
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS SUBCOMMITTEE ON DATA, RESEARCH, AND EVALUATION

"Concerns from various parent and education organizations"

LOCATION: Joseph H. Brensinger School
Jersey City, New Jersey

DATE: October 16, 2012
10:30 a.m.

MEMBERS OF SUBCOMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Ralph R. Caputo, Chair
Senator Sandra B. Cunningham
Senator Samuel D. Thompson
Assemblywoman Connie Wagner



ALSO PRESENT:

Melanie Schulz
Executive Director

Sharon Benesta
Chief of Staff

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ASSEMBLYMAN RALPH R. CAPUTO (Chair): First order of business, I'd like to call the meeting to order and at least announce the members of the Committee who are here with us now.

We have Assemblywoman Connie Wagner.

Would you like to say hello?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Good morning, everybody.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I believe Senator Cunningham is on her way.

And Assemblyman Charles Mainor would kindly stand and be recognized. (applause)

Also, before we get started, I'd like to announce one of our Board of Education members, Sterling Waterman. (applause)

And I'm told that Akisia Grigsby, Co-Founder of the Parent Advocacy Group, is here. I'd like to recognize her. (applause)

Let me say that this is a meeting of most importance because it is a meeting of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. Senator Rice is the Chair on the Senate side; on the Assembly side it's Assemblywoman Wagner. They have been receiving many calls from many different individuals about issues they would like to air before our Committee. This is basically the vision and purpose of today's session.

We're going to limit each individual to five minutes for their participation and their issues that are concerning them.

I'd also like to thank the Principal of this building for the wonderful greeting that we received earlier this morning and for the tour

that we were able to take; and the Superintendent of Schools, who I wish much luck in her endeavors here to work with the public schools, and the parents, and the teachers of this particular district. So I want to thank all of them.

Let's give those kids a big round of applause for what they did. (applause) It's a good, old-fashioned feeling to be in a school. I was an educator myself, and Assemblywoman Wagner was also an educator. So we really feel good and at home when we're in the presence of children. That's probably where we belong. That's where we started, and this is where we're going to end up. And that's the reason why we participate on this Committee -- because of our dedication to public education. Everybody recognizes the difficulties that we're having in delivering that education to our students based on the short -- or let's say the resources that are available because of the economy, etc.

So this job becomes harder, and it's harder for the administrators, harder for the teachers, harder for everyone to try to squeeze every bit of resources out of wherever they can get it to deliver the best education for the children, who deserve it. And when you take a look at those faces in this particular building, and anywhere in the State of New Jersey, you know why we do that. I mean, these are just beautiful children who have a lot of promise and hope. We saw their faces. And the way they behaved here today is absolutely exemplary. I think it's miraculous and marvelous that we're able to participate in that exchange. So it's my privilege to be here.

The speakers are going to be lined up. Let's take the order in which we found them, unless-- What I'd like to do is give each member on

the Committee a few minutes to open up with, and I will start with Assemblywoman Wagner.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Good morning, everybody. As Assemblyman Caputo has said, I spent 37 years of my life in education, so I love being with children. The only thing I don't miss is getting up at 6:00 in the morning to get out to a bus stop to get to school. So other than that, when you see the children here today-- It's one thing to talk about diversity, but it's another thing to see the pride that each student has because they know they represent the richness of diversity and they have pride in their schools. To see such talent is wonderful.

I've often said that any of the problems that we have here in public education-- And listen, I can't help but believe that public education is under attack and that we have to do everything we can to make sure that it exists, because it is the diversity that we pride, and we have to make sure that our children work together to grow up to be adults, and to be strong, and to have good educational foundations.

And I do believe many of the solutions, obviously, belong in the hands of educators, not legislators. (applause) Listen, in saying that, I just want you to know that I am five-years retired. I'm a dinosaur already, and I understand that. So I need to listen to the educators; I need to listen to the parents; and, guess what, even students know some of the answers. So I thank you for coming out here today.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you very much, Assemblywoman.

Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Thank you.

While the Chair mentioned his and Assemblywoman Wagner's background in education, I did teach one year of high school math, and I taught Chemistry in college for several years. I have a little bit of background in education, too.

Of course, the Joint Committee on the Public Schools' purpose is to review what's happening out there in the schools today and to see what we can do to improve the situation -- which there is nothing more important relative to where we're going to go in our country than seeing that our children are properly educated. And while we have some excellent schools in the state, there are others that have problems. And we need to do what we can to improve them. And we're here today to listen to what you have to say and take that into consideration.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you, Senator Thompson.

We're going to start with Akisia Grigsby of Jersey City.

Could you please come up and state your name and position?

AKISIA GRIGSBY: Good evening. (*sic*)

Thank you so much for coming here to Jersey City and actually hearing us.

First, I want to thank P.S. 11 -- I mean P.S. 17 students and Principal for hosting this hearing.

Thank you to Senator Cunningham for introducing me to Melanie Schulz who, in turn, has been organizing this hearing with me and just basically hearing our crisis of disenfranchisement of Jersey City.

The first thing I wanted to talk about is the zero tolerance and anti-bullying policy. I've been working diligently with Melanie in terms of

outlining some of the parent concerns of what's needed in the policy. Some of the things that are needed-- We need other parameters in place before the kids are profiled in this electronic violence and vandalism system. Right now if a child is reported under -- if they're under special education, they're within the system up until 28 years old. A child who is not in special education -- they're in the system until 21 years old. And parents are really concerned about that.

Other parameters that need to be outlined so that the urban schools do not have high out-of-school suspension rates-- This has led me to talk to the Education Law Center regarding the FERPA policy. Now, a lot of the advocates have this misconception that the FERPA policy protects the parents. The FERPA policy is a Federal -- just for the parents in the room -- is a Federal educational policy. It does not protect the parents, according to the attorneys. It actually doesn't really do anything. So I guess the next step is for the Legislature to talk to Congress now to fix the holes in that FERPA policy so that it can protect us parents.

The next one is about operations in QSAC. Now, I know-- It's my understanding that the Joint Committee on the Public Schools established QSAC back in the '70s. Last night, Commissioner Cerf couldn't confirm if we would get operations back or when we could get it back. But we've passed that scoring for a while now. So when can we get that back? We need help, because we're not getting the clear answers, and we don't know why.

And then the last thing -- the last point I wanted to bring up is: What happens to Title I funding now that No Child Left Behind is no longer in play?

Those are my concerns. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I definitely appreciate your remarks. We will review the transcript so we know exactly what you said, and the Committee will take a look at it.

Senate Rice was responsible for establishing QSAC -- one of the prime sponsors -- so he's very concerned about that level of achievement: when a district reaches it, how they reach it, what the data is behind each and every measurement. So we will look into that carefully.

MS. GRIGSBY: Okay. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you very much for your testimony.

MS. GRIGSBY: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Is Senator Cunningham here?
(affirmative response)

Senator Cunningham, take your rightful place up here with us.

Everybody see Senator Cunningham? Let's give her a big round of applause. (applause)

Senator, would you like to have some opening remarks?
(negative response) Fine, okay.

Is Patricia Jelly here? (affirmative response)

P A T R I C I A J E L L Y: I apologize, first of all, because Deborah Dixon was to speak and represent our group this morning. She had a death in the family.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Excuse me, could you tell me who you represent -- what town and who you represent, please?

MS. JELLY: I represent the Elizabeth Education Organizing Committee, which is an independent group of parents and other interested persons who want to take our rightful place in -- as partners with the professional educators. And we're part of a statewide organization. There is also an organization here in Jersey City as well, too.

The first thing -- I will not take your time, because I understand that you have no jurisdiction over litigation that is present, and there is much litigation, as you are aware, going on in the Elizabeth school system.

First of all, we would like to speak about the public response time at our monthly school board meetings. The process is that a person who wishes to speak needs to sign up at 6:00 p.m. Maybe the meeting begins at 7:30, maybe later -- but with their meeting. But it doesn't usually begin first. First they have entertainment by the children, which we heard this morning is a wonderful thing, but it should be on another night. Then they have giving of awards. So maybe the monthly meeting begins at 8:30, 9:00, 9:30. The time for public response could be 10:00 p.m.; it has often been 11:00 p.m. Now, parents who have children to put to bed -- other people have had to spend that length of time. So we are working with that at the local level. We would like to certainly see what you can do at the State level as well, too.

The second thing is the 160 credits that are required for every student to graduate high school in Elizabeth. As you are aware, the State requirement is 120. We understand that the local level can increase that amount. But we are saying that for every student to be required to get the 160 credits, that's really extremely serious and not good. It's good for some students, but not for all students. So we're asking that that really be

considered, and we're working on that. This requires an extended school day, does it not? And, again, for some students -- all students from 1st grade on go to school from 7:30 until 3:45 in the afternoon. For students who don't get up in time to have breakfast, they start their classes without breakfast.

Class size is another. For many years, Elizabeth has had the two-tier system. We have those for the gifted and talented -- and we don't want to take away from them at all, obviously -- but they have received the resources, and they have the appropriate class size for the state. Many classes in Elizabeth are larger than what the State requirement is.

And we are wondering -- as the last thing -- what about the State choice -- school choice that no longer exists. It is our understanding that it no longer exists, and we'd like more information on that.

We would appreciate very much if at the next public hearing we would hear an update on these issues.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I just want to make a comment.

MS. JELLY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Because Senator Rice wanted to ask this question. What about textbooks in the Elizabeth school system? Is there a sufficient amount of materials available for children?

MS. JELLY: Again, this is the difference. In the gifted and talented schools, there are sufficient textbooks. In the other schools, there are not and they are outdated as well, too.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Let me just ask this one question. I know we're going to move along because we have a lot of speakers. Have you met with the County Superintendent of Union County?

MS. JELLY: No, we have not.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I would think some of these issues might be able to be dealt with at that level, because the County Superintendent is the representative of the Commissioner in each county. And I'm not saying that these all will be resolved, but I think there are some issues here that you can discuss with that individual, whoever it is, and see whether that can be resolved from that level.

MS. JELLY: We certainly would. Again, we appreciate what you're able to do at your level, because these are questions which-- And I heard Ms. Wagner -- beginning -- we want all of our children to be educated well because we want a better society, do we not?

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Any other members of the Committee want to--

Assemblywoman Wagner.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I have a question regarding class size. Can you give me an example of what is an average class size in the high school, or middle school, or 2nd grade class?

MS. JELLY: And I don't want to say average. There are class sizes-- In high school, we know, the requirement is 24 students per class. There are classes of 35 or more in the high schools. There are classes -- and, again, I don't want to say average-- And there are many -- at the primary level it's supposed to be 21. There are many that are 25 and over. And that is the beginning of their education, is it not?

