
Public Hearing

before

JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING REFORM

"Testimony from members of the public regarding the funding of public schools"

LOCATION: The Atrium
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Newark, New Jersey

DATE: October 17, 2006
2:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF JOINT COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator John H. Adler, Co-Chair
Assemblyman Herb Conaway Jr., Co-Chair
Senator Joseph V. Doria Jr.
Senator Gerald Cardinale
Assemblyman Brian P. Stack
Assemblyman David W. Wolfe



ALSO PRESENT:

Theodore C. Settle
Kathleen Fazzari
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aides*

Keith White
*Assembly Majority
Committee Aide*

Nicole DeCostello
Senate Republican
Thomas Neff
*Assembly Republican
Committee Aides*

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

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SENATOR JOHN H. ADLER (Co-Chair): Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to be here on a dreary, rainy day to talk about a dreary, critically important topic.

And my apologies in advance for any abruptness we show you as we try to get as many ideas, from as many people, to get the diversity of thought that we need to consider, to try to do a good job with these thorny issues.

My name is John Adler. I'm one of the two Chairs of this Joint Committee. Assemblyman Conaway is on his way, I understand. Assemblyman Stack, Assemblyman Wolfe, and Senator Cardinale are here. I believe Senator Doria is on the way as well. But if they do not attend, you should be assured that they have access to the Web site, which of all these different hearings-- Trenton hearings and public hearings are recorded, and so they and the general public can have access to what happens here; as well as a written transcript, in the case of the members of this Committee.

I have to give two special thanks -- three special thank, frankly -- as we begin. First, to President Altenkirch and the staff at NJIT, who have been enormously helpful in setting up the logistics for this hearing today, and for providing this beautiful facility for the public to use and to enjoy, and to think great things about NJIT in the future. So, thanks, President Altenkirch, and all the folks on his staff, and all the folks who are in this room -- keeping us safe, and providing us with a sort of forum we want for public participation.

Secondly, to the Mayor of Newark, who offered to speak. And he was very gracious in offering to speak, and I was equally gracious in declining his offer; because frankly, as much as I want to hear from him all

the time, I'd much rather hear from the public. And I think the members of this Committee and the members of the Legislature really want to hear from the public and the different constituencies that make up the public. So my thanks to Cory Booker for his willingness to come speak to us today.

And similarly, my thanks to one of our host legislators, Craig Stanley, who is here, and who has shown a tremendous interest in education for all children, and who has taken the time to be with us for at least part of the hearing today; and for his great efforts over a number of years to help Newark, North Jersey, Central Jersey, South Jersey, and the people of New Jersey. So thanks, Craig, for being here, very, very much.

We're going to sort of do this somewhat casually. Please come up, please talk, and we probably will not have that many questions from members of this panel, because we just want to have you talk and have you educate us on your specific perspectives. So, please, don't take offense if we don't ask you questions. Frankly, it's partly a function of time. There are many, many people signed up to speak today. And if we ask questions of each of the speakers, we would get through five, or maybe 10 speakers, instead of the 70 or so that have signed up. The fact that people have signed up is great. The fact that you want to come, in part, to tell us what we should not do is great. And I imagine there are many people who want us to preserve the good things in public education, the good things in home rule, the good things in how we structure our school systems; and we value that sort of commentary. But even more important, at a time when we really have a property tax crisis in much of our state and we want to improve our education outcomes, we really want to focus on things we should do differently, or better, or that we should stop doing.

So while I'm not going to cut off people that have some ideas about what we should keep doing, I'm really hopeful that people will say something different than just, "keep doing this in my district, in my community, for my interest group." I'm hopeful that you'll say that we should do something different, because our charge from the Legislature is to find different ways to achieve a great public good, which is a thorough and efficient education for each child in New Jersey, in an affordable manner for property taxpayers and state taxpayers. So with that sort of gentle admonition, I want you to sort of think of your testimony in terms of telling us what we should be doing differently to make the system, overall, fairer for kids and fairer for taxpayers.

Now, our first speaker today -- not by any particular preference other than sign-up time and people's attendance already here -- is Frank Mikorski of the Senior Men's Forum. So, Mr. Mikorski, if you could come up here, speak into the microphone. And if I don't welcome each individual speaker going forward, I welcome all of you. I'm grateful to all of you. I know Assemblyman Stanley, and Mayor Booker, and President Altenkirch, and the members of the this Committee welcome all of you and are grateful to all of you. But that's my last really, really friendly thing.

Frank, it's good to see you.

F R A N K M I K O R S K I: Was that the end of the friendliness or--

SENATOR ADLER: Your time's up. (laughter)

And to start with, we're going to try to be about five minutes per speaker. And I'll tell you, we had a hearing like this a week ago in Collingswood and we started out with five minutes. And the first few speakers stretched their time beyond five minutes, to seven and eight

minutes, and Assemblyman Conaway and I were a little too timid, a little bit too respectful of the first few speakers, who stole the time of later speakers. And the later speakers ended up with two or three minutes each, and an abruptness of conversation and dialogue that I think is not fair to those later speakers, who may have just as valuable thoughts. So if you could start with five minutes and set a good example for the following speakers and for the members of this Committee.

Mr. Mikorski, welcome

MR. MIKORSKI: Thank you very much, Senator.

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee, and thus far have attended all your meetings.

I am Frank Mikorski, member of the South Plainfield Senior Men's Forum. I have served as a school board member from 1993 to 2003, and a number of those years as board president. South Plainfield is a community of approximately 22,000 residents with 20 to 25 percent being senior citizens. The goal of our forum is to be involved in the activities of the municipality and school district, with emphasis on governance and fiscal management. We are nonpartisan, most of us over 65, and the majority retired from industry. We attend the meetings and have participated in budget discussions. We have met with seniors at the senior center and have made presentations on the school budget, discussing the revenue side of the budget.

