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# *Committee Meeting*

of

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“The Committee will be receiving testimony from invited guests on the state of the Orange School District, with a presentation to include an overview of the fiscal and budget status; a facilities update; staff sufficiency to meet curriculum mandates; the capacity to fulfill contractual obligations to employees and vendors; and how student graduation rates are expected to be impacted by the recent promulgated DOE requirements, as well as any additional questions Committee members may have”*

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**LOCATION:** Committee Room 4  
State House Annex  
Trenton, New Jersey

**DATE:** June 20, 2016  
10:00 a.m.

### **MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:**

Senator Ronald L. Rice, Co-Chair  
Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey, Co-Chair  
Senator Samuel D. Thompson  
Assemblywoman Sheila Y. Oliver  
Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly



### **ALSO PRESENT:**

Rebecca Sapp  
*Executive Director*

*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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**SENATE**

Hon. Ronald L. Rice  
Co-Chair

Hon. Diane B. Allen  
Hon. James Beach  
Hon. Patrick J. Diegnan  
Hon. Samuel D. Thompson

**ASSEMBLY**

Hon. Mila M. Jasey  
Co-Chair

Hon. Ralph R. Caputo  
Hon. Betty Lou DeCroce  
Hon. Sheila Y. Oliver  
Hon. David P. Rible  
Hon. Benjie E. Wimberly  
Hon. David W. Wolfe



**JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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**MEETING NOTICE**

**TO: Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools**

**FROM: Senator Ronald L. Rice, Co-Chair  
Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey, Co-Chair**

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will hold a meeting on Monday, June 20, 2016, at 10:00 a.m. in Committee Room 4 of the State House Annex, in Trenton, New Jersey.

The Committee will be receiving testimony from invited guests on the state of the Orange School District with a presentation to include an overview of the fiscal and budget status, a facilities update, staff sufficiency to meet curriculum mandates, the capacity to fulfill contractual obligations to employees and vendors, and how student graduation rates are expected to be impacted by the recently promulgated DOE requirements, as well as any additional questions Committee members may have.

Members of the public are free to address the Committee with their concerns of the Orange School District.

**The public may address comments and questions to Rebecca Sapp, Executive Director, at 609-847-3365, or by email at [Rsapp@njleg.org](mailto:Rsapp@njleg.org)**

Issued June 16, 2016

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

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Good morning.

SENATOR RICE: (louder) Good morning.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: (louder) Good morning.

SENATOR RICE: Now, I know our brothers and sisters in here from Orange are church-going people. And I know that when we say “good morning,” we are supposed to get a good response, right?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: So we’re going to say “good morning” again.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: Good morning. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Man, you all go to school, and you all don’t-- (laughter) I thought you got up early to go to school.

Look, this is-- We want to, first of all, welcome you to the State House here in Trenton -- the nex. This is a meeting of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. My name is Ronald L. Rice; I’m a New Jersey State Senator and Co-Chair of this particular Committee, along with Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, who will enter soon. I think she went to another Committee -- Education. And traditionally we don’t meet on legislative days when the Legislature is in. But we know we’re breaking for the summer; we know this is a very important issue, particularly to those of us on the Committee, and also particularly to Assemblywoman -- Speaker Emeritus Sheila Oliver, who represents your District.

We do understand there are some real issues impacting the school districts throughout the state. We've been trying to adjust those issues as best we can. For your information, and for the students' knowledge, this is a Joint Committee; so what that means is that the members of this Committee are from the Assembly and the Senate; they're from the Republican side of the house and the Democrat side of the house. We don't do legislation; we conduct oversight and we raise questions and issues. We can recommend legislation to the various committees. So that's important for you to know.

I know we have here today the Mayor of Orange, Mayor Warren; and Trenton is not new to him. He travelled here many times, many years before he became the Mayor of Orange. But it is a process, and I'm glad to see students here, because I think it's a learning environment for you as well. We don't get many of our urban students coming to the State House to testify, or to hear from us, or even to do tours. So it's good to see you here.

With that being said, I'm going to ask for a roll call first, and then I'm going to ultimately turn this meeting over to Speaker Oliver, because she's the one who wanted to make sure you were here. And she understands the issues that are plaguing you that we need to hear from you about.

With that being said -- Becky, would you give us a roll call?

MS. SAPP (Executive Director): Sure.

Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Here.

MS. SAPP: Assemblywoman Oliver.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Here.

MS. SAPP: Assemblyman Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Here.

MS. SAPP: Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Here.

Next, I'm going to ask the members if they have anything to say, in terms of greeting the students and the administrators from Orange.

Assemblyman Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Good morning. I'd like to welcome Mayor Warren and the Superintendent of students to the State House. As our distinguished Senator said, it's always good to see people from urban centers come to the State House. I always tell people that until I was elected, I only had been here one time myself before, as an adult. So it's great to see you in the process; and know that you have a friend here in the 35th District to assist with anything I can do to help anything that involves public education.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Again, welcome to the State House. We're here to listen to your concerns and see if there is anything we can do about them, and we'll do what we can.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: With that being said, I'm going to turn this meeting over to Speaker Oliver.

Speaker Oliver.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you, Senator Rice and members of the Joint Committee.

I, too, would like to welcome Mayor Warren and Dr. (*sic*) Ronald Lee, your Superintendent; the members of the School Board; representatives from the Municipal Council; parents; and, most importantly, our students.

We are here today because during the past several months, Mayor Warren, along with parents and concerned citizens in the City of Orange Township, formed, under the leadership of the Mayor, a grassroots community-based committee to begin to educate the residents and the parents in the Township about school funding. As students would go to school every day, as parents would interact in the District, they did not understand why there were so many egregious (*sic*) kinds of activities and programs that were no longer being able to be offered because of the lack of adequate State funding.

What you will learn today, I think, is that we have a crisis all over the state, in terms of underfunding in many of our school districts. And we have over 500 school districts in the State of New Jersey.

However, I think it's important for you to know that when you look at the budget of the State of New Jersey -- the biggest amount of money that we spend is for public education. And it seems that it's just enough (*sic*).

But it's important for us to hear, as Senator Thompson said, some of the implications for the Orange School District by being underfunded by approximately \$17 million. And I know that Assemblyman Wimberly -- this is an issue that is of high priority for him, because he

represents the City of Paterson. And we have held Joint Committee meetings for the people of Paterson; as a matter of fact, we held a meeting at Paterson Eastside High School. And we know the severe, severe trauma that has been wrought upon the Paterson School District.

So with that, I want to thank Senator Rice and Assemblywoman Jasey for convening this meeting. You need to know that we offer our humble gratitude to the two Co-Chairs -- because, generally, this week in Trenton, it is all about the budget. And we have to have a budget by June 30; you will see our legislators up 24 hours a day for the next 7 to 10 days. And I'm just so pleased that our leadership is allowing us to have this Committee meeting this morning.

So with that, I am going to ask Mayor Warren if he would come forward, and he will begin with opening testimony.

And thank you, Mayor Warren.

**MAYOR DWAYNE D. WARREN, Esq.:** Good morning; good morning to all of the members of this esteemed Committee. To the Chairs of this Committee, we extend gratitude from the City of Orange Township.

We understand the priorities in Trenton at this hour, and we understand what it took in the background to reshuffle -- even to get this very room. It shows your commitment to quality education in urban areas, and we certainly thank you.

To Assemblywoman Oliver -- thank you for your support from the Legislative District of District 34. You have been a stalwart in terms of maintaining our urban education status, and thank you for being a soldier in our fight.

As we convene here today, I come before you as an advocate for children in the City of Orange Township to ensure that they receive a quality education. And this can't happen in Orange until and unless we are fully funded. As we all know, in 2008 the Governor signed into law a funding reform measure. The Reform Act replaced the previous funding law that was enacted in 1996.

The new formula was necessary because it addressed the deficiencies in the previous law as identified by the Supreme Court of the State of New Jersey. The foundation of the old law is based on a proposal submitted by New Jersey Department of Education entitled, "A Formula for Success: All Children, All Communities." As you are aware, there are two types of education State aid categories: the wealth-equalized aid is provided to school districts in an amount determined by the measure of a district's financial capacity. For example, a district with less wealth will receive more wealth-equalized aid than a wealthier district.

The second type of state aid is categorical aid. This funding is distributed to districts in an equal amount for all students, or for all students satisfying certain criteria. The standards for determining whether or not a district is eligible for this aid are special education, extraordinary special education, security aid, transportation aid, and preschool education aid.

The SFRA contains both types of funding. The amount of funding determined for Orange and other districts under this law requires a calculation of an adequacy budget. And the adequacy budget represents the portion of a cost that a school district must incur in order to provide a

thorough and efficient education that will be supported by the State on a wealth-equalized basis.

Well, the Orange Public Schools has determined its adequacy budget, and we have received \$12.6 million less than it would require for our public school system to provide a thorough and efficient education. This shortfall will impact our academic, afterschool, and Saturday programs designed to complement our students' education, as well as the salary of our educators.

In June 2010, this legislative body adopted Governor Christie's proposed Fiscal Year 2011 budget. His budget reduced \$1.1 billion, or 15 percent, in State aid from the State funding formula. On January 13, 2010, the Supreme Court delivered an order for a remand hearing before Judge Doyle; and Judge Doyle provided a report asserting that the funding formula was underfunded by 19 percent, or \$1.6 billion. This resulted in an inability of urban districts to provide programs necessary for students to meet the academic standards.