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Through the Chair.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Yes.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Did you say that school choice does not exist any longer? Because it does. It still does.

MS. JELLY: Well, that was our understanding. And if we're wrong on that--

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: It still does. It depends upon the municipality. And the talented and gifted program that you referred to -- how many children are in that program?

MS. JELLY: There is one high school that is gifted and talented, one middle school. I say there are probably four or five out of the thing that are lottery or gifted and talented. And the lottery also have good resources. So that's out of-- And I don't want to quote incorrectly, Senator. We certainly can find that information out for you.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Would you please, through the Chair?

MS. JELLY: Absolutely. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you, Senator.

Thank you for your time.

Is there a Deborah Dixon here?

MS. JELLY: No, she could not come.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: That's you, huh? (laughter)

Rekha Nandwani, from the Jersey City Democratic Committee.

(no response) Not here.

Irene Sterling, from Paterson.

For the record, just state your name so we make sure we're talking to the right individual.

R O S I E G R A N T: My name is Rosie Grant, and I'm here representing the Paterson Education Fund.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you, Rosie.

MS. GRANT: Paterson has six priority schools and 18 focus schools. In Paterson, the NCLB waiver implementation is beginning with the hiring of a former district employee to head up the Bergen-Passaic-Sussex RAC, regional achievement center, which is in charge of Paterson. We're concerned that someone who has a history with the district may find it very difficult to be impartial. Additionally, one current employee and another former employee of Paterson Public Schools have been hired to staff our RAC. All have preexisting relationships with current district staff and will be hard-pressed to make decisions impartially without regard to how it affects their former colleagues. We expect that the RACs will make decisions that are in the best interest of the schools and the children, and we do question their ability to do so given these relationships.

Furthermore, the Commissioner requested that Paterson develop a transformation plan to improve academic outcomes for Paterson children. This transformation plan was agreed upon by the Commissioner, our local board of education, and vetted with the community. The plan outlines proven strategies and sets benchmarks toward a bold goal of 100 percent graduation. We're concerned that the implementation of this transformation plan may now be jeopardized by the RACs and by the relationships that are already existing.

A second issue I'd like to bring before you is to consider the Commissioner's proposed change to use average attendance instead of the ASSA count. I'd like you to give some thought to this. Currently schools are funded by the October 15 ASSA count, as is required by New Jersey law. It's 18A:7F-34. The Commissioner's proposal to fund schools based on average attendance instead of enrollment contradicts this law that you, our Legislature, passed first in 1996 and then affirmed with the School Funding Reform Act in 2008. It is inequitable because when chronically absent children show up for school, the schools still have to educate them, even if their attendance is poor. In fact, chronically absent students need extra support, not less. We encourage you, instead, to support programs that are proactive about reducing chronic absenteeism rather than punish districts and, in effect, punish kids by giving them fewer resources and thereby exacerbating performance problems.

Our question that I'd like you to ask is: How does any of this lead to improved outcomes for our children? We need adults who hold children at the center. And I ask you, as you consider these policies, to please hold our children at the center because they are counting on you.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you.

If you don't mind, rest of the Committee, I'd like to comment on that, and maybe some of the other legislators here can add to my comments.

You're absolutely correct. When the budget was submitted, it was based on some other type of formulas that presently exist under the law. We stressed in our budget decision to make sure that that language

would retain, even though the funding is different, to stick to the formula that is on the books. So even though the formula did shortchange districts -- which is unfair -- based on those benchmarks, the school formula that exists will allow for lawsuits regarding school funding in the future. So we are protected in that regard, and we're hurt in the other part of it because we didn't get the funding that we should have gotten based on the funding that was available. But we did not go along with the Legislature in general, regardless of party.

MS. GRANT: I was very pleased and appreciate that. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Pardon me?

MS. GRANT: I was very pleased that you did that. Thank you. It did not go unnoted.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Okay, great. So we're okay there.

MS. GRANT: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We're not okay. The jury is out on that in terms of where we go in the future. The law is the law. So that was responded to.

Any other comment? (no response)

MS. GRANT: Thank you so much. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you.

Arnold Williams, from the League of Black and Latino organization. (no response)

Lorenzo Richardson. (no response)

Dr. Jonathan Hodges, from the Paterson Board of Education.

(no response)

Sterling Waterman, from Jersey City -- our Board of Education.

I think I met you before, right, Sterling? (laughter)

Thank you, sir.

S T E R L I N G W A T E R M A N: Good morning, everyone.

I am Sterling Waterman. I am the Vice President of the Jersey City Board of Education, former president. And I'm here speaking for myself, obviously.

I'd like to say thank you for coming to Jersey City and hearing us. (applause) Because no one else is listening.

Senator Rice-- I'm sorry, I know Senator Rice couldn't be here today. He had a death in his family. He and I, and my colleagues in Paterson, Newark -- of course myself representing Jersey City -- formed a coalition because we have similar issues as it relates to how districts are being handled by the Governor's Office and the Commissioner's Office.

Last night the Commissioner came to speak with the Jersey City Board of Education and members of the community, which we all appreciate. And we talked about something which is near and dear to me and, of course, my colleagues in Newark and Paterson -- local control. Jersey City was under local (*sic*) control longer than Paterson and Newark. And we got it back, or so we thought, in 2008. Now, despite the fact that we have -- and Ms. Grigsby from the Parent Advocacy Group spoke about operations. I've been speaking about this now since I've been a Board member. Operations was-- We were told by the former Commissioner of Education--

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Sterling, could you put the mike away from your--

MR. WATERMAN: Oh, I'm sorry.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: It's coming in very muddled here. We can't understand you.

MR. WATERMAN: I'm sorry.

Operations-- We were told that we had passed operations way back when, in 2008-2009, by the former Commissioner of Education Lucille Davy. However, it wasn't formally given back to us by the State Board despite maintaining anywhere between a 90 and a 98 average in operations. The Commissioner's Office saw fit to send in a highly skilled professional who is a wonderful person, but nonetheless -- for that area and other areas.

So right now Jersey City has control of fiscal and governance, despite the fact that our scores are not where they need to be. We still control governance, but we don't control operations despite the fact that our scores have been consistently over 90.

Now, the Commissioner said last night -- he said, "What you should be focusing on is student achievement. That should be your primary concern, not QSAC." And I told him then -- I said, "I disagree with you." Yes, we are focused on student achievement, as we should be. However, if the Commissioner should drop dead -- God forbid -- if he's not in office next year, we still have this problem with local control. We all strive -- every district strives for local control -- Paterson, Newark, Jersey City. We want the chance to control ourselves without State oversight. Now, we don't mind the assistance -- i.e., funding and other things -- but we want to

be able to control ourselves. So we do believe that local control is important while we're focusing on student achievement. Let's not get it twisted. We are not going to do one without the other. We want both. (applause) We want student achievement and local control back. And we need you to help us get it back.

Now, we've passed operations. I can't say -- again, go up to the mountaintop again, for everyone to hear. We've passed operations. We need it back. I asked the Commissioner for it back. He made no commitment. But we need it back. We've passed that. We've passed fiscal. Our scores were lower in other areas. We need our appeal. We've appealed to the State on governance and other areas -- personnel being one -- and we've always -- we're a bit deficient in curriculum and instruction. But we're not doing nearly as bad as what they would have us think we are. And the minute we think we're doing well, our scores are lower. And I think that happens, again, in Paterson and Newark. So obviously our issues are not ours alone. So when I speak, I'm also speaking on behalf of my colleagues in Paterson and Newark. We all would like local control, and we would like you to help us get that back.

Thank you very much for your time. Again, welcome. And don't take too long to come back.

Thank you very much. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Just a question, sir.

Your meeting with the Commissioner -- that obviously was brought up -- the question of local control. I was not at that meeting. Can you tell me what the response was?

MR. STERLING: He asked us to focus on student achievement.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Pardon me?

MR. STERLING: He asked us to just focus on student achievement. That's most important. We want both. We want to get back local control, and we'll focus on student achievement.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Well, you have to pass QSAC. We have to talk to the Commissioner about what these guidelines are, because the law is very specific regarding -- after the takeover, what the district has to do to meet certain standards.

It's my understanding -- and I don't have all the facts in front of me -- there are many districts in the state that have local control, and they don't measure up either in every area. (applause) So I think it's important that this Committee look at the information, look at the districts, and then have a reasonable meeting with the Commissioner regarding this issue.

Fair is the name of the game. It has to be fair, it has to be applied. And there must be reasons for not giving local control back.

MR. STERLING: Not good ones though.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I don't know if I agree with them, but I want to know what those reasons are, and I think the Committee also does. After all, the State has a large stake in financing districts. So if districts are measuring up and have made that kind of progress in certain areas, then it should be considered.

MR. STERLING: Please ask him to stop changing the questions when we get the answers. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you.

MR. STERLING: Every time we get the answer the question changes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Does anybody want to make a comment?

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Yes, through the Chair.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Senator Cunningham.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Sterling, what were-- My understanding is QSAC has to be -- there are certain QSAC scores that we need to qualify for--

MR. STERLING: Must maintain 80 or above.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: What is it?

MR. STERLING: Must maintain 80 or above.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: And where are we in terms of that?

MR. STERLING: In which area? Because in fiscal we've maintained in the 90s. We've maintained--

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: There are five areas.

MR. STERLING: Right. In operations we've maintained in the 90s despite the fact that we haven't gotten it back. Our scores were lowered in governance, our scores were lowered in personnel. In curriculum and instruction -- I won't go there just now.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Say that again. We're having a hard time hearing you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: You're probably better without the microphone.

MR. STERLING: As far as fiscal is concerned, we've always maintained in the 90s. We have that. That's fine. Operations, which we don't have -- we've maintained in the 90s. We don't have that; we need that. Governance -- we have governance despite the fact that our scores are lower than 80 right now. As far as personnel is concerned, we had our scores lowered. We were near 80. I think it was like 76 or 78, and now it's in the 60s. Curriculum was lowered as well.

So just as we thought we were getting closer to obtaining certain things we find out that we have a lot more -- a longer way to go. So we just-- Again, we want fairness just like every other district. We have districts in New Jersey that are well below 80 and they are not -- and they still have local control. And we want to be fair. We want equity all across New Jersey; specifically, because we're here in Jersey City, in Jersey City.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Do you know what districts those are?

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I don't have them off hand, but I know there are many districts in the State of New Jersey that don't meet those standards and they're not under State control.