Our school budget property tax levy for '04-'05 to '06-'07 has increased by \$7 million. For the same period, our State aid has been reduced by 244,000. We told the seniors we receive approximately 17 percent State aid, and the taxpayers fund 80 percent in local property taxes

to pay for the education of our children. Our cost per student is \$9,822. After our presentation, the seniors could not understand why we only received 70 percent (*sic*), when they are aware that Abbott districts receive considerably more.

The seniors prepared petitions that were mailed to legislators. You should have received a copy of this petition, but I will read the petition for the record, very quickly: “We, the undersigned seniors of South Plainfield, are hereby advising you, our selected legislators, handling matters important to us, that we strongly reject discriminatory taxes within our state. It has come to our attention only recently that selected communities in New Jersey are being subsidized by receiving a greater percentage of State aid for education than our South Plainfield. Specifically, we learned that as a result, 31 districts in our state have proportionately less realty tax burden from school budgets than in our community.

“Realistically, we do not favor a program that reduces taxes for some cities and thus increases the burden of others. With all the benefits available to the indigent in the state, already appropriated by our taxes, we can see no need for the course of action to go on year after year. In just one example, it is our understanding that one city is assessed only 3 percent for local school taxes while our town has realty tax requirements of 71 percent. For the State to provide for the difference of the remaining 570 communities, it is not only discriminatory, it is totally unfair since we in the 570 category must make up the difference.

“Each community should be required to pay their fair share. It is totally wrong to consider our community members, particularly senior citizens, as rich or affluent and ask us to pay more than our share. When

all other details are considered, we, the undersigned, recognize that a fairer method of basic realty taxation should be nondiscriminatory, adjudged the same for all and instituted accordingly.” And the petition is here.

The seniors prepared a petition which I just read to you. The Forum also prepared a position paper and has provided you with a copy that I will also read into the record: “Over the recent past, the Supreme Court has directed school funding through the *Abbott-Burke* decision for 31 districts out of a total of 611, significantly adding to the burden of most taxpayers. More recently, the Supreme Court (*sic*) has proposed a constitutional convention to determine what is necessary to provide property tax relief. We believe what is essential is for the Governor, the Assembly, and the Senate to make a fair analysis and act accordingly. We recognize that past actions of the legal system in New Jersey has resulted in a form of income redistribution and subsidization by the majority of taxpayers to finance the Abbott districts, in effect, a quasi form of Welfare.

“In 1981, the State Supreme Court interpreted the Abbott-Burke clause on ‘thorough and efficient’ to mean that Abbott districts should receive State funding to enable those districts to spend as much as the wealthiest. This determination continues to cause property tax disproportion between the two type districts, the non-Abbott being denied their fair share of State funding for education. For example, the State aid education funding for '06-'07 is projected at \$7 billion; the 31 Abbott districts will receive 4.2 billion, or 60 percent, and the other districts 2.8. Therefore, you in the non-Abbott districts must fund the majority of the school budget.”

And there's a chart showing -- that all of you have -- which shows that, locally funded for property taxes, the non-Abbotts that we selected contribute a very small percentage, whereas we in our districts contribute 82 percent.

And I may just close with this comment--

SENATOR ADLER: Mr. Mikorski? Mr. Mikorski, I apologize for cutting you off. But in fairness to the many other people who have also taken the time to be here, I think you should stop now. If you could submit copies of that -- I think you may have already submitted copies of that material to all of us -- we'll look at it, we'll review it, and we'll consider your views.

We thank you for taking the time to be here today, but we have to move on to other people to give them the same fair shot at educating us about what has to be done.

MR. MIKORSKI: I just wanted to mention at the tail end, we've made some suggestions at what should be done. So, please--

SENATOR ADLER: I promise you we'll review it closely.

MR. MIKORSKI: --please consider them accordingly.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you so much for being here today.

MR. MIKORSKI: You're welcome.

That was a fast clock. (laughter)

SENATOR ADLER: Our next speaker is Bishop Edgar da Cunha, the Regional Bishop for Essex County.

And while the Bishop is getting settled, if people could take the time to check their cell phones, and turn them off or turn them to silent mode so we don't hear calls. If you have to take a call, please step outside.

But out of courtesy to the speakers and to the people who are trying to pay attention, it would be a nice thing to do. So thank you for that courtesy to each of us.

Your Excellency.

BISHOP EDGAR M. da CUNHA: Thank you.

MARY McELROY: Good afternoon, Senator Adler, Assemblyman Conaway, distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Mary McElroy, and I am pleased to accompany Bishop Edgar da Cunha this afternoon. I represent the New Jersey Network of Catholic School Families, and today I am also representing the New Jersey Catholic Conference.

This Committee is looking for alternatives to the problems inherent in public school funding. And we come before you today to propose a solution to part of the problem -- a solution that would continue the viability of nonpublic schools within the State of New Jersey, schools that do the public good by educating students throughout the state, and schools that parents choose, and schools that have been in danger of closing. A number have closed, only because parents are unable to continue to afford even modest tuitions that are charged by nonpublic schools.

The solution that we'd like to recommend to the Committee today is legislation introduced in the Legislature, S-1332 and A-257 -- the corporate tax credit scholarship act. This is for students in urban public schools in selected districts. It's based on low income, and it would offer scholarships to students whose parents choose to send them to a school of their choice. It's a cost-saving measure. Scholarships would be offered in the amount of \$6,000, and up to \$9,000. And with the cost per pupil in nonpublic schools totaling less than half of the cost of public education in

many urban areas, this alternative is realistic as well as a cost-saving measure for the taxpayer, and an opportunity for achievement for the students who are able to take advantage of it.

