
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*"Testimony on virtual/blended learning with
presenters from various education organizations"*

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

DATE: December 5, 2012
11:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Connie Wagner, Co-Chair
Senator M. Teresa Ruiz
Assemblyman Ruben J. Ramos Jr.
Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly
Assemblywoman Betty Lou DeCroce



ALSO PRESENT:

Melanie M. Schulz
Executive Director

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
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ASSEMBLYWOMAN CONNIE WAGNER (Co-Chair):

Good morning, everyone.

I'd like to call the meeting to order, so let's please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance. (audience recites Pledge of Allegiance)

Good morning, everyone.

I know that those of you out there are looking up here and saying, "Wow, there's a few vacant seats." Yes, there are a few vacant seats. That's because the Budget Committee is meeting. Just to let you know, we scheduled first. (laughter) But we understand that there are some pressing problems in New Jersey that need to be handled, therefore they are meeting. But several of the Committee members will be coming in and out, and we'll be sitting here listening to the testimony today.

So this is a continuation of our hearing on online, virtual learning. And we decided to break this up into four segments. Our first segment was held way back on September 12, the warm days of early fall. And that's where we decided to define virtual learning and online learning.

I, for one, had to understand what it is. But other than defining it, our second meeting was a visit to Merit Prep and Newark Prep Charter School. And we had several people who attended that. Senator Ruiz, Senator Rice, Senator Thompson were there, along with myself. And we had an opportunity to view the learning that was taking place. And since I do have Dr. Fuller here from Newark Prep, I have to say that I did like what I did see that day. And there was genuine enthusiasm from the students and from the faculty. And it was good. But that was way back in October. And as I said to Dr. Fuller, I probably have to go back in again to see what's going on, because there are a few questions that I have and a

little bit more reading since then. So I think that Dr. Fuller today will probably be able to answer some of my questions.

And what I want people to understand is that the purpose of this meeting is to understand it and to see if legislators need to get involved or not, to see if there is a need for legislation. We know that in some states -- I'm not so sure that they have approached this in the right way. So if New Jersey is going to see how online and virtual learning can be a part of our educational program, we need to see how and if we need to be involved. Because we cannot have New Jersey make any mistakes. We're doing well. We need to continue to go forward. And I think with input from everybody we can strike a balance and see how it can be used to assist teachers and help our students. So that's the purpose of this.

This is the third part of the meeting. We have people from many organizations here to testify. And then we will be having a fourth session where people are just free to come in and give their opinions. And that will be held some time in February. And I'm sure that-- Hopefully we don't get preempted by a Budget Committee at that point. (laughter)

So we're going to begin today. My first person I'd like to call up is Dr. Richard Bozza, Executive Director of the NJASA.

Welcome.

RICHARD G. BOZZA, Ed.D.: Good morning.

Thanks for introducing me. I'm Rich Bozza. I'm the Executive Director for the New Jersey Association of School Administrators. We're a group of school leaders from the 21 counties, representing school superintendents, central offices, and other administrators. And our focus at NJASA is helping to build great schools throughout New Jersey through

support of those educational leaders, training, and sharing of best practices and information.

In 2007, our group had put together a vision statement, and we called it *New Jersey's Vision for World-Class Schools for a Global Economy*. It was a call to action at that time. We outlined eight factors that we thought were important in establishing world-class schools in New Jersey. And of those eight factors, one was about learning time to accommodate different learning rates and learning styles of children. And second was about the facilities and infrastructure to support and accommodate positive learning environments, including the advances in technologies that we all saw coming and continue to see.

Needless to say, we see technology advancing at dizzying rates. And it's important to understand, however, that there is not just one area to having effective schools for children in New Jersey, but clearly entering and taking advantage of this new digital learning environment is particularly an important one.

Another is establishing learning standards. We see a national movement in this regard, where New Jersey is involved in adopting the Common Core State Standards. And along with those standards we see new assessments that are coming, standards being assessed through technology. And we, in New Jersey, belong to PARCC, which is the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. It has about 24 states involved with it. There is another group called Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium which has another 22. And that presents a lot of challenges already, as well as opportunities to get information much more frequently -- but also interesting discussions about the kinds of tools

that will be used to be able to get access, providing bandwidth to children to be assessed. So we're looking at technology in a lot of ways.

And as we talk about accountability throughout the nation and certainly here in New Jersey -- not just from students, but from teachers, principals, and other school leaders -- we're starting to see the use of technology, and observations, and gathering data so we can start to look at things differently than we have in the past.

And I think that's all going to lead to some organizational transformation, another area that we're looking at. Because if we're going to move away from what has often been called the *factory model of education*, we need to be looking toward the future. And I will talk a little bit about that shortly.

Now, we will reexamine, this coming year -- 2013 -- our vision statement and update it. Clearly, online and blended learning will receive an even closer examination. Earlier this year -- just a scant few days after your first hearing -- NJASA held two very important events on September 19. In the morning we had the second convocation with our Commissioner, Commissioner Cerf, in which we brought superintendents from around the state to talk with him and his staff about his vision for teaching and learning in New Jersey and the role of school leaders in that. And that was the second time we had done that in nine months.

But directly in this area, in the afternoon we had a summit for introducing and talking about online and blended learning. And we invited educators from around the state that day. And we focused on a number of areas. We had partners in that presentation. K12 Incorporated, Intel,

Microsoft were partners who wanted to bring, with us, information to school leaders around the state.

And so not unlike some of your agenda, we took a look at national and international perspectives for online learning. Challenges in a number of areas -- online curriculum, assessment, professional development, funding, policy issues. We introduced, from Microsoft and Intel, some free tools that would assist schools in looking at online and blended learning. And we had a panel that focused on: How do we create educator capacity to undertake and to provide new opportunities for students?

Now we'll be building on this first opportunity to begin to talk about this with school leaders throughout the state when, in January, we will survey all school superintendents in the state about their current practices in online and blended learning, and also what they would like to see in the not-too-distant future in this area. So we think that's going to be an important step. And we are hopeful in our vision of becoming a thought leader at NJASA and providing information to schools; potentially providing access at low cost and different kinds of opportunities that we hear from our members throughout the state -- to training educators and accelerating the opportunities that are presented in what Secretary Duncan has called *personalizing education*. So we're going to look at that and try to be of service to our school districts, potentially saving them money and being able to quantify districts together, if we can, for services that they would choose to select.

And so whether these be opportunities for students to take credit recovery, or start new courses, or get tutoring, or explore areas that they may not have available to them now, we will learn from our

superintendents what their needs are. We will try to provide the opportunities to them, as our role is, again, providing great training and opportunities for the leaders and the students themselves.

A significant factor in January for us as well is, we will be conducting, on the last day of January and the first of February, for the 18th year, a technology conference that we call TECHSPO. For nearly two decades NJASA has been bringing together incredible keynote speakers, as well as practitioners in the schools, sharing with others what they are doing with technology, from administrative applications to instruction. And so we had nearly 1,000 people attend that conference last year. And so people recognize that this is a place to be to learn about services, about ideas from there -- presenters from-- And we require that our presenters be people in classrooms and schools in New Jersey so that they can share that information. And as you can see from the attendance, we get an incredible, incredible response to that.

Another area that we are seeking to work with in trying to provide education to members is, we've been working with the New Jersey School Boards Association and with the Education Information Resource Center to release, hopefully in the next few months, opportunities for staff training with regard to online opportunities for training for harassment, intimidation, and bullying. It's certainly been a very key piece. And we feel as though there is a whole category of folks who can be reached, particularly those folks who are in support positions -- the bus drivers, the secretaries, the cafeteria workers -- to learn just on their own time. And so we're trying to, again, lead by example -- and certainly there are other providers who do this -- but to respond to our members' needs, to give them opportunities at

very low cost. And I'm pleased to say we're working with other associations on that.

And just this past month Secretary Duncan outlined areas of the National Technology for learning Plan. And as he's captured it -- and in my written testimony you can read the five points that he's placed there -- but certainly that we are at a critical place in transitioning from what has been a print media to a digital learning environment. And clearly this is occurring. And much of what he talks about is much that we're speaking about and that you're interested in as well.

And I'll just close my oral presentation with regard to a couple of points. We know that education must -- and it will -- become increasingly focused on measurement of student progress and outcomes, not just how much time they spend in the class. And I know you've heard this before, but we say that if you're focusing on seat time, you're focusing on the wrong part of the body. We want to get to our kids' heads and what they know and what they can do, and not have the traditional system hold them back. And we see online and blended learning, particularly, providing that opportunity.

At last year's TECHSPO conference, I had the opportunity to talk at length with one of our frequent presenters. His name is Ian Jukes. And we talked about how kids are engaged and motivated with regard to technology. Now, if any of you yourselves, or certainly your children, or in my case my grandchildren-- They're digital natives. They just pick up the computer and do things. "How did you do that?" But you see how engaged they are.

Now, when we talk about gaming, one of the things Mr. Jukes told me was that part of the reason that it is so engaging is because the participants are asked to make a decision every second-and-a-half to two seconds, and there is a consequence every seven seconds. And they are engaged. And obviously the technology can adjust to their level of competencies to keep them engaged.

And so many times we've seen this. I can remember as a school superintendent many years ago when technology first came with regard to the Internet -- where a teacher in a social studies program in 6th grade was having a lesson where the children would look for information about what the definition of beauty was in different cultures. And at one point, one of the students, when I was in the room -- and this goes back many years -- said, "Hey, check this out. You have to see this." And as I said to the teacher, "I never heard the students say that when you were lecturing. That never happened."

And so we have students, now, who are digital learners. They actually process information differently than I did. And I've given you some resources there, again from Mr. Jukes, about how that happens, how they process images so quickly when the brain is geared to process images 60,000 times faster than print, and how they'll read pages differently than you or I may. And so we have digital learners who are coming in. And we can't continue to try to give them an education for our past, but we need to look to the future. And in that regard I think it's particularly important, to use a metaphor -- and it's a sports metaphor -- and that's the football quarterback. The quarterback doesn't throw the ball to the person where he is, he throws the ball to where he believes he will be to catch it and move

down the field. In the same way, we have to use all of our intellectual abilities and experience, and working together, to try to figure out: Where do we need to be down the line? But clearly the school pattern is changing, and we can't let some of the traditions of the past or even some of the contractual agreements that we have with our educators, that focus more on the structure of their time than on the opportunities for kids-- To make those differences happen.

So as I think you can tell from my comments, we're not only excited about this, but we want to be active in participation in that. I think issues that the Legislature will have to look at particularly, in very difficult times, are: How do we find the finances and resources to do this not only for what comes into the classroom, but also for the infrastructure in terms of the buildings and places where this occurs?

So with that I'll end my comments. And I look forward to answering any of your questions or hearing your reactions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you very much for your testimony.

I just have a question with regard to the survey. Will this be the first time that it's done? And will it be mandatory?

DR. BOZZA: The survey -- it will be the first time that we've done this type of survey with regard to technology other than soliciting opportunities for presenting at our conference. Now we're going to focus strictly on online and blended learning.

It is not a mandatory survey. It is one in which we provide, to the school superintendents who are elective members-- They choose to join our Association. It's not that they're required to join it. We have had

conversations with Commissioner Cerf and his Director of Innovation who is focusing on technology. In fact, he was one of our speakers at our online and blended learning summit. And so we will look to cooperate. That in fact, we have conducted a survey on behalf of the Commissioner for two years now with regard to superintendents' perceptions about the Department of Education. So we're open to whatever opportunities are presented to us.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I guess where I'm coming from is, I'd like to see as much data as possible, because I'm not so sure what's happening in this district, that district. And it would be nice if we could get everybody's input so that we do know what we have and what we're doing. So see if you can work on that.

DR. BOZZA: We will certainly work on that. We typically get a good response, and we'd be happy to share that information with you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: And you mentioned the conference. Where is it?

DR. BOZZA: We hold it at Bally's, in Atlantic City. And as I said, there are not a whole lot of places that you're going to get 1,000 people in. But that works very well for us. We've been there for a very long time. We outgrew our initial location in Long Branch many years ago, and so now we're able to continue to work down there.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Well, I thank you for holding it in Atlantic City, because we could do Atlantic City. That would very good for everybody. (laughter)

Thank you very much.

Anybody else?

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Assemblyman Ramos.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Thank you for your testimony this morning.

I just have a question regarding-- Have you discussed with the members at all -- feedback at all regarding infrastructure and facilities to try and bring these technological programs into place?

DR. BOZZA: Yes, and I'll tell you what most of that conversation is focusing on. And we've had individuals from the Department of Education who are working with the PARCC Consortium for Assessment. There's great concern about having the bandwidth as well as the tools, the instruments, the equipment to be able to complete these assessments. Because these are coming in 2014, and we will have students being assessed online. And the conversation is going on nationally with both of these consortia about what's needed. And we see from initial reactions that there is going to be a considerable amount of bandwidth that's going to need to be provided; and a lot of conversation around what kinds of instruments. Will you be able to use a tablet? What size does it have to be? Because we're now talking about standardizing the kinds of things that happen in the testing to make sure that we have comparable results. But that's where our conversation has most been as of late.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: As a follow-up question-- Because I know in the state of Florida they've gone to a lot of their state assessments being done online. And there have been some logistical issues in dealing with that. So if we're going to go that way with assessments in New Jersey,

I think there are definitely logistical questions that we have to ask ourselves in terms of it being possible.

DR. BOZZA: I think you're absolutely right. And that's why I said earlier that I think the role here with regard to providing resources from the State to local school districts-- This is an area that will become increasingly important.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Maybe you have 400 4th graders in a school but only 200 computers in the school, potentially. How is that going to work sometimes? So there's a question we have to ask ourselves. While it's all fine and dandy on paper a lot of times, logistics always get in the way. And until that gets ironed out-- I'm sure your members have a lot of input with that.

DR. BOZZA: I would encourage you, as we do, to follow the work -- because it most specifically relates to New Jersey -- of the PARCC Consortium. Because the Technology Director here for the State Department of Education is voicing the many concerns that we're hearing -- as you have heard, I'm sure -- throughout the state with regard to how we can possibly get this done. Where are the resources? How much money do we have to put into it to get there? What does that mean for our budgets and the tightness that we have with it already?

So there are many open questions, as you indicate very clearly -- that we're waiting for direction from the Federal government through this consortium of the 24 states. And there are similar questions in the other consortium of 22 states because this is impacting on almost every student in America. And it's been a requirement that we've all accepted, along with the Race to the Top dollars.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Correct. But I think it's vital -- to go back to the Consortium. How much input are you guys giving to the Consortium to come up with those standards? Because you guys are the reality on the ground as the superintendents, the principals, the classroom teachers. And a lot of these guys are three, four, fifth removed from the situation. And they're sitting in a room, and they're putting a plan together, and they're not dealing with the reality of what superintendents are dealing with, principals are dealing with, the classroom teachers are dealing with. And that's what-- Your input is vital to that process for them. So how is that interface going on?

DR. BOZZA: We have been participating with representatives from the Department of Education. I have attended several meetings of the PARCC Consortium when they organize people from around the country. But we do have representatives from the schools who are bringing forth. to those meetings and to our Department of Education, the viewpoints that we're expressing today about resources and how we can get this done. And I can tell you, because we've just had two people from the Department who are very focal in this area -- Mary Jane Kurabinski, who is in the Department looking at the PARCC assessments; and Larry Cocco, who is the technology person. And I can tell you that Larry understands it. He hears it from us, and he is lobbying on behalf of what New Jersey educators are saying with regard to the implementation issues. Because while there are certainly opportunities, there are significant hurdles that have to be overcome.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you, Assemblyman.

You know, I've been out of the classroom for five years. You're in it so you bring that perspective, and I appreciate that.

Anybody else, questions? (no response)

Thank you very much.

DR. BOZZA: Thank you.

And I extend to all of you the opportunity to attend our conference. And if you have any interest, please let me know.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Yes, I'm going to do Atlantic City. (laughter)

DR. BOZZA: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Next we have the NJEA, Marie Blistan.

How do I pronounce your name?

M A R I E E. B L I S T A N: That's okay. It's Blistan. (indicating pronunciation)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Blistan. (indicating pronunciation) And you're Secretary-Treasurer.

We're anxious to hear from you.

MS. BLISTAN: Thank you.

Before I give a little bit more information about myself, with me today I have two colleagues. I have Marguerite Schroeder, who is a UniServ field rep who has been our resident expert on studying charter schools, virtual charter schools. And, in fact, she chairs our task force committee on that area. And on the other side of me is Sean Hadley, who is an Associate Director in our Government Relations Division.

I am Marie Blistan. I am the Secretary-Treasurer for the New Jersey Education Association, and I'm also a classroom teacher. I've taught for well over 30 years in this state. I wound up, over that 30 years, teaching all ages, K-12 and then into adults. I've taught all ability levels. But I spent the majority of my time with what I call my *passion*, and that's dealing and working with kids who are receiving special education services. So we are very grateful to have this opportunity to come here before the task force and talk about this topic. And we are also very pleased and grateful that you're giving the due time that is going to be needed to study and review this area, because the decisions that come from this Committee are going to have a tremendous impact on public education in this state.

When we talk about virtual charter schools, there seem to be two major issues at stake. One is, of course, the legal issues and whether they are even, with virtuals, permissible under the New Jersey Charter School statute. And then the second issue is whether they are effective and actually deliver what they claim to deliver, and is it worth experimenting with the education of our children in this state.

