have great faith in him -- although he is

the other party -- and I think that he could be very, very helpful in listening to you.

MR. LANG: Can you get him in touch with me? I might have been-- I've e-mailed so many politicians, it's--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: We'll take care of that.

MR. LANG: I appreciate that.

But the reason why I'm here is to give you another reason to get legislation passed, or-- I know there was some-- The moratorium didn't pass last year -- it didn't get out of the Committee -- but generally it's said-- The conventional wisdom is that the Department of Education is not awarding the virtual charters now. And I wanted to offer another reason to get this process moving again.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you.

Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Yes, let me just say that even though I was behind that door, I heard you loud and clearly. And I walked out because I really thought, to be quite frank, that you were bashing public education, etc. But when I got here I heard just the opposite. What you were saying is that you'll be excluded for the same things that we are fighting for -- and that's excellent and quality education.

It also appears to me -- because I happen to know a little something about Lakewood; and my good friend and Senate colleague, Senator Singer, and I go back over 20 years, and I know the politics there as well as the makeup of the town, demographically. But I hear you also saying that the things that many of us are just totally angry about and have been for a number of year-- I mean, when you start to take out the kinds of

things that are necessary to help young people remain disciplined and want to learn, those curriculums that become important on the sideline -- the shops, and the culinary, and the art classes, and the music. We're not funding those and they've been cut out. And I keep saying we should insist that they have those; I don't care where the funds come from, we have to figure it out. That's very meaningful. I played in the band; I did those kinds of things. But I hear you saying that given the demographics and then given the fact -- and we can be quite frank about this -- there is a large Jewish population down there-- Which means that they have a different type of a need. There is a lot of common-ground things as it relates to education there; and there are some differences based on the culture of the region, etc., which we all recognize. It's no different than us being in, say, a predominantly Latino district and, say, most of the Latino districts don't speak English or something like that. There would be some common ground but there would be a lot of differences that we have to fix. And I hear your frustration; you are saying that the traditional public schools are not providing the kinds of things that are unique to that population, even maybe some common ground that doesn't create the whole person academically because without -- particularly given the background and culture, these things need to be in place to make a whole.

We have to figure out how to fix that. I don't know if you had any conversation with Senator Singer or not. I think it's something -- and Melanie, make a note -- that we need to have a conversation with him about. And I also think you need to reach out. I don't know his position on this; I do know that as a local elected official -- be it a council person for a number of years, which I was, too, and a Senator -- to me he has balance

when it comes to issues down here. One of the best Senators -- I can say, because I know him on the Republican side -- who gets it. Whether it's health care or something else, he's a hard fighter. So the question is, I need to know where he stands on this. I need to know where I can be of assistance to him as his colleague. What I do know is that many of us aren't ready to do -- and that's in both parties; they just don't-- The one thing about some of us -- we just tell you how we feel. You get angry, go jump, you know, beat us up, throw us out -- we don't care. Others feel the same the way. They talk to us -- they don't talk to you. Some of my Republican colleagues are good for that. And some of them will tell you where to go. I know some who will sit here who will tell you just -- they'll be real with you.

But the point I'm making is that we need to know their position. Most of us aren't willing to do virtual right now under certain circumstances because we don't know enough about the good side. We know a whole lot about the harms, as it relates to getting to where you're trying to get to with an excellent education. We know there's a place for virtual that can make a difference, and that's what we're trying to figure out right now. In the interim, whether virtual is there or not we need to be addressing your main issue. See, your issue is not virtual. Virtual happens to be your desperation at this point from what you know legally, and what you know from experience and research that it's like, "If I don't get this, I don't know where else to go." Okay? Right? The issue is not virtual. The issue is how you get the pieces of the academic system in terms of choice that you need to accomplish those other ends and to make things work.

And so we have to work on that, okay? And I'm going to read this. I've been reading, that's why I know you-- That's why when I look at it I say, "He's about excellence. He's about the things that people claim they're about for Newark and these other cities," which I'm not sure they're about that either. They say it, but I'm not sure if they're-- See, what the elected officials and the Governor and these people say-- I've been here 27 years and I'm not convinced they mean it. It sounds good, but see, my attitude is if you mean something then here's how you can show me. If you mean that you want to help this conversation in Lakewood, then here's how you can do that. If you tell me I can't get virtual, then listen to what I'm saying to you -- the substance of what I'm saying, okay? The substance is that we need these kinds of things to make this happen. So if it's not virtual, tell me how you're going to get it done.

And that's what we have to work on -- how we're going to get it done to meet that special need -- well, I wouldn't say special, because people confuse that in education -- that uniqueness about the differences there in Lakewood. That's a very important question, and it needs an answer. But it also needs a solution.

MR. LANG: I have met with-- Actually, I have met with Senator Singer (indiscernible). I would appreciate-- I mean, that would be great if you could talk to him.

Let me just say that my real -- my first love is really the high school and the public school. I'm all for-- I mean, I love-- I've been there for so long. I'm now looking a little bit frustrated because I've been working this for so long. I saw from the beginning that the key to turning around and helping our kids in the high school -- hook them up with the

businesses in town, have work study instead of them just hanging out on Clifton Avenue; and getting jobs. Hook them up so their employers report back to their teachers -- to me and to the principal so then we can integrate what you learned today on a job when you worked on Joe Schmo's shop on Clifton Avenue.

Make the bridge between the community and the school. I thought the goal was to make Lakewood High School everybody's school. We had the virtual department; we lost it because we lost the SIG grant. That was my hope. I wasn't getting any support from the Board but they did give me the permission, so I started doing it. It's gone now. The vocational education -- make everyone a stakeholder into the school. I'm only here and I've only gone to the virtual model because I can't do it through the public school -- although a lot of people say that might be a better model. I don't know. But, like I said, something has to be done to bring education to the people. And that would be wonderful if you could help bring some of these people together, because I'm just a teacher. I don't really have the kind of influence to bring these kinds of people together.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Well, I think you have the passion, and I think you have the knowledge. And I'm going to ask you not to give up that. I think if anything, what these discussions have done is to open up how can we best help our children. Because they are the next generation; they have to go forward; and personally, I'm going to be selfish -- I need them to take care of me. So I have to make sure that they're ready to do this.