Critics of such legislation will argue that it only affects a small percentage of the students at risk. However, the actual number of students affected is determined by the legislators in crafting the final version of the bill. The argument of opponents suggest that unless a remedy can help all students, than none should be given scholarships. Such a position would not be tolerated on other models of urban aid, where we try to help as many people as possible. For example, if a developer committed to building 1,000 units of State-subsidized, low-income housing, but was only able to build no more than 400, the State would never suggest that those 400 should not be built.

I'd like to turn the remarks over to Bishop Edgar da Cunha, who is the Regional Bishop for Essex County, within the Archdiocese of Newark, who will speak to why this bill is so very much a part of the solution to public school funding.

BISHOP da CUNHA: Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, members of the Joint Legislative Committee.

I come to you this afternoon as a Catholic Bishop of New Jersey, sharing the concerns that you all have for the education of our children here in New Jersey. All my life as a priest and as a bishop has been in the City of Newark, and now as a bishop in the greater Essex County.

I encourage you to look at public school funding in new ways, as we all see the need for it. The old ways need to be revisited. We all share the concerns for quality education of our children. The funding of

Catholic schools in the State of New Jersey is a part of our dream for our schools. Funding impacts Catholic school students, as well as Catholic students in public schools. Quality education for our children, delivered in a manner that is equitable for the taxpayer, is a goal we all share. We all have met people in business, in professional life, who have gone through our system of Catholic education.

By virtue of the choice parents have made in selecting Catholic schools, we here in the Archdiocese of Newark -- in the four counties of Bergen, Essex, Hudson, and Union -- will save the taxpayer over \$600 million a year. But the same families who are struggling to keep their children in Catholic schools are feeling the burden of their education. They, because of the cost of living and the cost of education -- many have not been able to keep their children in Catholic schools. I, personally, remember many times, as a pastor of St. Michael's Church, here in Newark, how many times parents have come crying to my office saying they just could not afford to keep their children in our schools.

If all the children presently in Catholic schools in New Jersey were to be moved to public schools, the State would have to come up with over \$1 billion to pay for their education. In the past, our schools relied on religious sisters who taught the children without receiving a salary. Today, that reality is no longer among us due to the decrease of religious sisters. Therefore, we have to pay lay teachers and pay a fair salary. The decrease of the number of sisters, the increase in the cost of education leads to necessary increase in tuition. The increase of tuition leads to the decrease of enrollment, and that leads to need for merging and closing some of our schools. Even in the City of Trenton, we no longer have a Catholic school

in that city. And many of our schools have either merged or closed because of this new reality.

When families cannot afford tuition, then they have to move from our schools into public school, never an easy decision when it becomes necessary. It is something we try always to avoid. Mergers become a new reality for our schools. But we have all experienced the changes that shuttering of buildings and shifting of sites brings. When a Catholic school closes, the ripple effect of that loss flows through the entire community and beyond. We must all work hard to find a way to help all those children whose families are trying to desperately send their youngsters to private and parochial schools, especially when public schools are unable to meet their needs.

SENATOR ADLER: Bishop, I apologize for interrupting you. I probably should have said that when two people come up with essentially identical testimony that that can count as five minutes together. I don't want you to excommunicate anybody up here, if I cut you off. (laughter)

BISHOP da CUNHA: I won't.

SENATOR ADLER: So I let you go a minute or two more than I probably should have, but I think you would confirm what Mary said about the support for that bill in the Senate and the Assembly. Is that a fair summary of the rest of your testimony?

BISHOP da CUNHA: Yes.

SENATOR ADLER: I apologize for cutting you off. But because we have so many speakers, I don't want to let you go on too long.

BISHOP da CUNHA: I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

MS. McELROY: Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thanks so much for being here today.

ASSEMBLYMAN HERB CONAWAY JR. (Co-Chair): Next, we'll take Thom Jackson, Silver Brigade of Morris County.

Mr. Jackson? (no response)

Well, it's raining.

Then Dana Rone, Newark City Council, Education Chair?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: She's on her way, Assemblyman.

Jim O'Neill, School District of Chatham?

J I M O ' N E I L L: Thank you, Senator, Assemblyman. I appreciate the opportunity. And keeping with your comments, I've submitted my testimony, so I will just try to highlight the points that I think that you're most interested in.

I do want to, in the course of those events, underscore, I think, that the guidelines by the Garden State Coalition of Schools is an excellent document for you to follow. I think the suggestions there are all worthwhile and will be helpful in your deliberations. I also want to underscore the fact that I think one dimensional measurement of school funding, which has to do with the cost of schools, not related to the quality of schools, will be detrimental in the long run to not only the individual districts, but the State as well.

One suggestion I have is that-- We have roughly 600 districts; if we take the middle 50, on a cost factor -- just take the middle 50. After you've sorted them out by cost, take a look again and see if those -- there are high-performing districts in there. If there's high-performing districts in those 50, I think that's a reasonable benchmark for us to look at. And

while, indeed, some districts can fund their schools more adequately than others, that that benchmark would be a more reasonable one than the State has given us. So if you have 600 -- if you look at the middle 50, and find others that are quality districts, you could, I think, use that as a benchmark.

There's a goal I think that would be helpful for you to achieve over the course of three, four, five years, and that is to move toward a minimum funding of schools at, say 15 percent, to the maximum funding at 85 percent. That would put us in -- recognize the different resources of each district. At the same time, it would make the distribution of those funds more equitable than they currently are.

In the course of these events, I think one of the things that would make it impossible for you to be successful -- if you did not address the needs of senior citizens. What the current formula has recognized is that some people who live in wealthy communities cannot afford to pay their fair share and they don't want to leave those communities. If the State can't come up with a formula that addresses that, my recommendation is that you give us some latitude at a local level to do that. We have looked at something akin to a reverse mortgage, so that we cap the taxes somebody pays when they go on a fixed income. The municipality keeps track of those taxes when they, or their heirs, sell the house. That money comes back in and it deflates the amount of money everybody else has to raise that particular year. This means everybody would pay their fair share, but not all at the same time.