I won't spend a whole lot of time on the legalities of it. I will tell you, which I think you probably already know, NJEA has, in fact, filed a lawsuit in this state regarding the approval of the two so-called *blended* charter schools in Newark on the grounds that they were in no way authorized for virtual or for the blended schools. We know that the courts are going to decide on that issue. But we also know that it is likely, very likely, to fall on legislators to make the decision whether to formally authorize virtual charters in this state. It's your right, and it's a huge

responsibility that you carry to make the right decision. And we trust that you will keep children at the center of that decision.

What we're seeing is that if you do not, the Department of Education in this state is very likely to make that decision for you. It has moved quickly and aggressively to pursue an agenda of putting virtual charter schools in this state despite significant questions that we have regarding the legality and, again, the effectiveness of those schools.

Saying that, I also want to be very clear that NJEA has been a long-time supporter of using technology in education. And I, myself, am a teacher who also supports it. Over that long career I've had, I've seen tremendous changes and use in the growth of technology in the classroom. We have access to resources today in our classrooms that we certainly didn't have when I first started.

We are not opposed to online learning as a supplement to existing in-person education programs. As you no doubt know, we have more than 100 schools right now in our state that are utilizing some sort of online learning through the New Jersey Virtual School. We have students participating in high schools and middle schools who are able to take classes that supplement their school's curriculum, and they can even use the online options for remediation or credit completion work.

But that is a far cry from the vision that our virtual charter schools proponents and advocates have been putting in place in front of us -- where they see primarily the instruction, and in some cases solely, given through online vehicles. You can already see that just here in Newark where we have two operators who have opened what they are calling, and we call, so-called *blended* schools. But in reality, 100 percent of the Core

Content Curriculum Standards is being given to students through an online vehicle. Some of the students are not even going to have to report to that place to get it. We have significant concerns, as you can well imagine, about those kinds of virtual schools and about the ability of them to be able to provide a thorough and efficient education.

I mentioned earlier that I have seen a lot of change in education over my 30 years. But through it all there are a number of things that remain constant. And one of the single most important elements of a successful education system for a child hasn't changed since the first day that I stepped foot in a classroom as a child. And that is that a good quality teacher is the one who makes the difference in that learning. I don't think anyone here would disagree with that. There has been strong and consistent research all along showing that -- that the single most important in-school factor affecting student success is that quality teacher. And although there are other factors that contribute to any student's learning, we know that the role of the teacher is incredibly important. And NJEA has been long-standing on that tenant -- that good quality teachers are needed in every classroom.

And I will also say that for whatever disagreements we've had with the current Administration and the Department of Education, one area of common ground has been that quality teaching, in fact, makes the difference. So I can tell you that we are quite dismayed to see some people in the Department of Education pursuing an agenda under the guise of virtual charter schools or blended schools which completely ignores the central role that we as teachers provide in those classrooms.

There are so many things, ladies and gentlemen, that a computer screen just can't do. A computer screen cannot tell if the child is angry, upset, frustrated, bored, or even just hungry. A computer screen cannot tell whether a student is upset, needs someone to talk to, whether the child needs crisis intervention services, whether a child just needs an ear -- for somebody to listen to. And these computer screens certainly can't tell if a wrong answer is simply due to a miscalculation or completely misunderstanding the concept.

The things that I just talked about are not just extras that we provide as teachers. They're not just extras, they're not just niceties, they're a critical component to the learning situation, to the diagnosing and remediation that we do constantly. We talk about seconds, seconds, seconds. Within seconds I learn, interacting with a child, whether I need to change course, add information, or just again go a completely different way to go back into the understanding of the concept. But all of that is missing in virtual schools, whether it's fully or whether it's in these so-called *blended* situations where students rarely, if ever, interact face-to-face with teachers and adults who are supposed to be teaching them.

I'm also going to tell you that teaching is not like tax preparation where we take information, fill it in on the lines, and then the computer spits out the program, and it's all done. And learning is not a video game where students sit down and can be successful simply by putting in on-screen time and completing those tasks, and then going to the next level. It is fundamentally a human interaction where a teacher and student work together to bring that concept to life in that student's mind, have that student apply it, and then connect it to the next level of learning.

If virtual schools could do all that, the results would show it. But as you will see in information that we're giving to you, over and over in every single state those results do not pan out. The simple fact is that virtual schools just don't measure up to the level of traditional schools where the teacher-student relationship is central.

A comprehensive study of the largest virtual school operator, K12 Inc. -- which, by the way, and you probably already know -- is a for-profit company, trades on the New York Stock Exchange -- shows just how badly those schools lag. Despite serving -- and this is important -- a less-diverse and more-affluent student population, K12 schools have lower test scores, lower graduation rates, and they do not make the AYP as compared to traditional schools -- the AYP connected to No Child Left Behind. We have shared that research with you along with some other studies that will back that up. And I urge you to please take a look at that work.

The studies, I found myself, were quite eye-opening. The difference in performance between virtual schools and the real schools is not small, and it makes me wonder that if parents really know what those statistics were, would they even consider enrolling their child into those systems.

But on the other hand, it is quite easy to understand why some adults would advocate for virtual schools. At the same time that they were achieving very poor academic results, K12 has achieved very impressive financial gains. In fact, in a statement to investors last May, the company announced that it seeks, and I quote, "To increase profitability in Fiscal Year 2013 by implementing as much as \$20 million in cost savings." It is also why that same company -- and that is in that research we gave to you --

spent more than \$21 million on advertising in the first eight months of this year alone. More students means more profits in the form of more taxpayer funding.

And while the benefit to investors is clear -- the benefit of that aggressive pursuit of profits -- it's far from clear how those in those already struggling schools will benefit from that company's determination to cut costs and splurge on advertising in order to provide more profit to investors. If our purpose here is to figure out how to do education on the cheap without regard for any outcomes, then virtual charter schools deserve attention. They do spend less than traditional schools, and they tend to be very profitable for their operators. Unfortunately, for the students in those schools, their academic results appear to reflect the focus on profit over students.

You and I know that New Jersey has worked very, very hard over these many years to have the best schools. We have invested in education and we have invested in our children's future, and it has paid off. Other states like Florida have taken a completely different approach. They have looked to cut costs without regard for the consequences and have embraced virtual education. And that shows up in their academic results as well.

I don't want New Jersey to compete with Florida or any other state in an educational race to the bottom. I want us to continue what I believe you will also do, and that is to keep children first, to invest in our children's education, and to keep value in what our teachers will serve in that student-teacher relationship in our public schools. I assure you that we

can and will innovate without turning our back on what we know works best.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you, Marie, for that testimony.

I'd like to just ask you to summarize, as quickly as you can: Where do you see the place for online learning in education? What's the place for it?

MS. BLISTAN: Well, we have online learning right now through our Monmouth County services, where we work through and with our public school systems -- where we offer supplemental courses, and we offer access for remedial and credit-completion work.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So when Dr. Bozza testified before, do you think a survey would be important so that we could know what we have and what we don't have? Because I'm not-- Do you know what we have in the State of New Jersey, because I don't -- what schools are doing it, what schools are not doing it, how they are doing it?

MS. BLISTAN: Well, we know our schools are attached with our online learning. And surveys, of course, are always important. It's always, of course, important to know what the questions are on those surveys and how they're worded.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Exactly.

You talked about-- You've given us material to read in regard to other states.

MS. BLISTAN: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Can you tell me what's happening in other states?

MS. BLISTAN: I made mention about that computer screen and about referring a child to crisis intervention services. And again I'm going to remind you that my background has been spent primarily with kids who needed all kinds of services.

And there were two states -- in fact, in the one study that we handed to you -- that showed that the online -- two states, Ohio and Arkansas, if I'm not mistaken -- they didn't spend a dime on those types of services. You see, that's not what they provide, that's not what they're looking for. That's a problem; that's a huge, huge problem.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: You know, we talk about giving parents' choice in education. Why shouldn't online options be a part of their choice?

MS. BLISTAN: Well, we do provide that online instruction right now as an option, as I just said, for the remedial course work, credit completion, or as a supplement to the instruction going on. And remember, we have interdistrict school choice now in this state. We do have our charter schools, we have vocational schools. And even within our public schools across the state we have options right inside where we have certain-- Certain schools have adopted academies. You know what I'm talking about.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: There is that problem of cheating. I happened to read in the *Record* just yesterday about technology. And this was public schools. And they have the 45-degree rule. The laptops have to be opened to a certain degree so that they can check to see

what the students are doing. What are your concerns in regard to online learning and cheating?

MS. BLISTAN: Well, trying to keep them in check with cheating -- they answered that question themselves -- it is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Again, one of the studies that we gave to you from Maine cites a statistic that happened in Colorado, where the CEO of that company actually came right out and said, "We could do little to nothing to prevent cheating."

Here is what I'm going to say to you: While we work always to prevent cheating inside of our classrooms, our main thrust is teaching and learning. And again, that comes down to that interaction with the student and with the teacher, and building a trust relationship.

My kids in my classrooms had trouble learning in traditional ways. I was trained to offer alternate ways to address them. But I had a trust relationship that I built with them so that my students felt very comfortable when they were able to come to me and say, "I don't understand this," or whatever the problem was. If they couldn't actually verbalize it -- and I did have students there -- I had gotten to know that child through that relationship so that I could do the intervention.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: One more tough question: While I did talk to some of the students -- they may have felt unsafe in a previous school, whether it be bullying through online, or bullying in the classroom, or just did not feel safe -- so now is in another setting. Why not give them the option of virtual schooling?

MS. BLISTAN: Well, you know, every child deserves a safe and secure environment ever single day. And while I can understand that

we have these bullying problems here and there, we also have put into place some very aggressive actions so that that is stopped. We need to address that problem right then and there. And removing that child out of that system for any kind of long length of time-- That does not get to the root of bullying. We have to address that problem right there.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: With the use of technology in the classroom, are teachers having the opportunity to be trained in technology? Has there been enough incentive, or financial incentive, or training programs to train teachers on how to use technology in the classroom?

MS. BLISTAN: From the State?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Yes.

MS. BLISTAN: I don't know that we're getting a lot of support there from the State in anything. (laughter)

The colleges have turned-- We're all using technology. All of us are using it, and so we have received some training on the appropriate use of technology. And that is to use it as a resource. I never used any one textbook to educate a child. If we're just educating children on information, that's not what we do as teachers. We educate a child comprehensively, fully, to become active, engaged citizens. And that does not happen simply working on a computer screen.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Can you comment on socialization? Because I hate-- You know, listen, I'm the older generation. I recognize that. But sometimes I talk to young people and I want to say, "Goodness, gracious. Didn't anybody teach you any manners or socialization skills? Can you look at me? Can you talk? Can you speak? I

know what your grade point average is but come on.” Can you comment on socialization?

MS. BLISTAN: Absolutely. And again, when you talk about removing students for any length of time out of any kind of environment -- that’s the number one concern, and what can we do to make sure that we keep that connection with students. And that is why we put students into our environment. That socialization aspect -- that’s what our society is based on. We are the greatest country in the world because of the public education and the investment that we put into that -- that we would train and educate all of our students, all of our citizens to the best that we could on an equal basis so that everyone had a fair opportunity. For that to occur, for society to continue and progress, we need to be able to work with each other in a collaborative nature. And we spend most of our waking hours in those school buildings with our kids. We are the conduits of that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you.

Now I am going to turn it over to the Committee.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Thank you.

It was very interesting listening to everything you had to say. And I want to say that I think it’s very important -- the interaction of a teacher with a child. I don’t see any other way than that.

A few questions that I did have-- I remember Assemblyman Wolfe, in past discussions, talking about the virtual schools in Monmouth, that they were for the purpose of students who had quit high school and they were going back for their diploma, and they were doing it through the virtual school. How do you see that? I mean, what’s your opinion on that part of the virtual school system?

MS. BLISTAN: Do you want to take this, Marguerite?

MARGUERITE SCHROEDER: I have, I would say, an intimate knowledge of the Monmouth-Ocean Ed Services Commission.

I'm sorry, I'm Marguerite Schroeder, NJEA. I think Marie has introduced me.

Going to your question: The program is actually bifurcated in nature. The program that the Monmouth-Ocean Ed Services Commission runs -- the New Jersey Virtual School -- is for, as you say, promotion, remediation, and those items. We've had a relationship with them in terms of looking at the program that they have developed. And there are, as I understand it, somewhere between 100 and 200 places where they have used that program.

One of the things I know about that program is that they use New Jersey's certificated staff who have passed criminal background checks, who have extraordinarily standardized and scrutinized backgrounds. We know and we support the idea of, again, remediation, promotion, credit recovery. What we also know is that they are not a for-profit agency, and therein lies one of the biggest items.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: I understand.

MS. SCHROEDER: That is something that must be scrutinized. And as I've always said, in studying all of these items since 2003, one of our major concerns is in the for-profit entities. Our certificated staff, the quality of education that is provided-- Who is on the sending side of the computer, who is on the receiving side of the computer in some of the examples that we know in blended learning that are around.

What we know is that there are things called *academic coaches* that supervise students. Monmouth-Ocean Ed Services Commission and New Jersey Virtual School do not do that. They use certificated staff as opposed to just coaches who have possibly not even an education degree.

And I always say that the devil is in the details in all of these things, and that's one of the reasons that we thank you very much for studying all of this very carefully.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Thank you.

Another question: When you talked about the blended schools in Newark, can you elaborate on that a little bit for me to explain it?

MS. BLISTAN: Well, I will start out, and then I'm going to turn to Marguerite because know I she has -- as I said, she's the chair of the committee studying it. I do know that they put an application in. It said 50 percent online and 50 percent in person. And then when we looked further, we found that -- and I think I mentioned this -- 100 percent of the Core Content Curriculum Standards was being shown to students -- and I say *shown* because I don't use that word *teach* lightly -- was being shown to students through that online program.

Marguerite, again.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: What grades-- You know, importantly in the blended schools in Newark, what grades are they talking about? All the way through?

MS. SCHROEDER: My understanding is that it's all the way through.

What I can tell you, in looking through the applications-- The applications themselves say 50 percent online and 50 percent face-to-face.

My understanding is that that is not necessarily what is occurring, that there is the involvement of academic coaches, that even phys ed has an online approach as opposed to -- well, just what it says -- a physical education component. I also understand that in one of the blended learnings, physical education is actually offered at the Y and that students have to go down to the Y to get that course.

And again, the blendeds were also approved under what the Commissioner thought and the Department of Education thought was allowed under the charter law, and it clearly is not. That is one of the biggest problems that we have with all of this. One is that there is no statutory authority to, in fact, allow for this. And the second is, once again, in the certification component. We know in blended learning, many academic coaches, as I said before, are used.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DeCROCE: Thank you.

Again, I'm going to say that I truly understand, and believe, and will never change my mind as to the need of teachers in person with the students. So thank you.

MS. BLISTAN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I always want to go back to the for-profit -- mention the for-profit again. What is their cost-per-pupil average for the for-profit schools? Do we know this? Because I can understand the brick and mortar buildings, obviously. If you're paying for the brick and mortar they're going to have a higher cost. But in this

situation we're not dealing with brick and mortar, or as big a brick and mortar.

MS. BLISTAN: And I testified that it is definitely going to be less expensive. And you will see that in your paperwork. But you're also going to see that it's very difficult in these for-profit agencies to find out exactly what the true cost is because the profit is interspersed in their reports.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: In their annual reports.

MS. BLISTAN: Oh, absolutely. And there are all kinds of other contributions. They're also going to show, when you talk about these-- You just have to look over here in Pennsylvania at what happened. They went, just recently, and invaded two of the schools. One of them was a CEO of a virtual charter school where there was improper use of funds. In another Pennsylvania school they found that the money had actually been used for restaurants and for cash purposes, and that they were charging for students who were not receiving the services.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I guess let's take it from the investor. I want to invest in a virtual charter school. Where do I get-- I guess the question is: Where do I get the return on my investment? Because they're not really producing a product. If I invest in a company -- Apple, Microsoft -- they're producing a product that I'm investing in. And I can easily track that product by their sales margins, and through their quarters, and all those types of things. Where, as an investor, do I track this, is my question?

SEAN HADLEY: If I may, Madam Chairwoman -- Sean Hadley, again, with NJEA, Government Relations.

One of the things that we see here, Assemblyman, is that the breakage in the per-pupil amount -- they're collecting the per-pupil amount per student, especially in a state like Florida where they're doing an investigation. They're getting the return because the same amount is going to the schools per student. So they get a chance to just cash it in.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: So they're getting the 100 percent amount of what it would be in the regular public schools.

MR. HADLEY: Yes. In many of the states they have not addressed that issue in particular. And what we found in Florida is that the incentive is to cheat. And they have a big scandal right now. Florida just opened up an investigation into one of the K12 schools where they said, "Wait a minute. You have all these students here, but you haven't actually taught these students. They're on a list, and you're collecting the money for it. Show us how you actually taught these students." And that, again, comes to the issue of -- like was mentioned earlier -- cheating. How do you keep track of students who are online? Are they really attending? And they found this big scandal in Florida -- again, Florida is still investigating -- where if you're an investor it's, kind of, a great investment. You get a chance to collect the per-pupil amount and then maybe not have actually taught the students. So there is an opportunity there to make money.

And, look, it's the wild west. And I think that's why we're seeing a lot of attraction for unscrupulous practices here. Because there is such a big pot of money associated with it. There are billions of dollars spent on education. So I think that's why you see the return.

And if you want to look at their financial reports, they're available. Their ticker symbol is LRN on the Stock Exchange. (laughter)

Again, it's very strange to look at an educational company and go to financial reports to find out more information about their strategies. So it's there available, including their compensation.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Would it show in their report that, as an investor, the money I invest in the company is going toward any materials? Or is it just the taxpayer portion that is going through the school and coming back to the investor?