So I do hear you, and I admire you for your passion and following through.

But now I'm going to ask Senator Greenstein--

MR. LANG: Hi.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: Hi, how are you doing, Mr. Lang?

I just wanted to make sure that I understood. I didn't get a chance to read your testimony or hear it in total. But I heard most of it. Are you-- What your plea here today is for the virtual -- that's what you're looking for; to have that brought in to your particular public schools that you teach in. Right now, most of the religious Jewish kids in Lakewood do not go to these public schools, correct?

MR. LANG: None of them do, actually.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: Right -- virtually none, or none.

Now, is it your contention -- I'm not sure if this is your contention -- that if we bring this virtual into your schools-- I mean, your feeling is that it would give the kids in the schools right now a good -- a better education.

MR. LANG: Well, the kids--

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: But is it your intention to bring the religious Jewish kids into the public schools? That's not what you're contending.

MR. LANG: No, no.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: Okay -- I misunderstood.

MR. LANG: Brick-and-mortar. I would like to see-- That's not going to happen. It won't happen.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: Because they need the special religious schools.

MR. LANG: It's just-- You have to under-- You have to look at reality. And, you know, when you're dealing with-- It's not like, "Oh, you know, one out of four, or one out of eight, or something--" When you're dealing with a whole population, that it's just-- It's just something that can't-- That gap can't be passed. You can't pass that gap. My idea is that through virtual, at least we can bring the school to the kids because the kids -- they're not going to come in. They won't come in.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: You're saying the kids who are in the schools now--

MR. LANG: Well, the kids who are even not in the school-- We have-- My son-- I mean, I don't want to put this on the record, but my son dropped out of yeshiva when he was in 10th grade. And I used to have to-- I hired teachers from the public school to come to the house. But then he didn't-- He stopped because he wasn't going to get credit for it. If he had the virtual education, he could've done that at home and just finished and got his high school diploma. He doesn't have a diploma; he didn't get a GED -- or nothing now.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: How many kids are in your son's situation there, where they dropped out?

MR. LANG: About-- Maybe 10-- I would say about-- I would say all the boys -- about 13,000. I mean, they get education until, like-- I mean, I don't want to-- I don't want the State coming down on all these schools and, you know, saying, "How come you're not teaching?"

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: No, no.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: No, we're not doing that.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: I'm just trying to understand.

MR. LANG: Okay. So the reality is, is with boys, basically, it gets very-- It's really good until 6th grade; 7th and 8th grade -- not do good; 9th grade -- it's almost nothing. With girls, they basically get high school; they'll get Algebra I, they'll get geometry, and then they end up getting a math class. And so basically, 12th grade -- basically it's already-- It's not quite like a regular high school, but it's decent. It's good enough. I mean, I wouldn't be crying about it if it was just the daughter--

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: But again, at the risk of repeating, I just want to make sure I understand this -- because I guess I am confused. Are you talking about wanting to bring in virtual to assist the kids who are in the schools? Or is it because of dropouts? I'm a little confused.

MR. LANG: Everyone -- home school, kids who dropped out, public school kids-- We had a girl last year -- I'm not going to say her name, of course -- but it was regular high school -- Lakewood High School student; regular public school student. She took all her courses at home. The Superintendent put several kids, because of-- She just chose that. The Superintendent put a few kids on home schooling for discipline reasons. They took all their courses at home. It will be for anyone. But this is why people fear this. "Oh, this is-- Oh, another thing that Lakewood's trying to do to close down the schools." No, it's Option -- if it's done through the public school -- it's Option 2 in the State Administrative Code. It's the choice of the student. If the student wants to do it, then he can do it. And so it can be for anyone.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: And I think the way we're talking about it and looking at it, it would be sort of a supplement, I think. I don't

think there's any thought here of just having it exclusively so that, as you said, schools close down.

MR. LANG: Oh, no way -- no. I mean, that's the exact opposite. My goal is to save Lakewood High School. I want to see that place thrive. I just see it go down year after year. I mean, I really appreciate it. I admire our Administration, the principal; and the teachers, I think, are wonderful. But we just-- We're just there shaking our heads. Like I said, we just lost our D Building. They're going to put the Board office inside the D Building. We had an auto shop, like I said; the ceiling is not as high as this, but with a high ceiling for lifting cars, cement floors, garages.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: Just a last point here: If you could just summarize why you think this virtual education would help to revitalize.

MR. LANG: Because if-- Let's say a kid is doing all his courses at home -- everything. I mean, under the Administrative Code there have been rulings from the Administrative Courts. And I don't think it's codified, but it's on the State website -- says that it's-- Well, it's one of the cases. Watchung, Watchung. Albert vs. Watchung -- that you're allowed to offer just one or two courses. You are allowed to offer -- it's a district's option; you could give one or two courses to kids who are not fully registered. But if a kid is fully registered for all of his courses so that he's going to get a diploma -- and that is in the Administrative Code -- I have the citation here, but they call it Option 2 -- and he will graduate, then -- I don't even remember the question. What was the question? (laughter)

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: I thought you were going to ask me to remember it. (laughter)

MR. LANG: That will be a way--

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: I was trying to figure out--

MR. LANG: Oh, so you were saying why would that help. Because then the kid could get an education and get a diploma. You know, I mean, my kid's going to get a diploma; my boy's going to get a diploma.

SENATOR GREENSTEIN: Thank you.

MR. LANG: Okay, thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay -- did Fred leave? He's coming back?