This situation is particularly concerning to the City of Orange Township. We are a city of 30,000 people; we have, roughly, a \$60 million budget. We have a school system of a little over 5,000 children. But most concerning is a share of our budget has to go to fund public schools. And with a dwindling tax base and with heavy leaning on property tax owners on the residential side, this has become a burden. Not only in that area, but it's become a burden because now grant dollars -- Federally funded grant dollars, applications for tax credits for development -- every time that we have to go and compete for dollars, increasingly the standard becomes whether or not you have an education system that is meeting State

standards. If we don't meet State standards, we can't apply for and compete for dollars that come from outside of our city.

So we've become a circular trap. We can't fully fund our education; that leads to poor performance; that leads to inequities in our competing for other dollars, and we can't fund our system properly.

On May 24, 2011, the Supreme Court reviewed and considered Judge Doyle's report and heard oral arguments. Their findings identified the State of New Jersey's failure to fund the funding formula, and it resulted in instructionally consequential and significant harm to at-risk students and districts across the state. The Court also concluded that the harm that New Jersey school children endured because of the reduction in funding was not a minor infringement, but a real substantial and consequential blow to the right for a thorough and efficient education. This resulted in the Court ordering the formula to be fully funded in Fiscal Year 2012 for students in the 30 high-need urban districts, which include the City of Orange Township.

In my preparation for this hearing, I looked at the equalization aid and adjustment aid. And our research showed that these categories -- the equalization aid category is the difference between a district's adequacy budget and its local share. If the local share exceeds the adequacy budget, the district would not receive any equalization aid. According to some estimates, in the current fiscal year, 197 of the school districts are over-aided. This was because they received more than 100 percent of their calculated formula aid, totaling \$598 million. Much of this aid came through emergencies, referred to as the *adjustment aid*.

As the Mayor of the City of Township, I urge this Committee to look into the adjustment aid formula to see whether or not there are dollars, or funds, or resources that could be used to offset the underfunding of the City of Orange Township School District. Once it is fully funded, we in the City of Orange Township know that our Township and its schools are full of promise, are full of the future.

If I might, Mr. Chairman -- if I could ask all behind me who are students in the Orange Board of Education School District to please stand so that you get a sense of the promise and genius that we have in our Orange Public Schools.

(students stand)

Behind me, Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee -- this is why we fight, this is why we come to Trenton, this is why we sacrifice the time, this is why we present our story to you so that you, too, can be soldiers in the army for funding the Orange School District to the fullest extent possible.

We thank you for your time; and I yield the rest of my time, if any, to our good Superintendent.

Thank you very much. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you, Mayor Warren.

SENATOR RICE: Mayor, let me say before you get up -- is that we hear your hue and cry. And your hue and cry is the hue and cry of so many districts throughout the state -- some Abbott, some non-Abbott. Even in Glen Ridge, which never really asks for anything -- a wealthy district -- when my colleagues and I met with the Mayor and the Superintendents up there, we recognized this whole adequacy budget

formula; and the adjusted aid stuff is just messy. I know that both houses of the Legislature -- Republicans and Democrats -- keep talking about how we have to revisit this formula, period. What we can do in this short period of time, I'm not sure. But it's not falling on deaf ears, I can assure you of that. I think Assemblyman Wimberly can give you some horror stories, even as to the last moment as it relates to Paterson.

And so we get it; and I'm glad that you have the young people involved, so they understand that they have to learn to fight for what's rightfully and justly theirs--

MAYOR WARREN: That's right.

SENATOR RICE: --even though they can't vote.

MAYOR WARREN: That's right.

SENATOR RICE: But they have to do it sensibly, and adults have to lead in those battles, okay? And that's why I'm glad the Speaker took the opportunity to ask us to sit here today with you.

SENATOR THOMPSON: In fact, I might add that--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: --Senate President Sweeney and Senator Beck are, on a bipartisan basis, currently working on trying to address some of these problems of the inadequacy and inequitable distribution of school aid right now.

MAYOR WARREN: Thank you, Senator.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Yes; as a matter of fact, I had mentioned that to Senator Rice. About two weeks, Senate President Sweeney and Senator Jennifer Beck announced that they were introducing legislation to form a task force to examine the current formula. I do know

that testimony is going on right now, as we speak. And one of the issues is that the proposed legislation creates a task force of four. There are some of us who believe that more voices need to be heard as this issue moves forward. So we will see what comes out of that Senate Committee, what bill emerges. That bill then has to be thrown over our way to the Assembly. But we all know that that is an issue.

And I'm glad that Senator Rice brought up the issue of a district like Glen Ridge, right in our Essex County. I used to represent Glen Ridge, and the property taxes there -- I cannot begin to tell you how onerous they are for families. And they get virtually no State aid for the operation of their schools. But of course, it is a smaller district than Orange.

But even so, this is a can we have been kicking down the road for the past 25, 30 years in the State. You are hearing a lot of chatter this week about gas tax and Earned Income Tax Credit, and pension payments constitutionally mandated. And it is incumbent upon the members of this Legislature to begin to prioritize what is important to it. But the issue of the funding of our school systems, statewide, is of concern to educators, parents, and students in every one of our counties and in all of our communities.

But I have a deep appreciation for you giving the historical perspective, Mayor Warren, in terms of what the Court has determined. And to remove \$1.6 billion from our public school financing in New Jersey is something that cannot be sustained by local communities. So I have a deep appreciation for your testimony.

I'm going to ask Assemblyman Wimberly if he has any comments.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mayor Warren, I think the first great step you took is that you, as the Mayor, are leading the charge along with the school district. And that's been one of the main problems we've had in the City of Paterson. It's been a splintered effort when it comes to State legislators, local municipal leaders, and the Board of Ed -- being a State takeover district. And unfortunately Paterson, this year, initially was going to have a \$45 million cut.

MAYOR WARREN: Wow.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: We found out on Thursday that, on top of the \$45 million, there is going to be another \$23 million cut.

MAYOR WARREN: Wow.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: So there's no way that we are giving our kids a fair and efficient education.

MAYOR WARREN: Right.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: So the fight, and your lead as the leader of Orange, is very, very important. Your history and knowledge of the school funding formula and being out front I think will make a difference.

So your fight, like you said -- it's up and down the line. We have, like-- I believe Clifton, in your district, experienced cuts. I mean, I just don't know. I know how much money we put in education, but I don't know if we ever put in enough. Because it will end all the rest of society ills -- when you talk about quality of life, health issues, employment -- all is

based on-- From prenatal care to early childhood education -- that's the base of giving our kids a fair opportunity.

MAYOR WARREN: That's right.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: So I appreciate you, and I thank you for being here as a leader today.

MAYOR WARREN: Thank you; thank you, Assemblyman. I appreciate it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you.

And I'd like to ask Dr. Ronald Lee to come forward to-- And you stay there, Mayor, with him.

MAYOR WARREN: Yes, I'll just move; he can sit in the middle.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: And Dr. Lee, one of the things that I am interested in learning from you -- the status of capital needs within the District. And we've seen a virtual halt to the School Development Authority, or whatever it is we're calling that entity these days. And I do know that Orange has been confronted with some significant capital needs in the District.

SENATOR RICE: Excuse me; before you speak, I'm just stepping out for a moment. I have to go upstairs and testify on a bill on racial impact statements, okay?

**R O N A L D C. L E E:** Good morning.

Thank you, Speaker Oliver and the Committee members. I also want to thank our Mayor of the great City of Orange for championing these causes. And I also want to thank all of my students, staff, parents, and community who sit behind us, and those who could not be here.

My name is Ronald Lee, and I'm the Superintendent of the Orange Public Schools. Again, I would like to thank the Joint Committee on Public Education (*sic*), and its Chairpersons as well -- Senator Rice, Assemblywoman Mila Jasey -- for giving the Orange Public Schools and its community an opportunity to give testimony on the impact on districts when funding is not based upon, nor maintained on, a per-pupil amount; and how it creates funding inequity in the State of New Jersey.

Just to give you a little bit about my background -- I've been Superintendent of the Orange Public Schools for approximately seven years. And prior to that, I was the CFO/School Business Administrator for the Newark Public Schools; and the School Business Administrator for the Orange Public Schools for 12 years.

As the Mayor stated, the School Funding Act of 2008 was developed in response to settle the multiple litigations regarding funding to school districts. SFRA was to distribute aid to all school districts in an equitable and predictable basis, and take into account the needs of all students -- including at-risk students, those with limited English proficiency, and students with special needs.

The key word in SFRA is *equitable*. The school aid formula was funded in 2009, and has not been funded since. As you are aware, school districts have either lost aid and/or been flat-funded during the period 2010 through 2016. Well, in Orange, we did get an extra \$7 million because, as a former Abbott district, we went back to court and that was restored by the Supreme Court.

For the 2016-2017 school year, a small amount of increase in State aid was proposed, of which the Orange Public Schools received \$565,000, or 0.8 percent.

When SFRA was enacted, the State of New Jersey determined the educational adequacy amount for each pupil, and weighted those amounts if a student was at-risk, special ed, or had limited proficiency in English. However, when we ran the SFRA formula, the State of New Jersey recognized that some school districts would be funded over educational adequacy, and some under. The Orange Public Schools has historically been funded under educational adequacy.