MR. STERLING: Garfield, Englewood. I can name a few.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We don't want to list them. We don't want any trouble for them. But the idea is that you're right. There are districts that do not meet the standard. We have to look at that. The Committee will take the time to look at that. (applause)

MR. STERLING: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Senator Thompson.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Let me say for all speakers, when you speak, get about 8 to 10 inches from the microphone. You come across clearer up here. When you speak directly into the microphone it's very garbled. We can't understand. Get a little ways away from-- The last speaker was very clear. When he was speaking into the mike it was very difficult to understand.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Next, Josephine Paige, Jersey City. (applause)

Josephine, if you don't mind, state your position, parent, or whatever organization you represent.

J O S E P H I N E P A I G E: Can you hear me?

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Yes.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: It's probably better if you don't use it, Josephine.

MS. PAIGE: Okay.

My name is Josephine Paige. I'm the Secretary of NJ Vocal Minority, and we're an organization that just formed about 90 days ago to monitor the actions and the policies of Abbott district school boards.

I'm here because I have some concerns about the Commissioner's turn-around plan.

I want to share some facts with you first. Sixteen -- this is Jersey City -- 16 focus and priority schools are in Jersey City. Six of them, or 38 percent of them, are in Ward F. Ward F is a predominantly black community. No priority and no focus schools are in Ward D or E. They are both predominantly Caucasian communities.

Another fact: The 14 largest budgets in Abbott schools total \$3.6 billion; \$1.5 billion, or 42 percent, of that money goes to three districts. I bet you can't guess which three. The three that are under control: Jersey City, Newark, and Paterson.

RAC centers -- that's my next concern. I'm sorry, I gave you that information so you could have some information about the demographics of RAC centers, because those focus and priority schools are the focus of RAC centers.

I attended the Education Program Committee meeting last Friday evening, and left there so depressed I could cry. There was no real information provided about financing the RAC initiative here in Jersey City. There was some mention of funding part of it using 30 percent of Title I money. But I'm not sure what percent of Title I money was actually given to those 16 schools previously, so I don't know if that's less than the title money they're entitled to or more. However, the Executive Director of the Essex and Hudson County -- Ms. Griffin -- did say in a PowerPoint program that 30 percent of Title I money given to Jersey City would be used for those 16 schools.

What I'm also concerned about is that there was no information given-- And this was, by the way, to set up the RAC initiative here in Jersey City -- that 30 percent. But there was no information given about how to fund those RAC centers going forward, and there was no projected finances. If you're going to do something, you need to project at least into the first three years, because that is the maximum number of years, as I understand it, that priority and focus schools are going to be given to improve their performance.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: (indiscernible)

MS. PAIGE: No, it's two years for focus schools and three years for priority schools, to be precise.

My major concern and reason why I left that meeting so depressed and almost in tears is because part of the PowerPoint presentation that Ms. Griffin provided to the Committee was based on -- it was a race-based benchmark component. And that race-based benchmark component said that Caucasian students had an expectation of improved performance over one year -- I believe it was one year -- it certainly wasn't five, or 15, or 23 years -- of one point from 85 percent to 86 percent. However, for African-American children -- or I want to call them -- since I'm not -- I'm half African-American and half Caribbean -- I want to call it children of African decent -- the expectation was 15 points in performance improvement in the same amount of time. And I assure you, I believe it was 1 percent. And if one of the Board members are here, they can confirm that for me.

MR. WATERMAN: That is correct.

MS. PAIGE: Thank you, Mr. Waterman.

Senator Rice, I believe, and the NAACP are filing a civil rights action against this same problem. I don't know if he is aware of the fact that there is a racial component in the RAC initiative, but I want all of you to know that. It has to be eliminated. This is so unacceptable. And then such a huge gap--

When the State has had control of a district for 23 years-- And I just did a spread sheet recently. That means that there has been 13 generations of graduating classes -- that is from 1st grade to 12th grade,

from 1989 to this present day -- who have gone through the State's control of this district. Unfortunately, there is no one evaluating the State. There should be. I think it's criminal. (applause) Since we can't evaluate the State, I would love it if you would.

I'm here to beg you to please take a very, very close look at the Commissioner's turn-around plan. It is set up to fail. And I also want to point out to you that there is a component in the turn-around plan that says that if you have -- if a district has 40 percent low-performing schools, the Commissioner's intent -- that is when and if legislation is passed -- is that he will have absolute control over whether a district is in this achievement district -- I forget what the acronym is -- and there will be no appeal process, none. He will have absolute power. If you set up a district-- And by the way, there are 39 schools in Jersey City. Guess what 40 percent of 39 is. Does anybody know?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Sixteen.

MS. PAIGE: Sixteen. And there are 16 schools in the priority and focus RAC program -- 16 focus and priority schools. That is 40 percent. And 6 of those 16 schools happen to be in the African-American community. (applause) So if you set the points at 15 points in one year of performance improvement-- If they haven't improved 15 points in 23 years, is it realistic to believe that they're going to improve 15 points in one year? So what are you doing? He's setting us up to fail so that he can continue to be in control of this district with no appeal process. That's what I'm talking about. That's my concern.

There are two elements -- two principles of the turn-around plan -- climate and culture -- which are supposed to look at the social,

emotional, and health of the children in the RAC programs. At the meeting there were Board members who asked if there were going to be social workers in that program. Ms. Griffin said no. No, I'm sorry, Ms. Griffin -- I suspect she didn't know. Now, she's the Executive Director, and she didn't know the answer. The Superintendent, after some continued questioning, said no, there would be no social workers. If there are no social workers, if there are no psychologists, if there are no medical professionals, how does that element of the turn-around plan succeed? The vast majority of the children in this city have some need for social, psychological, and medical need. If you're not going to provide that, then they are also being set up to fail.

The eighth component is parent and community engagement. There was-- In the turn-around plan that was OPRA'd by the Education Law Center-- I have read this plan two dozen times. There is no money being requested for community and parental engagement. There is no discussion--

I'm sorry.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: First, I appreciate your remarks. They're very informative. If you could, try to sum it up.

MS. PAIGE: Yes, I will. I'm sorry.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Don't apologize, you're doing great.

MS. PAIGE: Thank you.

I am asking you to please include in this turn-around plan -- or whatever efforts you take -- that you insist that there be town hall meetings and also focus groups that consist of community organizations and parents,

as well as educators and the Board. Everyone needs to be involved in this process. And unfortunately, that's not what is happening right now.

I'm also asking that-- I'm so desperate that I'm asking everyone I can appeal to, to please consider filing an injunction to stop the RAC initiative until this race-based benchmark is removed. Financing should be stopped, and further investigation, and educating of school board members should happen.

Thank you. I'm sorry I took so long. (applause)

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: The plan is still in draft form, but we're being held accountable as of September 1.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: If you want to testify, you can.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: If you want to testify, you can.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Do you want to testify?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Oh, okay.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: That testimony was very, very profound and compelling. I think the main thing that comes through is that no one individual, or no group, or no board, or no commissioner has all the answers to solve all the problems that exist in public education in Jersey City or anywhere else. So we need all of the people who have an interest in moving education to a higher level to be involved and not to be artificially involved. People have to be able to buy into something that they feel they're going to have an impact with. And some of these things -- although we're supposed to know it all -- we learned -- I learned something here about the way things are being treated.

One of the points that-- Regardless of whatever the plans are, the State has controlled, as you said, districts in the State of New Jersey for many years. They're the ones who were supposed to bring the technical assistance and the innovative ideas to these school districts that were in need of improvement. And I'm not holding this Administration responsible for that. This has been a 20-, 25-year situation. So no one group is-- But what bothers me is that every time we have a change in administration, we have a whole new set of rules to adhere to. We were trying to comply with the old rules and we were working toward that, and now we have to meet a whole new challenge. So there has to be some kind of bridge from the past to the future and the present so that we can actually look at this in an objective way.

So I will bring to our Chair your remarks. I think he's in a lot of agreement with that. So we'll go on from there. I appreciate your testimony.

Is Wilhelmina Holder here? (no response)

Donna Jackson, from Newark? (no response)

Frank Falcicchio, Jersey City parent. (applause)

F R A N K F A L C I C C H I O: That's Frank Falcicchio (indicating pronunciation), Mr. Caputo.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I apologize, sir.

MR. FALCICCHIO: That's okay, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I misplaced an *F* somewhere. I don't know where it is. (laughter)

MR. FALCICCHIO: Good morning.

Actually, I have a prepared speech, so I'm going to read it.

Good morning, Senator Rice and Committee members. Thank you for coming to Jersey City today.

We are in the epicenter of the struggle to provide quality education to the young citizens of the public schools of Jersey City and New Jersey.

My name is Frank Falcicchio. I'm a life-long resident of Jersey City by choice. I'm a career public-school educator. My wife, also a career educator, and I have deliberately raised our four children here in Jersey City.

I come before you today with 44 years of teaching experience in public and private schools in Newark, the Freehold Regional High School District, East Orange, the public schools of Edison, and the Jersey City Public Schools. I have also worked in Newark for a social service agency, first in the 1970s and later in the 1990s. So my testimony today before you is firsthand knowledge and experience of that agency then, and the power and influence that agency has today in Newark, and the direction of public education in New Jersey today and tomorrow. I know you know who I'm talking about.

From 1985 to 1990 I was employed as an assistant superintendent of schools in Jersey City. I lived a period of time when the New Jersey Legislature took the broad, bold steps to pass legislation to take over control of local public school districts. I know that the process of takeover, correction of the benchmarks to certify a school district, and the return to local control was to take place in five years. The New Jersey Department of Education seized control of the Jersey City Public Schools in 1989. The New Jersey Department of Education is still in control of Jersey

City Public Schools today. The State of New Jersey has and continues to fail to provide for the educational success of the young citizens of the Jersey City Public Schools.

You legislators hold the key to providing for these young minds. The New Jersey Department of Education Commissioner has or will propose major changes in the education laws of New Jersey, Title 18A.

And let me just say, aside, the RAC centers are not something that is legal here in New Jersey. It's something separate and apart, funded from -- and I will get to that in a minute. (laughter)

You know, it tells you something about the individual when instead of standing and fighting for what he believes, he instead moves his residence to circumvent the process of senatorial courtesy.

The Jersey City Board of Education got a green light to remove our school superintendent effective December 9, 2011. In November 2011, our Jersey City Board of Education held the first of seven community meetings to search for a new superintendent. At that first meeting, the Board presented to us-- The very first speaker was Dr. Walter Farrell, from the University of North Carolina. Dr. Farrell presented his extensive years of research on the corporate foundation takeover of urban school districts in the United States. In his presentation, Dr. Farrell spoke about the influence on elected officials, including our Governor; the influence of placing Broad candidates (*sic*) graduates in State government and local district leadership; the influence on the mayors of large urban school districts. In our state, that includes Newark and possibly Jersey City in 2013. Broad Academy graduates include Commissioner Cerf, Newark

Superintendent Anderson, and Jersey City Superintendent Lyles, to name a few.