All right then, we'll have, right now, Dr. Lorna Bryant and Deborah Baer. Is it Baer (indicating pronunciation)? Debbie Baer?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (off mike) No.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: No.

And Lorna?

L O R N A B R Y A N T, Ed.D.: (off mike) Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Oh -- come up.

Hi.

DR. BRYANT: Hi. I'm Lorna Bryant. I'm with the New Jersey Virtual Academy Charter School. I have provided testimony to this Committee, to the Board of Education, so I am not going to take up a lot of your time today. I just wanted to come back and reiterate my earlier invitation to everybody here to approach me, to call me, to contact me with any questions about the Virtual Academy: What it is we propose to do in New Jersey.

You met some of the families that are interested in enrolling in the school. We have 850 other -- or 849 other stories that our families would be happy to share. There is a tremendous amount of discussions still going on around this issue; lots of opinions; lots of information to share. But I think, as we can all agree -- with anything, if you really want to hear the story, come to the people who are most affected. And, in this case, that's the families who are looking to this option.

Again, we reiterate: It's not for everybody. But for those students who are looking for this option, for those families who know that this will work for their family, it's a wonderful option to have -- a wonderful choice to have.

So I just wanted to come again and remind you who I am, and remind you that we're still out here and that we're happy to answer any questions that you find that you have.

Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you very much.

No questions, right? (no response)

Okay. And last, but not least, Fred De Sena.

Fred -- and Fred came to my office and taught me a little bit about online innovations. And I thought it would be good if he would come here and testify.

F R E D D E S E N A: I thank you for the invitation, Assemblywoman Wagner. It's a pleasure to meet everyone and a great opportunity. I think I have a unique perspective to bring to the Committee regarding online instruction. And, if I may--

My name is Fred De Sena. I am Vice President of a woman-owned, small business innovation in online education. Founded in this state by West Milford School District English Literature instructor, Laura De Sena, we began five years ago with the purpose of partnering -- not competing -- with New Jersey school districts, providing online applications as a solution for their academic needs -- addressing homebound instruction, summer remedial, and in-school courses that supplement the district's own course catalog.

It is our mission to be community spirited and to strengthen our schools in New Jersey. What distinguishes us from other online education programs is that we are synchronous only -- teachers and students log on together in the virtual classroom for every lesson. We offer a maximum student-to-teacher ratio of 24:1.

We use technology to level the playing field -- to share the resources of the entire state. We are able to offer a New Jersey-certified content teacher to provide instruction to students across the state. We can assure that the homebound student will receive their instruction from a New Jersey State-certified content instructor -- live, in real time, mainstreaming students with their peers in the virtual classroom.

We have provided summer remedial courses in the same fashion, and met the concerns of both districts and parents. We help districts curb operating costs through being green. Many parents expressed that without an online component they would not have been able to make summer remedial study available for their children.

We enrich our programs by providing our students with digital literacy -- the ability to navigate, discernibly and effectively, the World

Wide Web. To perform proper research and avoid plagiarism, to discriminate among sources of information, to determine validity and credibly.

But none of this would be possible without the State-certified content teacher live in the synchronous virtual classroom, leading the students in critical thinking, student-centered learning, and project-based learning.

Here in the live synchronous virtual classroom, the social element of learning is not compromised. It is important at this point to distinguish between the content expert and the tools of the content expert. Technology cannot, by itself, replace the work and skills of a professionally trained true educator. In this equation, we cannot marginalize the teacher through online education.

In a recent Committee meeting, the NJEA expressed concern regarding virtual instruction. Their claim that a computer screen can't sense if a child is upset, distracted, bored, sick, hungry; if a wrong answer is the result of a simple miscalculation, or a failure to understand the whole concept being taught; a computer screen can't talk to a child about what's bothering her, refer a child in crisis, intervention services, or offer a listening ear to a child who needs it-- To this I would answer that I strongly disagree. Innovations in online education have done all these things as documented in our archived recordings. We have walked a child through proper chemistry calculations, listened to a child struggling with debilitating disease, and taken effective action regarding a child expressing depression and suicidal tendencies. All of this has been done live, synchronous, in real

time, with a professional educator as a role model in content mastery, but in empathy as well.

Further, the NJEA went on to state that the student-teacher relationship is fundamental to a successful and well-rounded education. To this, we wholeheartedly agree. Therefore, IOE has elected to make this the hallmark of its online education programs. IOE's service is firmly rooted in acknowledging the necessity of having a highly qualified professional instructor in the virtual classroom during every class session -- leading that class in a lively discussion and critical discourse, facilitating a true learning experience.

Technology not merely for technology's sake, but as the platform the professional educator will use, and the media for providing digital literacy to our students.

When I think back on my formal grade school education, it is often stamped with the faces of several influential instructors -- professional educators who reached out to me, nurturing my voice and enabling me to fully participate in the discussion and to grow in knowledge; to love truth and appreciate art; to make music, to pursue healthy activities. How much less would each of our lives measure, indeed our society as a whole, without the inclusion of these special people in our lives -- the professional educator.

Therefore, as I make this presentation before you, I urge you to afford all our students full access to this brave, new information age through digital literacy. But please do not equate the tools of technology to the instructor. These tools do not themselves serve as teacher replacement, as professional educators, as human intellect. In order for this great technology to be navigated successfully and, indeed, for our students to be

proficient, to become competent in a new millennium, this technology will need to be placed in the hands of the expert -- the educator -- to guide students through this challenging and thought-provoking environment.

I kindly thank you for your consideration.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Fred, you mentioned West Milford.

MR. DE SENA: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: How many districts do you have an agreement with, and how does the student make it to you?

MR. DE SENA: The company was formulated by my wife, Laura De Sena, who is employed as an English instructor at West Milford. She also has a background as an adjunct professor for NYU -- both as brick-and-mortar and online instruction. And she synthesized this program from her experiences.