In 2008, State lawmakers determined that no district should lose money in the first year of SFRA. This hold harmless provision ensured that every school district received increased State aid in the first year before potentially seeing a decline in funding, based on future enrollment and demographic changes. But the hold harmless aid provision and amounts received by districts -- that was supposed to disappear, over time -- is still being included in the State aid of several school districts. Like Orange, we still continue to remain underfunded, based on the State formula.

The Orange Public Schools receives 83 percent of its General Fund budget through State aid, and approximately 13 percent through local taxes -- as you see on the pie chart here (indicates). In Orange, our State aid underfunded amount for 2016-2017 is \$12.7 million, or 17.2 percent of the SFRA formula. In Essex County, we are the second-highest dollar amount underfunded school district behind Newark's underfunding of \$116 million.

For the period 2009 through 2016, the Orange Public Schools would have been underfunded by a total amount of \$59 million; that's \$59 million. The State underfunding for Orange Public Schools, on a per-pupil basis for 2016-2017 school year, will be \$2,483 per student.

Comparing ourselves to our neighbors in Essex County, the underfunding range for the 22 school districts in the County ranges from \$23 to \$3,292, which is Newark. On a per-pupil basis, Orange is also the second-highest district in Essex County for the eight years since SFRA has been enacted.

The Orange Public Schools have received aggregately \$19,864 less per student -- I said *less* per student -- when compared to our neighbors in our County.

The State aid underfunding of \$2,483 is exacerbated and understated when you add the ability of wealthier districts to increase their local tax levy because their ability is greater than poorer districts. Additionally, the Orange Public Schools' General Fund appropriation of \$17,300 per student is the third-lowest per-pupil spending district when compared to the other former 31 Abbott districts.

The disparity and inequity in State aid funding has given some districts a distinct and significant advantage of available resources over others. In Orange, our disadvantage is glaringly evident, and no clearer than when we try to recruit and maintain quality teachers. We are consistently losing quality teacher candidates and quality veteran teachers to neighboring districts because they can offer higher salaries.

Just to give you a quick overview of the Orange Public Schools -- we're committed to providing a diverse range of opportunities and

programs to meet our 5,600 students, supported by 800 staff, in our seven elementary, one middle, a high school, an alternative high, a gifted and talented academy, and a renowned preschool program.

Our student enrollment has grown from 4,500 to 5,600 in 2016. The District serves a diverse ethnic population that includes students from various African, Caribbean, and Latin American countries. The student body is 69 percent African American, or black; and approximately 29 percent are Hispanic. District data indicates that 16 percent of our students are foreign-born, and 67 percent of the Hispanic population speaks Spanish at home.

Over the past several years, our immigrant population has grown exponentially; and current data shows we have 523 ESL students in our program, with 19 percent of them never having education at all, or very little education exposure.

Many of the residents in Orange are struggling economically and have limited resources and opportunities. Eighty-two percent of our students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and some rely on District's breakfast, lunch, and dinner programs as their main source of sustenance. Poverty and the conditions our students live in have also resulted in the rise in a number of student with social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Students as early as preschool are exhibiting anger, depression, and self-esteem issues that are not being addressed and are having an impact on academic success.

The District offers a well-rounded education, meeting the New Jersey Department of Education academic standards. To support these

standards, the District has done many things. And I'm going to go over some of these things.

For students in grades 9-12, the District has expanded the Advanced Placement courses. Content-rich courses, such as pre-engineering, hydroponic gardening and graphics, have been opened to students.

Our high school graduation rate has risen from 58 percent to 86 percent.

Orange students are given the chance to fuel individual interests, while strengthening their core. We created numerous partnerships-- And you have my testimony; I want to get to the real crux of the issue.

I gave you a one-sheeter; actually, you have a front and a back. And I gave you the 22 districts in Essex; and I showed you, in the data that's on the right side-- That came from the State of New Jersey; this is not my data. So it is what the government actually funded for next year, what the model -- should have been funded; and the difference. And the highlighted line is the Orange Public Schools, and you see the \$2,483 -- that's for Orange, as the second-highest to Newark.

On the left-hand side, if you look at this entire document -- and I think I did e-mail it to Ms. Sapp -- it has all the school districts in the state. And the underfunded amount-- It would take \$8.9 billion to fund the formula. I think currently in the budget is \$8 billion; so it's \$900 million underfunded, or 11.9 percent.

What I did on the right-hand side-- If equity is really what we're looking to do, and what should occur, and what I am making as a recommendation -- that if the amount of revenue that's available to

education is being underfunded, whatever percentage that is being underfunded should be the amount that every school district has an amount underfunded. So if the State is underfunding the formula by 11 percent, then every school district should be underfunded, from the formula, by 11 percent.

So on the right-hand side, I just redid some numbers and said, "These will be the new numbers if they were underfunded."

If you go to the second page -- actually, it's on the back of your page -- I did a simple analysis. I have three school districts: District A, District B-- Naturally, the other one you see should say C. A is funded at adequacy. In 2008, each school district had 5,000 students. They were funded at the formula of \$12,000 a student. District A got \$60 million, or \$12,000 a student. District B was overadequacy when the formula was implemented, so they had \$60,000 (*sic*) plus \$3,000 (*sic*) that's over; and so they had \$12,600. District C, which is similar to us, 5,000 enrollment; \$12,000. They have \$60 million; \$12,000 a student.

In 2016, District A lost 500 students over that eight-year period, but they're still receiving their \$60 million. They now have \$13,333 to spend per child. District B, still receiving the \$63 million, is still at \$12,000. And District C, which is similar to Orange -- we have an additional 500 students, but we're still flat-funded at \$60 million, and we only have \$10,929 per student to spend.

So again, comparing it to District A, that's \$2,400 less; and comparing it to District B, \$1,000.

So in a simple matter, you can see how the formula is affected when we're not running on a per-pupil basis, and how we can get out of key.

So I'm going to talk about -- and I know my time is short -- but some economic hardship. We understand that we are in economically challenging times. New Jersey's economy is struggling, and some may say it's in a crisis. The lack of State revenue is being felt by all; it is particularly disturbing that there is little advocacy for public schools. If additional funds cannot be provided to public schools, then at a minimum legislators have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that all students have equal resources and opportunities. Annually, we need \$3.2 million to cover rising costs in nondiscretionary expenditures, such as salaries, benefits, utilities, transportation, tuition, and charter schools. Simply put, we only have discretion over 10 percent of our budget after addressing afore-mentioned categories. In a flat-funded State aid environment, and without increases in revenue to cover CPI, we have less each year to spend on a per-pupil basis for our students. We are eroding dollars spent on students.

For the past several years, the budget preparation process has been challenging and sometimes emotionally difficult. Our children have so many needs that must be met, and yet we are cutting much-needed resources. While we've tried to build a quality education system, the lack of school funding has resulted in the district making significant cuts in its programs. And I'll give you some examples.

Three years ago, the District eliminated summer school that provided remedial programs -- and we did some enrichment -- for students in grades K through 8. The Orange Public Schools served 2,000 to 2,500

students in its summer school. Research has shown that achievement test scores decline over summer vacation. District post-June and pre-September assessments reflect some knowledge loss by students. Time is now being spent in September and October reteaching, while also maintaining pacing with grade level Common Core standards.

Afterschool programs -- that averaged two hours historically up to two years ago -- will now only be an hour for next year; thus a reduction in focused instructional time and, potentially, student achievement.

The elimination of our Language Arts Spring Break Academy. During the spring break in the calendar year, we serve 400-500 students. We had to eliminate that.

During the winter break, when we had a break for a week, we served another 400 to 500 students for math. We had to eliminate that.

The elimination of Social Workers and guidance counselors. This has had a significant impact on the District's ability to address social and emotional needs of students that hinder their growth and student achievement.

The elimination of Behaviorists, which has resulted in the District seeing an increase in negative student behaviors that are not being addressed.

The reduction of District-level budgets by 25 percent over the last three years; a reduction of school-based budgets by 5 percent in 2015-2016, and 10 percent for next year.

To balance the budget, the District has had to stop spending before the end of the year to utilize fund balance for the subsequent years. So three years ago, we stopped spending in February; last year, we stopped

spending in January; and this year, we put a budget freeze on our budget in December. Thus schools and districts do not have time to spend their money, because I have to make sure that I have money to carry over because we're trying to eliminate the need to cut positions. But I tell you here and now -- and I've said it to my Mayor, and I've said to my Board -- next year, all that goes away. If we're funded based on the same level that we're funded now, we will be cutting 5 to 8 percent of our staff next year.

The elimination of five Visual and Performing Arts teachers; they now share. Elimination of World Language teachers; our schools now share. The elimination of science coaches, the elimination of a guidance counselor position at the high school. Deferring curriculum writing, and also reducing the amount of PD. Last year, we were able to have Professional Learning Communities for 512 teachers. This year, we could only do it for 84.

Then there are the unfunded mandates. To implement PARCC -- you know, we received an extra \$99,000 to implement PARCC, but it cost us \$700,000 to prepare for it. To address Common Core standards -- we had to rewrite curriculum and train teachers, and over a three-year period we spent approximately \$1 million.