What about the education of the students in the urban districts of New Jersey? Who will advocate for them? Will you members of this joint legislative Committee advocate for the young public school minds in Jersey City, Newark, Paterson, and the rest of New Jersey?

We are at a crossroads in our state, as well as in our nation. Everyone is watching New Jersey regarding the future of public education. I got mine, my family has theirs. Why should I care about the students of the public schools in Jersey City? I took my personal business time to come before you to respectfully request -- no, I guess I implore you to fulfill the oath that you took when you accepted the title of Member of the New Jersey Legislature. Do not fail to provide for the urban public school students. I urge you to follow Senator Rice Sr. (applause) Do not leave any stone unturned. Build the steps for the young urban minds to become productive adult citizens of our great state.

Thank you for listening to me, and thank you for coming to Jersey City today.

I think I have some-- Oh, no, I did my five minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Frank, you did a great job. We appreciate your expertise.

MR. FALCICCHIO: Thank you.

Mr. Caputo, I'm very serious about this.

And to the rest of you -- educators -- the one-year educator, the rest of the Committee-- I mean, you really have to step up. And this is bipartisan. We talk about bipartisanship here in the State of New Jersey.

We know what took place. We know what has to happen here. This is another generation. And it's true. The original legislation was a five-year process: four years of the State coming in, making all of the corrections; and in the fifth year, transition it back to local control. The State is still here. The faces have changed, the names have changed, but the game is still the same. Please help our young people here in the urban areas.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

I just want to make a comment in terms of who is testifying and who isn't. If you come from the same particular organization, please only send one representative up, because we will be here until tomorrow morning, and I think everybody wants to get home sometime. So if you could just take a minute out and decide who is going to come up representing your group it would be helpful. We're going to just take a couple of minutes out.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: That's Arnold Williams. I think you called his name before.

A R N O L D B. W I L L I A M S: Sir, you called my name. It's Arnold B. Williams.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Oh, I did call you. Mr. Williams, would you like to come up here please? You weren't here at the time. Come on up.

Arnold Williams, League of Black and Latino organization, right?

MR. WILLIAMS: That's correct.

My name is Arnold B. Williams, lifelong resident of the City of Jersey City, Founder and Chair of the National League of Black and Latino Voters.

We formulated, just for your information, a subcommittee that is focused primarily on keeping our school system public.

I'm here today to just highlight -- and I'm sure you've gotten it from some of the other members of the public, and both advocates of public education for New Jersey -- I'm sure you've gotten it from them, but just to highlight, once again, and to go on the record with a few of the instances that result particularly in a board -- both State and local-- That if they continue to walk this, sort of, fine line of breaking the rules and then hide behind the status of council person or board member, then the result is often, as you probably know in the State of New Jersey, more corruption and arrest of municipal -- Federally -- individuals.

So my concern -- and I'm sure what has been echoed here -- at least highlighted -- is the fact that we have a council person who has influenced -- who's had a great deal of influence over the process, and resulted in getting control of a school board in a way that-- In fact, when we opt in Jersey City and in Hudson County to have an elected school board, this same individual goes, again, behind veils and has secret meetings and so forth. The only reason that we're not in the courtroom today -- and we're not in the courtroom because of Senator Ronald Rice's inquiry. And despite whatever the results are, we will be in court to represent some of the facts. One of which is, we have a School Board -- we have some members of the School Board who, in fact, campaigned, for example, in removing a previous superintendent of schools. Now, I might not have agreed with 90

percent of what Mr. Epps, for example, was about and, at times have had some of the same discussions that we've had with you, but the method in which they chose to remove him-- Now, it's not illegal to go out and campaign to remove somebody. But what's illegal about it is the fact that, you know, instead of Epps, they negotiated -- the School Board -- some School Board members opted to negotiate the contract of Dr. Epps. So in addition to looking at some of the other hurdles that folks talked about in the school board, that might be an area that this body may also consider looking into. Because it underlines some of the undermining that has caused many of us -- both as parents and advocates of public education -- to be gravely concerned about-- And we want to work with Dr. Lyles. It's not that we-- We want to work with a new superintendent. We want to work with whoever that person is. But we want to do so in a manner that our Constitution provides us, and not be undermined just because a portion of the public elected you and we -- who are here being vocal -- sort of didn't.

So there's much to be talked about. I implore you to come back to this district to have more talks with us, have more forums. As you notice, despite what you've probably heard, we're less agitated because some of us are focused on the legal aspect of what is wrong with this district and some of those at the top, including our Governor Chris Christie and the Commissioner of Education Chris Cerf.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you very much.

Did I miss someone else?

MS. SCHULZ (Executive Director): Dr. Hodges.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Dr. Hodges, from Paterson Board of Education.

JONATHAN HODGES, M.D.: That's correct.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I think we've met before, Dr. Hodges.

DR. HODGES: Yes, we have, under similar circumstances, unfortunately.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Correct.

DR. HODGES: I apologize for being late. I didn't trust my GPS and paid for it.

Good morning.

I'm a 10-year member of the Paterson Board of Education, but I'm not going to speak for them today. I'm going to speak for myself because what I'm going to say may not be appreciated at home altogether.

Since August of 1991, the Paterson School District has been under the direct supervision of the New Jersey State Department of Education. It's important that you understand that -- the direct supervision of the New Jersey State Department of Education. That means that the Board of Education has advisory responsibilities only. They are expressly prohibited from being involved in personnel, they do not hire their superintendent, they do not have their superintendent directly report to them but rather to the State Department of Education. They do not have final say on any resolution in terms of curriculum and instruction, fiscal or operations. Indeed, the State-appointed superintendent regularly reports to the State Commissioner of Education, receiving approval on his or her

programmatic approaches, as well as directives the Department of Education wants followed.

Nevertheless, the QSAC process, as it's currently implemented, ignores the preeminence of the State Department of Education's role and seems to focus the total responsibility for QSAC outcomes on the boards of education. Consequently, the agency that shoulders the blame for failed progress is the so-called *advisory board*, the very people who do not have the direct authority to shepherd their own city school district. Meanwhile, the true authority, the State Department of Education, is absolved of all blame. This has led, in Paterson's case, to 21 years of State control in which there has only been modest improvements in the educational system. And very few people are demanding an explanation of the State as to why. They come and ask us, the Board members.

At the very least, the State Department of Education should be helping to build so-called *capacity* for the Board to govern itself. It should be strengthening the weaknesses that its QSAC process suggests prevents -- the local boards demonstrate. But no such efforts are in place. If the State Department of Education cannot, using all the tools of State control, manage to bring about substantive change in the Paterson School District in 21 years, then one has to wonder if they ever can or, more worrisome, whether they want to.

In fact, because of the readiness of the State to entertain a myriad of political solicitations, the Paterson School District has been wracked with virtually unprecedented instability, political interference, and a proliferation of curricular initiatives that seem to change with each gubernatorial administration, if not each educational commissioner. Few of

the State-appointed superintendents have been allowed the time to fully implement their programs in our city without either interference from Trenton or being replaced outright, to the tune of five superintendent changes over the last eight years, with all their programs, and all their plans, and all their personnel changes, and all their new directives. And you're wondering why our schools aren't getting any better? All of this without the consent, request, or desire of the local stakeholders, especially the elected Board of Education.

Politicians and the politically connected feel free to weigh in on personnel, school construction locations, and whose property gets bought or sold for those schools. And other issues, when not satisfied -- they politically threaten, and carry out those threats, to take their demands to the State Department of Education. Because they control everything.

While no school board is totally immune from political manipulation, the local boards must face the verdict of their constituents when they allow such influences, while no such consequences confront the faceless controlling entities in Trenton.

Interestingly, when the districts -- I'm sorry, when takeover districts achieve QSAC benchmarks, the State Department of Education, through its Commissioner, has refused to recognize their achievement and then release them as the State provides. And most peculiarly, the overwhelming majority of children who seem destined to languish from the seemingly imperialist/pseudo-colonialist repression are children of color, especially those in large cities, places with large budgets and numerous physical assets.

Other smaller districts that struggle don't seem to generate the same kind of interest for intervention from the State Department of Education.

I'm coming to the end very shortly. Almost--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I think we got the point.

DR. HODGES: Not quite. (laughter)

Almost as disturbing is the fact that the people who do the QSAC evaluation work for the same Department of Education with scoring peculiarities that suggest evaluation results are more than occasionally predetermined.

I'm not going to go through the rest of this. I'll simply say this to you: There is not a single thing that an advisory board can suggest that is superior to what the State Department of Education can insist on by edict -- not one thing that we can do that they can't implement. So if they're saying that the QSAC performance is not where it should be, they merely have to turn to the State Superintendent and say, "We want these things in place," and that hasn't happened. They can tell the Superintendent, "Change your personnel," and that hasn't happened in 21 years.

Now, we achieved 80 percent in governance, and we're told that does not matter, it's inadequate. And what I want you to understand is, they've come and put in -- and this is the most dangerous concern for us. They've come and told us, "There is a new reform plan in Paterson. And if you don't manage to show improvement this year, under this new reform regimen, we're going to come and close your schools, and open up charters and give those schools to somebody else to run. Your assets, your physical

structures that you paid for with your tax money -- we're going to close them down and let some other private entity come in and take it over." (applause) "And we're going to tell you what regimen to use. We're not going to give you any additional (indiscernible)-- And we're going to cut your budget at the same time, and you can't say no." That's the frustration we have.

I don't want to belabor it, but you can get-- And I will leave the testimony for you -- the full testimony.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I understand everything you're saying, and I understand the frustration.

When you say that a school district asks to be relieved -- when they want their own control back -- who does the asking? Is it the superintendent who is hired by the State?

DR. HODGES: Never.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Who does the asking?

DR. HODGES: The school board and the community.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: And how is that done?

DR. HODGES: They have written letters, they have sent resolutions.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: You pass resolutions?

DR. HODGES: Absolutely. And right now we're in court suing for governance control.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I wanted to know that.

DR. HODGES: All right.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: What role does the superintendent-- They stay out of it completely?

DR. HODGES: They stay out of it because they report to the State.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Yes, but when you need to have an answer regarding the educational process, who is going to respond? You need the professional to do that. So if the superintendent stays out of it, how do you get the proper response on any findings that may be holding the district back?

DR. HODGES: Well, now you know why we're in here for 21 years. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: It doesn't make sense.

DR. HODGES: The problem is, the superintendent may be sympathetic to the board's position, but the superintendent is hired--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Obviously, when they lose their job after a year.