One thing I had not seen discussed is the interim taxes. What happens is, school district budgets are set in April. You look -- and I guarantee it happens in nine out of 10 communities in New Jersey -- new

homes, expanded homes, new developments come on the market after that. Those taxes are collected in the name of schools. Those do not go to schools. That money goes into the municipal bank account. It's used for maybe valid municipal purposes, sewers, other public projects, but it's not coming back to schools. It shouldn't be raised in the name of schools. My suggestion is that also be kept in an interest-bearing account; and that, next year, is money we do not have to raise through school taxes.

I recognize that somebody in the Legislature has made the recommendation that you make an attempt to separate social services from educational services. I think that would help with a more accurate reflection on what actually is the cost of the educational services.

I think it's worthwhile to look at whether or not there should be some taxes dedicated to schools. Lottery tickets are sold in the name of schools, but my understanding is that all goes to one central account. It's not dedicated. If it was dedicated to schools, that would be less money that schools would have to raise.

I'm bothered by the fact, constantly, that we have to send \$7 to \$8, \$9, \$10 million to North Carolina to have our State tests marked. That's a lot of money to a lot of us, more money than many of us get. I think there should be a way, after we do well, you have 75 percent or more of your kids that are advanced proficient on those tests three years in a row, maybe we should be able to mark the tests ourselves in-house and that money comes to us rather than to go to North Carolina.

One of the things I want to recommend to you is that you try to be careful-- Oh, the special education -- I know you've heard a lot about that. One of the things -- I've been at meetings every year, for six years,

when Mr. Librera was Commissioner, and now. There's always been recommendations to change the model for appealing cases. If you think those cases -- the model we have now is extremely expensive. If we took Delaware -- other states have a much more, less adversarial, more collaborative style, which would save us all a lot of money in litigation as we go forward.

I also want to recommend to you that there are unanticipated consequences that come from legislation that has been passed. And over the course of time, we are stuck with the low bidder on buildings and construction that winds up costing us additional money, excessive amounts of money later on, both through litigation and through retrofitting what they did incorrectly.

(timer sounds)

That's my time, I'll accept it and leave you with the rest of the testimony.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, Mr. O'Neill. And that's excellent testimony, and I think it should be a guide for those who follow -- got to his points, got them out there, and followed the rules in terms of the time.

Next we have Mary McElroy?

SENATOR ADLER: She spoke.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: She spoke.

Ms. Gordon, Jessani -- Charter Schools, New Jersey Charter Public Schools Association.

Hello.

J E S S A N I G O R D O N: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Co-Chairmen Adler and Conaway, and members of the Committee.

My name is Jessani Gordon. I'm the Executive Director of the New Jersey Charter Public Schools Association. The Association represents the families, teachers, and leaders of New Jersey's public charter schools. And on their behalf, I thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony.

New Jersey's Charter School Program Act of 1995 became the nation's 20th school law stimulating development of an important model for innovation in the State's system of public education. The Legislature declared that the goals and objectives of the program are to improve student learning and achievement, to increase the availability of choice to parents and students when selecting a learning environment, to encourage the use of different and innovative learning methods, and to establish a new system of accountability for schools.

We now have 54 operating charter public schools in New Jersey, serving approximately 16,000 students, with thousands on waiting lists. Over 78 percent of New Jersey's charter schools are located in Abbott districts. Charter schools represent an important public education option for disadvantaged students in urban communities. Parents have been loud and clear in their demand to have meaningful school choice outside of the often unsafe and under-performing district schools.

Charter schools of New Jersey have been raising the bar of academic achievement higher each year. We can point to numerous examples of tremendously successful charters, but our purpose today is to talk about what -- the serious threats that charter schools face to their long-

term survival, stemming from the inherent and unintended consequences of charter school funding.

The funding formula for charter schools is a patchwork of original statute, amended statute, budget language, and DOE policy. Funding streams for charter schools are confusing for everyone. Once more, the current funding formula has built in no -- unintended consequences or inequities that have destabilized high-performing, cost-efficient schools, and must be addressed if charter schools are to survive. Specific issues we'd like to see addressed in the school funding formula include inadequate operational funding, especially funding from Abbott districts, and lack of access to facilities funding.

From their inception, charter schools were expected to do more with less operational funding. However, the actual amount of funds they received is significantly less than originally intended, and is having dire consequences on many charter's ability to deliver strong academic achievement. The original law set charter school funding at 90 percent of program budget, which was at the time a reasonable approximation of what -- of local per-pupil spending. And charter schools actually do not receive any Abbott aid on top of receiving only 90 percent of the program budget. This Abbott aid stays in the district.

In the 2005-'06 school year, Abbott districts collected and kept over 39 million in State aid designated for students who are enrolled in charter schools. As a result, charter schools located in Abbott districts, and the students that attend them, are actually funded at 65 percent of what their peers in district schools receive, according to the DOE's comparative spending guide, which I've attached to the testimony in the back.

The funding picture for charter schools gets worse when consideration is given to the fact that charters are not able to access facilities aid from State, county, or local government sources. Charter schools have been excluded from receiving State aid for the cost of their facilities through the Schools Construction Corp. Through New Jersey school construction law, every public school student in the state, rich and poor; north and south; urban, suburban, and rural were eligible for State-subsidized school buildings except for charter schools students. Furthermore, charter schools are not able to access facilities aid from Federal, State, county, or local sources. Instead all lease, purchased and renovation costs come out of general operating budgets to the detriment of each school's classroom needs, innovative programs, and supplemental services. As a result, many charters receive a fraction of the funding that their neighboring school districts receive.

In our sampling of 20 charter schools, the real amount of per pupil spending, when all facilities costs were taken out of the spending numbers, ranges from 48 to 65 percent of what the school districts receive. It's a testament to the efficiency, creativity, and resolute spirit of charter schools' leaders that so many charter schools have been able to survive at all under these conditions. Unfortunately, when we look into the not-so-distant future, this is not the case.