Achieve NJ -- additional time spent; hiring additional supervisors in order to do all of the mandated evaluations that were required.

As part of this conversation, we must also address the opportunities lost due to inequity and underfunding. Many initiatives were set aside. Additional funds would have afforded the District an opportunity to be competitive with our neighboring districts again to hire and retain

teachers; create an alternative program at our elementary level, because there's a dire need; and to lengthen the school day.

The District also needs to create a Newcomers Program for students who are just entering the country, for our middle and high schools -- that we currently do not have and, right now, don't have the funding for.

For facilities -- many of our schools in Orange were built in the late 1800s and early 1900s and have considerable maintenance needs. As a former Abbott District, the State is still responsible for addressing the structural space needs, major upgrades, and improvements in our buildings; but they ran out of money several years ago. We do have two projects that were approved in the last go-round -- which is the expansion of Cleveland Street School and the expansion of our high school. The State came in and did an enrollment analysis, and the numbers reflect what they saw: They said, "We need to build additional space." And even after we built that, we still need additional space.

The District has had to declare projects as *emergent*, because we have had some issues -- such as inoperable boilers, HVAC systems, leaking roofs -- and we have some pictures of some of those for you, and you have them in your PowerPoint slides.

These funds would have been spent on our students, but instead were used to address emergency facility needs. As crazy as it may sound, former Abbott Districts are precluded from raising funds from local bonding if the project is to be borne by the SDA.

So in conclusion, the students in Orange deserve the same opportunity and resources as every other child in New Jersey. We've come

here today to ask that you reexamine the current inequities in the school funding formula and provide funds to Orange as an equitable remedy.

Two of our country's founding fathers, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, are noted for not always seeing eye-to-eye. But they did agree on what we should do for public education. Adams and Jefferson knew that public education was the heart of democracy. "The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it. There should not be a district of one mile square, without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves."

As Adams wrote, "Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant."

I end by saying, treat us equally. While I gave you a summary of some of the accomplishments of the District, we do have a lot of needs; but I do that for the purpose for those who may be naysayers about providing more aid to an Abbot district -- or an urban district. To the question, "Why should we give you more money?" I answer, "Because we want our fair and equitable share." To those who ask, "What would you do with the extra funds?" And I answer, "If you've seen what we've done while we have been underfunded, imagine what we'll do with an extra \$2,400 a student."

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you; thank you, Dr. Lee.

Do any of the members of the Joint Committee--

Yes, Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: The table you showed here, comparing two Districts, *A* and *B*, funded at adequacy and overadequacy, and the consequences of -- in the case of one district where the enrollment has declined and they're still getting the same money.

MR. LEE: Correct.

SENATOR THOMPSON: And the other district, where the enrollment has increased, and they're still getting the money -- and the impact of that. This is among the issues that Senator Beck has discussed in the Budget Committee -- the inequity that is associated with this kind of thing. And that is one of the things that they're seeking to address, as they look into what we can do about the funding here. Because while I realize that those districts that have seen declines in population -- if you say, "Well, you don't really deserve that much money," and you want to cut it back, they'll scream. But still, in the sense of fairness -- yes, the districts that have increased should be getting more money; and if they have less students, then they should be getting less money. That's only fair and equitable.

I do have one question, also, about your table here. On it, you list the *Governor's Proposed FY 2017 Total K-12 Aid*; and in another column, *New Total Governor Proposed Total of \$803 million*, etc. Now, the latter -- is this a new proposal the Governor has out there, or what you're suggesting?

MR. LEE: It's what I'm suggesting.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Okay.

MR. LEE: So if you look from the left-hand side-- Again, I downloaded that from the State--

SENATOR THOMPSON: The left-hand side is what is out there--

MR. LEE: Right.

SENATOR THOMPSON: --the right-hand side is what you're suggesting could be.

MR. LEE: The middle is showing the inequity among other communities in Essex County; and the right-hand side was redistributing money if everybody shared that 11 percent of underfunded amount.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Okay. Thank you very much.

MR. LEE: All right.

And I need to also say that if you reallocate the funds, 233 districts would receive less money; but 366 would receive more.

SENATOR THOMPSON: That is certainly something under consideration at this time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you, Senator Thompson.

And Dr. Lee, thank you very much for that testimony; and Mayor Warren. And Dr. Lee, you are to be commended because you have received national recognition from the U.S. Department of Education in terms of all of the accomplishments the Orange School District has achieved. You are to be commended for that significant increase in the high school graduation rate; you were singled out as the District with the most improved student performance numbers. And you are to be commended. (applause)

SENATOR THOMPSON: If I may, I would like to join you in that congratulations to him. The 86.6 percent graduation rate in an urban district -- fantastic; tremendous job. (applause)

MR. LEE: I want to thank you for that recognition; but, again, you can't do it without good staff, you can't do it without a great community. And really, we try to listen to our students and hear their needs and address their needs. But again, there are so many needs that we need to continue. But really, the accolades go to my staff. I just happen to be sitting in the right chair at the right time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you.

And I think if ever an illustration of what this public policy issue is about, I think you have put a very strong face on what the public policy implication is. So it would be great to have you over at the Department of Education. (laughter)

Thank you very much.

MR. LEE: All right, thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Next, we're going to hear from David Sciarra, from the Education Law Center. (applause)

**DAVID SCIARRA, Esq.:** Assemblywoman Oliver, Assemblyman Wimberly, and Senator Thompson -- thank you for the opportunity.

Superintendent Lee asked me to come and talk a little bit about their status under SFRA. You know, we were the ones who went back to the Supreme Court and argued, in 2011, that the Court should restore the funding that was cut by Governor Christie in 2010 -- the \$1.1 billion cut. As you know, we were able to get the Court to restore it for the former Abbott districts. We tried to get the Court to order it for everybody else

but, unfortunately, due to certain legal principles, we were unable to do that.

The problem since then is that we've been flat-funded -- all of the districts across the state -- since 2011. So as you saw on the chart, we're heading into, I think, the fourth or fifth year of flat funding, no increase. And that's not just true of Orange, but underadequacy districts across the state -- urban, suburban, rural; take your pick.

Let me just emphasize a few points about Orange that I think are important. The District's enrollment has increased between 2009 and 2016; Orange resident enrollment increased 15 percent from about 4,500 to about 5,200 kids. Importantly, the number of kids with special needs -- which is the point of the formula -- who need more resources, English language learners in particular, has been increasing significantly in the District. The District has seen a sizable increase in -- a tripling of students from 176 to 600 who are in need of bilingual education services. That has a big cost impact, as you've heard.

And the classification rate -- special education has also gone up. That also generates additional needs.

In terms of adequacy, as you've heard, the District's adequacy budget, because of the enrollment increase and the increase in weighted students has grown 41 percent from \$78 million to now \$111 million in 2016; \$111 million represents the level of spending that the District should be at, calculated under the formula for 2016.

As I mentioned, this increase is due to rising enrollment and the increase in the number of at-risk and ELL students -- which causes the District's weighted enrollment under SFRA to grow.

So at this point, because of the flat funding, the District has become increasingly underadequacy. It's not just underadequacy; it's increasingly underadequacy as that dynamic occurs. In 2009, the District was below adequacy by \$6.7 million, or \$1,461 per pupil. Last year, the District was below adequacy by \$26 million, or about \$5,000 per pupil. So the adequacy gap in Orange and in other similarly situated districts is growing.

The real problem is the lack of State aid to increase funding under the adequacy budget. In 2016, Orange received \$73 million; if it had properly implemented the formula, the District should have received \$86 million, which is a gap of about \$13.2 million, as you heard, in State aid.

So the biggest problem, in terms of underadequacy, has been the recurring flat budgets under Governor Christie since-- Well, the cut-- Orange got its money back; other Districts didn't, who are in the same boat. But the continued year-to-year flat funding, since 2012-- And as you heard from Superintendent Lee, it's starting to take its toll on the essential resources that kids need to have the opportunity to meet State standards.

I do want to mention local revenue. Because while the State hasn't been doing its job, the Mayor and the City Council have. Even though Orange is a District that's in municipal overburden -- what we call *municipal overburden* -- its total equalized tax rate -- which is County, City, and school -- is 4.1; the State average is 2.5. So it's way over the State average. Property taxes in Orange are extraordinarily high in comparison to other communities across the state. But despite that -- and this is a really important point -- the town has been working with the District to increase its local tax levy, as you've seen, subject to the 2 percent cap. Remember,

you can only increase your local levy from year-to-year by 2 percent, because of this cap that the Legislature has put into the formula.

So the local levy has increased 26 percent between 2009 and 2016. So the town is putting more money in, subject to the cap, year-to-year. They're doing their job; the Governor hasn't been doing his job -- that's the problem here -- and we're not getting the State aid in the formula that we need.

I'm not going to go through the expenditure cuts; the data shows that there have been cuts, as you've heard, in expenditure categories that are critical to students, and that are actually supposed to be funded under the formula. One of the big ones is bilingual education. The District is struggling to get sufficient bilingual education programs in for kids who are limited English proficient, and get those services in. But also, as happens when you're in flat-funding context and you have to make cuts from year to year, support services get cut as the District tries to protect the core instructional program. So it's the guidance counselors, the social workers, folks who work with parents, teacher leaders, coaches -- things like that -- remedial programs for kids who are behind. As you heard from Dr. Lee, those are the things that -- essential resources that the District is now scaling back.