MR. HADLEY: The taxpayer part is the profit. That's their profit.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Thank you.

MR. HADLEY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Assemblyman Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Thank you, Chairwoman.

Most of the points have been hit on. And I had my concerns last time in reference to cheating. How do you prevent that? I don't think you can prevent it. And unfortunately I think probably the wrong students and families will have the opportunity to cheat -- than the ones who actually need the help -- the coaches who are not certified teachers.

One of the main things is the socialization. Being a classroom teacher before, there are certain things you just can't do online -- everything from, as the Chairwoman said -- just from etiquette to dressing. If you roll over in the morning and you have pajamas on, and you get in bed, how are we preparing them for society? And I'm just curious to see what kind of numbers there are when you talk about graduation rates. What colleges are they going to? Are they going to college.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Good question.

MS. SCHROEDER: May I answer that?

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Yes. Can you answer that?

MS. SCHROEDER: Yes. Actually, we have given you three great documents which really-- And I'm hoping that you really take the time to study this.

Primarily the first document, which was put together by the Government Relations Division in the Maine Education Association-- And the bottom line very simply is that they go into great detail and really do answer, in detail, all of the questions that you may have.

What I can tell you is that in certain cases-- And my understanding is, in fact, in one of the blendeds here in Newark, you can, in fact, earn credit -- to not ever have to show up at that location at all. You may have to come in possibly for a test or something like that, but the primary education is done at home.

The question becomes: I'm sitting at home in front of my computer. Is it Marguerite Schroeder in front of that computer, or is it somebody taking Marguerite Schroeder's place in front of that computer?

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Yes.

MS. SCHROEDER: What is the accountability?

I also -- and I have to take this opportunity to say this because, again, having studied all of this since 2003, I think there is this grand misperception that NJEA is somehow standing in the line of what -- of blendeds, and virtuals, and all of those things. And in certain cases, what we do know is that these are programs that we already offer and have offered. We have incorporated technology into the classroom. There are enormous programs. I sometimes listen to this testimony and say, "I don't

think people have ever gone into one of our public classrooms at all to see exactly what is going on.” I’m a public educator. I’ve taught for 29 years, now fully employed at NJEA. And I can tell you that I used technology in my music programs to actually craft out music. But I’m a certificated staff member. There are accountability standards.

Also, the very curious thing is that we are tightening up the regulations on every single thing that needs to be done in the traditional public schools and yet going to the wild west in our charters and our virtuals. We are deregulating those things. When I’m looking at what is possibly coming down the pike with deregulating some of the standards for our public charter school teachers, I’m appalled, quite frankly.

So why is it we’re strengthening and tightening up all the regulations for our public schools and yet loosening them up for these other entities? And our virtuals -- we have document, after document, after document that proves that, in fact, virtuals do not deliver the same quality, the same standards. They’re drop out rate’s double what traditional public schools have in terms of drop out rates. And, again, we’ve provided all of those documents for you.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Do you have any numbers on college placement from virtual schools or online learning?

MS. SCHROEDER: We do. And I will be very honest with you. I would have to look into the documents myself, but they are there.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Okay. And obviously I have concern -- and this was a concern before when we had hearings -- is the physical education aspect. I mean, you look at a society now where our children are dealing with obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, you name

it, everything possible. The physical process of walking up and down a flight of stairs every 40 minutes or so -- how important that is; our playground time. Those things, I think, we definitely have to keep in mind when we look at those things.

Now, the one area that I did support before is the recovery programs. I mean, I come from a district in Paterson, where he teaches, and our drop-out rate is astronomical. I think Latino and black boys are close to 50 percent drop-out. So, I mean, I'm all for any type of plan -- be it through, unfortunately, incarceration or second opportunities through job planning -- that these young men have an opportunity to go online, under supervision, under certified staff, to get a high school diploma. I'm for that and I support that.

But on the end-- And the question is -- and I'm currently-- And I'm going to have to excuse myself -- in a hearing now for the RFP out for privatization of the lottery system. Do we want to privatize the lives of our children? And is there a price tag of saving money under so many cash-strapped districts like the Patersons, the Newarks, the Jersey Cities? Are we going to look for the easy way out financially that is going to save taxpayers' money? They will pay for it later on. And I continually say that. If we don't make that investment into our children, into our buildings, into our things, it may be a quick fix for a cap on taxes, but in the long run we will pay for it, like you said, with the astronomical drop-out rates. Where are these kids going? What are they doing? Unfortunately they're getting in trouble. We look at our numbers now with the gun violence and other things. These are the drop outs, these are the kids who unfortunately are part of special education sometimes who have not been able to socialize in a

comprehensive setting or any type of setting. So there are alternate routes. I think that we can work with them, under certified staff. That can work. And I just don't think there is a dollar amount.

So I just wanted to make that statement.

Chairwoman, I just got a text. I want to hear from some of the business owners who are here, but I'm going to have to excuse myself and head back to another hearing.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I have a follow-up question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I just want to follow up because I just got the information that you provided.

And it's in regard to other states and their success ratio of graduating on time. And according to this -- and this report was done by the Maine Education Association, Government Relations Department -- Colorado Virtual Academy, 12 percent graduating on time; and Colorado public schools, 72 percent. In Minnesota, the virtual schools are at 25 percent senior drop-out rate, whereas the public schools have a 3 percent drop-out rate. So that's just some of the facts that are out there.

But just, in my mind, to summarize, it's not the online learning that you're opposed to. And I gather that if a child is home ill and has a disease that prohibits the child from getting into school, you would say, "Okay. This child has to be taught online." Are you okay with that or no?

MS. BLISTAN: No, I would not say that. What I would say is it should be used as a resource, just like I would use in my classroom. But having worked -- especially with my kids in the special education

population where there were some kinds who were not able to come into our buildings, I went out to them and provided that instruction.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: And I also spent a great deal of time-- And I think it has to be some sort of combination, because I know that sometimes a child is only allowed five hours a week, and that just wasn't enough. So I think some of that online could certainly be for practice, but with human contact.

MS. BLISTAN: It's a resource, exactly. Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: They certainly deserve that human contact. But I just wanted to clarify that it's not that you're opposed to online learning, it's the manner in which it is being used.

MS. BLISTAN: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: And I appreciate that.
Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I just want to take it back a little bit to -- maybe we haven't spoken about this enough. I have a 4-and-a-half-year old at home going to Kindergarten next September. What would his and my experience be like as a parent if he attended a virtual charter school or even a blended charter school? Do you guys speak to that? Maybe one of the others would like to speak to that a little better than you guys can -- what their experience would be like or what my experience would be like.

MS. BLISTAN: Well, you wouldn't have-- Well, for a 4- or 5-year-old, that socialization is critically important. That's why Kindergarten is mandatory here -- because we know and recognize that critical importance of identifying if there are any types of lags where we need interventions. That's where that classroom teacher comes into play. She's

able to identify, or he's able to identify, those situations and then put the services into play.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I know what the classroom teacher in regular Kindergarten -- what experience you're describing there.

MS. BLISTAN: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I'm talking in terms of the blended model or the entirely virtual model. And maybe you guys can't speak to-- Maybe I'll ask one of the other members to speak to that.

MS. BLISTAN: Assemblyman, I will tell you that it's difficult to answer that question because I can't find one set definition for *blended*. One document that we gave to you says that there are four different models for blended. Another document says that there are 44 different definitions of blended. And what we're seeing right here in Newark is that we supposedly had two blended virtual charter schools put into place. And we're finding that, in reality, 100 percent of the Core Content Curriculum Standards is being given to them through online. So it's difficult to answer you.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I just wanted to introduce Senator Ruiz. She's one of those traveling back and forth from the Budget Committee to here. She'll be here with us for a short time.

I don't know if you want to make any comments.

SENATOR RUIZ: Sure.

My apologies to my colleagues here and to everyone. We're over in Budget, so I will be up here for a little bit. And I think I missed the bulk of the conversation.

But as Chair of Education, I think that everyone recognizes that we're open to discussions. I echo the sentiment of not having a defined kind of regulated setting. However, we had an opportunity to visit one of the school sites and to see what was happening there with professionals accredited in the classroom; with premiere, state-of-the-art equipment. It's something that cannot be denied either. We're in an age of technology. We have to embrace it. I think that oftentimes we get caught up in this kind of blended learning-- You know, we've been doing blended learning since calculators were allowed inside the classroom. The key is to do it responsibly, to have things that are defined so that we can regulate. But at the end of the day, to assure that students are getting what they need, and that's learning at the best of their abilities.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Any other comments? (no response)

We thank you very much for coming today.

MS. BLISTAN: Thank you.

MR. HADLEY: Thank you.

MS. SCHROEDER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Next we have the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce, Dana Egreczky.

DANA EGRECZKY: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Good morning.

MS. EGRECZKY: First, my name is Dana Egreczky. I'm with the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce.

For a moment, I'd just like to have my colleague, our brand new Government Relations person, introduce himself. He is a Trenton High School graduate and an attorney.

ABIDEEN ONIGBANJO, ESQ.: Good morning.

My name is Abideen Onigbanjo. I'm very happy to be here, and I'm very happy to be engaged.

MS. EGRECZKY: So my job at the Chamber of Commerce: I'm Senior Vice President, Workforce Development; and President of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation, an organization dedicated to producing the high quality workforce our member companies need.

So I am here today to lend my voice in support of increased use of computer technology in schools. My diverse background includes 16 years as a middle and high school classroom teacher -- half of that time here in New Jersey, the other half of the time in Pittsburgh -- three years as a corporate computer trainer, and many more years serving the business community in a succession of three chambers of commerce. I would add those years to it, but then you would figure out how old I am. I'd rather not have that happen.

I know many question the use of computers in schools. Many wonder if we fully equip schools with appropriate technologies -- if we did that -- would students play games and surf the web all day long rather than learn what they need to learn. But I wonder why those things would need to be considered to be mutually exclusive.

So I'd like to share a view from the business world, where almost all students in schools today will seek employment tomorrow. Business knows that there is a technology that is advancing faster than

almost any technology ever invented, and that is the technology of gaming. This has been made possible by the advances made in manufacturing faster and faster computer chips. In fact, if other technologies had advanced as rapidly as computer processors, a car that could go 88 miles per hour and get 12 miles per gallon in 1973 -- which was about average -- would today be able to speed along at over 180,000 miles per hour and get 24,575 miles per gallon; and an airplane would take only 8.8 seconds to fly from California to New York, 3,000 miles.

Of course, sooner or later transportation technologies and computer processors bow to the laws of physics and we hit the limits of the natural world. But I can tell you that business is gearing up to utilize gaming technologies in every aspect of its operations. For example, IBM has established a division that is developing gaming software that business will be able to use as training tools. One of their first projects is the development of a game that will be used by sales professionals who need to learn the techniques that lead to closing the deal. In short, business is preparing to embrace the gaming generation and use their interest in games to further our own objectives. In fact, I should add that these computer programs are far more sophisticated than anything we really have in schools today. They are not programs that show things; they are programs that teach things.

In business, our computers -- one on every desk and then some -- serve us as well as our human assistants used to serve us. Once, managers dictated letters to secretaries. Now we all type or dictate our own letters to our computers, and those machines magically correct spelling and grammar at least as well as most secretaries used to do. Managers don't need to wait

for a piece of critical information. It's in the cloud, instantly accessible to us. Our work follows us home, and as a result employee productivity is at an all-time high.

Imagine what we could do if computer technologies were embedded in schools as deeply as they are embedded in business: One, learning opportunities could follow students home, creating classrooms without walls that could be accessed 24/7.

Another: Course offerings made to students could be greatly expanded. For example, to meet graduation requirements in world languages, most schools offer Spanish or French. Yet the in-demand business languages are Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, German, Russian, Hindi, Arabic, Persian, Syrian, Turkish, Swahili, Urdu, Farsi, and Bahasa Indonesian. Those are the languages that we're looking for. Individuals who know these languages can expect a 25 percent increase in lifetime income. These languages could all be offered using over-the-counter language training programs and greatly increase a student's potential to earn income.

As an ex-teacher, I mention this next with that experience in mind. Teachers could better manage classrooms and provide students with a variety of environments that suited their individual learning styles. Students who had gained proficiency in the topic of the day could use computers to access advanced subject matter while the teacher could focus on the students who had not gained proficiency, or vice versa. There is some emerging data that suggests that learners of all abilities learn more in certain circumstances using computers than with human teachers, because they don't mind revealing what they don't know to the computer.

Professional development opportunities for teachers could be greatly enhanced if the same learning opportunities were given to teachers to increase their subject matter knowledge or their pedagogical skills.

And you've heard this before from a previous speaker. There is one final part of the computer equation that must be considered. New Jersey, as we know, has adopted the Common Core Standards and will be deploying the PARCC tests over the course of the next several years. The PARCC testing system is of great interest to me, I should mention, because as an ex-computer trainer, as an ex-corporate trainer, we never just tested, we pretested, and pretested, and pretested benchmark tests so that we always gauged the exact level of learning in specific content arenas that our learners knew. The PARCC test will actually offer this. There will be online diagnostic quizzes that students will take that will provide teachers with instant feedback. Teachers will know what every student has learned and where learning gaps are for individual students. And this resembles the way business trains its employees -- constant analysis of who knows what and what else they have to learn.

So schools will need an ever-increasing base of computer technologies and a growing acceptance of their various capabilities. And to tie it all together, I would like to present to you one of the questions from the PARCC test in 3rd grade math. And you can see that that question is actually a mini computer game right there. The question is: "A farmer planted three-fourths of her field with soy beans." I actually put the *her* in. The actual question said *his*. "A farmer planted three-fourths of her field with soy beans. And the chart on the right represents the farmer's field. Drag the icon of the leaf into the chart as often as necessary to represent

three-fourths of the field.” These are computer technologies; these are gaming technologies. And they stand to make these tests far more interactive and, frankly, more interesting to the students who are required to take them.

So as you can see, the technologies and underlying programming used in gaming software have permeated even into our testing systems, in my opinion making learning and testing more interesting and more fun. By allowing students to access the world through the cloud can only lead to better outcomes for students.

Thank you for your attention.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I thank you very much.

First I need to comment on your math problem with the car and the airplane. It brought back my visions of word problems. But then it was trains and leaving at a certain time. What time would I arrive going a certain speed? And it was a horrible unit of math. I could never understand why I had to do that. But it worked out anyway. (laughter) Listen, I could do the 3rd grade math problem and that made me feel good.

Truly you do represent the business community. And obviously technology is extremely important. How do you feel we can balance the socialization skills with the technology?

MS. EGRECKY: Well, you’ve probably heard, ad infinitum, that businesspeople want people who have been socialized. We need people who can work on teams, who can interface with each other, who can communicate. So we absolutely would probably -- except in special circumstances -- would really need to see data coming out of completely virtual learning.

I actually -- we actually would agree with the NJEA. The data are absolutely clear that the most important thing in a student's learning is the quality of the teacher in the classroom. But unfortunately teachers in classrooms are being asked to do more, and more, and more, particularly under the Common Core.

When I was a teacher I used to teach science. In fact, most of the time I taught biology. I taught everything else sooner or later, but most of the time I taught biology. In fact, to go to your math problems, I remember teaching a physics problem which asked the kids to figure out: "If the room was so many feet long and you threw a chicken against the far wall, how fast would you have to throw the chicken so it was cooked by the time it got to the wall?" (laughter) I never understood why they would ever ask a kid to figure that out either.

I lost my train of thought on that one. I'm sorry, senior moment.

What was I saying?

My young colleague here. That's why he's here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Socialization.

MS. EGRECKZY: Oh, socialization. Thank you.

So we absolutely feel that the student's best place is in the classroom with a highly qualified, highly specialized teacher. On the other hand, do we think that teachers are using technology to its utmost use or to the best benefit of the student? Not yet. In fact, I think we have a long way to go.

So from our perspective, we're right in the middle. We would have to see significant data before we could support 100 percent virtual

learning. Adults can do it because in the workplace adults are highly motivated. If we don't learn virtually, we could lose our jobs. That's a pretty interesting incentive. Kids are not under that incentive; they're not under that threat. So we have to see the data before we could say 100 percent virtual.

Our definition of *blended learning* is the word *blended*. Somewhere or other there has to be the blending of the human being overseeing, supervising, teaching, making sure that the kids are getting it. As a teacher, you can see when a kid's light bulb goes off. Computers, as good as they can be, may not ever be able to do that. So, again, we would probably take a middle-of-the-road position on all of this.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: You know what? I hear what you're saying, which is a balanced approach. Use the online learning as a tool.

I just need to ask one more question. When you talk about using technology-- And when I talk to some of my local districts, budgeting has become a real problem. And sometimes they don't have the money to invest in it. And needless to say textbooks-- And I understand it's printed. I get it. But some of the textbooks -- they're not even allowed to go home, and I understand that. They're having a hard time making ends meet. And I would love to say that every kid is going to have a computer in the classroom or it be available. I don't know how we're ever going to get there considering the finances.

MS. EGRECKZY: Well, that's clearly an issue, particularly with the PARCC test coming down the pipeline. Because as somebody mentioned before, if you have 400 kids, how are you going to manage to

cycle them in and out of the testing process? On the other hand, the cost for these machines are going way down. In fact, Microsoft, I believe, just introduced a brand new computer. It has very little innards because it accesses the cloud technology. And it's \$245. Now, a student can use that for the entire lifetime of middle school and then again, perhaps, in high school. So as prices drop there is going to be a real cost savings for buying a laptop -- a version of a laptop -- versus the textbook.