We first focused on homebound instruction students. And we drew from West Milford. They had a few individual cases that they were not able to meet-- Whether they were not able to find a content specialist in the area, or a unique situation where a student is recovering from surgery and may be possibly out-of-state -- which has happened to us on several occasions -- out-of-state recuperating. And we supplied their State curriculum instruction with a certified New Jersey State content specialist while -- during this period. So we started in that respect. We service, roughly, about a dozen school districts in North Jersey; it's mostly word-of-mouth. We're a small company. We do not have any money to promote ourselves. But word-of-mouth has been successful for us.

We respond to our clients' needs, so we were approached after that to provide a summer program, which we were very successful with. We started with a small handful of students -- 33 students; 32 of them passed -- and in the process we saved parents, who would have had to travel to the adjacent school district, 76,000 miles in travel time and fuel costs, because the school district itself was not hosting the summer classes. And then we were also approached by Northern Highlands Regional High School, which I believe it is in your county -- Bergen County. And they needed a French Level 5 class. And we found the instructor and we were able to pipe it into the school. The students would report to the computer lab. And they would be chaperoned there. And we supplied the instruction online. What I find a particular interesting story -- and I commented to you previously -- is the instructor who we had hired for this purpose needed to travel overseas with her husband. She wound up in Saudi Arabia. She continued to log on to her classes every day, on time, no lag time, and the communication -- everything worked smoothly. So we're experienced with intercontinental hookup. We'd like to expand on that theme by possibly taking the school district that wants to learn a language and maybe hook them up with a sister school district in that language so that they can share the cultures. This is a goal of ours at the moment.

So I hope I wasn't too wordy in answering your question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So you're just doing high schools right now?

MR. DE SENA: High schools, and the middle schools associated with those school districts. When we did summer school for

Warren Hills Regional High School, we did their middle school and their high school.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I'm just thinking here. If I wanted to do a foreign language, which I know many districts right now -- I hate to say this -- it's a videotape and then that's how they're learning it. So let's just say it's 7th grade and-- No, I'm going to bring it down a little. Do you even think you could do something in 4th or 5th grade for a foreign language and have a live teacher online teaching to a 4th or 5th grade class?

MR. DE SENA: You know, everything that we've done has started on that premise. Somebody approaching us with a question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay.

MR. DE SENA: And we'd look at each other, my wife and I -- Laura -- and we'd say, "Why not?" And our premise is that the resources of the entire state are available to us. So if that school is in North Jersey, and the instructor they need is in Trenton or, possibly, Lakewood -- anywhere -- we can bring them to that school district. And we did just that with a student in Sparta High School who needed digital multimedia to complete their credits for graduation. And Sparta High School told me they spent all sorts of money advertising in newspapers. They were offering as much as \$100 an hour. They couldn't find anybody. We brought them the person from another locale in the state -- a State-certified teacher of digital multimedia. We brought them that person on their budget.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: All right. Now I'm going to ask you one more question. If I was in 4th grade and I-- And I'm only saying this because it really disturbs me, because I think a foreign language should be brought down as low as we can get it to.

MR. DE SENA: I agree.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: And our students are not--

MR. DE SENA: The older you get, the more--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: They are not getting what I think they need to have. Is there any possibility, do you see any way that districts could come together and share services and plug in and have this talk live?

MR. DE SENA: Oh, absolutely. The virtual classroom is accessible from multiple locations. So if two districts or more wanted to share -- say they only had six students and they couldn't justify hiring a teacher for six students -- possibly one semester or one year -- we could get two, three, four school districts together. We like to keep it a maximum of 24:1 student-to-teacher ratio. But we could do that. They could all show up at the classroom at the same time. Of course, the districts would need to negotiate what time that would be. But we could do that and we'd even operate on block schedules so the time could keep changing. But we could do that -- yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: That's welcoming, and I know that, for me, I'm going to be thinking an awful lot about this. Because, you know, I can't help but go back to the good old days -- and I know we shouldn't -- but I remember learning a foreign language in 1st grade and in 2nd grade. And by the time I got to 4th grade we were pretty good at it. And I think we're doing such a disservice to our young people by not promoting the understanding of different languages and cultures. So I'm just trying to think how can we do this other than plugging in a tape,

and making it a little more entertaining in learning. And you may have the key to that, in my head.

MR. DE SENA: Well, I certainly appreciate you thinking along those lines because, as I tried to demonstrate here, we're sort of a boutique shop. Our clients can come to us with requests and then we just put on our thinking caps and say, "Well, how can we do this?" And really, I think that the virtual classroom offers unlimited possibilities. It's like there are no limits. But I do believe that a State-certified content instructor is essential to that formula.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you.

Senator Rice, do you have any questions?

SENATOR RICE: Yes, one basically.

But I just wanted to say that, first of all, thank you for staying. It was very informative. It kind of reinforces where the Chairwoman and I and others are trying to go. We know like anything in life, most things in life, there's a time and place for everything. The question is, what's the role of that particular element, if you will, or entity or thing?

And I do agree that language is important at a very early age. I was okay with Spanish in 9th or 10th grade and all that stuff. I was good with vocabulary, but could never understand anything to this day. So the vocabulary became weak -- because I could put together structure, I could write it, but I couldn't understand anything because everybody talked too fast. If I was younger, I could pick on it, I know that in my mind.