Just a couple of final summary points. The problem is a simple one: It's the State's underfunding of the formula. This is a District which, despite its high tax rates, the community has stepped up and, year to year, increased its local levy to move closer to its local fair share under the formula. They really should be commended for doing that in a situation where their total tax rate is almost twice above the State average.

But it's the State that hasn't lived up to its side of the bargain through constant chronic underfunding from year to year. And as you've heard, that underfunding isn't just a question of dollars; it's having real impact on the District's ability to create meaningful educational opportunities for all of its students and to increase the progress that it has been making.

There's no other solution other than get more money into the formula and target it to underadequacy districts. And I just want to comment on the Commission idea, which is now floating around. You know, we don't need a Commission to address this problem; and we don't have to wait two years, which under the bill that's being considered, you would have to wait a couple of years to get started. We should start now. And this Legislature, right now, should put a reasonable amount -- \$100 million, \$75 million, \$125 million -- a down payment, if you will, targeted to the most underfunded districts across the state -- urban, suburban, and rural -- to get us back on a path of year-to-year increases under the formula, targeted to underadequacy districts.

I also want to make a point about adjustment aid. There's been a lot of mythology about adjustment aid floating around these days. There isn't a lot of adjustment aid to be reallocated from overadequacy districts. Well over half of the adjustment aid goes to underadequacy districts. So if the principle is, we're not going to take money away or redistribute from districts that are underadequacy -- which we wholly support -- there just isn't a lot of money floating over, as it's been called, *overaided*, overadequacy districts that can be grabbed and reallocated to underadequacy districts.

At the end of the day, we're going to face the bottom line, which is more new revenue has to go into the formula.

And the last thing, since you mentioned it, Assemblywoman, is the issue of facilities. We have a big problem there, too, because, as you've seen, essentially all of the last round of school construction funding -- which, as you recall, we worked with you back in 2007 to get that additional funds into the capital funds, both for *SDA districts*, as they're called, and regular operating districts -- it's all gone. Orange has a couple of projects that are in process; they've been funded. But there's no new money in the school construction fund to do anything new, including repairs -- capital maintenance repairs, emergent repairs. In Newark, remediating the impacts of lead in those buildings -- there's simply no more money in the pot.

So we've been-- And this is going to be an issue we're going to have to start working together on in the fall. We've started to talk with the SDA and the Department of Education, the Commissioner of Education about a new capital plan to present to the Legislature for the next round of projects that need to be done, with additional money for capital maintenance and emergent repairs to deal with issues like lead remediation in schools. We haven't gotten much of a response; we're going to need your help. The problem in Orange with facilities is they've got, as you've seen, a lot of old buildings still that need a lot of work, and we're out of money on that front as well.

So I think with that, I'll stop unless anybody has any questions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you very much, Dave.

Does anyone have any questions for Mr. Sciarra? (no response)

No? All right; well, thank you very much, Dave.

MR. SCIARRA: Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: And we want to thank you, Dave, for continuing to educate this Legislature.

Without the work of the Education Law Center, many in our body of 120 would not have a significant understanding of the challenges. So we thank you for your continued commitment, David.

Is Councilwoman [Tency Eason](#) here? (no response)

Okay. Then we will next hear Councilman Elroy Corbitt. (applause)

**COUNCILMAN ELROY A. CORBITT:** Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Good morning.

COUNCILMAN CORBITT: I want to open by thanking you guys for giving us an opportunity to come before you and to share with you our concerns as they relate to our school district and the lack of funding.

I have served as both a Councilperson for the past eight year; and before that, a member of the Orange Board of Education. Therefore, I am aware of the funding and resource needs of the Orange District.

I understand it as a homeowner, who has to pay taxes; as a legislator, responsible for the City budget; and as a former Board member, responsible for approving the school budget.

Underfunding Orange is being felt at every level in the schools. It threatens to diminish resources at the elementary grade level, and it fosters a high turnover rate of teachers at a time when children need stability the most. It hinders the opportunity to provide resources that

could advance those who are ready for advanced study, and hinders efforts to bring those who are behind up to grade level.

At the middle school level, underfunding robs districts of vital teaching and extracurricular resources during these important transitional years. In the high school, underfunding is felt at the Guidance Office, teacher, staff, books, resources, facilities, extracurriculars -- are resulting in declining college education, college acceptances, and college readiness.

I understand the conditions of the State of New Jersey. I fully understand, with great clarity, the argument about the cost of education. However, the price we are paying by not adequately preparing our children for success -- further educate our children to become productive citizens is a far, far higher price to pay.

So I'm asking -- no, I'm going to change that -- I'm pleading with you guys to -- let's make a more economical path and fully fund the Orange Public School system. You heard the presentation from Mr. Lee; you understand how he is working at the bare bones. The well has run dry. Our taxpayers are suffering tremendously; I hear it constantly. We can no longer afford to continue to raise taxes at the rate that we've been raising taxes on our citizens. We are losing ratables, we are losing home ownership. It's no secret in Essex County, people are walking away from their homes because they simply just cannot afford to continue to pay these high taxes.

I understand that a lot of the burden has shifted from the State to the taxpayers in every municipality to fund their school district. Orange can no longer afford to do that. So we are appealing to you for your help.

We are doing marvelous things in the City of Orange, in terms of our educational system. Our school district is turning the corner. And so you heard what's going to happen next year if we do not get your help. We are going to be in very, very *deep stuff*, for lack of a better term. And if we do not get that funding from you guys, all the effort, all the turnarounds that our school district has made will be going in the opposite direction. We can't afford to have that happen; we don't want it to happen, which is why this chamber is filled today with our students, and parents, and other officials from our City, to appeal to you for your help.

I don't know any other way to say it, but to continue to ask, and say it over and over, "Help, help, help."

Thank you very much. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you, Councilman.

Any questions? (no response)

Okay; if not, I'm going to ask Councilwoman Adrienne Wooten to come forward, if she is here. Yes, I see her. (applause)

**COUNCILWOMAN ADRIENNE WOOTEN:** Good morning, Madam Chair and the members of the Committee.

I am Adrienne Wooten, Councilwoman-a-Large for the City of Orange Township. Today, I am here with Douglas Porter; he's the Mayor's intern. He's a second-year student at Xavier University in New Orleans. He's the product of public education, and he's here with us for the summer.

There are various forms of opposition to the financing of school funding. My testimony will focus on one of those categories.

Economic self-interest is probably the most common source, or reason, for opposition to school finance reform. This theory implies that a

mandated change will receive resistance based on economic cost. For example, opposition to the full funding of Orange Public Schools may exist and be centered around the potential cost of court-ordered school finance equalization. I urge the legislators to see beyond that argument and look at what we do for business.

According to *New Jersey Policy Perspective*, since 2010 the State of New Jersey has given \$2.1 billion in corporate incentives in very creative ways. I urge you and your colleagues to be creative with education funding.

As a former teacher, I am dedicated to ensuring the children of Orange receive a quality education. Our Mayor has consistently found creative ways to provide excellent resources to residents. We now need your help as we take on this mission to get full funding for education. Our kids deserve it; we need it to invest now before it's too late. Crime goes down; pride and future success go up. Support fully; fund our schools.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you, Councilwoman.

And for your student intern, I'm sure that Senator Thompson got a broad smile on his face. Because he is a born and bred replant from the state of Louisiana; and Xavier is one of the gems of the state of Louisiana. So it is good to have you here today.

**DOUGLAS PORTER:** Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: And you can certainly follow in the good Senator's footsteps -- he won't be around here forever -- and we'll need someone else with a southern drawl. (laughter)

Thank you for being here.

We're next going to hear from Dr. Erica Stewart, if she is here.

(applause)

**ERICA L. STEWART, Ed.D.:** Good morning.

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER:** Good morning.

**DR. STEWART:** And thank you to the Committee members for giving us this opportunity to make our appeal to you.

I am here on behalf of the Orange Public Schools' principals, teachers, and students; and the impact that flat funding continues to have on our academic program in progress at the building level.

I believe I was selected by my colleagues because I am an example of what adequate funding can produce in Orange.

I am Dr. Erica Stewart, a former Orange High School graduate, teacher, and parent of the Orange Public Schools. I have served as an Administrator on the elementary and secondary levels; and I currently serve as Principal of our alternative school, where I have the pleasure and responsibility for educating and supporting our most at-risk secondary-level students.

These experiences have helped me to shape the path of thousands of students for more than two decades; and it gives me a perspective on how the delivery of education and its related services have been impacted by flat funding. While I'm speaking as an advocate for all building administrators and instructional staff, I also have personal experience with the access of programs and opportunities, available some 40 years ago, when I began as a student in Orange.

I had access to a myriad of opportunities, from 4-year-old kindergarten to competitive college prep programs. We had authentic auto,

wood, and plastic shops; sewing, home nursing, a childcare center, and cooking classes that were supported by our co-op program.

Unfortunately, a shift in technology and demographics created funding and space limitations. District leaders of that time had to choose between new technology, Internet access, STEM, etc., and existing programming. Educators soon discovered that these areas would intertwine with all facets of our lives and learning and, subsequently, create a gap for those students who were interested in pursuing technical and vocational careers.