And I also have to tell you that when I was teaching -- way back in 1985 was one of my last years in teaching. I was in Pittsburgh, and we were in a less-than-wealthy district. It was a highly diverse and rather low-income district. And I taught from a textbook that said, "When we land on the moon, we don't know what we will find." That was in 1985, and the moon landing had been in '69. So one of the advantages to all of this technology is the instant access to instantly changing information -- the ability to take a dry passage about landing on the moon and then see the video of Neil Armstrong actually doing it. There are so many things that blended learning can really bring to a classroom that I don't think we can really even imagine much of it today.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: It's probably not a fair question to ask you, but I'm going to try it anyway: How about the idea that whatever is out there on the computer must be true because it's out there.

MS. EGRECKZY: That's the commercial.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Right. And not using primary sources-- I mean, tell me why it's not important to do your own research or go to libraries and read the primary source.

MS. EGRECZKY: I think it is important to read the primary source. I don't necessarily, however, think that we need to find the primary source by going to the library. And I think that's where we would gain in the process. It is absolutely critical for teachers to teach all that research -- protocol. But that doesn't mean you have to go to the library to do that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you.

Assemblyman Ramos?

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: No, I'm good.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Are you sure?

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Everybody else good?

(affirmative responses)

Thank you very much.

MS. EGRECZKY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Dr. Fuller, Newark Prep Charter School.

Welcome, Dr. Fuller.

DAVID FULLER, Ed.D.: Good afternoon.

My name is Dr. David Fuller. I'm the Head of School at Newark Prep Charter School in Newark, New Jersey.

I'm really excited to be here today. I think I missed the first two meetings that took place. And I think this is the third or fourth, but I just found out.

It is good to be here. I'm able to share my experience as the Head of School with you all at Newark Prep. It is a new model here in the State of New Jersey, and I understand it's very controversial.

It's interesting to hear the different positions I've heard today. The first thing I would like to do with all the individuals in the room is to invite you out to Newark Prep. And you can schedule that tour with me or someone on my staff. But I would like you to come out and visit Newark Prep just to see the exciting things that are taking place at the school and the things that are provided through our management company, K12.

Again, this model is brand new, it is exciting, it is state-of-the-art. And when you see the joy on the students' faces, and you work with this day in and day out and see how students are benefiting, you can't help but be in support of a model like this.

I just want to piggyback off one of the statements that was just made by the individual who just left. And that is in regard to textbooks. The one thing that's exciting about the curriculum that we use is that you can update the information in real time. For example, when it was found that Pluto was no longer a planet, our curriculum was able to go in and the next day it was in the textbook -- for the online textbook -- that Pluto was no longer a planet. That was just one small example. But, again, in this model things happen in real time.

Someone made the comment about the credentials of the teachers. Well, all the teachers at Newark Prep are credentialed. Actually, the teachers had to come in this year and audition for their positions. For example, I'm a math teacher by trade. And all the math teachers had to come in and actually audition for me because I wanted to see exactly what they were going to be providing to our students. Another thing that I was able to do yesterday -- and this is an example of how we all work together.

And there is a collaborative effort in providing the best education for our students. I was able to go in and model lessons for my math teacher. The one thing I will say is that I do have a new staff, a young staff, of teachers. But the one thing we believe in is staff development. So that's why I want to invite everyone out so you can actually see the quality things that we're doing at Newark Prep in terms of staff development, in terms of providing a holistic approach to educating these students. I know someone mentioned something about teaching students etiquette. Again, that's something that we're working on with our students, because some of them do lack etiquette, whether it's professional, whether it's personal. They do lack those things.

Another thing that we're doing at Newark Prep is that we are providing students not just for college, but how to be good students. We're preparing them for the real world. And the one thing that I'm very proud to say is that the staff that we have hired represent a very diverse sample of our real world. I mean we have backgrounds that represent the African-American race, we have Indians on our staff, we have Asians on our staff, we have Italians, we have whites. So, I mean, we have a very diverse team that is working with these students.

And in terms of the socialization, we do reflect the real world. And it's not always good to just place students in a large environment with 1,000 students for the sake of just saying they're being socialized. You do have students who have different requirements, different backgrounds, different environments in which they thrive. And you have to be careful. The one thing I think we're trying -- the point we're trying to make is that

this model is not for everyone, but it does benefit those who decide to take part in this process.

So I'm open to questions from you all. Again, this was-- I found out about coming here last minute. I probably would have prepared more statistics for you. But I am open to the questions that you may have.

And, again, I do invite you to really come out to see the powerful learning that's taking place at Newark Prep since September 6.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Dr. Fuller, could you just briefly summarize, for the people on the panel here who didn't have a chance to visit, how many students you have and how they were selected to participate in your school?

DR. FULLER: Yes. We started out with 182 students this year, and it was on a first-come, first-served basis.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: What was it? I missed that.

DR. FULLER: One hundred eighty-two.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: What grades? I'm sorry.

DR. FULLER: Grade 9 only.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Is there a waiting list?

DR. FULLER: We do have a waiting list. I think currently the waiting list is about 111 students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Do your students have a computer at home or do they just use the computer in school?

DR. FULLER: Our students have thin client computers at school. Not all of them have laptops at home; some of them do. We do encourage students who do not have laptops at home to go to libraries or

other resources in the community so they can continue their online curriculum away from school.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: All right. I'm just going to take this one stab here.

You know that when I went there I told you that I viewed -- and I wanted to just come back again. I had just one concern, and that might have been the month of October because it's October and kids are training to get back into school.

And in talking to several students, I didn't see a passion for -- "I'm going to go home, and tonight I'm going to read this novel," or, "I'm going to read this book." I didn't see a translation. I saw it like, "I'm doing my work here, and then I'm off." Is that October, or are you seeing a difference now?

DR. FULLER: Yes, that's October. And that's a fair question. Like anything, it's new. And like we told the students in the very beginning, "Give us time to get to know you and you get to know us." Admittedly, this model is tough. It is really tough for students. It's hard sitting in a flex center the majority of the day to get your work done. But, again, the students have gotten used to the process like anything that's brand new. Even as adults, it takes us time to get used to different processes.

Students now are motivated. They're engaged now with more clubs and organizations. It took us time to get those things in place. Students are engaged in all aspects of school curriculum now -- school culture. Students are motivated to do more reading. We even have a book club now. It's interesting you mentioned that. The book club now meets.

They complement what takes place day-to-day in the English curriculum. And so do all of our other clubs that we've established so far. So you're going to see a lot more excitement. Students have settled in with the curriculum, with the staff, with the model itself. So it will be a different feel and a different look when you come back next time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: How do you communicate with parents? This is usually the time of a cycle of a report card or something like that. Does that go on?

DR. FULLER: Absolutely. We conduct parent conferences in which parents schedule their conferences throughout the day. Unfortunately, since the Hurricane, we had to use those parent -- well, one of the parent conference days as a make-up day. But parents constantly set appointments with teachers. We constantly talk with them through e-mails and K-mails. That's our internal system. Parents schedule staff conferences, administrative conferences. So there is constant communication with the parents. I just received a message from a parent yesterday. Her son was struggling. He's a special ed student, and he was struggling with the curriculum. And she actually left a message because my dedicated teachers are now conducting classes after school and on weekends for those students who need the extra help. And she called to thank us for providing this extra service for her son because now he's excited and motivated about school.

So, again, it's all in the culture that you create and promote. And I just want to say that when you have a dedicated staff that is passionate about providing a quality curriculum for students, you're going to produce results. And the main thing is that when you get a student who

can come in every day smiling, and excited when they leave the building, you've done your job.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: My town was without electric for two weeks, and we lost school for a week. Do you have an alternate plan if you lose power -- I hate to say it -- since it's online education?

DR. FULLER: Absolutely. The one thing we require -- and I heard someone mention our academic coaches. We do have academic coaches. We have three academic coaches who man the flex center. And, again, in hiring we're very strategic about who we hire. And all of our academic coaches are credentialed. They all have degrees. Two of them are certified teachers. Unfortunately, they're not high school certified; they're elementary certified. But they are credentialed, degreed individuals. Those individuals are required to prepare what we call *back-up plans*. So if we do lose internet or electrical power, those individuals must give a hands-on assignment out of the book. And they must follow, and they must know all the State standards when they create these lessons for students to take part in.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: All right. I'm going to go back to that accreditation -- the qualified staff. You mentioned that they were elementary school certified. If I'm teaching history and English, or a foreign language, do I have people on my staff who are certified to teach that?

DR. FULLER: Absolutely. The core teachers are the ones who are certified in those areas. The academic coaches are the ones who just

facilitate the flex center and keep the students moving along throughout the day, making sure they're engaged in their assignments.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So how many teachers are employed and how many coaches are employed for 182 students?

DR. FULLER: We have four core teachers, we have a PE coach, we have a music teacher, we have three academic coaches who man the flex center, we have two instructional assistants who work specifically with the special ed department, and we have one academic administrator, and we have one counselor, and two special ed teachers.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So a core teacher in English is responsible for how many students? Would that be 182?

DR. FULLER: Well, throughout the day -- and this is the way it works -- our core teachers bring students into break-out sessions. And every Friday we meet and have data meetings. And we use the data that students produce throughout the week from their quizzes, their unit tests, observations from the academic coaches. We do Study Island participation throughout the week. Students participate in Scantron testing. So all that data is used, and we evaluate that on Fridays -- every Friday. And then we create lists of students who are to go into a break-out session for the upcoming week. So those lists change on a weekly basis. Some days you may have two-- Well, one student may go to a break-out session maybe twice a week; whereas, depending on the data, a student may only go to a break-out session once a week. But those teachers are responsible for pulling in 15 students at a time during their break-outs throughout the day. And, again, that's what I had a chance to do yesterday. The class is never larger than 15 students. It could be as small as five students. But, again,

the data tells you exactly what the deficiencies are with those students, and that's what you use to drive the instruction for those break-out sessions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Just one more question.

DR. FULLER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Way back when I was an English teacher, we would read two novels a month. Is that happening? Are you reading -- are they reading novels?

DR. FULLER: Yes. We do have recommended lists of novels that students are required to read. We do have two English books that are on site. They're not the full novels, but they're excerpts from those novels. And then we use supplemental readings to back up what's provided on a day-to-day basis in those books.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So how does discussion take place of the books in the English curriculum?

DR. FULLER: They take place in those break-out sessions. And, again, the teachers work with the book club, and they also piggyback those readings with the book club.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Assemblyman Ramos.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Unfortunately, I could not attend that day.

You mentioned the words *model* and *flex center*. How is the initial instruction delivered to the students?

DR. FULLER: There is no direct instruction that takes place except in the break-out sessions. What this model does is, it really promotes independence; and students are really thriving in this environment because what you don't want to do is, you don't want to have

an environment where students are required to turn the book and the page at the same time. And what I've noticed with a lot of these students is that some of them are thriving at their levels. If I decide to work ahead in mathematics, I can do that as a student. If I see that I need extra help in history or science, I can spend more time in the flex center working on those subjects and making sure I'm pulling my grade up and getting instruction with that. Now, if I ever get stuck, then that's when I can either request or -- based on the data that's provided -- that teacher will pull me into a break-out session.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: It's only if they're doing poorly according to the instruction that's delivered through the computer?

DR. FULLER: Not necessarily. It could also be used as enrichment. So you don't just have to be doing poorly to be pulled into a session. What we do is, we look at all the data. And some students will need it as enrichment, and those students are also provided -- and pulled into those break-out sessions.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I teach in a school. We use technology in my classroom and all the other classrooms as well.

But the initial-- Let's say a math teacher is doing the initial instruction of a lesson. They're not getting that. In our school a math teacher does the initial instruction. "This is how we do ratios to fractions," what have you. "This is our lesson for today." And then six kids can go into the six computers in the back of that lab and work on a lesson there. Six other kids will work on a different center there. So you have kids throughout the classroom doing various things. Technology is implemented on that. And they have so much-- They have the eBoard, and they're

working on the -- the teacher has the computer at their desk, and the lesson is on the eBoard, and they have a remote control to put the answers up. They answer the question and the teacher gets to respond there on that. Is that taking place for the students?

But the initial-- Why I'm going back to the initial thing -- and it's important -- is the teacher is giving the instruction on how to solve the problems properly in the beginning. My concern is: Is that taking place? That's my concern.

DR. FULLER: Okay. That's taking place on many different levels. You don't have what people call *direct instruction* that takes place with all the students. What this model does is, it teaches you independence, and the students are taught to read. They're taught to read and really get into the lesson that's being presented at that time.

Now, say you have a student who is struggling with the concept and needs that direct instruction. Again, that student is pulled into those break-out sessions with those teachers, and they're provided that initial direct instruction that is needed to help solve those problems or provide that concept development that is needed in order to even engage in the lessons that are on the computer.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I'm sorry. You mentioned the word *flex center* a couple of times. What does that mean, for us who don't know?

DR. FULLER: The flex center is the main hub. That's where all the stations are located, and that's where each student is assigned a station. So you walk into the second floor and you see this big open area

where students are at stations. And those stations are numbered, and that's their own individual computer that they use.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: And all the instruction, for the most part, is delivered on the computer itself. Is it video instruction, or just more reading and reading comprehension?

DR. FULLER: It's a lot of reading. Some courses have where they have to listen. Some of the courses are interactive. Students are invited into what we call *illuminate sessions*. And for those students who need the illuminate sessions, that's where they're provided the direct instruction if they're not in a break-out session.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I'm just going to ask one more question before I turn it over.

Attendance: You heard that-- They're 9th graders. Do they have to be there?

DR. FULLER: Absolutely. It's mandatory. Students have to be in school at least 90 percent of the school year in order to receive full credit.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Are you seeing any problems with attendance?

DR. FULLER: Not at all. We're actually at least 95 percent in attendance.

Let me make this point also. We started out with 182 students. We've lost-- We're down to 175. We lost two students because they decided to go back to their home districts, and four left the school for discipline reasons. So when you really look at it, we lost two students

because they decided to go back to their district. The parents with the other four decided to take them back to their traditional settings for discipline reasons.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Can I ask a question? (affirmative response)

The discipline issue: That's an issue that could become problematic in terms of the charter school-public school debate as well, because the charter schools are able to-- When there's a problem with the student or parents -- don't want to deal with the discipline that's being hashed out by the school, they just take them back to the traditional public school. And the traditional school doesn't have that option. And that's a problem that needs to be looked at further. This happens a lot of times. Students leave -- there's never a real reason why-- I'm glad you said it -- the reason why they left. But say I have an issue with a student in my classroom. My kid is not getting kicked out. He's getting suspended 5 or 10 days probably, and they're back in my classroom again.

DR. FULLER: But they'll go to an alternative school.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: No, no, they're going back in my classroom. I've been through this; I know.

DR. FULLER: Right. And I'm also from a traditional background. And in dealing with discipline you do have students who come back to your classroom. And it's the same thing at the blended school. They do come back to the classroom. But it depends on the offense.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Exactly.

DR. FULLER: So depending on the offense, that's where it is determined whether you go to an alternative school, whether you're

homebound. So it's the same situation. But really, at a charter school, when you have discipline issues and students enroll in your school, you're stuck with those students. You don't have an alternative program to send them to. Again, if parents do decide to pull them out and take them back to their traditional school, that's their choice. But when they come to a charter school, the charter schools are stuck with those students. They don't have an alternative school to send them to.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Anybody else on the panel?

(no response)

Any closing statements, Dr. Fuller?

DR. FULLER: Again, before I got involved in this blended model, or even the virtual world, I had the same thoughts as most people because my background was traditional. I was a traditional math teacher. But I was someone who was very passionate about doing what's best for students. And my mind or my mindset has been totally changed, being a part of this movement and actually seeing the benefit that it provides students on a day-to-day basis. So before we make a final judgement, or before we say that our minds can't be changed, or we just close our minds to the whole concept, I would invite you to see an effective model in practice. And after visiting that model and asking the tough questions, then form an opinion.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you, Dr. Fuller.

DR. FULLER: You're very welcome.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: We just want to clarify: You've been open since September, right?

DR. FULLER: September 6 was the first day.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Okay. If you had to improve one thing, what would you improve so far?

DR. FULLER: Providing bus tickets to all the students and not just students who live two-and-a-half miles away from the school.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I think we'd like that all over. (laughter)

DR. FULLER: That's what I would do.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: That's a big problem.

DR. FULLER: Yes, it is.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Anybody else? (no response)

Thank you, Dr. Fuller.

DR. FULLER: You're very welcome.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Thank you, Doctor. We appreciate it.

DR. FULLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Monmouth-Ocean Educational Services Commission, Sister Elizabeth Dalessio and Tim Nogueira.

TIMOTHY P. NOGUEIRA: Thank you for inviting us here today.

My name is Tim Nogueira. I'm the Superintendent of the Monmouth-Ocean Educational Services Commission.

With me today is my Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Sister Elizabeth Dalessio. Sister recently received her doctorate in Education, so we now call her Dr. Sister Elizabeth Dalessio. (laughter) You

could probably call her Dr. Dalessio, you could probably call her Sister Dalessio, Sister Elizabeth. There are several names she'll answer to. (laughter)

Thanks for inviting us here today. Will Rogers was a political satirist back in the '30s, and he said, "There are two sides to every pancake, no matter how thin." And there's some discussion we have to hear today, and some of them are not even the same pancake, believe it or not.