DR. HODGES: That's exactly right. They're hired by the Governor, they're not hired by us.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: So when they fall in love with you they lose the job.

DR. HODGES: That's exactly right. And we've had cases where the last superintendent before us -- before this current one -- did not get along with the Commissioner of Education and lost his job.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER FROM AUDIENCE:
(indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We're recording, we can't-- I'll give you another chance.

DR. HODGES: That's the total picture here. Their hands are tied. Because as much as they'd like to do things-- It's like, this current Superintendent had a whole new plan but went down to Trenton -- which we budgeted for -- but went to Trenton and was told his plans were changed. It's illegal for us to implement a new program which is not on budget. But he came back and had to change his entire program because that's what the State wanted done.

And in QSAC, which would say, "No, you can't do--" we've been sanctioned for doing that, but not when it comes to what the State asks for.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: That's why we're here, to listen.

Thank you very much. (applause)

DR. HODGES: So I just ask you to understand that very important point. It's how it's being implemented. We want responsibility, we want to be able to choose to work together and fix our schools. We want that, and we want to be held accountable. But give us the power to do what we're supposed to do and don't tie our hands. And don't let the State come and take our schools. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you, sir.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: I just want to--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I'm going to recognize Senator Cunningham.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: I'm sorry, Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: It's okay.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Through the Chair, did you have any-- Does the school board have anything to do with the hiring of the superintendent at all?

DR. HODGES: We have in the past. We've hired our own superintendents in the past. But the last three were placed by the Commissioner of Education.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I don't think that's the-- Did you ever in the last 23 years?

DR. HODGES: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: How many superintendents did you pick? The State went along with your selection?

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Right.

DR. HODGES: They allowed us to pick two. One was an interim and the other was here for two years.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: The rest were all by the State.

DR. HODGES: The rest were-- Yes, in fact, the State was even part of the process for the one we did pick. They were part of that process. But when they didn't like him, they--

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: So you chose them, but they fired them.

DR. HODGES: They fired them.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: They fired their own people too.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: They fired their own people as well after one year.

DR. HODGES: It varied, but yes. Two were appointed for a year -- interim -- and one was appointed for two years. The one they had

for five years and we had to get rid of that one. And this last one here has been in place-- It's five in the last three years.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you so much.

DR. HODGES: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We appreciate it.

DR. HODGES: And I'll leave my testimony.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We'd like to have that. Give it to our staff, please.

Telissa Dowling.

TELISSA DOWLING: Telissa Dowling.

Hello.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: All right. Where are you from, Telissa?

MS. DOWLING: I'm from Jersey City, born and raised, public school student. My daughter got denied her high school diploma when the State actually came in and took over our schools in Jersey City. But I'm here--

Let me slow down. My name is Telissa Dowling. I'm with the NAACP. I'm a representative of the Jersey City branch. And we're fully aware and engaged in what's going on. Our community members have already come forward.

There are two quick things I want to ask that I know the State -- that you guys can get involved with. There was funding from the State Department of Development (*sic*). We had some early childhood centers that were supposed to be built, and that money has been stopped. No one is talking to us about getting those facilities. We've been waiting many

years to get new schools, and our pre-K is really growing. We have waiting lists now here in Jersey City.

Also, I know the RAC centers -- that money is coming out of the Department of Education's budget. I would like to have someone question how he finds money in his budget to put these RAC centers in place, and what is going to happen with the State County Superintendent's Office. Is that not redundancy? Are they not doing the same thing? And I want to know, legislatively, how do you disregard the State County Superintendent's Office and have these RAC centers?

So I will make it quick and short because I know you've been here -- and it's almost lunch time, and I know everybody has to go. But I do thank you guys. Please come again, and please hear our concerns. Maybe we can have it later in the evening. That was one of our problems about getting more people to come out and understand the importance of you taking the time out of your day to come down here. Because most of the time I see you down in Trenton when I'm advocating for housing issues. So it's a good thing to see you come down and really hear our concerns about education here in Hudson County.

One quick thing, also in reference to charter schools. I know the legislation said the minimum (*sic*) of charter schools could be three in each county. We have 14 in Hudson County, and 7 are in Jersey City. When I asked Commissioner Cerf last night -- because also Ms. Josephine Paige, the advocate who spoke earlier -- the plan that he has -- the turn-around plan that is being put upon Jersey City -- it's still in draft form, but we're responsible for it as of September 1. And Cerf was, like, "Oh, no, we're not going to hold you to that two-year accountability." It's not in

writing so I don't trust what he had to say last night, truthfully. So he's still holding us responsible.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Let me ask you this, Telissa: Was it a big meeting last night? Were there a lot of people there?

MS. DOWLING: No, there were just a handful because-- That was something also -- where they had the school -- the meeting at was up at No. 7 school, which was out of a target area and a brand new facility where parents are pretty much okay in that area. He didn't have it where the people who are being affected could really come out. And it wasn't an open forum where we could engage with him. It was more, "Well, I'm going to do what I'm going to do. And if you don't like it, you just have to handle it."

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: It doesn't sound like--

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: We had the Commissioner here in Jersey City about three weeks ago for an open forum.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: How did it go, Senator.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: We had about 300 people there.

MS. DOWLING: At the first meeting, yes.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: He was a little disingenuous in some of his answers, certainly.

MS. DOWLING: Same thing last night.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Same thing last night. He pretty much had a plan that he wanted to get out. And we couldn't have the parents speak as long as they wanted to because we were on a time schedule with him. But he was definitely a little disingenuous, and I think they all knew it.

MS. DOWLING: He kept blaming us. When you asked the question earlier about his reason for not giving us local control, he kept harping on the fact that our graduation rates were low. But he's not taking into consideration that our-- I can only give you an example of where I'm at. In Dickinson High School, 637 students were held back because of their attendance. Do you understand me? That's a problem. It wasn't based on the fact that they weren't passing their scores, not getting the class work done. It was just based on attendance. So what he did was set it up to come in and have our graduation rates be low in the district so that he had an excuse to come-- Once again, he kept harping on \$22,000 per student. He knows that's not true. It might be \$22,000 on paper. But when you break it down on what actually gets to the classroom, that's not what we're using in our public schools.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: You're right. In an urban district, there are other expenditures: security, social services. There are so many other things that go into the per-pupil expenditure that you'd have to actually dissect it to find out how much is really going into the classroom.

MS. DOWLING: But we need our schools. We were promised schools. We need them here in Jersey City.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Okay. Thank you very much.

Peter O'Reilly.

State your name and organization.

PETER O'REILLY: Sure.

Peter O'Reilly, just a parent here in Jersey City with two public school children.

Actually, I would like to talk about school funding of charter schools. As you know, it's a very hot-button topic. My issue is not with the actual school funding formula, where a lot of the discussion is about, but it's the proliferation of charter schools. In Jersey City there is actually not 7, but 11 charter schools.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Eleven.

MR. O'REILLY: In Jersey City. And over the past two years, 4 of those 11 have opened up. You have 4 new charter schools over the past two years in Jersey City. So the issue that I have is, as a parent of two public school kids who attend a charter school just a couple of blocks from here, is that I would say that their funding is very insufficient. And I would like to see legislators consider not so much to be in a rush to open up more charter schools, but to better fund the ones that currently exist.

To give you an example, as it was previously cited, the local school district spends roughly \$22,000 a year per student. Where my kids attend, that number works out to be \$12,000 a year. And I can tell you as a parent that that \$12,000 is very hard to come by in Jersey City. While my school is a public school, to be honest it feels like it is a private school in that a week can't go by where we're not doing a fund-raising activity. It seems like a very private enterprise having to be very innovative to find creative ways to raise funds for the school using -- soliciting private enterprise. Examples would be having parents commit at least 10 hours of their time to volunteer within the school serving school lunches, running bake sales, lotteries, what have you. I really want to press upon you the fact that there are excellent public schools out there that are not well-funded.

And it's very -- it puts a lot of stress on parents as well as school administrators to run those schools.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you, sir.

Is there a Frances Jackson here?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: She left.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Monique Andrews.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: They left.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: They left.

Yvonne Weaver. (no response)

How about Jeanne Daily?

J E A N N E D A L Y: Good morning.

My name is Jeanne Daly. I'm just a parent of a child in public school.

I'm just basically commenting on things I've heard from everyone else because I have no prepared speech. I have no prepared agenda. But just observations, I would say--

I'm just glad there is a conversation going on because some of the-- It seems like it is a very broad problem that is present right now, from the legislation to communication between the entities, as well as what is really needed on the ground.

My first concern when I came here was about the class size, because-- My son is in 2nd grade now. Last year, in 1st grade, there were 22 children in his class. And when you look at that-- And I just learned from another -- someone earlier that there is only allowed to be 21 children in the class. And I think what that does is -- from a teacher's point of view,

but more from a student's point of view -- they become casualties. You can't teach all the kids all their skills when you have 33 (*sic*) kids in a class. I personally feel -- and this is an example of our school -- is that our principal is useless. I mean, that may sound too forthright, but there is absolutely no accountability. You ask the principal something, and nothing happens. I would like to know what the role and function of a principal of a school is. Don't they have a job to execute? That's the problem I have. I brought up something with a gym teacher -- a sadistic gym teacher -- and nothing happened. Finally, she's -- after two or three years now she is out. I don't know how she even got the job. But when you go to the principal, and the principal has never sat in on the class-- This is a tiny school. There can't be more than 15 classrooms. And you have a gym teacher who is having Kindergarteners do 50 minutes of calisthenics. And I was the one, not the principal, who had to go look up what the requirements were for a Kindergarten or 1st gym class. The principal had no idea. She told me to do it. And when I did, I present it and nothing happens. I believe we have a very ineffective principal. And I don't know what the means are of getting rid of that person because, truthfully, that is what I think needs to happen.

One of the reasons there are so many kids in these classes is because of open enrollment. The principal allows kids from other districts into the district because of open enrollment. And you ask her about it -- "Oh, well, we have open enrollment." And meanwhile the classes are ballooning out of control, kids are falling through the cracks. And you ask her, "What are we going to do about it," and you get nothing. I suggested to her just this past September, "Look, we have a real problem with this

class size. What are we going to do about it? We don't have a teacher's assistant." I said, "Well, you know, my thought is just, off the cuff, Jersey City University has an education degree. Why don't we get one of the student teachers there to just come in and help." And she was like, "Oh, that's a brilliant idea. Why don't you call them?" I'm saying to myself, "What is the role is the principal?"

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Do you have a principal certificate? (no response)

MS. DALY: No, I don't, but I wish I did.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: You sound like a good one.