On the other side of that, you know, we keep talking about shared services and shared this and shared that. We do, and I do, recognize when-- Through the redistricting process I took it upon myself, on behalf of

the Legislative Black Caucus, not to trust the State Democratic Party to tell us where there is going to be diversity in representation. So I drew maps. But my problem was trying to get the lines together, because I'd look and I'd say, "What is that town? What's that population -- 300 people?" I said, "(indiscernible). A town in my way with 300 people," so I couldn't get my map connected, okay, and I'm thinking-- But in the process I started thinking about education and these debates about shared services; and people saying that we should take a look at the number of school districts we have. I mean, I was like, "No, no, no, no," until I realized that we have a population that calls themselves villages, townships, or something -- with 300, 400 people. And so the question is, you're right. If, in fact, as the Assemblywoman said, if you have three people in this little town who really needs this or should have the (indiscernible), how do they get it? They can't drive 100 miles down the road -- some of these are rural communities, too. How do you put that together? So the shared services piece is something I think we need to have more conversation about. It may be something that, Assemblywoman, we can talk about. If we think that it fits, we're going to have to craft it to legislation -- because we allow our colleagues and others to do it, it's going to get out of hand. And if it gets out of hand, then it's going to wind up with a big fight about virtual learning that shouldn't be there in the first place.

So somebody has to pay attention to this. That's really my statement. And I recognized my question, as you said that your wife is really doing this; you know, you're just the marketing guy. I see where this is going right now. I see where the brains are behind the business.

(laughter) But you also said you were small, so I just wanted to know -- did you ever watch *Shark Tank*? (laughter)

MR. DE SENA: I can't say that I have because we don't use TV in our house. We're pretty computer-focused. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Okay. Aw, shucks. That (indiscernible).

MR. DE SENA: But I do appreciate you bringing up that viewpoint. It is so important. There is so much that the State has that it can't bring to certain areas. And they don't have to be remote areas only. Whether a district needs a Mandarin teacher-- And as I mentioned, Northern Highlands had six students who wanted French Level 5 -- they wanted this. Why not? And there are unlimited possibilities with the virtual classroom. And we need to think broadly, across the state, rather than saying, "Well, no, we just can't do it. There is nobody in this area who teaches that and we don't have enough students; so therefore, we don't have the demand. And hiring a full-time teacher is too much of a commitment." We need to find ways to say yes. And that's a way of doing it -- as you put it, shared managed services.

SENATOR RICE: Well, prison is my primary goal for use because I had a (indiscernible) years ago that said-- You see, I have a very simple mindset about people who commit crimes. And that's the fact that some are going to do it and get their lives together. But they keep coming out in society and telling me that they don't read and they don't write. See, my attitude is, if you go to jail -- that's on you. But my attitude is, I don't want to let you out-- See, I had a bill that said I'm going to mandate that you get a GED. Don't even think about the parole board until you get a GED. Because I go to prisons -- at least I used to go there and everybody

was like, "Hey, Mr. Rice, yo, what's going on?" I said, "Why aren't you in class? There are some opportunities." "Well, you know--" I said, "Are you going to stay and hang out on the basketball court for all these years?" So if you had a high school diploma, then my attitude is you should be working on some technical skills or some college. If not, don't even talk to-- In other words, you're going to tell me about high school diplomas and you have this much time? Now, I have enough sense to know in this much time you can get an associates degree -- on their time -- because you aren't coming out for that time, okay? And that's being liberal. So my attitude is, don't even think about-- I don't care what kind of model prisoner you are. You don't even think about getting out until you get some education. And if, in fact, we were to do those kinds of things, I believe -- because prisons aren't supposed to be fun in the first place; we're supposed to be in control. But then I see where virtual becomes really an important tool. And unless of course, by the way, because they keep trying to cut out prison education dollars that can come from the lottery, etc.

And so that's the focus with me -- a mandated bill that you have to do *A, B, C*; and we have to have virtual to make sure this is happening, along with the teachers that we do send in there. I don't know, but I do have an interest in some aspect of it.

MR. DE SENA: Well, you know, I would have to say that that's common sense. If you talk rehabilitation you have to talk education. And here's another application. You just brought it before me. I have to be honest -- being connected with the school system I hadn't been thinking about the prison population. But it's there to do. And you need to bring

teachers into the prison -- how do you get them there? Well, virtually. And it can be done. There's no reason to say no. We can say yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Well, thank you, Fred.

Is there anyone else who would like to testify, or would like to--
Come on up, yes.

Fred, you're done. (laughter)

MR. DE SENA: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you, Fred.

MR. DE SENA: I appreciate your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you so much. We really appreciate it.

Okay, we have two of our favorites -- Tim and Sister Elizabeth.

So go for it.

SISTER ELIZABETH DALESSIO: Okay, I think most of you know us, but I am Sister Elizabeth Dalessio. I am the Assistant Superintendent of Monmouth-Ocean Educational Services Commission.

TIMOTHY P. NOGUEIRA: Tim Nogueira, Superintendent.

SISTER DALESSIO: And today my main purpose-- I know it's late in the day. So as we walked up, Tim said, "Don't read it -- say it."

I'm going to be brief because everybody asks something later on. But here's the thing: I've been to every one of these hearings. I've heard a lot -- pros and cons -- about virtual education, online education, blended learning, whatever you want to call it. The bottom line is this: We know it works. We've been doing it for 10 years -- in school districts, in juvenile justice, in correctional institutions -- as you know very well now, Assemblywoman. And it works, okay? We started the New Jersey Virtual

School in 2002 -- so we just celebrated our 10th anniversary. Tim and I co-founded the New Jersey Virtual Charter School which, probably because of bureaucracy and a few other things, it will never open. And what a travesty that is because it was only for dropouts. New Jersey ranks very high educationally -- we hear it all the time. We also rank very high in the number of dropouts -- we're 4th in the nation. We have a responsibility to give those students an education -- a thorough and efficient education. And I don't want to hear, "Do they deserve a second chance or don't they?" They most certainly do -- because if we don't give them a second chance, they'll take another chance at being dropouts.

And here's the other thing: Most of the dropouts -- it's not because of substance abuse -- although there is -- or illegal activity. How about the number of students who have left to take care of a family member. They're working so the family can stay together. Or the bottom line is they're just afraid to go to school.

So we have a population there that we need to help. But as I said, Tim and I have worked very hard; and I will tell you right now, because of the bureaucracy, because of all the infighting -- and I know Tim's telling me, "Watch--" it's just not going to happen. That's a travesty.