In an analysis of 15 charter schools, including urban, suburban, north and south, charters will be in operating deficits within 18 months. This reality flies in the face of the declarations made by the Legislature in the Charter School Program Act: "The Legislature finds that the establishment of a charter school program is in the best interests of the

students of this State, and it is therefore the public policy of the State to encourage and facilitate the development of charter schools.”

We are very encouraged by the words of the Commissioner of Education during her confirmation hearing, and we look forward to working with you on developing some solutions. And we have some ideas that we’d like to present later on.

Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thanks.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Very good. Those ideas are in your handout?

SENATOR ADLER: And later.

MS. GORDON: Yes, and later.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Next, together, Ronald Santos and Monica Gallaro, Union County Vocational Adult High School.

M O N I C A G A L L A R O: Hello and thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the Committee, for granting this opportunity to speak before you today. I would like to share my story with you and ask you to consider--

SENATOR ADLER: Could you put the microphone closer to your mouth, or talk a little louder, either way?

MS. GALLARO: Okay.

Hello and thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the Committee, for granting this opportunity to speak before you today. I would like to share with you my story, and ask you to consider keeping the funding for adult education as part of your formula for the next year.

This program has helped me change my life in a better way. At Elizabeth High School, I was hanging around with the wrong crowd and cutting classes. I wanted more for myself. I knew I wanted a career in cosmetology and I needed my high school diploma. For that, I needed a fresh start.

Vo-tech gave me that fresh start and a second chance. I was able to focus on my school work and was earning good grades. But after my first semester, I became pregnant. This helped me get stronger and have more goals for myself. I continued to attend vo-tech and left two weeks before I gave birth to my son. Unfortunately, I had some financial problems, and I could not come back for a while, but I wanted to continue pursuing my goals. My son motivated me to keep on going. I kept on thinking that I wanted a better life for both of us. I came back to finish what I started.

When I returned, I was able to stay focused on my goals. The students and teachers were all here for the same reason -- for us to get our high school diploma and take the next step towards our careers. I was able to complete my academics and participate in the New Jersey Youth Corps program. Youth Corps provided me training and the opportunity to serve my community. I learned so much, and enjoyed the immense experience. I have great memories here and I will carry them throughout my life.

Now I am a full-time cosmetology student who will become a licensed cosmetologist in June 2007. I will be proud to realize that I can support my son and myself because of that effort that I put in this program. I dream of that day that I can move out of my parent's house, and be a productive member of my society without needing to lean on anyone else.

The day is not too far off, but the reality is that I could not have done that without achieving my goal in the Adult High School -- Union County Vo-Tech.

Thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

Mr. Santos?

R O N A L D S A N T O S: Good afternoon, members of the Committee. I'm Ronald Santos.

I would like to begin by thanking you for allowing me the opportunity to address you today. I'm grateful for this opportunity because this is a worthy cause. The funding that in the past has been set aside for the high school helps young men and women like the one you see before you. I am urging you to continue to think of us while you configure your equation this year, and to restore that funding.

I was a high school senior who lost my ambition to get to school every morning. Elizabeth High School told me that I could not graduate with them because of these days out. I did not want to repeat the grade, and I dropped out because I lost all hope. I knew of a friend that was attending the Union County Adult High School in Elizabeth, and I decided to go there to see if they could help me, too. The staff at the high school gave me all the information that I needed. I was able to start immediately. I found a new hope and honestly became motivated to get my diploma again. I worked hard and did not miss one day of school that year. I even got involved in Youth Corps to give back to my community.

While I was earning my high school credits, people began to talk to me about what I was planning on doing with the rest of my life. I

knew that I was not ready for college and that I enjoyed working with my hands. I looked at the building trades class for graduates and decided that I would like to become a part of that. The counselors helped me with the financial aid process and now here I am. I get to go to school and work with my hands while earning my degree on the post-secondary level. They told me that when I graduate they could even help me find a job.

My hope for the future is to earn a good living working in the trades. I live with my mom and younger sister, and my mother has worked long hours to support us. I want to make life easier on her, now that I have the ability to do that. My life has a different path now, because of the adult high school program. I would not be here, without the adult high school program, as a success story. Please consider restoring the adult high school aid. There are so many people out there in my situation.

Once again, thank you for your time and attention.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, Mr. Santos.

SENATOR ADLER: Thanks for being here. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Is Mr. Thom Jackson present or no? No Thom Jackson.

Then we'll next take Esther Fletcher, Councilwoman in River Edge, who has a fan base.

C O U N C I L W O M A N E S T H E R F L E T C H E R: Thank you, Senator Adler -- and I see you again, Assemblyman Conaway -- members of the Committee, for this opportunity. My name is Esther Fletcher. I'm a Councilwoman in River Edge, in Bergen County, which has some of the highest property taxes in the State of New Jersey. I am also a

teacher and a mother of a special needs child, which gives me a multifaceted perspective on this challenging issue.

Special education is the one segment of the educational population that crosses all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines. It doesn't matter whether you're an Abbott district or the wealthiest district in the state, all districts must provide for the educational needs of special populations as defined by the State and Federal regulations.

However, this system affects non-Abbott districts disproportionately, because they must compensate for the lack of State funding to support their special needs education as well as support other educational expenses. In this regard, the State is failing to provide equality in education. One solution is to provide, for all school districts, adequate funding for special education students, benefiting all students of special needs across all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines.

Now that I've asked you to provide additional funding, I will help you find the money to do so.

Oh, I made you happy.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: That would be novel.
(laughter)

COUNCILWOMAN FLETCHER: Though there are many cost drivers in the current funding formula, there is one way to save expenses in both the local and State budgets. The State currently requires many reporting schedules that are redundant and costly to both the school district's administration and the State in processing and personnel.