MS. DALY: No, but you know what it is? It's not that hard.

Running a--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: You know what? I don't want to cut you off, but I think you're right. And I think you ought to ask for a meeting with the superintendent about these issues. Because we have no jurisdiction as far as telling the--

MS. DALY: Right.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I really do think you should write these things down because they're very, very important. Management of the school is everything. You could have a dilapidated building, you could have teachers who are not all working at the same level, you could have kids who have big problems. If you have a good leader you'd be surprised what could be accomplished. I'm not condemning this individual, but I think these are issues that have to be brought to the central office. And that's where you're going to be able to try to solve it. Are there other parents who have the same feeling about this situation as you?

MS. DALY: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Then that's what you should do. And you should let our Committee of the -- send us a copy of that letter, and we'll follow up to make sure that you get that meeting.

MS. DALY: Okay. And just really quickly, because we're sitting here in front of the show-- Her greatest claim to fame in her couple of years at the school -- she announced to me so proudly -- was that she renovated the auditorium. Sorry, here I am blabbing.

I just wanted to go back to a different subject -- more, I guess, in your legislative area -- was about these larger schools. I believe Jersey City needs an audit, a State-run audit. Because it's my understanding that we have no control of the staffing. I know at one of the Board of Education -- they were running for the Board of Ed -- one of the ladies had said, "Twenty years ago, when I had this position--" I don't know what it was -- "There were only two of us." She goes, "Now there's 40 doing the exact same thing."

I think specifically in Jersey City there is a -- or has been. And I can just say from what people have told me, so it's definitely just hearsay versus fact -- but I know Mr. Waterman has some facts on this -- that there is a lot of nepotism that has gone on in Jersey City. I would actually--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I'm shocked. (laughter)

MS. DALY: The only thing to do, I believe, is to get an audit in Jersey City and hang the people.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I don't mean to interrupt you, but the State has control of the district. And it's just crazy that they would allow that to go on. I'm not saying that you're wrong, but I think all these

issues -- and I'm not trying to push the -- you have to put these on paper and submit them, and give us a copy of that letter, and sit with the superintendent, with your parent group -- two or three of you--

MS. DALY: I know. You're trying to squeeze me into the parent section. I was just trying to jump over to the--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I'm not trying to squeeze you into-- This is all your business. Anything that comes up here is your business. I just understand your frustration.

MS. DALY: I just have a couple other -- about the funding. Because we're in Jersey City-- And it-- There definitely needs to be--
I'm sorry, your sighing.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: You have to--

MS. DALY: All right. Thank you. I've wrapped it up.
(applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you very much.

Is there a Desreane Danuli?

D E S R E A N E D A N U L I: Good morning.

I will be super brief. I guess everyone said that, but--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We want to hear you, we just don't want to hear the same things. If you have something to say that hasn't been said before, let us know.

MS. DANULI: I got a phone call at 9:30 last night from the board telling me about this meeting. Thank God I have a flexible schedule and was able to make it. That's a little bit inadequate.

But I wanted to speak to -- and I will try to sum it up as quickly as I can -- I have a son who is special education and has gotten through the

system to the 10th grade before he got an IEP. This is a child -- special education child who has performed advanced proficient in language arts categories, but in math performed at 5.6 grade level.

With his IEP, I have simply asked for a book for trigonometry. We don't have books. It's a problem throughout the district. The principal says to me. "We don't have books." I say--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Let me hear this again. "We don't have books."

MS. DENULLI: He said, "We do not have books." That's a problem. I have a child with an IEP who I'm paying for separate tutoring, but there is no resource for him to -- for the school to be accountable to and for him to understand what he's learning. That's a problem.

In addition to the lack of books, my other concern and my desire is to see if there is a way to have the parents be able to make an election. Whether it's that they self-pay or that it's provided under their IEP -- that if the school is a failing school in the subject matter where the child needs help, where they have a learning disability, that they should be allowed to go out of that school setting for an alternative resource. Right now they said to me, "You're probably going to end up on some piece of paper in legislation because no one has ever asked us to do this." My request has gone to special education supervisor -- the supervisor of special education, the supervisor of curriculum with no answers so far. We can't have kids slipping through the cracks when, as a nation, we're 33 in the world in mathematics and science, and you have a child who is otherwise proficient but failing in this area and the school is not responding, the district is not responding. It's a problem.

And what I was told with regard to school books -- by the same math teacher -- who he failed last year, although he passed on paper with a D -- is, "Just take a picture. Get him a smart phone. We'll take a picture of the one book we have in the class for him to do his homework." This is totally unacceptable. And as a parent who is willing to pay for another setting so he can get educated in math and not get through high school barely making it -- willing to pay -- the school district has not responded to my request for me to simply have his day end early so he can go to another school, another resource to get proper education in math. I just think at this point we need to figure out some system and a timeline for getting back to parents, who have this sort of concern when their child has a special education need, before they fail.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We're going to follow up with the Commissioner's Office on that -- on their textbook policy in this city.

MS. DENULLI: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Lucy Walker.

LUCY WALKER: Lucy Walker, Englewood, New Jersey, retired teacher of 27 years, Teaneck.

Listening to the people testify today -- inequity in education is the only thing I can think of. In Englewood, it took seven years to do QSAC. They won't even share with us what score they got on QSAC. Our Superintendent still doesn't have a State-approved contract. We have apartheid education in the high school whereas on one side of the campus students have no books, on the other side of the campus they have a set of books for in-school and a set of books at home so they don't have to carry the heavy book.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Let me ask you a question. Is that because it's a charter versus--

MS. WALKER: We have school choice. They've divided our high school according to -- so that when the people from out-of-town come in they don't have to be sitting beside kids who have free and reduced lunch. We are 70 percent free and reduced lunch. Our Board of Education has decided that they are not going to follow ESEA. They say that NCLB is out-of-date. They don't have to follow that any more. But those of us who have been in education for 27 years know that Title I is attached to ESEA, not NCLB.

Now, at the meeting on the 24th of September, Commissioner Cerf said that you don't have to follow NCLB anymore. You really should speak to him about that, because there are people across this state -- and especially in Englewood -- who are taking that as gospel. 18A:10.1-4 is the law that was endorsed by Senator Cunningham, Voss, and Turner -- brought into law in 2010, protects paraprofessionals. Not only are they kept in the district because of the high number of special-needs children-- They just abolish paraprofessionals, regardless of the law -- and they won't listen to us, they say we're not Title I. They have just basically predetermined and determined that they're not -- they have an identity crisis going on.

Now, we had to beg for our -- I'm going to keep saying that word -- *apartheid* high school to be made into a focus school, trying to get the RACs in. Now, if the RACs come into Englewood, hell will freeze over. Because there is a difference in New Jersey. If you think you are a suburban school and you're better than the Abbott districts, you don't have to follow

the rules, and they don't follow the rules. They also don't follow the law. I think you all know that you're supposed to be approved by the State if you become superintendent. He's getting \$208,000 and we only have 3,100 students. Every single law-- I have written ethics violations, I have been to Commissioner Cerf. He says there is nothing wrong with this. It should have gone through. But still, what do they do with it? Nothing. Our Board of Education has absolute power, and they have none? Where is the equity in all of that.

(indiscernible) is supposed to be important. You would not believe the May 15 law about how you have to -- if you give someone a promise of employment-- Our paraprofessionals -- 31 of them -- had a promise of employment written, and they still abolished them. They brought in temp workers. Do you realize what that means in a district where everyone is mainstreamed? Do you have any idea what is happening in our district right now? They are still firing people and still hiring people, and there is no rhyme or reason. I call it *poor planning and work organization*. The Superintendent from New York doesn't know anything about New Jersey law. And I have to tell you that I think our biggest problem is that our Board Attorney is Mark Tabakin, who is in the firm of Senator Lesniak. They do whatever they want because they are protected from the Legislature. I think that if you're going to make laws you should make sure that people follow them. (applause) That law is very important. I really am very concerned about the special-needs children in our district and across New Jersey if people are going to ignore that law. That is the one law that extends itself into the classroom. When I read it I said, "A school teacher wrote this." Then I did the research and found that Joan Voss wrote it.

She's a school teacher. It's very important. We're looking for a hero in Englewood. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

Samira Ali. (no response)

Dalila Zelaya. (no response)

Mona Scott.

M O N A S C O T T: Hello, everyone.

I will be very brief. My name is Mona Scott, and I am the Lead Organizer for Newark--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Try to move over to the mike a little bit so we can hear you.

MS. SCOTT: I'm short, so--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: That's okay.

MS. SCOTT: I am the Lead Organizer for Newark for the Statewide Education Organizing Committee. But I'm not here for that today. I'm here to speak as a parent of Jersey City. I have two children in high school who are 15 and 14. They are a sophomore and a freshman.

The curriculum, at best, is horrible. Every year since my children began school, my son who is 15 has never, not one time, been able to help my daughter who is 14. They are only one year apart.

Every year they come up with a new fabulous idea to change -- whether it's part of the reading, or part of the math. The teachers-- I went to the school to help, and the teacher -- sometimes with the homework -- has to go back to the book. They are not even being properly trained on these new fabulous ideas that are a part of the curriculum.

And before it is too late for the incoming children-- My children are already in high school. They are already getting different tutoring and different help. But for the younger ones who are coming up, I beg you-- It takes at least five years to examine the curriculum to make sure it works. Why -- every single year since my children have started school -- some part of this curriculum has been changed? I do not understand what is going on and why they are using our children as guinea pigs to test out these new fabulous ideas. I will not be one of those parents who sit and say, "When I was a child this is how it worked," because I understand change must happen. I understand technology must come and that things are going to be different. But every single year? They're only one year apart and this keeps going on and keeps happening. I don't understand. Maybe you guys can shed some light on the situation.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: You think you're confused? We are too.

I agree with you. I think there are positions that are taken where local districts have to adhere to State law, and regulations, and administrative code in the Department, and then a year or two goes by and people are struggling with those old regulations, and then someone else comes in and does something entirely different. So it's not easy for the local boards, and superintendents, and administrators, and teachers, and principals to deal with that. It's a very, very severe problem because it's like working on a job and doing everything right, and then you get a new boss who comes in and says, "Well, that doesn't count. You're starting over again." Things should evolve where things should be better, and we should keep those practices that work and then go on to improve them. But it

doesn't seem to happen that way in education. I think people are well-intentioned. I will not say they are not well-intentioned. But I think their ideas sometimes don't really fit in every particular situation, because every school district is different, every kid is different. So it's very hard to homogenize these approaches to make them work in every particular setting. When we talk about Jersey City we hear that everything is not the same in Jersey City. There are schools that have various problems. Some schools are Title I, some are not. So supplemental instruction is required here and is not required in other places. There is more money being spent -- Federal money -- in one area. So you have to really look at all that. And I understand what you're saying. It's very difficult and confusing to the kids themselves. No wonder why they get discouraged. And it's very difficult to motivate them as it is.