So I'm asking you to do whatever it takes to make sure that all of the students who are citizens of the State of New Jersey get a chance at a thorough and efficient education.

My final thing is this: While I've heard about virtual education and everybody's yes or no, and all the reasons they are afraid of who's going to manage the schools? Who's going to do this? Who's going to do that? And every time I ask, "Has anyone looked at the curriculum?" nobody ever

says, "Yes." It's about education, it's about the phenomenal teachers we already have doing great work. And it's about the students.

That's my abridged edition. I'll be back.

Tim.

MR. NOGUEIRA: Inside the folder there are two pages of all the schools that we've dealt with. I don't know -- there are 400. I can't tell you -- take a look at that list. It's the fourth one on the right-hand side in the back. I want to give you guys the highest praise of going through all this testimony from all these people. It's my third meeting, too. And I can't believe that we're blending together many different kinds of online. And it's just not true. Some of the things you hear about are computer-assisted instruction, which means the student goes on, reads things, and then the teacher is there to help them. That's called *computer-assisted instruction*.

The other one about videotaping a teacher and putting it up on the screen -- that's not today's definition of *blended learning* or *online learning*.

Assemblywoman, you saw it yesterday. You saw that there were students in a classroom; there was a live teacher there, but on the other end of the computer there was an online teacher. In the United States of America today, that's online and blended learning. There are different pieces of the pie. But if you're going to consider talking about online learning -- and I mentioned this the last time. And I, as part of the people on this side of the table and all the gang who was here, want to apologize to you for not coming up with definitions of what everybody means. Every time I pick up a piece of legislation you have all the definitions listed; you tell me what all the words mean. We're using words

today -- left and right, up and down -- they don't mean the same thing. Computer-assisted instruction and online instruction -- not the same thing. We've been doing it for 10 years; I do 3,000 students every summer for summer school -- 3,000. I teach Mandarin Chinese, I teach AP Physics during the regular school year; 2,000 students during the school year; 5,000 students, times 10 years. We teach in the prison, we teach at New Hope -- the drug facility. We've been doing this a long time. Some of the stuff that you're hearing, I have to tell you -- if you want to talk about online and blended learning -- this isn't what you're hearing. So it must be very confusing. I have to apologize because we -- this side of the table, again -- are not giving you the right information here. A list of definitions would be great.

And I remember in the very beginning at one of the sessions I didn't attend, Senator Thompson said, "What do all these mean? What's the difference between online and blended?" He went into that-- He was absolutely right. We didn't have those things.

It's a late hour; we'd love to talk to you again. The shared services, as you talked about, Senator -- absolutely. Cooperative bidding, so that school districts are knocked out as independent people buying a computer or a piece of software or hardware -- that absolutely should be done. You want to do it by county -- that's fine. But that's how you get the leverage to save money -- if they're going to go that way, if they're going to buy more computers. And they have to buy more computers because of PARCC. But they're going out as individuals; sometimes as one or two school districts together. We should be forcing people into a shared service

or cooperative bid situation for no other reason than you have the power to save some money.

You're absolutely right, Senator. I heard you say it a couple of times.

It's late. We'd be happy to answer any questions, but please invite us back another time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Senator Rice, go ahead.

SENATOR RICE: First of all, once again, thanks to Sister Elizabeth and you, Tim. And let me commend Assemblywoman Wagner. This has been a priority of hers; this is her first session, really, on this Committee. And she's Co-Chair, and this has been something that has been on her mind. She's an asset to the Committee. And when I was looking for members there was one we were asking for, and the other was connected with me -- because we have to have someone who's been there besides those of us who have been through the system. She understands the system as it is and as it was. And she's worked in that system. And so we rely on her for a lot of her thoughts, and I think that's important.

Senator Thompson has always been the balanced person to try to get it right. He's going to ask the right questions, he's going to raise shared services -- stuff like that -- things we have to pay attention to.

The two things that I have in mind-- I have the school dropout bill, and for some reason they won't post it. I just do not believe that young people should be dropping out of school at age 16 -- two years before. And I also believe that if they learn down here -- because there's nothing to learn. If there is no such word as *dropout*, you don't think about it up here when you hear it. You know, you assume everybody's going to school until

a certain time, but there will still be people who don't go to school -- but there won't be, I believe, a significant number of dropouts.

But in the interim, we have to deal with the dropouts we have. Those dropouts are the same population, in many cases, that we talk about we have to deal with in the prisons. So my preference is to try to deal with them prior to going to prison.

And then, you know, there's another component to this stuff that no one is talking about. I just believe that the generations have come behind me -- many of those generations -- a couple of generations -- that the parents, they're too ashamed -- and even in my generation, some of them are still around -- they're too ashamed to tell somebody -- because they articulate very well, and they're doing okay academically -- that they can't help these kids at home. And why not? "Well, I only had a 6th grade education, because I went to work." "Well, I thought you did math pretty good." "Yes, but I can't--" You know what I'm saying? And it seems to me that a lot of these adult schools--- It seems to me that if I was at a 5th-grade level of reading, and my kids was in the 5th grade, if we went to school at the same time and had the same teacher, I'll do it because I'm with her and wouldn't be embarrassed, you know? The parents would be there. But I know when we go home and do the homework, there is going to be some real serious debates over the answers, and the kids are going to remind you, "But, Ms. Wagner said this, mommy," and I'm going to say, "That's not what she said." And we're just going through this thing. And I think we'll have fun learning and bonding.

So I can see a few places where, throughout the state, people want to have some options and use some of this virtual learning. That's the

one thing. And the other is you scared me when you said 3,000 students. Could you have said something that you taught besides Chinese and chemistry?

MR. NOGUEIRA: Oh, no, no. The 3,000 students-- No, that was the regular school year.