We have gone through the testimony that you've had at your last meeting, and we're prepared to talk about a good number of things, from cheating, quality of programs, inmates, dropouts, halfway houses, results of program, weatherization of education -- kind of what you, Madam, referred to before when you said "when the school is closed, what do you do" -- teacher qualification, cost of programs, virtual charter schools, and a few others.

What we are is Monmouth-Ocean Ed Services Commission. There are 10 of them in the state. We are an intermediate educational unit. We receive no State, no Federal, no local taxes, but we follow all the rules of 18A. Monmouth-Ocean Educational Services, which I will refer to as MOESC from this point -- there's \$37 million. We run 10,000 students a day on busses, we do 5,000 nonpublic school students in Monmouth and Ocean, we run an alternate school, we run a substance abuse school, we oversee an autism school for 50 students, and we're involved in several programs that have to do with online learning.

I'll go backwards a little bit. One of them is OTIS, Online Teaching In-Service seminars. We've done almost 100,000 New Jersey administrators on programs such as bullying, child abuse, cyber safety,

those kinds of things. We're also in concert with -- in a partnership -- called Legal One with Rutgers and NJPSA on a program that provides 12 hours of training for administrators in the state so they can keep their certificate. It has to be done by June 2013. Over 100,000 people have been involved in that.

The program you heard NJEA talk about -- and thank you NJEA for the compliments -- is the New Jersey Virtual School. That is our school. We've been running it for 10 years. I do 3,000 students each summer, about 1,000 students during the year. Those are remedial during the summer -- kids who are making up summer school. That's \$299 a course. For all our courses we have about 90 percent passing rate. And the reason it's so high is, for summer school, the kids that we're getting already know 60 percent of the material. We're working on getting them through the next couple of points.

For the children who are doing September to June -- and we're running courses like AP physics, AP macro/micro, Latin, courses of that nature -- they're usually highly motivated students and have a very good success rate.

Another program we have is in the jail. Monmouth County jail -- we're just about to have our -- I think it's December 13 -- we have another graduation. We'll be at 130 graduates in five years. And even though that beginning might not sound like a lot, the five years before they were there they had one GED graduate.

So we've been doing this for a long, long time. We don't have the answers to every question, but we have been getting out and working on the questions that you have been talking about. And, again, we've gone

through all the testimony. I have you all tabbed. I don't know exactly who is who, but I can tell you the kinds of questions that were asked. I know cheating is one of the big ones. And you're never going to solve cheating completely. It's absolutely true. You're not going to solve it in high school; you're not going to solve it online.

But there are things you can do. Much the same as you have in a regular school, you can do pop quizzes. You can find out if that's the person. If you have a worry that that person is not the right person -- I'll give you some examples -- you have them come in to take the test. Your Uncle Louie can tell you everything about the driving test. You're the one who has to get in the car and go down to the DMV. Schools have done that. I think it was Hackensack who had problems with chemistry. So during the summer they were going to have chemistry courses provided by the New Jersey Virtual School. The principal decided to bring all the kids in, put them in the lab from 9:00 to 1:00, watch them work, and obviously do the tests. So our answer is: If you think anybody is going to cheat, we'll give you the midterms, the finals, whatever you like, and you do it. Have them come in front of somebody who knows them and they take the test. That's one of the answers. Generally speaking, those who teach online know the children. They know that one day he was doing a great job, the next day not doing such a great job, and the next day he does a great job. There is something going on there, and they can generally ferret that out.

One of the things that we do is, every day there is an e-mail, a text message, or a fax that goes to the principal, the parent, the Department chairman, whatever, telling the students' test scores and homework assignments. That's conversation every single day. So if you're a parent,

you say, "Do you have any homework?" If they say no, you can look at your text message.

The second one is, all of our teachers are required to call the parents once per week and log it in. So this communication is pretty clear. And, again, this has another piece to do with the validity of the program, who is really taking the course, is somebody else watching. In many cases, the parent can help us do those things.

Let's go one second to the quality of programming. We have over 100 teachers all around this state. When we work with a district we say, "Who are your best teachers?" And we try to hire them.

We handed out to you a sheet that looks like this. (indicating) I heard that in the testimony -- or someone said there are about a dozen schools, and then I heard NJEA correct it and say about 100. These are all the school districts that we deal with. There are two pages of it. You can see somebody from just about every county -- mostly public schools. Monmouth County's High Tech is in there. They're number 10 rated in the state.

So that's the quality of teachers that we have. And these teachers are New Jersey certified, highly qualified, and teaching the subject that we say they teach. When we talk about quality teachers -- and some of you talked about equity at your last meeting. And that's absolutely true. We have a Ph.D. in classical languages who teaches our Latin programs. I don't know of anybody else who is a Ph.D. in classical languages. Maybe my experience is limited, but there are kids who have him who would never get him as a teacher. That just wouldn't happen. They wouldn't be around. Point Pleasant has started Latin in the 7th and 8th grade with this

teacher so they can have a full high school Latin program. So there are some real advantages to this kind of thing.

We'll talk about the Virtual Charter School. Sister, myself, and former Commissioner Librera are the founders of the New Jersey Virtual Charter School for dropouts. And Sister can tell you in a minute about how that is set up. This is an interesting program. Before I let her go on-- We haven't found -- we've been doing this a lot of years together. We haven't really found a dropout program in this state that has worked. There were 14,000 dropouts last year. I don't see anybody making any progress on it. You may not agree that our program is the answer, but I have to tell you this: If there isn't something else better out there, we're definitely worth trying.

Now, I know this gets mixed into the whole virtual charter school discussion. I wish that I didn't have to go down that road and I could offer this another way. But funding being what it is, and how I would get my moneys, and how I would do it -- that's the only avenue I have. But this is an issue -- whether we address it this way or some other way -- we've been avoiding for too long. We don't have an answer to dropouts, and we have to start working on it.

I'm going to let Sister talk for a bit.

SISTER ELIZABETH DALESSIO, Ed.D.: I want to clarify something in the discussion before on the New Jersey Virtual Charter School and New Jersey Virtual School being combined. The New Jersey Virtual School, as Tim has said, is for those students who are in regular high school or perhaps middle school taking courses, as you know, for credit recovery, advancement, they can't fit everything into their course

scheduling. That's the New Jersey Virtual School. The New Jersey Virtual Charter School-- We had to take an extra planning year because we could not get the students. The New Jersey Virtual Charter School's only purpose is to take students, 17 through 19, and get them back into school, have them finish up their high school programs, hopefully get their diploma, and move on to the community college. Our New Jersey Virtual Charter School has three prongs to it. It's the educational part, which is online; it's the community colleges that have partnered with us to allow the students to go to school there at the community colleges. Because let's face it, most high schools don't want their dropouts back in the building. It's reality. So where are we going to put them? They come to the community colleges. While they're there we have guidance counselors, we have job coaches, and for the most part we are trying to have retired police officers as our job coaches because they know the town, they know the employers, they can help these young men and women find jobs. Then, hopefully, when they do graduate we want them to continue at the community college.

We need to give them another chance. I heard the discussion, "They're a dropout. Why give them another chance?" Why not? If they're a dropout and we don't do anything for them, in essence we are giving them another chance. We're giving them another chance to become part of the criminal justice system, and we don't want that. We want an educated citizenry. So that's our purpose.

Before I mentioned about advertising -- I heard mentioned advertising. I need to be honest with you. We need advertising in education, because the only reason we couldn't open our school was because we didn't have the money to advertise to say, "We're here. Come to our

schools.” Because the other thing is, the high schools that we’ve been dealing with haven’t necessarily been forthcoming with their dropouts. Who wants to?

MR. NOGUEIRA: Well, let’s say something first about who they are. If you’re going to start a charter school in a town, the population is captured -- they’re there. You go to the high school, you go to the elementary school, you get a bunch of people to go to the auditorium and speak to them.

What happens with dropouts? They’re not necessarily living in the house when in high school. They might be living with a friend, they might be down in another area. So we have to go find them. And the State Department, because it makes us follow all the rules that a regular school does-- I have to get ahold of the landlord and get the landlord to sign a notarized affidavit that that kid is living there. And if they speak a foreign language, I have to get a foreign speaking notary. This is a tremendously difficult problem to get ahold of. But the State Department says we have to follow the same rules. So by June I have to have 90 percent of my kids. That’s very difficult to do. We need a lot of people on the ground. We’re doing Camden, Paterson, Perth Amboy, and Neptune. These are big-time urban districts. This is a difficult issue to get done. So finding the students is our hardest part. The rest of it’s not going to be that difficult. We have relationships with four community colleges. As Sister said, we can provide all the services. And we think it’s a great environment for them to come to to see kids like them who have different aspirations and are doing different things. And the colleges have embraced us. They have been wonderful about giving us space. They’ve been just terrific.

So this is a good model. It's different from the model that we're talking about with the other virtuals. I'm not taking anybody out of anybody's school. They're not there now. I'm not coming into your school and taking a child out and you lose 90 percent of State aid. It's not happening. The child is not there. I'm not going to come and take them out. And we'll hopefully get those kids who only have a couple of courses. If somebody needs four years I can't help them. A couple of courses -- probably can get them through.

And our other argument is, we're all stuck in this time warp of September to June. I'd like to get past that. With these kids I'd like to make them September through July and August, and just continue. With a virtual school, that's not a difficult thing. What difference does it make if a kid takes 11 months to pass geometry or it takes 9 months or 10 months to pass geometry? Does it really matter? No, it really doesn't matter. If I can get that kid to pass geometry, that's what we want to do. Basically that's what we do in summer school. "You blew it for 10 months, I put you in July and August and you passed. Now you had 12 months." But it should be a continuum and not necessarily a separate program.

But I'm happy to answer your questions.

The last one I want to talk about is weatherization of education -- Sister has something to say because she put her hands together; that was my clue (laughter) -- weatherization of students. What we didn't do this last time-- And we got nailed by the storm. I was out nine days; I know what you're talking about. And the schools got nailed. And if you don't have electricity, online doesn't mean anything, obviously. But when we had

the bird flu -- remember all the bird flu stuff -- and we were going to close down schools--

SISTER DALESSIO: HINI.

MR. NOGUEIRA: --when we had to close down schools?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Yes.

MR. NOGUEIRA: We met with a task force from the Department of Education -- because we were the only virtual school that was homegrown in New Jersey -- and we said, "We have an answer to this for middle and high school kids. Here is the deal. We can set them up so that their homeroom teacher can either teach them or watch our teacher teach them." By the way, you can do that anyway with my programs. A teacher from a high school who is the homeroom teacher for the kid -- and I'm doing online -- they can watch everything that the student does. But anyway, we said we'd set this up. It was a great deal. We brought some of the telecommunications people in. The only person who would do it was Verizon. The State backed up because the State said, "We can't give this business to one person." We have to bring that idea back again and work our way through that issue. Because there is a way. If you're an AP student -- I know there are a couple of educators up here -- if you're an AP student and you miss two or three weeks of school, you're not passing that AP test. That's not happening. We can all say that's nice, but the test happens in April. If you miss two or three weeks you are done. There is a way to do this. Does it take time? Are there always computers? No. Is there an effort we can make to help some kids? Yes, there is.

Now, particularly with the advent of generators, and some of our schools having generators-- And as you know, some people lived

through the storm. We can take some students and have them go to that school with the generator and take online courses perhaps. There are a lot of logistics involved. But right now we don't have a plan. We talk about a plan; we don't have a plan.

And that's an important thing for the continuation of education. It just is. It's going to take a while for our electrical system to get back up. If this happens to us again, we're all going to pull our hair out. It's just not going to happen tomorrow. But the education of students is important. And the Commissioner has said, "Except in extraordinary circumstances, everybody has to do 180 days." So now there is pressure on the school districts to be able to do that, and it's a difficult time to do it.

Sister, I interrupted.

SISTER DALESSIO: I'm in an interesting place: 35 years in education, more in public education than private education. Because of the Commission, I was fortunate enough to be sent to go study as a Microsoft-certified engineer. So I had the technology background. And I agree with you. There are many problems that are going to arise when we have to start doing all this testing online. We don't have the infrastructure to do it.

You asked about what happens when electricity goes down. Well, we do have, in virtual education, redundancy. So even though our server in New Jersey went down-- That server went down but immediately popped out through a server, I believe, in Idaho. So students don't lose time learning. Yes, we lost electricity, but everybody's iPad and-- When they were doing all the preparation for the storm, what did they say? "Make sure you charge all your electronic equipment," and we did. So it's

to a certain extent that they can continue. So I have all that kind of background.

I want to make a comment because we talked a lot about this: teachers, teachers, teachers. We will always need quality teachers. Online learning does not replace the teacher. And when it does, pack it up and go home. And here is the reason I say this: We worry about socialization, we worry about, “What about that kid who has a special need?” We really vet our teachers extremely well. We also make them take an online course before they start teaching students. We also make them learn-- You know, teachers are great. I don’t think we give them enough credit, personally. They sense when students have need. Right now I’m an adjunct professor at Seton Hall. I’m also doing Colorado State Global writing courses and doing some work for them. And they’re making me take a course in order to teach for them. And, yes, Hurricane Sandy affected what I was doing, because she wrote back and said, “I’d love to have you, but you can’t communicate right now with the rest of the class. We’re switching you to the next class in January.” That happened to myself and Tom Giordano (phonetic spelling) who works here in the State. So, yes, it did affect us.

In 2003, our English teacher was teaching a student online. And Tim said, “Very well, we make sure our teachers communicate with students.” As she was talking to the student through the white board and blogging, she got the sense there was something wrong. She kept communicating with that student, and the student finally said, “When my father leaves today, I will not be talking to you anymore because I’m going to kill myself.” She had another teacher go and get me. The second English teacher kept communicating with the student. The primary teacher called

the father and said, "Where are you?" He said, "I'm getting in my car. I'm getting ready to go to work." She said, "Don't go to work. You have to get back inside the house." "Why?" "Get back inside the house. Your child is in desperate need." He went back into that house. The child ended up getting the help that he needed. He stopped taking our course, obviously, because he was in treatment. When he got out of treatment he came back and finished the course.

Now, is that a dramatic one? Yes. By the same token, we had a teacher who applied for a job with us. One of our administrators who was interviewing that person said, "They have all the qualifications, have all the certifications. I'm just not sure." So we held the person off. It was a good thing we did, because the teacher was brought up on child abuse. So it always comes back down to people and how well we're going to work together to make this work.

Online learning is here. Tim told me a tremendous story yesterday that blew my mind. The technology is here. The students are already using it, young adults are already using it. His daughter, who is a new mother, was concerned about the wax in the ears. What did she do? She pulled out her camera, took a picture of it, cleaned out the ear, brought the child to the doctor.

MR. NOGUEIRA: Yes, she showed the doctor the picture. Who would have thought to do that?

One of the things Sister just said is an important-- I've read your stuff and there is some confusion. And I'm going to tell you what I think it is. There are really two kinds of online courses. There is the canned online course where one teacher can oversee 100 kids. They're

going through a program; she watches; they have a question; they help out. You hear that. You've had testimony where somebody said -- I think Horn (phonetic spelling) said there were 25 teachers to 240 kids (*sic*). You have to be kidding me. At any rate, that's that kind of program.

Our program isn't that kind. It's a live teacher, one to 25, "You do your homework, you don't do yours, you go two days ahead." That's okay. Eventually, very quickly, it gets very individualized. And by the way, I was an elementary school teacher. You can't do that in a regular class. You can have three reading groups, but you can't have 6, you can't have 12, and you sure as hell can't have 25.

With online teaching, believe it or not, you can. You can have different levels of kids going at different speeds, and isn't that what you want? Teachers always have the problem, "My fast kids are over here. My kids who need help are over here. How do I keep this class going with the same topic?" It's a universal problem. I don't care if it's AP honors. It doesn't matter what the level is. There are always kids who are the top and always kids who need help. Online learning let's you handle those kinds of things.

Does it have its retractions (*sic*)? Of course it does. Is it for every student? I haven't seen it work with special ed yet. We've been doing this for 10 years. We have brought it to many people -- all the people who are on this list -- I haven't seen it work yet. Special ed is very difficult. There are 12 kids in a class, 12 IEPs, 12 behavior managements. It's just another story. And how you can get that poor teacher, even with two aides, to sit down and work with an online teacher-- Call me when it happens, because I don't think it's going to happen. And it's nothing against --

saying there aren't online programs or programs in technology that special ed can't use. But not in our setting -- about teaching a course. I just don't see it happening.

So, to summarize, quality teachers -- take the best teachers I can find. Constant communication with the parent and the school-- And the cheating aspect-- And we tell them -- we say to the schools -- we give them models. "Hey, if you think somebody-- Call them and sit them down in front of somebody. Send them into the guidance counselor. They know Johnny. Johnny takes the test." It's not difficult to do. We've been doing it for 10 years. We're not perfect. I don't have all the answers, but we've addressed many of the problems you've talked about. And I have to tell you, as a practitioner-- I know some people are not practitioners. We actually run a school. This has been going for a very long time. And we have a terrific success rate because we work with the schools. "In your English 1 you have *A Christmas Carol*, and I have *A Tale of Two Cities*. I will switch it for you, and I will give you that." "You're not too happy about my course? You don't think my geometry is too good? Great. Give me your final. I'll use your final for your kids." Freehold Regional has been using us for about 10 years, and that's what they asked. They said, "We have the problem with the teachers. The kid doesn't pass for 10 months. We send them to you and you pass them in summer school. They don't think it's the same standard." I said, "Great. Give me your final." So I'll take a school's midterm and final -- their midterm and final -- and give it to the kid so there is some legitimacy to it. "You know what? There must be a pretty similar experience to our course because the kid is passing the midterm and the final."