But the visit here today was encouraging to see these beautiful young people here who were very engaged.

MS. SCOTT: But is there anything that you can do?

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Well, we can ask for more consistent policies. And I think that's something the Committee will consider and deal with the Commissioner on. That's something we're going to have to talk about.

MS. SCOTT: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We appreciate your testimony.

Florence Ibrahim.

F L O R E N C E I B R A H I M: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Hi, Florence.

MS. IBRAHIM: I want to say that my son goes here to this great school.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Florence, are you from Jersey City?

MS. IBRAHIM: Yes, I am.

I'm from Jersey City. My name is Florence Ibrahim. I also volunteer at the Family Success Center of New Jersey. It's a couple of blocks down. I am the Chairperson.

I want to thank you for coming to Jersey City. My son goes here, like I said -- P.S. 17. I just want to say something about the role of some of the staff here.

First of all, my son has been here for two years. He was transferred from P.S. 11. And when he came here, we met with the Principal, Mr. Brower. And he said to my son, "I don't want to know where you come from or what you're doing here. I just want to know that you're going to achieve while you're here." And I was there with my son. He said, "I don't want to know what happened. We're going to achieve at this school." That stuck in my head.

The Vice Principal is Ms. Critelli. I knew her when she was at Lincoln High School. She's a great woman doing a great job.

The security staff are great -- very informative and do their job very well. The guidance counselor -- I have a very good relationship with her from here. She helps my son, she gives him good advice, she gives me advice, she's up on things. Also my son -- when he came here, he came here with a couple of problems, but they're straightened out. He joined the band. And before he joined the band, on the outside a couple of years ago I

had paid for music for him -- which is the violin. He's not doing that anymore. But when he came here he found his passion in music, which is the trumpet. He was playing here today. And ever since he played that trumpet he hasn't gotten in any trouble. (applause) I want you to know that.

Not only that, this school has a lot of programs for the parents. They have a fall festival, they have a spring festival which is great.

Also, the teachers here are great -- great, the teachers. They always have a moment for you. They give up their time; they help my son and the other kids as well.

I also wanted to say -- is that when my son graduates next year from this great school that I'm looking for a good high school for Francois. It was just last night he said to me -- we were walking from my aunt's house home -- he said, "Mom, I have to go to a school that has music like 17. Liberty High School does not have any music. I can't go there. I have to go to a school that has music."

Now, what I want to say is that -- I want to know from the State that -- would you continue to bless and to help 17? This is a good school. The Principal is doing a good job and all the staff here.

And not only that, the high school he wants to go to -- and we're trying to get in that high school -- is County Prep. And it's just this year that he's decided that he wants to be an engineer. That school has a lot of programs that he's interested in. It's hard to get in. I would like to know if you could help my son to get in that school. (laughter)

I do a lot of things here at the school. I'm just starting. I just got in charge of the fund raising for the school. But at No. 11, eight years I

was a parent council president there. And it's not my first time meeting you from the State. I was at No. 11 as well, and I saw some of you.

But I just wanted to say this is a good school.

And I want to say one more thing to Sterling Waterman.

He is a Board member, but he's also a good friend. When you see him or you call him, he responds. He's not only sitting in the seat, but he's got a minute for you, and he's always willing to help. So this school is going to go on with your help. Continue to help this school. Look around, look at this beautiful auditorium. It's great. And the Principal -- they do their job -- "You wear your uniform. You wear your shirt." It's great.

Thank you so much. Continue to help 17. Thank you.

Here is my card.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Listen, you're a wonderful mother.

MS. IBRAHIM: Thank you so much.

Here is my card.

WILHELMINA HOLDER: Mr. Chair, if I may.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Would you like to come up to the microphone, please?

State your name please, and organization, if there is one.

MS. HOLDER: I'm sorry I was late. I was at a previous meeting in Newark.

My name is Wilhelmina Holder. I believe you called on me earlier.

I am the President of the Secondary Parent Council in Newark and a Founding Member of the Coalition for Effective Newark Public Schools.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Go right ahead.

MS. HOLDER: Thank you very much.

I want to say, first of all, thank you for the opportunity to be able to speak to you today about issues around parents. Unfortunately, we don't have the same experience in Newark in some of the schools as the speaker previously before me. I'd like to be able to say that all the schools are great and they're producing the kinds of outcomes that we hope for my children and now my grandchildren.

I was the former President of the PTA at West Side High School where Senator Rice is my neighbor -- the Honorable Senator Rice, who assisted us in what we needed to do to make sure that my children were -- and the children in the neighborhood were -- successful in that school. Now I'm starting out as a grandmother and finding out that much to my dismay we're taking steps backwards.

And why I'm saying that is because in Newark we have-- The number one problem is the lack of clear communication concerning what the district's goals, and aims, and objectives are, and getting that information to the parents. We want our children to be successful, we want to be part of an education reform that impacts children positively. But in order for that to occur, we have to have good intelligence or communications so that parents have the right information so they can make the informed choices, as they're entitled to make, for their children. That is not occurring.

There are some examples I'd like to site such as-- We had the standardized test results that were not given to the parents. So the parents were not able to have discussions with the children's teachers at that time. The children have moved on to another grade, as well as the teachers have moved on to other schools or perhaps other grades. And my own grandchildren were impacted by that. We just received (indiscernible) test results in September -- the beginning of September. He went from Kindergarten to 1st grade, and we had no opportunity to speak to the teacher about anything that needed to be changed to improve his academic standing. This is a district-wide problem.

And there is also a problem with the disconnect with the information that's coming down at some of the renewed schools. The parents were not involved. I can tell you that because I sat on two planning committees in the Newark school -- 13th Avenue being one of them. And the problem there was the fact that the meetings were held during the day. I am a working parent. I work for a large law firm in Morristown so I had to take personal days. Thank God I am old enough to understand you don't use your days, so now I have a lot of days that I can be here -- now they're telling me, "You have to use those days up."

So the point is the information to the parents was not given out in time. There was no building-use study, which we asked for; no impact study on what was happening in the neighborhood. Hence a lot of the special needs children's parents were left out of the equation because they get on a bus and they go elsewhere. And we had an even bigger problem with the district because the parent piece -- the communication piece -- the

parent board was not available to the principals to notify the parents because it was summer session.

So we said, "How do we inform the parents? How do we get the parents involved in making intelligent decisions for them?" If you don't get the test results back in a timely manner, if there is no discussion held with the parents and the teachers -- and that's a State problem. That's why I'm asking you. That is a State problem -- the standardized test results have not been published. Some of the parents did not get individual test results back, as well as the fact that the principals themselves did not inform the parents in terms of where we stand academically, where we're going in sharing that vision in order to engage the community.

I can tell you from experience as a mother raising three children -- I raised three girls. One was a homeless girl and she has blessed me with grandchildren. I raised another child. And I had one birth daughter. They're all college youngsters, thank God. And now I have grandchildren -- 5, 6, 7 -- all in the same range. I'm learning a lot of Spanish -- *Spanglish* -- from my 5-year-old grandson. He's picking up some bad street words. And the issue I'm having there is that, again, the school is not communicating properly with the parents because they're not sharing that vision. The vision isn't shared at the superintendent level down. It stops. And we've had meetings with the superintendent, believe me -- and with her staff. And while we meet one day with one individual, six months later we have another individual we have to meet with because there is a constant change in Newark. We have consultants all over the place and no longer employees. The chain of command gets changed as often as we change our daily clothes. So that is an issue in terms of continuity.

The one thing I'm sure all of you gentlemen and women know is, if you want success and you want community engagement, you must have continuity. We must all be in Lane A going northbound if you want success to be continuous. And that's the problem we're having not just in Newark, I'm sure. I'm sure we're having that problem in the other districts where there is a lot of change. And we don't have people on the ground who are getting the proper information. We've asked -- and we are volunteering to have information sessions. But, again, we need the data. We're not getting citywide data, we're not getting school data -- data that we share with other parents. And we also don't just criticize them.

Let me say I run, along with some other good volunteers, a very successful high school academic program in Newark. It's an SAT prep. It's free. We get kids from everywhere, including Snyder High, Jersey City. Kids come from the private schools, they come from the charter schools. We have kids now coming from Queens High School in New York and the Staten Island School of Performing Arts because it's free, and it's an SAT prep program where we send the kids to college.

So I just want you to know that if you give parents an opportunity to become truly engaged, without putting the barriers in their way, and make sure they have the information -- the standardized test scores -- and ensure that there is some follow-up with the Title I money to make sure that the parents are getting the training that the money entitles them to get -- to make sure all the components come together so that we can sit down as a community-- Because I'm not moving, I'm not leaving. So therefore other people are like me. They're not leaving. And we want to make sure that our legacy -- my grandchildren and great grandchildren that

I may or may not see -- are able to be the next senator, the next governor, the next president, the next superintendent. And we want to make sure that they're homeowners, business people, and people who can clearly articulate a command of their world.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you.

Wilhelmina, I just want to say that Newark experience is invaluable. You're very articulate about what happens.

MS. HOLDER: Well, I wanted to let you know that I am a proud graduate of Weequahic High School, Indians, orange and brown.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Not a bad place.

MS. HOLDER: My daughters are proud graduates of West Side High School Rough Riders. My late husband was a proud graduate of Newark Vocational.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Terrific. Thank you.

We're going to have one last speaker.

Gina.

G I N A H O: Hi. Thank you so much for finding me.

My name is Gina Ho. I'm a parent of a 5th grade student who is currently in the Hope class at P.S. No. 3 School.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: What district is that?

MS. HO: Jersey City.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Jersey City.

MS. HO: Located downtown -- P.S. No. 3 School -- it's a newer school, a newer facility.

Previously I was a parent council president at P.S. No. 5 School, which is also downtown, and that school was predominantly Hispanic in its composition. So I have had a lot of parent involvement and community involvement. I make a point to ask a lot of questions, and I've worked with the Board members here very closely on various committees to try and improve things. Sometimes it's within the school, sometimes it's district-wide improvements.

To answer your question: Last night at the meeting, when Chris Cerf was asked about the local control issue for operations-- President Mack actually did convey to him that verbally she was told that they had met all the requirements in the previous Administration and that they were getting local control back.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Say that again. Who said that?

MS. HO: President Mack informed Chris Cerf that they have met all the requirements previously -- prior to him becoming Commissioner -- that the paperwork was in the channel, in the pipeline. And then when the State Administration changed, it didn't get followed through with. She has, I guess, followed up on that and has just been stonewalled.