SENATOR RICE: I understand--

MR. NOGUEIRA: Three thousand students have taken--

SENATOR RICE: The two subjects you named just threw me off. I said-- (laughter)

MR. NOGUEIRA: You know what they're taking, Senator? They're taking all the things kids usually fail at. They're failing geometry, algebra, history, and English. So those are the kids in summer school.

SENATOR RICE: There's a question for Sister Elizabeth, because I hear, loud and clearly, and I'm looking at her -- not as an educator or a person of concern, now. I'm looking at the spiritual side of it, where she just wants something good to happen because she knows people deserve it, okay? And that's constitutionally, but it's God's way, too. And she knows that we all can learn.

So let's talk about the issue that you raised: the debate about this virtual charter you're trying to get in, okay? Well, let's not have a debate on the virtual charter schools that you're trying to get in for dropouts. Let me keep it connected. What happens if we said in traditional public schools we'll set aside this space, this time, or this building they keep closing; in the traditional public schools, working with someone advising them or working with them, like yourselves -- are going to have this curriculum. In other words, the teachers you are using are locked

into our system, unless you have some specialty and you have to reach outside.

MR. NOGUEIRA: No.

SISTER DALESSIO: No.

MR. NOGUEIRA: Teachers-- There are current teachers who teach those subjects in the state. And you were correct--

SENATOR RICE: That's my point. My point is they're certified in the state.

MR. NOGUEIRA: That's right.

SENATOR RICE: I call that *locked in our system*.

MR. NOGUEIRA: Okay.

SENATOR RICE: And so these aren't necessarily the charter school people-- These are, probably, NJEA and all the rest of the people, or someplace out there, okay?

MR. NOGUEIRA: They are; that's right.

SENATOR RICE: So the question is, okay, Teacher Connie Wagner -- I can say that, because she was a teacher, okay? She was. She was a principal and everything else, so (indiscernible), too, okay -- she stayed in the system. We're just saying-- Look, okay? I'm not letting Cami Anderson take these buildings and just privatize them and close them down. There's nothing wrong with this building. You're telling me the kids aren't learning and the teachers aren't teaching -- which I disagree with. I say you're closing my buildings -- just like New York -- yes, we're just going to close it. We never owned the structure. And then they wait a little bit and say they're going to bring a charter school in. No, no, no -- you're not bringing in a charter school. You're going to close my building. If you

don't have capacity for the building and you want to share -- it's about shared services again -- share it -- that's how we're going to share. We're going to share with the dropout students, okay? This side of the building is going to be used for dropout students, and we're going to experiment with virtual learning. No, it's not a charter school. If the student is coming out of your traditional system, dropping out, he needs to be redirected and want to participate. How do you see that as a potential means of getting part of your dream in place, Sister Elizabeth?

MR. NOGUEIRA: Let me start, then she can take it. Just one second.

There's the problem with the dropouts who exist, and then there's the dropouts who are coming, right?

SENATOR RICE: Yes.

MR. NOGUEIRA: We're working with the New Brunswick School District; they've identified 125 freshmen who they say don't have the skills and they're doing course work with them during the regular school year. And you're right -- you could do what we call a virtual school inside a regular school.

SENATOR RICE: Yes.

MR. NOGUEIRA: What happens is-- Let's go back to the teaching model that we all know. There are 25 kids in the class; 5 of them are really excelling -- and it doesn't matter what level you're talking about; if it's a remedial class, if it's an AP class -- there are some kids who are ahead of others. So there are 5 kids who are really bright and they're moving on, there are 10 kids who need to do some work, and there are the kids in the middle. There is one teacher. You can have the greatest teacher ever; this

is a difficult task to take on. With virtual, you plug the top kids in and you can plug the bottom kids in and you can do that kind of work with them to move them on. What happens in tradition education is that the kids down at the end, as the rest of us take off, they fail. And eventually they give up. And eventually they go and take the courses for a second time in their high school, and they are a pain in the neck in the course now, and they're smart enough to get their stuff-- They get themselves thrown out. We create the dropouts. Where do they come from? They didn't show up yesterday. We get dropouts who we're growing right now.

Virtual education, virtual online courses help you do that.

SENATOR RICE: My question, though-- I understand what you're saying. We're not on different pages. My question is, if I can convince, by way of legislation or by just punching somebody in the face and saying "You're going to do this" -- if I convince them to say, "Look, I have this space. I have this ratio of dropouts. I have this population coming, and I want Sister Elizabeth and her team, okay? And we're going to pay her from your budget, all righty? And if she's a certified teacher, we're just going to hire every teacher -- we don't care if it's a nun. This isn't going to be a charter school. This is going to be a traditional school with a choice" -- because we keep talking about choice; that's how we started on this -- "there's a choice in here for dropouts." But we have to make sure we don't create dropouts by other students saying, "Well, that sounds like it's cool, so I, too, want to go to where you can't call me a dropout when I drop out." You know what I mean? But my point-- You understand what I'm saying?

SISTER DALESSIO: Absolutely.

SENATOR RICE: I think what's hurting us with some of the choices that people want is the privatization side of it. When I said that, people said, "Well, I need to get this done in Lakewood." And I said, "You're right. I didn't realize that was happening." "We need a charter." You don't need a charter. You need to get this done, okay?

SISTER DALESSIO: Senator--

SENATOR RICE: We want to take this for dropouts, okay? I agree with you. "But we need a charter." No, you don't need a charter. We need to get this dropout program in place. That's what I'm talking about. And I think that's the biggest problem I'm having, and I believe it's the biggest problem that a lot of my colleagues are having. Because they don't like these debates about what is best. We're getting torn politically; Democrats aren't in love with all the things that Republicans say and do. Republicans aren't in love with everything that Democrats say and do because we represent populations -- most of us -- that have differences over their common grounds. And the differences happen to come when a majority of our population are the ones you are trying to get to, the ones who wind up in jail, dropping out, not getting it -- you know, think the parents are having all kinds of problems; versus their philosophy is, "Well, we'll find another way, because we can pay, and we don't care about that. We're giving you too much money now."