There has to be things done legislatively. I heard somebody say there wasn't things done legislatively. I disagree completely. You have products coming into the state that nobody is looking at. You have virtual schools that offer courses. I'm not talking about K12. I'm not talking about management systems. I'm talking about courses that come in. The courses that come in obviously have to align to the New Jersey Core Content Standards and the Federal ones. They do. They align to Core Content Standards. But what are they doing? A canned one, 1 to 200, 1 to 25? What are the protection rights? Every key stroke that our kids make and our teachers make are recorded. We have never had a problem with somebody saying something incorrect or inappropriate online. We tell everybody, "Every key stroke you make is recorded." And we keep them. We're sitting here on a Wednesday. If Sister had to go back and evaluate somebody, the entire interaction between that teacher and that staff is recorded. So that's another thing that has to happen. You have to vet the organizations.

And NJEA said it best -- and I refuse to change off this one -- you have the New Jersey certified teachers -- highly qualified, fingerprints, background check. Now, you will hear from people up at this level in the city -- that they want you to say, "No, there are great people all over the United States." And there probably are. There are wonderful people we can learn from. But their fingerprint and background check, and their certification under New Jersey's-- We've never had a problem. This is not the time to introduce it. Online predators are far too big a problem for us to start messing with that. You have enough teachers in New Jersey. You have wonderful people. They've graduated from Princeton, Harvard, Yale,

and Ivy League schools just like everybody else. They're terrific here. We don't need to go other places. That's what you have to do with those.

And the third one is: Even though we may not have that relationship in our end of the world, higher education has to start offering courses on how to teach online and how to write courses online. And then that way we won't be subject to -- don't take it the wrong way -- textbook companies that write courses that we use. And there are some fine ones out there. We use Florida Virtual -- terrific. Some of the best coursework in the United States. But those are the two things that have to be done. We have to start training the teachers how to teach online -- and it's blended call it whatever you want. And they also have to be able to write courses online.

And the last one is: You talked about cost. And somebody was talking about textbooks and the cost. I know school districts that have every text book online. The kids don't have a textbook. They go online -- it's there. So they don't get into that, "I've got to buy every year." And you heard a couple of people mention you can update them very quickly. And that's a way you save money. That's a way that you do save money.

And our summer school is \$299. That's for the summer school course. For our 10-month course, it's \$650. That's \$65 a month, or \$16 a week. And I don't think there is anything you can do in a school system for \$16 a week.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I'm sorry. Is that paid for by the student or the school?

MR. NOGUEIRA: When it's September to June, it's paid for by the school. And it's things like, you have three kids for AP physics and

you really can't run it because most schools require 10 to 12 kids for a class. So I will take your three, her six, her five, and I make the class. The summer school is generally paid for by the parents. That's who pays for that. Some schools pay for it as well. But I can tell you that the greater portion is the parents who pays.

I am done with my soliloquy. (laughter) I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I have a question.

Tim, suppose I'm a good student. How do I find out-- I wanted to take AP French 5, and my school doesn't have it. What does the student do? Can he go with you on his own or must the school--

MR. NOGUEIRA: That's very good. Thank you for that question.

We take no students unless the school says that the student could attend and should attend. Because I'm not a credit-giving institution. They are. It's much the same-- Think of the model that -- if you went to a high school and the kids went to summer school not at your high school but at another place. The principal is the one who decides whether they're going to give credit. So the parent could never register a child. The school does, even though the parent might pay. And the school is saying, "Yes, this is an appropriate kid who can take online learning," because it's not for everybody. And number two is, "Your course is of a sufficient rigor that if he passes, I'm going to give my school credit."

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So, Tim, I'm going to assume that all schools know about the program that you have.

MR. NOGUEIRA: Pretty much. There are a couple hundred on this list.

SISTER DALESSIO: We try to, once or twice a year, do mailings to every high school in the state. But I will tell you that it's very hard to get everyone's address.

MR. NOGUEIRA: We put it on New Jersey Transit, we put it on trains, we put it on buses. We have a booth. We go down to the New Jersey School Boards Association and we show there. We're going to be going to the NJASA's technology-- We go to all those things.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Sister Elizabeth, Dr. Sister Elizabeth Dalessio (laughter) -- I'm not going to make any mistakes on that. You've earned all those titles. You talked about having a relationship with the community colleges. Which ones? Where are you?

SISTER DALESSIO: Okay. According to the charter school application-- We originally only wanted three. The State came back and said we had to have a fourth one because one of them had to reside in Monmouth County because that's where our office is. So we're using Passaic Community College, so it's Paterson; Perth Amboy is Middlesex; obviously Neptune is Brookdale; and Camden is Camden Community College. And I need to tell you that every one of those colleges have been very responsive to our needs. Now, they may have different types of solutions. Ideally, what we would like is, obviously, at least one office -- a classroom -- so that when the students, and teachers, and guidance counselors, and job coaches are there, it's always the same place. Obviously because of the demand on community colleges, that can't always be. But that really becomes the goal.

So if we get the students, and if we get the money for advertising-- That's all that's holding us back. We're ready to go. We were ready to go two years ago. Because as Tim said, we've done this. My experience has been -- in alternative education and advanced education-- I've gone the gambit from pre-K through college at this point. But we are ready to start.

My whole dissertation was on the at-risk student in an online environment. I'm going to tell you something. They did very well. They liked it. They also said that it wasn't for -- they, themselves, said it's not for every student. But they liked it because they were able to work at their own pace. There was always a teacher they could go to. One student commented, "I always feel like I'm in the first row because the teacher is online and is there with me." (laughter) So, you know, every new thing has its pros and cons. But we really need to give more of a chance to online education.

I know his hand is up, but I'm going to finish.

I believe, Assemblywoman, you asked about accreditation in your last-- I was on the very first team for the Middle States Association. In 2004 we went to Johns Hopkins Talented Youth Program. And that was the first online program that was accredited. Since that time, Pennsylvania Cyber received accreditation last year from Middle States. I'm going to leave this with you. This is all the criteria from the Middle States Association for online. We started that in 2004, as I said. That was the one thing I wanted to bring up.

We talk about professional development. It can't be drive-bys. It can't be one hour today, one hour tomorrow. As Tim pointed out, you

have to get it into the colleges. It has to be a concerted effort on everyone's part. And Tim will tell you, the two of us, since 2002, have been asked by the State to come up three or four times to help to write white papers and regulations. And then I don't know where they go.

MR. NOGUEIRA: They disappear in the Trenton -- I don't know what.

SISTER DALESSIO: We're willing to be here again to help.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: You just might.

SISTER DALESSIO: Well, I'm here.

MR. NOGUEIRA: You know, one thing I'll mention-- You asked the gentleman before about waiting lists. New Jersey Virtual Charter School for dropouts-- The State asked me that. We had to vet before a committee before they'd even give us approval to do the planning year. And he said, "You've never answered the question to my satisfaction about waiting lists." I said, "Well, there isn't any waiting list." He said, "What do you mean?" "If 25 kids show up, I'm going to go get another teacher. I don't need a bus, I don't need another desk, I don't need a textbook." And I said, "The real question is for you." He said, "What is that?" I said, "If I get 50 more kids, are you going to give me the State aid for it, because you only approved me to 150?" And they had no answer. But that's one of the things about this. There is no limit.

I will tell you my problem with charter schools. Here is my problem with charter schools. My brother, by the way, is a retired principal of Red Bank Regional, and he was the first charter school principal for the Red Bank Charter, so we've had issues. (laughter)

My problem is this: If we're all going to sit here and say the following-- If the people in this public school are not happy with it, they should have an option. I agree. If the people in the school -- so should all the kids have an option. So there are 400 kids in the school, and the charter school only takes 100. Well, the news is that it's only an option for 100 people, not for all 400, isn't it? It's not an option until you have 400 spaces over here. Because the rest of it is a game. I was the superintendent in Long Branch. I'm going to tell you there were some people who were just not aware of the charter school idea. And if they had become aware of it, and they had become educated about it, they would probably be interested. But there was a portion of the population who didn't know about it. They may not know about it today.

So to have a charter school-- I think you have to have some options. There are serious problems with total virtual schools. There are problems with how it's applied. I mentioned here about canned. There is a problem with teachers, there is a problem with people using out-of-state charter schools, out-of-state virtual schools. That shouldn't be done; not in our state. There is not a lot of monitoring of that. And, again, how can we say there are no (*sic*) regulations when we only have two lines about virtual training? It's option number two, and it says, "You can take a distant learning course." That's the first thing it says. And the second thing it says is, "The distance learning teachers who you hire must meet all the employment requirements of any teacher." That's all it says. So we're going to now build, in our state, an entire virtual school system based on what? On two sentences. And I'm not in favor of regulations, and I'm not in favor of big books. But I have to tell you there has to be more direction

that comes from that so there is some uniformity about delivery of service. There are some terrific programs and there are some lousy programs. There are two sides to every pancake no matter how thin. That's just how it is.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I want to ask another question. You're exciting me so much. In case I leave this profession and decide to work for you, what can I expect as a teacher? What do I do if I'm an online teacher?

MR. NOGUEIRA: Well, the first thing that happens is you're going to get trained by us. You're going to come for a full day of training. We're going to train you about the curriculum you're going to be using and how to use it. Because the teacher gets to modify a whole bunch of things. It's just like you would do in your classroom. The first thing that's laid out is 180 days worth of coursework for the student. But you do pretests so you might say, "You know what? This kid is pretty good. I'm going to move him up a couple." To somebody I might say, "Why don't you try these two lessons and then I'm going to check on you?" Those kinds of things. But we're also going to match you with a techie, one of our technicians. We have Microsoft techies as much as Sister is. And we match them with them if there is any problem. And then what we do is we match you with somebody who has taught online and, hopefully, your subject. So you can call somebody up and say, "Hey, what am I doing? How does this work? What happens here?" That's what we do. And you get monitored all the time.

Then we go to the school district and say, "Can we have a watchdog from your school district?" Let's say Mary Jones is being taught. We go to Mary Jones' high school and say, "Can we have a watchdog?"

Because we're going to let you watch that teacher -- everything the teacher does -- all the records, attendance, everything."

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: How many students would I have, and how am I paid?

MR. NOGUEIRA: Twenty-five, and you're paid-- We have negotiated two successive contracts with NJEA. We have a salary guide with steps on it for virtual teachers.

SISTER DALESSIO: And they get paid more than college professors.

MR. NOGUEIRA: How much do college professors get paid?

SISTER DALESSIO: I'm getting \$2,000 to teach a course.

MR. NOGUEIRA: How much does a virtual teacher get?

SISTER DALESSIO: It's \$5,365, is their current--

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Per course?

MR. NOGUEIRA: Per course.

SISTER DALESSIO: Yes, I will sign you up if you have your certification.

MR. NOGUEIRA: English teacher; we can use an English teacher.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: It sounds like a great part-time job.

SISTER DALESSIO: I also want to finally say: Why are we successful? Because we don't use just one curriculum. You go into a school -- they may use Pearson for something, they may use -- I'm dating myself, because I'm going to say Houghton Mifflin. I don't even know who they've been conglomerated with at this point. I've heard, bantered around, K12.

As part of my dissertation I examined all those programs because they all have a version of online learning now -- Florida Virtual School, North Carolina. So I examined all of them. For my particular study I did use Pearson because that was already in place.

However, I need to say this: In terms of curriculum, K12 has an excellent curriculum because they have it two-pronged. We always worry about the students who are not doing well and the students who are doing well. There is a first prong called *A plus*, and those students take those courses. They're regular high school courses. And if they do well and pass that course, then they get put into the regular high school curriculum to make sure that they really do know all the work. So they're getting double the amount of education. Pearson has a wonderful program. Florida Virtual has a wonderful program. They're actually partnered now with Pearson. They're getting (indiscernible) up.

My point being is: I don't think we should throw everything out because we've heard bad things about one thing or bad things about another -- for-profit, and not-for-profit. I'm going to go where I can get the best quality for my students. That's the bottom line. And you will do the same thing.

MR. NOGUEIRA: You mentioned home instruction before. The problem with home instruction-- I have been an elementary teacher, assistant superintendent, all those things. The problem is that the State requires you have a certified teacher to go out and do home instruction. There aren't certified teachers hanging around doing nothing for AP chemistry, physics, calculus. They're not there -- Spanish -- they're not always there.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: There is hardly enough in the classroom now.

MR. NOGUEIRA: Right. So they're not really around. So districts have a really hard time meeting the real requirement of saying, "I have a certified teacher there."

Plus, you mentioned before the five-hour limit. It's absolutely true. We run home instruction online -- same thing as everything else -- except we say the following, "You can do as many hours as you want. I really don't care. You want to do 10, 20 hours a week online with my teacher? I don't care." And how do we do that? In home instruction, you have to stay home for five days and you need all those courses? I take you, because it's a virtual school, and I plug you into those classes that are going on right now. "Hey, teacher, you have a new person. She's going to be here for a little while." And I do the same thing. We get a hold of your teacher your homeroom teacher and we say, "She's taking geometry with us. Here, you can watch us. Where do you want us to be? Where is she? Help us. You can watch us teach her." So that coordination is there.

And I've been doing this for 38 years. I'm going to tell you, I never had that communication with my home instructors. I would love to tell you that it was true when I was a principal. I would love to tell you that I had my finger on every one of them, and I knew what they were teaching, and they reported back to my classroom teacher. I'd love to tell you that. For most people -- at least for me -- that was never true. This way I can tell you every minute the kid was online, what they did, how they did. This is very open. Everybody knows. I tell the school who the teacher is and where they work, and give them a contact number. This is real open stuff.

I think there are ways to deal with online that's intelligent. If people say it just has to be supplemental, as our program is, that's fine. My Virtual Charter for dropouts is another story. I wish it was in a different category so I wasn't part of the bigger discussion. But I think that kind of thing is fine. And I was always opposed to pulling people out of the school, because you have to remember who I am. I'm a service agency. They don't have to come to me. No one is required to use MOESC services. Ten thousand kids don't have to be on my busses, 5,000 don't have to do my nonpublic. No one has to do any of these things. I never want to offend my clients by saying, "Oh, you're (indiscernible)? Let me steal five kids out of here." I mean, I just wouldn't do it for other reasons as well. But this is different. High school dropouts are a different class. I think they should be treated in a different way, and we should make a different set of parameters for them. Because it's not the same as pulling out 10 5th graders. It just isn't.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: One more question. I heard you talk about high school, and dropouts, and the 17- to 19-year-old -- nothing about elementary school. Do you see a place for it?

MR. NOGUEIRA: Elementary school is really difficult. We started out 10 years ago, and the people we modeled after were Florida Virtual School. They had received a grant from Florida to create that, and they're very successful and do an excellent job. And they told us, "Pick out what you're going to do and do that one thing well. You can't do everything."

Elementary is just far different. I was an elementary teacher, and I really don't know how you could-- I can see how you can use

programs in the classroom, without a doubt. But giving over a whole course -- I don't know if those learners are ready to do that. I don't know that my 4th or 5th graders that I had would be ready to do that. Middle school kids, high school kids -- no problem. There is no problem. They do that in a heartbeat. Elementary I just don't see. Maybe there is a good model out there. I haven't seen one that really works to my satisfaction.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Any questions? (no response)

Thank you very much for your presentation. You really gave us a lot of information and food for thought.

MR. NOGUEIRA: Thanks for the opportunity. We appreciate it.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you very, very much. Deborah Cornavaca, from Save Our Schools.

I know that we were rather lengthy here today, but it's some good discussion.

DEBORAH CORNAVACA: Thank you.

I want to start by saying that I'm really humbled following Dr. (*sic*) Nogueira and Sister Elizabeth, perhaps intimidated too. (laughter) I think they do such tremendous work in New Jersey for New Jersey students with technology and with districts. And I would love to know more and learn more, and I would love us to use those as the models as we move forward in technology in classroom learning.

So I'm here intimidated and humbled, but I'm going to say what I came to say.

I'm here today speaking on behalf of Save Our Schools New Jersey, which is a grassroots, non-partisan organization of over 9,500 parents and other concerned citizens who believe that all New Jersey children should have access to a high quality public education. We do appreciate the opportunity to present the views of our organization on the topic of online learning to the Joint Committee today.

In the rapidly changing world of education and technology, it is timely and important that this Committee is devoting such careful attention to this topic. And I, for one, have certainly learned a lot by being here today.

Technology and education are not new collaboration. Public schools strive to introduce, keep pace with, take advantage of all sorts of technologies to enhance everything from communication with parents to instruction of students. Districts have technology policies and programs to integrate technology into their administration and curriculum within their own district's visions and means. The varied uses of technology in schools are as varied as the technologies themselves. A high school freshman signs onto Moodle to access a study guide, lecture notes, and participate in a forum where students work collaboratively on a project or study together for a test. A 5th grader watches his teacher guide the class through a microscope lesson by projecting a slide on the Promethean Board for all to analyze together. A 5-year-old in Kindergarten uses an iPad for an interactive reading lesson, advancing both her reading and comprehension skills. These are examples that I can cite from my own children of technology seamlessly woven into curriculum, advancing both content and use of technology for our leaders of tomorrow.

So we must give careful consideration to who and what is behind the current national push for online learning that has made its way to New Jersey. In a state with one of the best public school systems in the nation -- that uses technology in instruction, that has successful online programs, such as outlined by Dr. Nogueira and Sister Elizabeth, for such things as credit recovery and high school dropouts -- why are we feeling the pressure for an entirely new direction of online learning, its rapid expansion, most especially the push for virtual charter schools?