Our students who desire to explore careers and technical education are now in a significant deficit, as the facilities and resources are no longer available -- for example, many tracks such as automotive, respiratory therapy, cosmetology, and construction. And expansion of this opportunity is needed for general education and limited English proficient students, as we do have students with Individual Education Plans who attend, at cost, vocational schools outside of the District.

Demographically, the community was different. More students came from two-parent households with a median income above poverty. We did not have the Internet and computers, although the computer did exist. Families were upwardly mobile, more were homeowners. We had safe pools and parks. Teachers taught more than 10 years in Orange. City officials and civil servants knew their community, and we had access to competitive programs like NJIT High School Scholars, Seton Hall Upward Bound, and INROADS.

The community had facilities for their children in the East and West wards: a fully operational library, two professional bowling alleys, a

YWCA, a YMCA, and a local movie theater. During my time as a student, there were fewer social and economic demands on the schools.

No choice had to be made between what students needed more and what they needed less. If it was needed, it was provided. Our students rely on the schools to do so much more with so much less.

Today, Orange is a diverse community with a significant rate of mobility. We have a transitional housing shelter, and a number of resource homes with DCPP placements. With the exception of our high school and one of our elementary schools, most of our buildings were erected in the early 20th century and built to service far fewer students than we see today.

The middle and high schools that I attended are exactly the same. I attended two elementary schools, because my home school was K-4, which is now K-7. My nephew is in the same kindergarten class that I was in 40 years ago; and physically, it has not changed. What has changed is that he learns using technology that was not available to me then. His teachers are afforded more time to provide small group and individualized instruction, as well as accurately assess student learning. The technology is a great tool for maintaining high levels of engagement; maintaining licenses and equipment, as well as providing professional development is an ongoing cost to sustain the investment. These costs grow, especially when used by more students. However, burgeoning enrollment and a shrinking budget often force schools to choose what they can service and when.

For years our schools have been an extension of the recreation department, an extension of the public library, and providers of the primary technological experiences for our students. As stated by our Superintendent, we no longer provide social and guidance services at our

buildings; elementary schools had to choose between the two positions. Guidance service is available only one day per week at the alternative school, and the residual impact is that nearly 200 Orange High School students only have access to our shared counselor one less day than their peers. This will further be impacted by the pending reduction.

The District has had to look to equipment leasing programs. These are one-size-fits-all approaches to technology acquisition that our District has employed to save costs. Schools are now restricted to centralized equipment selection, service, repair, and replacement.

While we have to make those hard choices between a reduction in force, suspension of programs, purchasing restrictions, and hardline contract negotiations, what is different is we now have leadership that seeks opportunities where they do not exist. We do not take “no” for an answer, but use it as an opportunity to enter into dialogue about how much more we can do for our students if the resources are available. We look for the best opportunities for our students that require minimal costs to implement and sustain.

H. Jackson Brown Jr., said, “Nothing is more expensive than a missed opportunity.” Consecutive years of flat funding have called for the suspension of programs and services, tabling new and innovative practices that schools have researched and wish to implement, as well as the much-needed facility improvements for all the school buildings.

Schools report that the following issues are extremely important, and appeal for funding to remedy these and others too numerous to list. Our Superintendent asked the question, “What would we do with the money?” Our staff and students say facility improvements,

such as school annexes, gymnasiums, and auditoriums, apart from the cafeteria; central air conditioning; STEM labs in all schools; media center upgrades and paved parking lots. Programmatic support, such as robotics, robotics coaches, resources, supplies, and competition costs; content coaches, who will collectively address standardized assessments; classroom libraries for all content in all classrooms. Student and family services; at least one fulltime social worker per 250 in all schools; at least one full-time guidance counselor in all schools, with a ratio of 1 to 100 on the secondary level; and ongoing parent-family workshops.

Extended learning opportunities, such as greenhouses and community gardens for all schools--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Excuse me, Dr. Stewart.

DR. STEWART: Yes, ma'am.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Are you near the end of your testimony?

DR. STEWART: Yes, ma'am.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Because we have a lot of people who have sought-- And we certainly want to hear from Reverend Guyton and many of the students who have traveled here.

DR. STEWART: Yes, ma'am; I am almost done.

In fact, the last area is recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff. Stephen Covey says, "Always treat your employees exactly as you want them to treat your best customers," which, in this case, are our students. Fifty percent of teachers who submitted responses to our school funding survey reported that they have been employed at Orange between one and five years. We lose more teachers to resignation than nonrenewal.

Competitive salaries are needed to maintain model student-to-teacher ratios across the grades and schools.

As the former Administrator responsible for new teacher induction, entry-level resources are expended each year, and fewer and fewer of the most-promising teachers remain. They are seeking districts with better facilities, competitive pay, and better able to address student learning deficits. Unfortunately, the expense of training novice teachers far outweighs increments and time lost by administrators and students, thus creating larger gaps.

Based upon the reasons stated, the Orange Administrators and Supervisors Association requests that the Committee decides to assure that Orange is adequately funded so that school management teams and administrators no longer have to choose between *best* and *sufficient*, and we can work to reverse the impact of consecutive years of underfunding.

I would like to thank the Committee for affording me the opportunity to make this appeal on behalf of the Orange Public Schools administrators, teachers, students, and their families.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you very much, Dr. Stewart. (applause)

We certainly can hear the passion that you have for the children, and we appreciate that.

I'm going to ask Dr. Lanel D. Guyton to come forward. And Dr. Guyton, it is wonderful to have you here. And many of you know that we had a frequent visitor to the State House, in the guise of Bishop Reginald Jackson. And when Bishop Jackson was called to go to Zimbabwe,

the A.M.E. Church outreached and brought to Orange, and to Saint Matthew A.M.E., Dr. Guyton. And we're pleased to have you here with us.

Please have a seat.

**REVEREND LANAL D. GUYTON, D.Min.:** Thank you, Madam Chair, especially for that wonderful introduction.

Today I am flanked, to the left and to the right, by two students whom I will ask that, at this time, they would introduce themselves.

State your name.

**NIAM THOMAS:** My name is Niam (phonetic spelling) Thomas. I go to Orange Preparatory Academy in Orange.

**KIRAH LEWTER:** My name is Kirah Lewter, and I go to Orange Preparatory Academy.

**DR. GUYTON:** Good morning, once again, Madam Chair and to the members of this wonderful Committee. I am, again, the Reverend Dr. Lanal D. Guyton, Senior Pastor of Saint Matthew A.M.E. Church, which is located at 336 Oakwood Avenue in the City of Orange, New Jersey.

Today I come before you in support of Mayor Dwayne Warren, Esq.; Mr. Ronald Lee, Superintendent of Schools; the parents; the community activists; and the Orange Interfaith Coalition of pastors, clergy, and lay members -- of which I am the Chair -- in an effort to advocate for the children of our City.

The School Finance Reform Act of 2008, the SFRA, was accepted and approved by the New Jersey Supreme Court to ensure, statewide, that many of our poorer and economically disadvantaged

children could have hope of receiving a quality education in our great State of New Jersey. Surprisingly, our argument is to protect what is a right that has already been made law by the Supreme Court of New Jersey.

To deny the children who reside in the City of Orange Township the funding required to fund a thorough and efficient education is disappointing. We are committed to continue the fight to restore the \$12.6 million shortfall to our educational system in the City of Orange.

Madam Chair, and to the members of the Committee, I want to take this opportunity to just give a gentle reminder that, according to the Education Law Center, the School Finance Reform Act adopted an unprecedented public education finance formula which connects school funding to the State's broader adoption of academic content standards and performance assessments -- by delivering significantly more resources to students and schools with greater educationally related needs, through a weighted formula. The SFRA was intended to not only maintain equitable funding in higher-poverty districts, but also to advance equity across the State of New Jersey, solidifying the State's overall high ranking in school funding fairness.

Be further reminded -- the Education Law Center's document on the SFRA actually predicted that a day like the City of Orange School District is facing today, in regards to being inadequately underfunded, would come. In their document, they explain that although the fair funding formula was essential to the determination of educational costs and funding, it does not itself ensure actual State aid at the formula-determined level. Funding from year to year requires the appropriation of aid, as calculated by the formula in the annual State budget.

Having experience with the co-equal branches not appropriating the funds mandated by formulas in the past, the New Jersey Supreme Court was understandably concerned that the SFRA might suffer a similar fate. The Court was also concerned about whether the SFRA would actually work when implemented, noting that until “the formula has had time to function as intended, it is impossible to know precisely what its effect will be.”

These concerns prompted the Court to give the SFRA a constitutional greenlight to impose two unprecedented conditions on the State. Number one, to fully fund the formula for the first three years of implementation; and number two, to diligently review the formula after its initial three years of operation and adjust the formula as needed, based on the result of that review, as required by the SFRA.

The Abbott 20 ruling concludes with the warning that the Court remains committed to enforcing the constitutional rights of the children of this state, should the formula prove ineffective or the required funding not be forthcoming.

Since 2010 and 2011, our beloved state has seen -- as you’ve heard before repeatedly -- a \$1.1 billion cut and the refusal to appropriate an additional \$500 million increase, which was required by the formula itself.