I'm a teacher, so I brought visual aids. I have here a representation of some of this documentation, and it represents only 15 percent of what a school administration must put out in a year:

This is the long-range facility plan: It is required by school building, not district, so regionalization would not be cost-effective in this manner. It costs school districts approximately \$3,500 per building to generate this report, and is obsolete because it is to secure funding for the New Jersey Schools Construction Corp, of which there are no funds available.

This is the State budget: It is completed by district, but the current regulations are suggesting it be completed by building. The information in this document is contained in three other documents.

This is the annual School Report Card: The information contained in this is available in four other documents.

This is the Fall report: The Fall report data is available also in several other documents, including the application for State school aid, a form that is obsolete because our State aid hasn't changed in five years.

Finally, the newest proposed requirement for information: The New Jersey Smart Initiative Data, which is to be collected by student, both this year and for the prior year 2006. Most of the data requested is already contained in these documents I've provided today. In addition, it is redundant to most school management systems, but it is not compatible with those systems, driving the need to generate -- get another piece of documentation.

None of these documents can be used to measure cognitive growth. All of these reports generate massive costs in administrative time

and preparation, both within the school district and within the State, because they must take employees to process all the documents. By the way, the same redundancy does exist on a municipal level.

The final burden passed from the State administration to school administration is actual expense. Now, State reports are being sent electronically, putting the burden of printing and distribution upon the school districts. The most recent rumor, and I hope it isn't true, is that the State is actually considering passing the burden of the costly expense of annual testing onto the school districts. Much like the expense of deer carcass removal (laughter), the State cannot in good conscience continue to burden schools and municipalities with State-committed expenses and then point the accusing finger at local property taxes.

You have the power to streamline the system, cutting expenses both on the local and on the State level. The PR factor alone is staggering, because you will have truly cut waste and simplified a complex and redundant process. Should you need, I am available for further reports and testimony.

Thank you for your time. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you. Great testimony. I thank you. There's a bill in there.

Next we'll have Pam Giacchi, parent. I might not have said the name well enough for her to recognize I called. Oh, here she comes. (laughter)

P A M E L A G I A C C H I: Thank you, gentlemen, for seeing me.

Good afternoon. My name is Pamela Giacchi, and I come before you today as a parent, as well as a public school special education

teacher. So I feel that I have some things -- that I would hope that you would listen to me and that will help you.

I'd like to share a photo of my son, Anthony. He's 4 years old, and he attends The Children's Therapy Center in Fair Lawn, New Jersey. The Children's Therapy Center is a school program. It's a private school program that's part of ASAH, which is formally the Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped.

My son has significant medical needs, as well as physical needs. Knowing the public education as I do, being a current public school teacher consultant, there is nothing within the public school setting that can help my son. My son doesn't walk. My son doesn't talk. My son is severely visually impaired. And above and beyond that, he's got an extreme form of complex epilepsy which requires resuscitation. I have been on the side of highways resuscitating him many, many days. So I can tell you point blank that my son, knowing public school education as I do -- there is nothing available for him in a public school. He would be sitting in a corner with a nurse, by himself, while the other children are racing around the room. It's not appropriate, and it would not be in his best interest.

I'm hoping that public school would not be the road that I would be told that I would have to take. Private school -- my son is thriving: he is actually up and walking; he is using his vision, which is an incredible thing, and the doctors are incredibly impressed about. When I met with my public school district, they flat out told me -- and as lovely as they are -- they did not know what to do with us. And they right away felt that a public school would not be the answer.

We took him to The Children's Therapy Center in Fair Lawn, and like I said, he's thriving. I am involved in all the social networks that I would not have if I was in the public school setting. And one of the big things that the parents wanted me to bring to you today is that in private schools we fund raise. We're probably fund raising several times throughout the year. We just put in an addition on our building that cost the private school, not-for-profit organization \$2 million. And we have paid over half of that already ourselves, in just fund raising. The parents, the families, we've come together.

I know today you're looking for answers. What I'd like to say to you is, the Lottery -- pull money, use it for kids, let those kids stay in the private schools where they need to be. They don't belong in public education. And you know, truthfully, if they did, I would love my son to be in public education. But it's not appropriate right now; maybe one day it will be.

So please consider that. I don't want to lose my choice as a parent. If you've seen the *Bergen Record*, maybe two weeks ago, in late September, the numbers of kids with autism are staggering. And my fear is, I don't know what the State knows -- what they're going to do with those kids as they age up. There will be issues down the road. These kids aren't going away. I don't know what the answer is, in terms of why our state and why families are going through this. I certainly didn't expect it myself. So I'm hoping that your esteemed Committee is not going to take choices away from me and my family. We're doing everything that we can for our little boy. We are paying out of our pocket. And we are also taxpayers in this state, so we're feeling the crunch. And we understand, too, that you're

trying to help us in that end. But there are children that don't belong in public school, and I hope we can keep that choice.

Thanks again for seeing me, and I appreciate the time.
(applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: We certainly are very glad to hear your son's doing so well.

MS. GIACCHI: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Ms. Ginsburg, Garden State Coalition of Schools.

E L I S A B E T H G I N S B U R G: Good afternoon, Senator Adler, Assemblyman Conaway, and members of the Committee. My name, as you said, is Elisabeth Ginsburg. I'm the President of the Board of Ed in Glen Ridge, and a Board Member of the Garden State Coalition. I am pleased to be here today to offer testimony on behalf of the Coalition.

I had the privilege of testifying before you on September 5. And at that time, I offered a number of cost-saving measures that have already been implemented by members of the Coalition. Today, I'd like to round out that testimony by sharing my constituents major concerns about the new funding formula, or formulas that your Committee is charged with creating. And I'll try not to be repetitive of things that other speakers have said.

I would be remiss if I didn't say quality first: I've heard a lot of disparaging things about education in New Jersey. There's a lot to be said for education in New Jersey. I would hope that quality is your first concern, as it follows it is with the education community.