The answer to these questions raises issues in education about which Save Our Schools New Jersey advocates strongly -- in particular our opposition to for-profit companies in education, our position that local communities must have a real voice in the creation of charter schools -- in this instance virtual charter schools; that the Department of Education should not be allowed to circumvent both the letter and intent of the law to impose virtual charter schools on this state, schools that would receive the same 90 percent per-pupil funding as brick and mortar charter schools; and that we cannot continue to divert scarce public dollars to unproven experiments while the State continues to fail to meet its obligations to school districts in funding the SFRA.

Here I will briefly address Save Our Schools New Jersey's most pressing concerns regarding online learning in the context of policymaking. We want to begin with a very clear statement that we support the incorporation of online learning at the district level. We believe school districts are best able to discern the need of their student body, the capacity of the district to integrate technology and use external online curriculum -- perhaps to supplement course offerings, offer Advance Placement classes,

provide opportunities for students to recover lost time and credits, and provide alternative learning environments for students who have not been able to thrive in the traditional classroom.

These examples of district level uses of online learning are entirely different from the movement that is spreading across the country to promote schools that rely primarily or even exclusively on computer-based learning, whether the computers be located in private homes -- such as a virtual school is referred to -- or in a centralized location referred to most frequently as *hybrid schools*. The push for these schools is inextricably linked to business models of for-profit companies pushing their product, and cannot be, based on empirical evidence from such schools around the country, justified on the basis of academic outcome of the students.

We would like to highlight the need to be aware of the enormous sums of money being used to promote these schools. While advertising for high school dropouts is a reasonable way to expect to find these children and bring them into a special program within New Jersey, we have to acknowledge that it's fundamentally different than what the NJEA cited about K12 spending in the first eight months of 2012 -- \$21.5 million on advertising; and since 2007 the estimated total spent on advertising alone by the top 10 for-profit providers of online services is \$94.4 million. Some portion of this money, very possibly a large portion of this money, is taxpayer money received in payment by states that contract these companies for online schools. Advertising is not educating. I'd like us to just think about what that money would have done invested into our public school system.

Aggressive marketing is only one facet these companies use as strategies. Even more troubling to our members across the state is the acknowledgement of K12's CEO Ronald Packard that investors -- that, quote, "We understand the politics of education." Their understanding is reflected in their actions. They employ a strategy that includes hiring lobbyists, as we know they have done in New Jersey, to make their rounds to legislative chambers and offices, and donating large sums of money to State-level politicians. They promote model legislation written in conjunction with ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, to create an open markets for their online virtual charter schools. These expensive political maneuvers to buy influence in the world of education policy do not preclude Ronald Packard himself from earning \$5 million of compensation in 2011.

A recent in-depth report from Maine, on K12 Inc.'s predatory practices of creating markets and influencing both legislators and legislation, should serve as a cautionary tale for New Jersey as we consider the future of these companies and their schools in our state.

Save Our Schools is, frankly, outraged by the money invested in marketing, lobbying, influence peddling, and compensation packages, money that stems largely from taxpayer contributions towards public education. We do not want New Jersey students, taxpayers, elected officials, or public schools to be drawn into this expensive scheme to bring virtual schools to New Jersey. In New Jersey we have an effective and successful program of online learning, as you heard well-articulated before I came up here. And we cannot allow them to be hijacked by companies interested more in their Wall Street rating than their academic success.

As previously mentioned, academic success is something that these forms of schools cannot claim to accomplish. In Florida, we have examples of these schools not using certified teachers and teacher-student ratios of 275 to 1. In Colorado, we see virtual charter schools with graduation rates of 22 percent. In Ohio, we see the on-time graduation rate of 30 percent. In Arkansas, we have examples of outsourcing the grading of computer-written essays to people in India to save money. Across the country, we have teacher accounts of attendance problems -- teachers who have taught at these virtual charter schools -- accounts of attendance problems, burdensome workloads, sacrificed curriculum to compensate for unreasonable teacher-student ratios, high student dropout rates, and more.

It is clear that critical to any potential of academic progress in these virtual environments is substantial parental involvement, a factor well known to be important to all student success. But K12 and other companies target low-income areas for placement of their schools, specifically because the per-pupil amount the company will receive is generally higher in urban, poor areas. There is no attention paid to whether this virtual environment is appropriate to the students they recruit.

As a *New York Times* author has said, “A portrait emerges of a company that tries to squeeze profits from public school dollars by raising enrollment, increasing teacher workload, and lowering standards.” This can best be explained in the words of Ronald Packard himself, in fact, when he says in a Wall Street interview, “We are now that much closer to our manifest destiny of making K12 Inc. education available to every child.”

And therein lies the fundamental divide between Save Our Schools New Jersey and those promoting online charter schools. Our goal,

and the goal of our 9,500 members of our organization, is to ensure that every child in New Jersey has access to an excellent public education. These companies simply want to make their product available to every child, regardless of appropriateness, academic standards or outcomes.

Save Our Schools New Jersey strongly opposes virtual charter schools in this state; the presence of for-profit companies hiding behind the screen of a nonprofit board; the use of taxpayer money to create a market and then advertise their product, influence policymakers, and ultimately experiment on our children's education for the purpose of profits.

Save Our Schools New Jersey knows the importance of technology and the potential that online learning can offer students across the state. We strongly urge our legislators to ensure that the Department of Education not create regulation contrary to the law or in violation of its intent with respect to virtual charter schools. We urge you to act in your capacity to create legislation that will create an appropriate framework to encourage innovation and the use of technology in our schools, recognizing that school districts should be allowed to develop their own strategies and plans for the roles of online learning in their schools. We ask you reaffirm that under the 1995 Charter Act there is no allowance for virtual charter schools, and that the primary motivation of accessing 90 percent per-pupil funding is not justified, nor reason to allow these schools to open in a state with one of the best public school systems in the country. Our increasingly scarce resources for public education must be focused on improving and supporting public schools for all children, and integrating online opportunities in those schools rather than diverting precious resources away from these schools for profiteering.

I want to thank you all very much for your time, and for accommodating me before I have to pick up my children today.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Well, Deborah, you opened up your presentation by saying that you were intimidated. I can tell you that your delivery was not one from a person who was intimidated. (laughter) You were very, very strong in your opinions, and I want to thank you for your presentation.

I'm just going to ask the question: We talked about the graduation rates of the virtual schools versus the public schools. Do we have any knowledge if some of those students were some of the students who weren't succeeding in the first place?

MS. CORNAVACA: In the states that we've looked at, we don't know the reasons that the students who are in those high schools have entered. We don't know-- We cannot track their records.

We do know that they tend to be students, obviously, who weren't flourishing in their environment, because if they were, they would probably be staying. So you come with additional challenges without a doubt. But if one of our goals is to increase graduation rates in our state and to decrease the achievement gap, and we see that this model is not producing that in other states, I think we have to double down caution and say, "This is not going to solve one of the problems we've identified here."

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: All right, Deborah. I've given you the magic wand. And you have the magic wand so that we can prevent dropouts, so that we can have our students embrace education and realize what it is. And we know what we're dealing with. What would you do?

MS. CORNAVACA: Well, first I would probably ask more people like Dr. Nogueira for their advice. (laughter) Secondly, there is no single solution. There are multi-faceted problems that we have to address simultaneously. And one of them goes back to early childhood education. When we make a commitment to early childhood education, and we bring children into a school system who, by third grade, feel confident in their reading abilities and their learning abilities, they'll be far less likely to drop out by a senior in high school. So that is one broad stroke that I would suggest.

We also need to address various reasons that children are dropping out and what is lacking within those high schools. And we also need to address the fact that in many instances these schools have grown to too large a size, or too dilapidated a building under too much financial stress, to address the needs that these schools themselves can identify and recognize. It's not that we don't know what the problems are with the students. We do. But they don't always have the resources to address them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Well, Deborah, I think we're going to make you happy again, because in February we are planning to do an early childhood education hearing. Because we recognize that every place I have gone -- whether it be the inner city, the suburban areas, charter schools, public schools -- every place they tell me that if I can't get them by third grade, I'm finished. And we know that most parents today -- everybody is working. And our children need to have the same standards for early childhood education. I should know that if I go to X school, Y school, or Z school, I'm getting a quality education. And we haven't put

forward our money, our training, or anything into early childhood. And that will become a priority that we hope to address. So I'm glad that you recognize that as one of our problems. And I hope we will see you back again in February.

Assemblyman Ramos.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: My question is: Would you be opposed to the online version that Dr. (*sic*) Nogueira was just speaking of regarding 17- to 19-year-olds specifically -- the dropout issue?

MS. CORNAVACA: I would have to agree very strongly with him. I think it's an important model to try. And I wish that it didn't have to fall under the rubric of a charter school. I would encourage this Legislature to look for funding sources that would fund such a vital and important project without putting it under the myriad of problems that our charter legislation has right now and without being -- falling victim to the politics of charter schools. So I would concur 100 percent, with due deference.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I think I would agree with his model as well. But I think the details to put something like that together-- As far as the funding sources go, does the district itself fund the dropout student? And things of that nature really have to come into play, as far as specifics to fund such a program. I think it's pretty vital, especially where I work and in other districts around the state as well.

MS. CORNAVACA: And given just the basic -- that a student gets 90 percent of the per-pupil student -- goes to the charter school. When you have a dropout, how does the money transfer? There are just so many

-- a host of problems for such an important program that we should look -- this is worth looking for another source of funding to do.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: You spoke a lot about the profiteering aspect of a lot of these schools, and that's a huge concern of mine as well. We don't produce widgets; we're producing people. And even for many of these schools that just started in the last five or six years, the data really isn't as strong yet or doesn't exist yet. I know in our schools in Paterson and Jersey City, no matter-- Our kids come to school smiling and happy; they leave smiling and happy. But when our test scores come in July and August and it says, "Your student got 190-- They didn't pass. They got 190 instead of 200, or 198 out of 200." It doesn't reflect that they're passing. So those smiling faces -- we think we're doing a decent job; our test scores don't reflect that yet. So I think that's an issue that needs to be addressed.

MS. CORNAVACA: Could I comment on that briefly?

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Sure.

MS. CORNAVACA: There are two things. The first is that we have to look at how appropriate these learning environments-- Online learning is a particular environment not meant for everybody. And when you bring it into an urban area where children don't have access to the Internet at home or access to a computer at home, and yet that's the basis from which they're learning-- It's like we all know that children read better in school when they have books at home. How are they going to perform as well in school on computer-based learning, where their homework would also be, when they don't have that equipment at home? And remember, it's not just a computer, it's Internet access.

The other thing that that raises is a discussion you were having earlier about Common Core State Standards testing -- which is going to become computer-based. One of the huge pushes in this state is to decrease the achievement gap. When you move to computer-based testing, you're now going to be comparing a wealthy district that has computers in every classroom for every student -- and those children probably go home to multiple devices, so they're very fluent in how to drag, and click, and cut, and highlight, and all those other things -- to urban schools that will have just enough to process testing five days a week for three months out of the year. And mind you, then, that the children who test at the beginning of that cycle will have a disadvantage over the ones who test at the end of that cycle because of the curriculum taught in the interim. And they're not going to be as fluent on those machine.

Now, should it be a goal for us to get technological fluency for all of our children in this day and age? Absolutely. But will we achieve decreasing the achievement gap by moving to this form of testing in this state? I would be the first one to be happy to say I'm wrong, but I'm willing to put a lot down right now that it will not do a thing to improve the achievement gap. It will exacerbate the problems we have.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I'm just going to make a comment to that, because I agree with you. When you talk about urban-suburban, I even see it in communities within the suburban community. I look at where I have been in my life -- in two different districts, one that had money and one that didn't have money. And when I went back to visit where I had been, I said, "Oh my God, nothing has changed." They don't have the money to invest. And it breaks my heart that the students there

do not have the benefits of all the multiple devices and what I have had at this other school.

So it's becoming not just even urban-suburban now, it's all over. And it's something that we have to address. And I think the biggest issue -- and it's something that we certainly don't have solutions to here -- is how we want to fund education. And it all comes down to it. Because someone lives in a wealthy neighborhood, their kids get more. It's just not fair, because it's the same student who is coming out who will one day be our doctor, one day be our lawyer, one day going to take care of me. And I need to make sure that they all have the same opportunities. And we haven't done a great job of addressing how we want to fund education. But that's for another day, another hearing.

MS. CORNAVACA: I'll be back for that one too. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I'm counting on you to have some ideas.

Thank you very much for coming.

MS. CORNAVACA: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Lorna, I know that you've been waiting for a long time.

Lorna is from the New Jersey Virtual Academy Charter School. It's not yet open, but it's in its planning year.

Lorna Bryant.

And I can see you. Boy, you have so many ideas in your head. (laughter) I've been watching you out there.

Can we take a short, five-minute break? I don't want to be disrespectful, but if I don't visit the ladies' room I'm not going to be

listening to you. So can we have a five-minute break? (affirmative responses)

Thank you.

(RECESS)

AFTER RECESS:

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Lorna, I'd like to thank you for being so gracious. But now everyone is in a better mood because they've been fed, they don't have a headache. We're all taken care of now. (laughter)

So now we're all ready to listen to you, Lorna. It's all yours.

LORNA BRYANT: Thank you.

I hope I can still speak intelligibly at this point. Don't hold that against me.

My name is Dr. Lorna Bryant. I'm here today representing the New Jersey Virtual Academy Charter School Board, as well as those families who have asked me to speak on their behalf.

I'm going to take a little bit of time to speak a little bit about my background, because there certainly have been questions raised today and issues raised about motivation for people coming to work in virtual schools or working in the virtual model. And so I think I would like to, at least from a personal and professional perspective, address that.

I come from a traditional brick and mortar public school background, working with primarily low socioeconomic and at-risk students.

My focus in my later years, and certainly the focus of my dissertation, was working with twice exceptional students, specifically students who are gifted but on the autism spectrum.

I am also the parent of a child with profound special needs. So I want to be very clear when I say, as with everybody in this room, that my intentions are to ensure that every child has the best educational opportunity possible however that looks and whatever format. That is what brought me here. I worked in a school and in districts that, without question, did the very best that they could for the students that they served. And the majority of those students were very well served.

Where I became concerned as an educator and as a parent was for those students who, for whatever reason, the traditional system simply wasn't working, and it wasn't due to lack of effort or expertise on the part of their teachers, on the part of the administration, or counselors. They just needed something different. And in looking for what that something different might be, I came into the "virtual" world.

I'm here specifically today to speak to the New Jersey Virtual Academy Charter School, where I hope to be head of school at the end of this planning year when we open in September. But I have worked in other states and I have worked with other virtual academies, and I have worked specifically with -- I don't want to say *special* populations necessarily, because I think that actually a fair number of students who come to virtual academies fall into one of those categories. But I've seen how this could also work for your "typical" students as well.

So a lot of questions have been raised that I was not necessarily planning to address in my statement, but I would be happy to address any questions that I can at the end of my brief statement.

Since 2010, the New Jersey Virtual Academy Board and I have worked very closely with the Department of Education to bring this option to families across the state. We have done everything asked of us to guarantee that we will be accountable in the same way that every other charter school in New Jersey is accountable, and to demonstrate how we will offer another high-quality public school option for families in New Jersey.

Like all other public charter schools in New Jersey -- and I think this is the point -- if I leave here today making no other point -- is this: We will hire New Jersey-certified teachers who are residents in the State of New Jersey. And the one thing that I think everybody here can agree on is that nothing can substitute or take the place of an effective teacher. This model does not propose to remove teachers from the teaching equation. And certainly we can speak more to that after this if you would like.

But our teachers, throughout the process last year when we were hoping to open this fall-- Before we were given an additional planning year, we had gone through the process of interviewing teachers, of extending preliminary offers of employment. All background checks have been conducted. And certainly that will be the case moving forward. There is a significant amount of professional development on (indiscernible), and preparation that goes into bringing our teachers on board, in addition to, of course -- as they move forward -- there is ongoing professional development and work with the staff.

Being a teacher in a virtual school, as several people have already alluded to, is a little bit different than it is in a brick and mortar school, but the responsibilities don't change. Those teachers are there to provide quality instruction, and they're also there to provide those pieces that we look to in our schools, and that is sensitivity to the children's needs, an awareness of something if something is happening in that child's life. And I think that one of the things that we see -- and I've certainly heard from the, literally, hundreds of virtual teachers who I've spoken with in the schools that I've visited and the families that I've spoken to -- that there is a significant amount of knowledge of those families, involvement with those students. And I have more teachers who have said to me, "When I was working in the traditional classroom where I had 30 kids in a class, I saw 150, maybe 200 kids a day. I think I was a good teacher, and I think I did the best for a large number of those students. But there were some who I just couldn't reach, I just couldn't see, who would come in -- maybe wouldn't cause any problems, who would leave at the end of my period, and I no more got to know those students than a student who never stepped foot into my class." And so every teacher I spoke to said they get a very intense, one-to-one, personal relationship with their students and the students' families. And I don't think that can be passed over. And I certainly don't want to make the suggestion that a computer teaches these children.

Certainly it would be disingenuous to say that online instruction isn't a part of the model. It certainly is. But that is with teacher support. And those teachers are certified, those teachers live in New Jersey,

those teachers have all the same background checks as any other teacher in the State of New Jersey.

In addition to that piece, we have worked with the Department of Education to make sure that we follow mandated attendance requirements, that we prepare our students for mandatory statewide tests and other assessments. And we have guaranteed that we will be transparent when it comes to sharing students' academic growth over time. I know that that certainly has been raised, and it should be raised, as a thoughtful question about students' academic growth in other schools -- in other virtual schools. And I'm sure that will be the driving factor here in New Jersey in how we plan to address that. And I can certainly speak to that as well.