Be also reminded, I fully agree with the conclusory statement point made by the Education Law Center -- which they suggested, and I am paraphrasing -- that the SFRA original intent was to offer a framework for fundamentally altering traditional approaches to State finance reform. The formula posits the necessity of finance reform by building upon a simple

logic, wholly consistent with current education improvement efforts: Because states are mandating curriculum content standards and adopting test-based accountability regimes to measure district, school, and student performance in meeting those standards. The states therefore must also put in place a financial system driven by the actual cost of giving all students -- especially the students in the City of Orange -- an equal opportunity to achieve those standards. Put differently, if states are defining the standard of content of what all students are expected to learn, and measure outcomes based on that content, then the states must also provide students the financial resources necessary and needed to achieve those very same standards.

Let's not forget that the SFRA, in its fundamental way, stands as a remarkable accomplishment in providing a reasonable formula to fund education in not only the State of New Jersey, but in our entire nation.

Today, Madam Chair and members of this wonderful Committee, we are seeking to impose upon you all -- those of you who represent our Legislature -- to act on our behalf and reverse, in any way possible, by all means necessary, this crippling trend that will greatly affect the conditions of our state and our children if allowed to continue. We must stop this vicious cycle of lack of funding and the continued diminishing of resources which result in further inequality, especially in our educational system. You all have the power to do this.

Madam Chair, to the members of this Committee, please note -- it is the intention of the Orange Interfaith Coalition, of which I Chair, to team together with the various coalitions -- namely, the Black Ministers of New Jersey, which is headed by Bishop Jethro James of Newark; the United

Clergy of the Oranges, which is headed by the Reverend Alphonsus Platt; the Coalition of Ministers, which is headed by the Reverend Ronald Slaughter of Newark; the United Clergy of Union County, which is headed by the Reverend Dr. Erika Crawford of New Jersey; and, of course, my predecessor, who is now Bishop, the Reverend Reginald T. Jackson, newly elected Bishop by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and who was the former head of the Black Ministers Coalition of the State of New Jersey, and now is the Chair of the Social Action Committee of our connectional A.M.E. Church. Along with these religious organizations, the Orange Interfaith Coalition, aggressively seeks to address issues concerning the State of New Jersey and, especially the City of Orange, when it comes to educational opportunities. Whether it be job opportunities for the disenfranchised, healthcare rights being denied, or injustices in higher education -- together, these clergy group advocates, that I have already named, stand by ready to continue the fight for parity, especially when it comes to the proper funding of our education system in our City, and even other urban school districts.

We stand united in this effort to encourage all of our legislators to think twice -- not only twice, but thrice, about giving the wonderful, hopeful students and families we represent the same rights that our Constitution guarantees for every child -- a right to a quality education that would prepare them to become productive citizens of our state and country.

Madam Chair and the fine members of this Committee, in closing, we believe this to be a goal in which our legislators should work extremely hard at, ensuring that as many as possible of our children would one day be law abiding, taxpaying citizens making our state and country

prosperous. This is a goal that cannot be achieved if our own State legislators simply sweep this matter under the carpet at the expense of these innocent children who deserve a right to the best educational experience ever.

Again, thank you for your time, and attention, and representation on this very important matter. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you very much, Reverend Guyton.

And one thing we have always had, from across the state, is a strong support and advocacy from our black clergy organizations. And we continue to need your leadership and your advocacy to work along with those of us in the Legislature.

I want to thank you for taking the time to be here today; and also, you show up at every community meeting as it relates to education. And your commitment to that is not unrecognized, and it is appreciated.

Thank you very much. (applause)

You know, I will tell you that Orange has demonstrated today that we certainly could trademark your grassroots organizing and mobilization abilities. Because I think that you are here representing, quite frankly, the views, the dilemmas, and the challenges of probably every school district across this state. And you could not have communicated a stronger message to the Joint Committee on the Public Schools as you have done today.

So I commend the leadership of Orange. You know, I always say, you have to show up and show out. (laughter) And Orange certainly

has shown up in the State House today; and you are on the record showing out on behalf of the children of Orange. (applause)

Our Speaker has called the Assembly into a caucus. And so I'm going to have to kind of wrap up; because what happens for us in the next couple of days is putting on the boxing gloves and doing what we've heard many of you say -- fighting for our children. So we do have a Budget caucus shortly.

But I would like to hear testimony from several of our community representatives. And if we have a parent with us-- Mr. David Armstrong; if you are here, Mr. Armstrong, I'd like you to come forward. I think it's important to put on the record testimony from a parent of a student in the District.

**D A V I D   A R M S T R O N G:** Good morning, Madam Chair and Committee members.

My name is David Armstrong; I appreciate the opportunity to be able to present to you some concerns for a parent, as myself.

I presently have two children in the Orange School District; one in the high school, and one in second grade. One is a special needs child, which is a whole other story, as far as funding is concerned.

Let me start with having these two young ladies introduce themselves before I proceed.

**F R A N C A   E S T I M A B L E:** Good morning; my name is Franca Estimable. I am currently an Orange High School rising senior.

**V A L E R I E   B A R N A V E:** Good morning; my name is Valerie Barnave. I am a junior at Orange High School, and--

**MR. ARMSTRONG:** That's it.

MS. BARNAVE: Yes. (laughter)

MR. ARMSTRONG: Okay; getting back to me-- I'm an involved parent, actually. I'm currently the PTO President of Lincoln Avenue School; currently the PTSO President of the middle school, professionally known as "The Prep." I also sit on the School Management Team of both schools. So I have some little knowledge of what goes on in the inner workings of the School District.

And I just want to say that we came a long way -- being flat funded and not being properly funded for a lot of years. We went from a school district of parents really thinking twice about sending their children to the schools in Orange; until now -- we are fully accredited by a highly respected outside entity, the Middle States Association, which came in a couple of years ago and did a thorough evaluation of our curriculum, our operation, of the whole. It was very thorough; they even asked me to open my mouth and stick out my tongue. That's how thorough it was.

And with that being said, we were accredited. Our School Superintendent, Mr. Lee, had the foresight and the vision to not only accredit our high school, but the whole Orange School District is accredited. And with him, we have done great things -- like I said, with the flat budget and, you know, underfunding.

But you know, with the Mayor, Dwayne Warren, and the Superintendent both being visionaries -- they are not Houdini. We had to stretch our budget to the point where it's busting at the seams. As a parent, I have seen us grow with the little amount of money given to us. We have done more with less. Also, as a property owner and a homeowner, I feel the pain also.

And I would just like to say that I wish the government and the State Legislature are able to do what they are responsible for -- and that's fully funding the Orange School District, so we can continue moving in the right direction for our kids and giving them a quality education.

With that -- that's basically, as a parent, all I have to say to the Legislature. And I thank you again for allowing me to present to you. And I believe as a parent advocate, I speak for a lot of parents in our District. And we are behind each other; we're behind the School Superintendent; we're behind the Mayor; the Administration -- whatever is best for our children, we want for our children.

Thank you, and I appreciate your time. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.

And Mayor Warren, as we wrap up -- because I will tell you, when I look at-- We have, you know, representation from Guidance; we have representation from the School Board; and I know that we have students, community-- But quite frankly, every testifier has pretty much hit the essential elements of the challenges to the District. And trust me, it has been a very forceful and very illustrative case that you have put on the record for us today.

But Mayor Warren, I would like you to, maybe, identify who, from amongst the representatives here today, would you like to wrap the testimony up with.

MAYOR WARREN: (off mike) Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: And thank you, Mr. Armstrong; and thank you for being an active parent.

MR. ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: One of the challenges we have in our urban districts is parent participation. So we certainly look at you as a jewel, because without parent participation we do not get effectively working schools.

So thank you for all that you do.

MAYOR WARREN: Thank you, Madam Chair,

And to wrap up our testimony, there will just be two student speakers -- one will just give a perspective as the President of his class; and then another who will talk about what it means to the School District to get our kids prepared for college.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Oh, great.

MAYOR WARREN: They will be very brief.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you.

MAYOR WARREN: Thank you very much.

SENATOR RICE: Madam Chair--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Yes, go ahead.

SENATOR RICE: Mayor, before you-- Mayor Warren, I wanted to say to you -- are there any elected School Board members here?

MAYOR WARREN: Yes, sir. There are plenty of School Board members here, yes.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. Well, what I wanted to say to you is that this is why we had the meeting in December in Union Township. And the charge in Union Township, if you remember, when we formed the New Jersey statewide Black Elected Official's policy -- now Political Alliance -- is to address policies. And we said we were going to go back to each county and organize countywide. Because had policy committees, elected officials

come together for school board or Congress, addressing policies years ago, we probably wouldn't be in the position we're in now.

And I just want to commend Assemblyman Ben Wimberly, because they organized Passaic; but I'll be speaking to you and others in Essex County -- we need to get that going as well. And this way we can have regular conversations about education as it relates to our districts, and what forum we should be in to address them before it gets this far down the road. The same with health care, housing, etc.

We do know that from an elected position -- that for good or for bad, the next election -- the Governor is going to be a different Governor. And so we need to have these discussions prior to then, because we didn't know that our policies were going to be a part of people's agenda -- not just during election time, but long afterwards -- and develop that relationship. And I think that's important for the young people to understand, too, that the people who represent you in Essex County will be meeting on a regular basis to continue to have discussions about how we're going to fix these problems.

So I just wanted to say that to you, Mayor, okay?