So it is very apparent to us that we should actually have that in writing. That's what President Mack and the Board members were asking Commissioner Cerf last night. He was taking a completely different stance that -- "I'm not going to give it back to you unless you've earned it." And they were having two separate conversations. And there lies a big part of the problem with what we're encountering here. Because we now have a new Superintendent, but we also have our highly skilled professional. We were informed last night that in 30 to 60 days there should be a winding

down of Ms. Coyle's position. But there hasn't been that clear-cut discussion with the Board, and with the Superintendent, and with the community to convey what her role currently is, what the Superintendent's control currently is, and what the Board members' control currently is. So everyone is running around and no one is really understanding who is responsible for decision making. And all the while the State is trying to hold onto it and not give it back.

It's a big problem. I really hope you can follow through on that. Because if that's one of the few things that you're able to do, that is critically important so we can move forward.

I also would like to ask for you to assist us in asking for full local control, because we're in a very unique situation right now. We have pretty much an entirely new Board compared to what we had four years ago. We have a brand new Superintendent. So we have shown that we have been moving in a positive direction in recent years, irrespective of the complete dysfunctionality that's going on here. (laughter)

So we are in a situation where I think the State has proven that they haven't done any better, and they haven't rectified anything, they haven't really moved us forward. It's really been the new Board and the collective gathering of the community members in recent years that has really started to move this district forward. Because as a community, what's new is we are really trying to come together, although the last process with the superintendent search has greatly divided us. But we are collectively trying to improve the district, and we're demanding that. And that's something that hasn't happened before.

Also, demographically, socio-economically, Jersey City is gentrifying, and it's changing, and we have to keep up with the pace of that. There hasn't been adequate urban planning happening, so this is why we have the situation right now where the State previously, several years ago, promised to fund the early childhood centers, and then the money was withheld. Meanwhile, our district spent an enormous amount of funds, and time, and effort, and energy in putting together the plans for those early childhood centers. And now we're hearing that the money has been reallocated to other things by the State. So we're in a situation where-- And this is a real problem. We have children coming into the district on wait lists who cannot get into our district. This is-- I can't convey to you how enormous this is in the next two to three years. This is a huge problem. State, Federally, we're obligated to educate the children. So I'm wondering what other plans are going to be put in place to deal with that, because right now that conversation isn't adequately happening.

My biggest thing is parent and community involvement. Last night at the meeting Commissioner Cerf promised me -- and I'm looking for your assistance on this, as well, to put pressure on him to follow through on this promise -- that he would allow me to put together a core group of people to work directly with the RACs. This core group -- the way I conceive it -- would actually go out to the community segments. We have many parent groups here, we have church groups, we have the NAACP, we have (indiscernible), we have all sorts of community organizations that have a lot of valuable input in how we can provide the services and support systems that these kids need. And if we don't address those things, we're never going to move this district forward. You're not going to see those test

scores increase because it can't just be done by legislators and curriculum mandates. You have to bring the community in. There has been a culture here to leave the community out. And it's been happening by the past superintendent, it's been happening by the Board members, it's been happening where that has been filtering down into the schools by principals. "Keep the parents out, keep the community out. They won't hear about all the problems we have." And that has to change.

There is gross inequality in schools. I saw some of your reactions when another lady mentioned about the textbooks. That is very real. She's not talking about just her school. I've been dealing with the current Superintendent, the new Superintendent, on this issue. In our school alone, we had a majority of students without textbooks. And even now today I think they're still waiting on some. So my child was coming home in 5th grade in the Hope program with photocopied pages -- breaching copyright laws by the publishers. The teachers were multiplying every page by 80 students just for that one piece of homework or that one piece of instruction. Multiply that by six hours of instruction across multiple schools -- most schools in the district -- you have a huge problem. Now, the reason why that occurred -- there are various reasons -- but the predominant reason was that the Board members were not acting in concert with the Administration. And that is a classic example of what we're finding has been happening. Hopefully now with new Board members, new Superintendent that will change. But that hasn't been happening here. Everyone is fighting everybody. It's all these power struggles, it's all these political agendas that are working, and the children are suffering because of it.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you.

MS. HO: We haven't had follow through.

I'm sorry, I just have a couple more quick points to make.

We haven't had follow through with tutoring programs, mentoring programs. So when I get this core group formed to go to the RAC leader and sit down and have a real conversation, I beg you to please make sure that that is -- that you're making Commissioner Cerf follow through on his promise to this community. Because if we don't have the community inputting--

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: What is the specific promise that he made?

MS. HO: That he will allow this committee to be formed to work directly with the RAC center so that we can provide the parent community input.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We will have community groups working directly with the RAC, right?

MS. HO: Sorry?

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: The community groups -- is that what you said?

MS. HO: It's the parent community committee that we're setting up.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Who is going to appoint your committee?

MS. HO: We, as a community, are going to appoint the committee. And what we're going to do is branch out and create

roundtable discussions all throughout the city so that we can collect the ideas of what we need to do.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: How much time is that going to take?

MS. HO: Well, I'm ready to move on this straight away. I've actually already, this morning, at 8:00 -- calling Commissioner Cerf's office to set this up.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: We can't expect him -- and I'm not putting pressure on you -- to keep his promise if we don't have those committees.

MS. HO: I promise you the committees will be done, will be formed. Jersey City is not going to be the one lagging behind on this, I promise you. I will make sure that that happens.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Thank you very much.

MS. HO: Please do more of these. We really appreciate your time.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I appreciated your testimony. It was very valuable.

Would anybody on the Committee like to have some closing remarks?

I think we're over with the testimony. We're done.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I just want to thank each and every one of you for coming here today to present your point of view. I

started my day very optimistic with the children. I wish I could say that I'm leaving feeling optimistic, but I am not.

When I first came here-- I told you, I've been in education a long, long time. And when I look back, I say, "How did we possibly mess up so badly?" And for me it's very hard, because I'm a very concrete person. I have to see things. I really do have to see things.

This is my first year on Education, my first year on the Joint Committee, and I am going out, and I am seeing urban schools, I'm seeing private schools, I'm seeing charter schools, I go back to my own district and see what they have. And I become more and more convinced that we have made education a very complicated issue, and it doesn't have to be so complicated. Because I think we're focusing on the wrong things.

When I go out and take a look at why I see kids so engaged -- and I'm very focused on that. "Why is this child so engaged?" And I take a look at the Kindergarten, and the pre-Kindergarten, and the 1st grade, the first thing that I notice is class size. And if we have a class size of 10 to 15 when they are young, they are engaged. If I am hearing 21 1st graders or 22, that is almost impossible today in the world that we live in. Because do you know what kids have to know? They have to know that they matter. "I matter." When you have a small class size, they know that they matter, and I can focus in so that I don't have to wait until someone is 15 years old to find out that they have a learning disability. That should have been discovered a long, long time ago.

So you know what? This is a beautiful building. I'm so glad that these children have a beautiful building. But for me, if I want education to be successful, the most important thing that we have to do is

to control that class size. Then I have to control after-school activities that are fun and educational, and then I have to focus in on summer programs which continue that learning. Because if I don't catch a child before 3rd grade -- and we've seen that, we have seen that over and over again -- I am falling further and further behind, and I am never going to catch up.

The other thing that I truly feel is that one size does not fit all. I cannot legislate one solution for all of the schools that I have and the school districts. It does belong in local control.

When I hear about testing -- and I'm hearing you loud and clear. You know what? When the test results come in-- You're right. You're home, and the personnel here is trying to create a new schedule for that child and where that child belongs. I also think that testing-- The purpose of testing should be to focus on how I could change or tweak the curriculum to help that child and not focus on, "I'm either passing or failing. I'm not good at this." We're not focusing on the right things. And when we talk about the United States and where we are educationally, can you please go take a look at why other countries are passing us by? Because their focus is not where we are focused on.

So you know what? The local groups -- that you want to meet and that you want to get together -- that is the key. And I know for us--

Listen, this is not my world. I represent the suburbs. It's not my world. And let me tell you something. They're just as upset by many of the things that are going around. When I hear the QSAC-- They're saying, "Why do I have to keep doing these reports? I have rooms full of paper and no one is looking at it." So they are just as upset. That's why the one solution doesn't fit.

We formed a 38th District Advisory -- Educational Advisory Council -- and it's growing in numbers,- where I'm listening to -- superintendents, teachers, parents, and students have the opportunity to come together and say-- And we're listening, and we are hearing their frustration. And it's almost like we have to take a step back -- be willing to take a step back and focus on what we need.

And, again, I go back to the class size-- And I have no idea what they are here, no idea at all. But I think that's key. And I think that's where we need to go.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: I'm going to conclude by saying this meeting was not only informative but a little painful. Because coming out of Essex County, out of Newark, we understand how these things -- and we think that's the only world it exists in -- these frustrations. But they're in many places, and they're not easy problems to solve, obviously. If they were, they would have been solved a long time ago. But it does bring focus to some of the major issues that we have to deal with.

The Committee will discuss many of these issues with staff and with Senator Rice, and we will carry through on those matters that we have jurisdiction over. Those that we don't -- we think that the local parents can deal with the Board and new Superintendent. Obviously we want this district to succeed. I'm sure the new Superintendent and the Board does. So we've got to come together. Forget about who has the power at this time. Let's solve some problems and get it done, no matter how we have to do it.

So we're living with a system that we're not completely happy with because it's bifurcated in terms of authority. I never heard of a board

of education historically -- now we know it exists in the last number of years -- not having the authority to make decisions about the education that they're managing. So it's troublesome. But the fact is, if that power is presently consolidated with the superintendent, that's where we have to go to solve those problems. And if it doesn't work, there's the county superintendent; if it doesn't work, there's the Commissioner and the State Board, or whatever, and the Legislature.

So we've got to learn how to adapt to this new form at the present time. That doesn't mean that local control shouldn't go back, but right now we don't have the luxury of time. We have to deal with what we have. And hopefully, through the efforts of this Committee -- making some recommendations and, hopefully, legislative changes, and applying the proper pressure -- I think in those instances where local control should be given back, it should be done; and it should be done on a fair basis, no matter what district is involved. If you compare this district that has similar problems and they're not under local -- under State control, there should be a reason, there should be an explanation. And if this district has to remain under local control -- under State control, there should be reasons, and people should understand those reasons. We shouldn't have to be fantasizing about what conspiracies there are or what agendas there are. It should be clear cut to the people who are paying the bills and living in these communities.

So I'm going to conclude by adjourning the meeting.

Thank you. (applause)

(MEETING CONCLUDED)