Equity: The testimony before your Committee has demonstrated how the inequities in the current funding formula have created extreme polarization in the State's communities, turning municipalities against school districts, seniors against young families, suburbanites against urban dwellers, and business community against the education community. At present, 45 percent of the districts in New Jersey, including my own, are considered too wealthy to receive regular State education aid, a situation that does not reflect the fiscal realities in many of those districts. And we've heard particularly about the plight of seniors. We need to heal the divisions created by the current funding formula -- and those are large divisions -- by moving our State forward with a single funding formula that mandates that every New Jersey student will receive a basic level of State education aid, regardless of where he or she lives.

And I want to touch on special education: We have heard that there is a possibility of equalization of special education aid, which would mean that in some of our communities our special ed students would be completely abandoned. Do not abandon these children in their communities based on assumptions about the relative wealth of those communities.

And finally, I want to stress something that I haven't heard a lot about it. We all -- you, members of the Committee, and I -- we're creatures of the 20th century. Those of us working at the local level know that the classroom of the future -- that which is now 21st century -- will provide much more customized education to every student, whether it is through new methods of direct classroom instruction; accredited, interactive distance learning; or educational experiences provided through partnerships

with other districts, local businesses, and/or institutions of higher learning. Those changes are already taking place in many of New Jersey's districts. Educators, especially local superintendents, are already sharing knowledge and innovation through superintendents' round tables, and benchmarking consortiums through which school administrators reach across county and sometimes state lines to help each other implement best practices. A stable funding formula for every district and legislative initiative, to end barriers to the sharing of services, will enable us to use those innovative and cost-effective tools within our communities.

We know, and I know from experience in my own community, that high property taxes are sapping the strength of our communities in our state. And we also know that the single greatest reason for increases in local property taxes is decreases in aid to local school districts. A reasonable funding formula, like the one I've described, has the potential to be the single, most important tool that we will have in the effort to lower property taxes.

We ask that you reject solutions, like forced consolidation, that will cause further polarization; and embrace a new, equitable universal funding formula that will allow us to continue New Jersey's proud tradition of quality education.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thanks. (Applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Dana Rone, Newark City Council, Education Chair.

COUNCIL MEMBER DANA RONE: Good afternoon, and welcome to Newark.

I'm going to be right to the point of it -- I forwarded a copy of my testimony, so I won't read it verbatim, okay?

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Excellent.

COUNCILMEMBER RONE: My name is Dana Rone. I'm a former School Board member in the City of Newark and newly elected Council Member of the Central Ward here in Newark.

I come here today to voice my support for your efforts to revise the school funding formula, and more precisely, direct State aid to K-to-12 students across the state. I've heard many in the Legislature recently state their support for a dollars-follow-the-child funding model that would address that there are students in need all across the state.

I do, however, want to suggest that they also consider legislation, currently in the Assembly and the Senate, as another way to drive innovation and improvement in districts such as Newark, while controlling several cost drivers that can unnecessarily increase the cost of public education in these districts. Introduced by Senator Joseph Doria, who sits on this Committee, S-1332, or the urban school scholarship act, would provide tuition scholarships of up to \$6,000 for students in grades K through 8, and up to 9,000 for grades 9 to 12, for low-income families residing in the cities of Newark, Camden, Orange, and Trenton. Other districts are presently awaiting inclusion. The scholarships funded by corporate tax credits would allow students in these districts to attend better performing schools, both public and private, in or out of the targeted

schools districts that participate in the program. The bill also established an innovative program for public schools in the districts.

This bill is vital for Newark, where both the expense and the failure are arguably the state's highest. In 2004-2005, audits revealed that the Newark Public Schools' budget was \$916 million, of which taxpayers fund approximately 9 percent here in Newark. This is nearly a 38 percent increase over the \$670 million spent in the year 2003-2004. In the same year, only 42 percent of our graduating general education students were able to pass the High School Proficiency Assessment to receive their diplomas. The remaining 58 percent needed an alternative route, Special Review Assessment, given to the students who failed the HSPA at least three times. This also does not account for all the children we lose on their way from 9th to the 12th grade. In Newark, our near \$1 billion education system delivered 740 students from 13 high schools who could pass the HSPA. Members of the Committee, this is unacceptable.

The urban schools scholarship act supports this Committee's efforts to redefine the funding formula and control costs, and our efforts to reform the public schools in these districts in a variety of ways:

One, scholarships for low-income families will provide meaningful school choices and spur competition among largely unaccountable public schools in the target districts.

Leveraging existing nonpublic building capacity, both in and out of district, reduces the need for new construction, while immediately reducing preexisting overcrowding of many of our schools.

Scholarships will slow and halt the collapse of local, urban, nonpublic schools with a history of educating minority children. The

shrinking size of the non-public sector in the pilot districts directly drives increases in the public school expenditure by unnecessarily inflating the number of public school students. Indeed, every 10 new students from a closed parochial school in Newark who enroll in a public school cost the State another \$200,000.

Lastly, many parents, when confronted by a parochial school closing and the reality that they might need to enroll their kids in a traditional public school in one of the districts, simply lie about their address and enroll their kids in neighboring district schools. The families are driven to break the law to ensure access to quality education.

In Newark, we lose about one nonpublic school annually, and with it we lose both the key institution that normally stabilizes neighborhoods--

My Mayor and my City Council Members fully support the legislation. I'm going to defer from this package since you have it here. But it is essential that you look at the current bill in the legislation. This is an opportunity for parents to remove their kids from failing schools that have been identified over the past six to 10 years as failing, that we continuously send our children to -- buildings that we know are not producing students. So I ask that you look at those bills again. Senator Doria, who is a very respected Senator on education issues -- and would not support something that is not in the best interest of our children in the City of Newark. Our Council fully supports this. Our Mayor supports it. It is a creative initiative to assist children in getting a quality education.