And so my point is that it shouldn't be that kind of debate. It should be a need-driven base. There's a need to do something different for dropouts. What is it? "Well, Sister Elizabeth said the need is to do these kinds of things virtually" -- fine. "Let's put it in Bergen Street right now. I have some space." You see what I'm saying? Let's put it in Passaic or

International High School right now; we have some space. I'm just-- Let's put it in Lakewood right now; we have some space -- you see what I'm saying? That's where the debate is. We need to get away from the semantics -- well, it's not really semantics, it's money. That structural money, and that private side because, some of us thought that's what it's all about. The problem is you're not about that. All you know is, "There's a law that's says we can do a charter school, and here's how you open it so I can get my dream over here." If we never said *charter* -- because you're not into privatization; nobody's trying to hedge fund you. That's those other folks, like TEAM and all those people, okay? You're into, "Oh, here's a way that we can open up something and show them it works." And I'm saying--

MR. NOGUEIRA: Because we can't get the money any other way.

SENATOR RICE: Exactly.

MR. NOGUEIRA: There's no other money for me to get.

SISTER DALESSIO: Right. So Senator, here's the answer. You're right; we're a public school district already. That's what makes us unique. And when we couldn't get the money any other way, we said, "Well, maybe we can get the money through the charter school."

I will be honest with you -- that's becoming dimmer and dimmer for us right now. So the next step for us to do is-- You're right. How do we get into the schools? Because our entire application will fit perfectly into any public school in New Jersey. I know it because I've done it. Here's the thing: I did my dissertation on at-risk students in an alternative school setting within the public school, doing online learning. It works. Tim and I have waited for two years now -- how can we make this

work? Tim has a great relationship with the -- I don't want to say retired police officers, but -- police officers who work with D.A.R.E. and they were more than willing-- Listen, let's set this up. We're going to have an educational component; we're going to have a job component; we're going to have counseling. And here's the other thing: "We're going to put you on college campuses so that you get the feeling of what it means to be on a college campus. And we're going to help you learn. You're going to graduate, you're going to go on to college -- if that's your choice."

It does work, okay? How do I know? Because when we ran a brick-and-mortar adult high school-- And I'm going to say something that you brought up about the parent going to school with the kid. Do you know that we had an 86-year-old great-grandmother receive her high school diploma because she wanted to be an example to the children -- her great-grandchildren who she was taking care of? To me she's one of the finest examples of an educator that I've ever seen.

We want to help the students who get off the bus and have the nerve to say to me-- I say, "Who are you?" "We're the kids nobody else wants." "Really? Not in our place -- no."

So we know it works, because we've done it. We've done brick-and-mortar, we've done online, we've done a combination. I'm sorry I'm getting so passionate with you; I apologize. It just-- We've done it, and it can work.

SENATOR RICE: And I like it.

SISTER DALESSIO: And it can work. It can work in the public schools.

SENATOR RICE: I like it. We're going to end here because I know it's been a long day. I like it.

What I'd like to do is-- I would like, if the Assemblywoman doesn't mind, that maybe someday when we're in Trenton at the same time, that you come and talk to us. Maybe we should be talking to OLS. I would like to see a pilot program, and what we'll do is make ourselves a meeting, Melanie, with the Assemblywoman herself and Sister Elizabeth, OLS, and bring someone in from NJEA at the table, okay? Because it seems to me that we should be having a conversation about how to legislate a pilot program or two or maybe three. Maybe we'll be able to legislate one in the South, North, Central and see how it works out -- with the components you were talking about -- getting it directly for dropouts right now, and the stuff we're talking about. You know, we might do a lot to -- the parents working with them and that kind of stuff. Just on that notion. Because that makes more sense than a lot of things. And then we can see and show that, look, don't run from virtual because there's a time and a place for it and there's a need for it in certain places. But then as we look at the (indiscernible), we can help define in the future those needs and those times and places. So that it doesn't become this gawky virtual system where there are no longer teachers in the classrooms, and the number of teachers that are needed, that the unions have, are diminishing and stuff like that. Where there's a greater need, if anything, for more folks to just reeducate themselves to assist themselves with the kinds of tools we're putting in the schools. Do you understand what I'm saying? We need to have that conversation.

I just want to thank-- I'm going to end on that.

Thank you, madam Chair, for letting me talk so much on it. But they get me; they're getting me. And Melanie, you need to just work with some dates that we're here and bring them in.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: You know-- And listen. I want to thank everybody for coming here today, and especially Tim and Sister Elizabeth. And I think you can see where our thinking has gone through the past couple of months. And I think you can see that there are some breakthroughs coming through on this Committee and how we are thinking.

And I think if we approach it that-- You know, it doesn't have to-- Because what I heard over and over and over again is we're not taking anybody's job away. We need you to do this. You will be the face in the virtual school. And I agree with the Senator that if we started in pilot programs and you have the success -- what I saw yesterday was successful; we need to get into the detention homes. We need to stop the bleeding, because if we are 4th in dropouts, that that's not a statistic that I'm very happy with. And what I saw yesterday, and when I talked to the graduates yesterday -- that when they get out of prison each and every person had a plan that was a reasonable plan. They knew it was still going to be difficult, but they had a reasonable plan that they could be a productive member of society. And that's what I think it's all about.

So we've come a long way and we're not finished with this. And we're still going to end up talking to you in regard to legislation. But I think if we approach it that way, it's going to be good for everybody. And New Jersey will not be 4th in the number of dropouts, okay? We don't want any dropouts.

So once again, I thank you for coming. And I can guarantee you on our way home in the car I'm still going to be yak, yak, yakking; and he's going to have to listen to me (laughter) because you've got me all excited.

But now the meeting is adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)