Our accountability plans also include addressing concerns raised by people who either don't understand or simply haven't taken the time to learn about a model, that does exactly what we as all educators claim to have as our primary goal: recognizing that each child is unique, and as such entitled to the educational approach that works best for him or for her.

All of that being said, I recognize that there are legal and political issues at play here that I don't necessarily think we'll get into today. But what I want to talk about is the human element that somehow seems to have been overlooked amongst some of the very heated rhetoric and much misinformation.

Over the past two years I have personally had the opportunity to speak with and meet with hundreds of families that are looking to the Virtual Academy as an option for their children. In reading the comments

and the critiques of those who would oppose our school's opening, it is disheartening to me how little consideration seems to have been given to the people actually affected by this opposition.

As an educator, I have to believe that if you took the time to meet with and speak to these families, to get to know them as I and the Board have done, you would have a difficult time ignoring their pleas for a program that meets their children's needs in a way that, for whatever reason, the traditional brick and mortar system cannot.

There is the 7-year-old girl who, due to a life-threatening condition, is rarely able to leave her bedroom or her hospital room, let alone step foot into a classroom. Her own district has acknowledged that it cannot accommodate her academic needs to the extent that this bright, creative, intellectually advanced but physically challenged little girl needs. We can. We can assign her a full-time teacher, a classroom, a challenging curriculum in all her subjects, and we can connect her with her peers on a daily basis. We can give her a full-time school rather than a part-time substitute for what her able-bodied friends are receiving in a neighborhood school.

There is a military family stationed at Fort Dix who, after six moves in 10 years, would like to give their children some consistency in their education. Having had their children enrolled in virtual academies in three of the states they were previously stationed, imagine their astonishment at finding that New Jersey, of all places, still considers this to be an out-of-the-box concept.

There are the athletes whose accomplishments we laud and we are happy to claim when they compete and succeed at a level that makes

the whole state look good. But when these families come to us and ask for a public school option that will challenge and prepare their children academically, while allowing them the flexibility to train as they need in order to succeed on the court or in the gymnasium, we balk.

There are hundreds of families that might choose this option. There are those who are bullied, there are those on the autism spectrum, and there are those with families who are in transition for one reason or another.

I really could go on and on, and I might, but I won't. The bottom line is this: All of these children deserve an education that works best for them, regardless of where they live or of their families' ability to pay for the alternatives to the traditional public school options or other options available to them. I know that the traditional public school system, especially one as accomplished as New Jersey's, serves most students very, very well.

That said, is it difficult to imagine that a school with greater flexibility but equal accountability; a school that provides a more individualized approach to instruction might not work for just 1 in 100 students, 1 in 1,000? The approved charter application for our school assumes that this will be the right fit for one in 1,600 students and families. This is hardly the threat to the traditional public school system that opponents would have you believe.

This model will not work for everyone. We don't advocate that it does. But for the children who, for whatever reason and for however long, need an alternative that provides the support of a traditional public school with the flexibility and individualization that today's technology

allows, the school is a gift. Why on Earth would we want to deprive a parent of this choice due to opposition based, at best, on half-truths and misconceptions and, at worst, on self-serving agendas and some deliberate misinformation?

The New Jersey Charter School law was passed to promote the creation of truly innovative and new models. You have one before you. As everybody has said, there are always two sides to everything. And what I would like to do, as Dr. Fuller did, is I would like to offer my time, at any time, to anybody in this room to better understand how the school works, to meet with our families, to see a teacher teaching, to let you see how this model actually works so that we're not making statements based on suppositions and assumptions. I want to show you I will be held to the same accountability measures as other public charter schools and how it can work very well for many families.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you very much, Dr. Bryant.

I need to ask you-- The school is not open. Am I right?

DR. BRYANT: No. We've been given an additional planning year. And so if we do receive our charter, it would open next fall.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: What grades?

DR. BRYANT: Grades K-10 the first year, adding 11th grade the following year, and 12th grade the following year.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: How many families do you have interested in the school, and how did they find out about your school?

DR. BRYANT: So we had about 1,200 families who submitted initial enrollment or registration papers. The school would serve 850 the first year.

There are various ways that families find out about this. For our purposes, a lot of the families that contacted us were familiar with K12 curriculum, and that's the curriculum that we would use. There is a site where families basically go, and many of them said they clicked on the K12 website looking for public school options in New Jersey, and that's how they found us and that's how they contacted us. That really is how the majority of families contacted us.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: And when you mentioned some of the reasons that the families are coming to you -- for whatever reasons -- what would be the major -- the highest percentage of reasons that the parents are reaching out to you?

DR. BRYANT: I think there are two pieces. On the one hand we have those families who say they really want to be actively engaged. I'll say two pieces, actually. There are probably -- I would say three. I think the first is that we have some families who really want to be actively engaged in their children's education. So we have families who are educators themselves. We have a fair number of families where the parents have advanced degrees and they do want to be able to be engaged in their children's education. That's one piece.

The other piece is we have several students whose parents feel they are not able to progress at a level that works for them. One of the reasons that we get children who are twice exceptional is because in one area they are very advanced, they're moving ahead really, really quickly in

one subject area. But because of social challenges or because of a disability in another subject area, there is a real disconnect in what they're able to get in a traditional school day.

And then the other piece -- and this is a large number of students -- there are safety concerns, bullying concerns within their neighborhood school.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So are most of the children presently enrolled in a school, are they home schooled?

DR. BRYANT: Actually, we looked at -- we pulled at those numbers, and I haven't looked at them in a little bit. I would be happy to send that information to you. From the students who enrolled, the majority were currently enrolled in traditional public schools. That was then followed by students who were in private schools, and then by students who were home schooled.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: How would you handle the testing situation online? Will they go to a building in order to take a test, or will they be doing them from home.

DR. BRYANT: So the statewide tests -- and obviously that's how we're going to assess whether or not our students are making progress, whether or not they are learning what we say they are learning. So we have been working -- and we have already been working with the Department of Education on this to talk about securing sites around the state that are accessible to all the students. They would obviously be approved by the Department of Education to make sure that they are appropriate testing sites. And then we have proctors who are on site with those students to administer the tests. Obviously several of our students will have special

needs, and so we make accommodations for that to make sure that they get the appropriate testing accommodations made.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Refresh my memory again. How many students do you think will be attending the school?

DR. BRYANT: It's 850, K-10.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Thank you.

Assemblyman Ramos.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: You can answer the question I asked earlier. I have a 4-and-a-half year old going to Kindergarten in September. What would his experience be like in your model and my experience as a parent in the model?

DR. BRYANT: Interestingly, we actually do have a fair number of students who are Kindergarteners whose parents want them to be in this model. And there are various reasons. Usually because the child is advanced academically, the parent wants them to be able to move forward a little bit more quickly than they had heard that they might in their traditional classroom. In many cases it's a social issue. The parents are concerned that their child is perhaps not quite ready to be in the traditional classroom.

The first thing I want to be very clear about is they do not sit. There is this image of this poor, pale little child sitting in a closet somewhere clattering away at a keyboard while mom is off doing something, and they're being babysat by the computer. The younger the child is, the less information is delivered online. So a child who is that age could expect to maybe get about 10 percent of their instruction actually delivered online. And I'm not saying that-- That's separate from the teacher who does

instruct the students, who illuminate and so on. But the actual delivering of the instruction will be about 10 percent on the computer.

Beyond that, they receive materials. Every child-- And this is the thing with a virtual school. It's a little bit of a misnomer, I think, to call this *online learning*, but that has become the more favored name for it because it suggests that it's all done on the computer. And we recognize that you shouldn't simply plug in technology for technology's sake. In many cases there are very traditional teaching methods that work best for children. And young children need hands-on. So if we're going to have a child who is going to do an experiment with dirt, then we ship them dirt. They will receive, literally, tubs of materials full of manipulatives. They're going to get books that they actually hold in their hands and turn the pages -- so they don't do what my son did the other day, which was open up a book and try to swipe it with his finger, which horrified me at a level I don't even want to get into, because they get so used to using technology all the time. They get hardcopy books, they get materials they can actually use and get their hands dirty with. And then some of their instruction is delivered online. The older the children get, the more their instruction is going to be delivered online. So by the time they're in high school, they're going to get about 75 percent of that instruction delivered online.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: That requires mommy and daddy to be home. Mommy and daddy work--

DR. BRYANT: It does. And so here is--

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: --to handle all those materials with them.

DR. BRYANT: Absolutely. And so those are the questions that we've had. Again, 850 students. We were very open about that from the beginning. It involves an active and engaged learning coach. Because not all families can, should that preclude those families who want to and are able to?

On one hand, we have those families who have learning coaches who are the parents; but there are others -- and we see this in our military families, and there are many military families -- who basically have, for want of a better word, *cohorts* or *cooperatives* of families who serve as learning coaches for the children. And so they will go on base-- In fact, there are several states that have on-base programs where the parents will come together and, today, this parent or this adult will act as a learning coach for this group of military children who are enrolled in the academy. And so they work out-- They have groups that are able to serve as learning coaches.

We have some families where mom and dad both work and the grandparent is the learning coach, or they actually have somebody come in and who -- a university student or somebody they trust.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: I'm sorry. The learning coach goes to the home?

DR. BRYANT: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Okay.

DR. BRYANT: So there are two components that we have proposed in New Jersey. The majority of this is going to take place at home. But in the budget that we submitted, we have also accounted for several learning sites around the state. And we recognize that we want to provide some scaffolding in a series of support structures for students who

need it. So, yes, most of this will take place at home. We'll deliver the materials, we'll deliver the instruction, the teachers will instruct through Illuminate and various other online sessions. But there are learning centers. And when it comes to a point where a teacher says, "Look, I really feel that this student would benefit from a couple of days of face-to-face instruction," we can bring them to a learning center. If there are some concerns about, perhaps, this one week-- And, again, not to keep going on about the military families, but they are near and dear to my heart. Dad is in the midst of, or mom is in the midst of, a deployment. Our family is really consumed right now with trying to handle that. We will have these centers where teachers are available to go and work with that student for that week while the parents are dealing with the issues that they're having in their home. And we feel that that is a really useful component to this, because we realize that there are different pieces that need to happen.

There have been references to academic integrity and cheating, and certainly we can talk about that and the pieces in place with that. But this is another one of those components. A teacher has some real concerns. She has noticed, perhaps, a change in the student's pattern of performance. And this is an opportunity for us to say, "We would like for you to come to the learning center so we can do some one-on-one work with you and get a sense of just how well you really are grasping the material that we see you are getting."

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I just have one more question.

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: An adult has to be present when they're communicating online. I happen to have met a young girl from North Carolina -- it was a family, and this was their experience -- was that most of the learning for them had to occur in the evening because that's when the parents were home. And they had a few issues when they couldn't communicate through the computer or had questions and had to make the telephone calls. The teacher wasn't always available at that time. And it was difficult getting ahold of the teacher online. And I sensed tension truly between the parent, the child, and what was going on. How do you plan to handle that?

DR. BRYANT: And that is something-- I mentioned some of the athletes who we will possibly serve. And that is something that we have to be very aware of. Because one of the things that makes this model attractive is the fact that they have some flexibility during the traditional school day and, therefore, they're going to need some instruction outside of that. What we have talked about, and what our hope is, is to essentially have a cohort of teachers who will work with those students who specifically have those challenges or have those particular scheduling needs. And that way-- Another attractive piece about that is we have a lot of teachers who apply -- and there are many teachers who apply -- who are excellent teachers, but they have some similar challenges that some of our students face. We have a number of teachers who have physical challenges that make it very difficult for them to step into a traditional classroom. And it's wonderful to be able to provide them an opportunity to use their skills to provide instruction within this model. And so being able to offer different

cohorts of time when teachers are required to be the teacher is also attractive to many of these teachers.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I guess when you hire your faculty that's how you will be doing it -- by time when they're available to--

DR. BRYANT: Overall, we look for teachers-- And when our teachers interview with us, one of the things we're very clear about -- because certainly people come to us and say, "I have three children at home, and this will be a wonderful way for me to stay home with my children all day and teach on the side." We're very clear with our teachers that this is a full-time job. And by and large our teachers teach from 8:00 to 5:00. I mean, that is a traditional day. There will be some exceptions based on the students that we enroll. And that's something that we look at when we make staffing decisions as well.

So our teachers have to understand that while the majority will work a traditional school day, so to speak, there will be those who would work different hours based on the needs of our students. Again, that doesn't take away from the fact that certification requirements remain exactly the same no matter when those teachers teach. And it's a full-time job with full-time responsibility. Most of our teachers make child care arrangements. They go to this like it's a job. Whether they're doing it in their home or whether they're doing it at a learning center, this is their full-time job.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I'm not going to try to get stuck on how much time I spend on the computer, but I'm going to ask that question anyway. I'm a student, and I'm in the 5th grade. How much time will I be on the computer within all -- the program?

DR. BRYANT: In terms of actual computer time: If you're a 5th grader, I would say roughly 15 to 20 percent of your instruction is going to be delivered online. So they also have that offline time, and they also have-- The work is delivered to them. There are some of their assignments that they complete online, there are some of the interactive components that they participate in and observe. But then the majority of their work is also going to be done offline. So I would say maybe up to 30 percent, but a fair number of it is done offline. Because we recognize (*a*), their attention span is only so long, and they can only sit in front of a computer for so long; and then (*b*), there comes a point of sort of limited returns, where the longer they're doing the same kind of thing, the less engaged they're going to be. Most kids love technology. We know this. But that doesn't take away from the fact that, just because they love technology -- it doesn't necessarily meet their way of learning. So you're still going to have your kinesthetic learners who need to be using their little hands and moving around, you're still going to have your auditory learners who need to be getting it delivered to them that way. One of the nice things when I spoke with families -- and certainly those with children who have -- again, not to harp on the autism piece. It's just, again, my interest. They love the fact that the students had the ability to get up and move around at a time that was -- that they needed to. And they felt that they were so much more productive. The curriculum, they said, was good, and that was wonderful. But it was less the curriculum than it was the way in which it was delivered to them. And the ability for those students to say, "Look, I can sit for 10 minutes and then I need to get up and just walk around for a minute or two," which would be somewhat disruptive in a traditional classroom -- they

were able to make those adjustments within their own home, within the virtual setting, and it helped the students productivity as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: One more question: timeframe. Am I thinking, not thinking, the September to June timeframe? Am I thinking the Monday through Friday timeframe? Do I contact a teacher on a Saturday or Sunday? I'm just asking.

DR. BRYANT: We essentially, from the very beginning-- And students will initially get a calendar. And we basically will follow the school calendar, and that's Monday through Friday. Here are your holidays and so on. The reality is that the students can really access their curriculum and they can work at any time.

Now, it may be Sunday night-- And our teachers are human beings. They do have lives. And we don't want to burn them out either, and we respect that they are entitled to have lives outside of the classroom. Some of them have a hard time grasping that too, and we actually have teachers who -- many people have had to say, "You have to turn it off. Because the reality is these students can follow you home because they can access you a lot of times." And that's true actually in traditional classrooms too. I know. Once you give a student a cell number you're in trouble.

But technically, students can access their curriculum at any time. What is built in as well are various ways for them to contact their teachers. There are discussion threads. There is a tool within the curriculum that we use called *Raise Your Hand*. And essentially a student may be watching. There may be a lesson that a teacher delivered, and the student was unable to attend that live lesson during the week so it's recorded. And the student goes back, and the student watches the lesson

and the recording. And then they can raise their hand, essentially, and they see something that they want the teacher to clarify, they want a response. And the teacher, the next morning, when she goes in she sees, “Okay, this student was watching this on Sunday night. They had this question. I wasn’t available to ask. But I have it right here in front of me and I can hopefully have a response to them before they even log onto their computer the next morning.”

A lot of families-- We have traditional holidays, but families -- again, the military families who often will take off, in the traditional school, a week or so when mom or dad come home. They can continue to access their curriculum, they can continue to work. And some will choose to do that over holidays, on weekends so that they can get a little bit ahead. And then the teacher will follow up with them through one of these other tools.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: So when you’re talking a live lesson, that means that they’ve taped the teacher. And when I turn on my computer, I’m watching a teacher.

DR. BRYANT: In the live lesson, when it’s live the teachers are actually interacting with the students. So you have this tool. It’s almost like (indiscernible) meeting on steroids -- is probably the best way to describe it -- where the students have, essentially, their white board in front of them. They can hear the teacher, they can see the teacher. It may be small group, it may be one-to-one, in some cases it’s whole group. It may be you and your whole class. They can hear the other students participate, you can write your questions to the teacher on the board. And it’s that interactive component that the teacher does -- direct instruction. And the students have the opportunity to respond and interact.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Any other questions? (no response)

Thank you very much. We appreciate it.

DR. BRYANT: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: Paul Lund? Is he here? (no response)

I think you're all going to be happy with this next statement: We're finished. (laughter)

Not bad. You come to a meeting, you have lunch. It's okay.

No, truly--

ASSEMBLYMAN RAMOS: And you fed them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: I fed them. It's good.

Truly, lots of information here today, lots to read. And I know, for me, my brain is ready to explode with everything that I learned today. And I want to thank each and every one of you for being so patient and for being so open-minded. And I'm sure that when we come back in February we'll have even more. And you know what? You're invited to come back in February.

Will they have lunch again? (laughter)

MS. SCHULZ (Executive Director): We will have lunch again.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN WAGNER: We will have lunch again.

Thank you very much for coming.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)