MAYOR WARREN: Well, thank you, Senator. We're ready for the assignment.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: And for the record, let me just recognize Assemblywoman Jasey, who is the Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. She had an Education meeting this morning, and she has joined us.

And we're about to hear testimony from two students.

MS. ESTIMABLE: Good morning. My name is Franca Estimable; allow me to introduce myself again. I am currently the Class of 2017 President. And from what I've seen-- Well, my job and duty as President is to get the concerns of each student to see what needs to be changed.

So I feel as if -- with the lack of funding, it hurts the students tremendously. And as funding grows, we can help our children be ready for college and career readiness. I believe that every junior should have a course where they learn more about the SATs, the ACTs, FAFSA applications, etc. and etc.

And kudos to Orange High School having a higher graduation rate; however, because you graduate, it does not mean that you are completely ready for the real world. And I feel like with more funding, we can ensure that for our students. Instead of sharing SATs books and having no ACT books, how about each student being provided with both? We need more funding so that we can help the students.

Also with that is -- the conditions for the ESL children is also a very, very strong point. Because although the children are getting good grades, they're just using Google Translator, instead of actually learning the language. So that once they leave the four walls that they have been in for four years, they know how to comport themselves into society.

Although the children may not seem as if they care, with more motivation -- especially with more funding, with more programs -- we can acquire a better solution for them.

And I just want all of you to please think of it as if it was your child. Because behind me are the future doctors, the future lawyers, the

future nurses, and even the future President of this great country. And with your help, we can go beyond the hype.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: All right, now we're going to hear from each of the two gentlemen. But I have to give a shout-out for the girl power at the table; yes. (laughter and applause)

MS. ESTIMABLE: And now my colleague, Taiwo.

**T A I W O O D U N O W O:** Good afternoon.

My name is Taiwo Odunowo. I'm the proud upcoming Junior Class President of Orange High School.

In my testimony, I'm going to present you with three main problems the lack of funding is presenting, and how we could benefit if we have the full and sufficient funding.

The first problem I would like to bring up is academic college career readiness. How can full funding get more students to be enthusiastic about learning and taking the next necessary step to their individual goals? I have been made aware of that not all students are comfortable being guided and advised by teachers. However, in such cases, that's where the parents come in. Picture this: A class filled with students helping each other with whatever it is they need help on. The class would be managed by high-achieving students. The class would guide students in the academics, and teach them how to properly study for tests and exams -- like the PARCC -- and would inform them about available enrichment programs, such as the New Jersey Seed Program. With the proper funding, the classes can go on college trips to explore what's outside of Essex County and choose the right college that properly fits them.

My second point is that with the funding those issues can be solved. Speaking as the Junior Class President, starting next school year I have plans to fund raise for our Senior Class trip and prom. I plan for this school to have a car wash in September; to have bake sales; (indiscernible) dress down days; sell goods to the community, like the school (indiscernible); and even, as a class, donate money at the end of each marking period; and so much more.

But no, if we were to raise about \$100,000 by senior year, and take an estimate of 260 students -- that would be about \$304.60 per pupil. The money would only be able to cover parts of the senior package, and prom as well, leaving them all of the senior trip, which would cost (indiscernible). Another reason why the State aid needs to provide the full funding -- the full finding would make a cut in the amount that students will have to pay for the class trip.

And now, before I introduce my colleague, one more point.

This effect about funding incarcerations. America's system of incarceration has been spending more than triple since 1980, according to a 2014 report from CBS. This means individuals in the U.S. also are paying about \$260 per year on corrections, increased from \$77 per person -- and that's in 1980 -- gratitude to the country's \$80 billion price tag for incarceration; according to a new report from the Hamilton Project, which is part of the Washington D.C. think tank, the Brookings Institution.

Basically, this is what this is saying. I am trying to make you realize that, as a nation -- and each state takes a fair share of this -- we spend more on putting our young, future students in jails and putting them -- incarcerating them while we lack funding. (applause) And while we lack

funding on something as important as education, something we can actually (indiscernible) in the future, we are spending more, and consistently more and more money each year on incarceration and putting these young folks -- future doctors, future presidents, like my colleague said -- that could be the next-- The future of this nation -- we spend more money putting them in jail; but then (indiscernible) with education, we lack funding because of that.

And if the lack of funding continues, this will be a circle, and it will continue to happen to each individual student who attends the Orange Public Schools. This is not the future we want for our kids; we want their future to be great, to be successful -- to be successful entrepreneurs -- men and women to be something in life.

With this funding that you have given us, we're already doing our part to try and help these kids out. We need you to do your part and help us -- and not grow up as thugs on the street, but be successful men and women of the future of America. (applause)

And now I'm going to introduce my colleague, Andrew Coates, from Orange Preparatory Academy.

**A N D R E W   C O A T E S:** Good morning. My name is Andrew Coates; I'm a proud freshman of Orange Preparatory Academy. And I have a problem, a serious problem.

My school -- nay, my District has recently had millions of dollars leveled from our budget. And as a proud scholar of this District, frankly I'm disappointed by this decision.

I have been a student of the Orange Public School system for over 10 years, ever since the sandbox days of kindergarten. Budget cuts

such as these are catastrophic for a student's education. And at the end of the day, isn't that our goal -- to teach, to build the leaders of tomorrow, today, like my colleagues pointed out?

As well as a scholar, I'm a performer. I've been a member of the chorus for over five years. And I've recently begun acting in Orange productions, which is great. But I feel it can be spectacular, fantastic with better funding.

And as for the scholars, we always feel inadequate when we look at our textbooks, centuries (*sic*) old, with every page almost torn out and drawn on. The budget cut has caused us to lose positions in education, such as guidance counselors, social workers, and teachers. We spend the whole year building healthy relationships with these educators, and then -- poof -- they're gone, laid off. And not only that, but our District is incapable of hiring new, adequate teachers.

The City of Orange is constantly growing and expanding. With these budget cuts, we are unable to adhere to our rapidly growing city, nor can we afford the necessary amount of educational resources.

In closing, these are only a few of the prime examples of why education funding is so crucial, so important, to Orange students, Orange staff, and the Orange community.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN OLIVER: Thank you very much, Mr. Coates, and all of our student reps. You have made me very happy because, maybe, in the next election cycle, you might be 18. And I feel very confident that we have strong leadership in Orange. (applause)

And now our Co-Chairs, Assemblywoman Jasey and Senator Rice, will wrap up our meeting. And you will be hearing from us.

Assemblywoman Jasey. (applause)

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN MILA M. JASEY (Co-Chair):** Thank you very much.

I want to apologize; I was here at the very beginning, then I had to go upstairs for, of all things, the Assembly Education meeting. And I left that meeting -- they're still going on; we had a pretty heavy agenda -- but it was important to me to come down to this hearing to let you know that not only do I support you, but previously I represented Orange, and I live in South Orange. So I am very involved, still, with what's going on in Orange in the schools, because I believe that tremendous strides have been made. But I also know -- I'm very much aware of the financial problems because of the State's lack of funding; everything from facilities, to supplies, to giving you enough in the budget to hire the staff that you need.

So this fight is not over; this fight is really just beginning. And I want you to know that you have a voice in me; as well as Senator Rice; certainly, Assemblyman Wimberly; and your representative, Assemblywoman Oliver.

When I hear students speak, that reminds me why we do what we do. Having served on the Board of Education in my town for three terms -- as well as I know Assemblywoman Oliver did -- I understand how important it is to the vitality of the community that the schools be strong and excellent. And we're not there yet, and we know it.

The one positive thing I can say is that, about two weeks ago, your Superintendent and I had the opportunity to be at Montclair State

University to witness the graduation of teachers who are committed to working in Orange in conjunction with the training that they've received at Montclair State University. So there are many things going on -- not enough, yet -- but I can assure you that, as we move forward, you will be at the top. Because I know that Orange is actually one of the most underfunded districts in the state. And we have to fix that; we really do. And we have to get our colleagues to understand.

I'm disappointed that some of them are not here to hear you, because I think you are the best advocates for your education -- young people. And the other thing I will let you know is that everything that is said here today is transcribed; so although I was not physically here, I will be able to read all of the testimony as we go forward.

And I very much want to thank the Superintendent, the Mayor, the Education Association and, most importantly, the students and parents who came out this morning to talk to us. It's very important to put faces to the situations that we're trying to address.

Thanks very much for coming. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: I don't really need to say anything else. I know you have good leadership in your School District because I go way back with Ron Lee, so I know his skill set and his sincerity.

I'm really happy to see the students here; and I just wanted to say that several members of this Committee would have probably been here today, but they are sitting on other Committees now. In fact, I left Senator Diegnan up in the Law and Public Safety Committee. But we're here, and we'll make certain that all that is said becomes a part of our agenda.

And once again, we know Orange is here today; but as the Speaker said, you really represent, really, pretty much every school district that is having serious problems now. When we look at Orange, we're looking at Paterson; we look at Paterson, we're looking at Jersey City; we look at Jersey City, we're looking at Camden; we look at Camden, we're looking at East Orange; we look at East Orange, we're looking at Irvington, Perth Amboy-- We get it; believe me, we get it on this Committee. Hopefully, our colleagues will get it too, after this testimony.

Thank you very much, and have a good day. (applause)

**(MEETING CONCLUDED)**