And as the young lady before me talked about, I hope that this Committee is looking on a quality education that we're paying for in the State of New Jersey.

And with that, gentlemen, thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you. (applause)

Mr. Jerry Cantrell, Silver Brigade of Morris County; and I'll have Mr. John Alfieri get ready.

Mr. Cantrell.

J E R R Y C A N T R E L L: Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the Committee.

My name is Jerry Cantrell. I'm from Morris County, Randolph. I'd like to speak to you today from a couple of perspectives. I'm the President of a group called the Silver Brigade. Some history: We started back in 2000, primarily as a spin-off of the Denville Senior Group. I live I Randolph. Over the last year, we have reached out across the state. We started our first separate chapter in the area up here. I'd like to briefly go over a couple of things.

I'm President of the Silver Brigade, a statewide grassroots organization dedicated to achieving major reforms in New Jersey's out-of-control tax mess, where the past two years the group has undertaken an aggressive campaign to reach out across the state to those without a voice in the process. The Silver Brigade is a group of concerned citizens who came together in 2000 to formally oppose the Abbott-controlled property tax increase that is rampant throughout the State of New Jersey.

I'll skip down -- you can read as well as I can -- I'd like to hit some of the bulleted points. And I did get an opportunity to watch some of the previous hearings. And rather than going into minutia, I'd just like to maybe have a brief conversation with those of you on the Committee.

We, two years ago, created a 10-point proposal which has been submitted to a number of bipartisan leaderships in conjunction with meetings around the state. The primary focus is to focus on spending. I won't be the first, nor will I be the last, to say that I don't believe that New Jersey has a revenue problem or a funding problem, it has a spending problem. So one of our first proposals was, there's a lot of talk about the constitutional convention. If it happens, that's wonderful. But in the meantime, our premise is to hold the elected officials accountable for what they were elected to do.

There's a current movement afoot, by a bipartisan area, to move school board elections to November. All fine and good. I was even in favor of this a couple years back, until I discovered that you could not vote on the school budgets if you move that election, because the cycles don't match up. Our proposal is, move the election any time you want, so long as it does not take away the citizens' right to vote on those budgets.

The next one is to take away the education Commissioner's right to override what could be thousands of negative votes on the budget. People come out and vote a budget down. There should be local adjustment of it, not one person sitting in the back with a stick overriding the majority of the voters in the community.

Regional and centralized purchasing: I realize that on paper it is in existence. I can tell you, as a former school board president in

Randolph, it is not followed. We bought computers off of the State contract, paying list price. When I forced the business administrator to contact Dell directly, we'd save \$18,000 on a \$80,000 order. The premise is, because he was perfectly legitimate and legal in doing so, he could write the State contract number on there. And to those who are familiar, the State contract -- anybody who falls under the umbrella of the purchasing authorization can buy one computer. So you're not going to get volume discounts that way.

Expenditure limitation amendment: Because we feel that the expenditures are the problem, what we propose is, if you raise the State budget annually by one penny you would have to get a two-thirds majority vote of your Legislature.

The next dovetail issue is, if you raise it beyond the cost of living-- In other words, we have to live within the cost of living means. Why can't the State, one year out of a decade, perhaps freeze the budget or certainly live within the cost of living? If you go exceeding cost of living, we would ask that you go out to the public under a referendum and let the public vote on that.

Joint revenue forecasting: Right now, it is my understanding that recently, with Assemblyman/Speaker Roberts, that the Governor determines what the revenue projections are for any given year. There needs to be a bipartisan or an independent evaluation of that.

Performance audits: This was done on a very limited basis some years ago. But I can tell you, again as a former school board president who discovered that we have a long-term theft going on in the district -- only because of an outside audit -- and been going on for at least six years.

One year there was \$50,000 stolen -- all under the guise of everything was signed off -- signed, sealed, and delivered from the auditors on down. So these things can happen. There needs to be an independent audit, a forensic type of audit.

Pay to play: It's been bantered about a lot. As a group, we're asking you to ban it, manage it. You know what happens after the fact. We read it in the newspapers. We're tired of reading so much of it. Maybe it can't be completely eliminated altogether, in the world that we live in, but manage it in a meaningful way.

The primary proposal that we have, out of our 10, is uniformity for financial reporting across the state. My local school district budget is not in the same format as yours, or any other town's in this state. If we had the ability, as taxpayers, as parents -- I have two kids in the school myself -- to be able to compare our school district expenditures with other districts, etc., we would have a lot more meaningful proposals, as far as the budgets are concerned, probably more support, and more meaningful follow-up on it.

SENATOR ADLER: Mr. Cantrell, as Assemblyman Conaway very graciously cut you off, I wonder if you could provide us later on with a written copy of what you were citing. Do you have it here to give to us?

MR. CANTRELL: I do not have the specifics, but I can certainly provide it.

SENATOR ADLER: That would be very help to us.

Thank you so much for being here today.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Very good. Thank you.

Next, we'll have Mr. John Alfieri, Bergenfield Public Schools parent.

Thank you, Mr. Cantrell.

MR. CANTRELL: By the way, equity is the key to all of this as well.

JOHN C. ALFIERI JR.: Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is John Alfieri. As a parent of two children, I felt compelled to sign up when I heard you were accepting public testimony. While your task is a daunting one, I know that at the end of the day this is all about our children, and their children's, education. My children went to public school and received a well-balanced, well-rounded education. They were tested and tested, but the tests were diagnostic and helpful in terms of curricular adjustment and better teaching methods. They weren't used against schools as they are now with NCLB. I have no problem with the concept of the law, but I do think it is unfairly administered and completely underfunded.

This has caused some districts to divert Title I funds for other purposes mandated by NCLB, thereby creating a situation where districts had to increase local funding to offset the Title I requirements. I hope, as legislators, you will address this issue with our Federal representatives as the law is being renewed.

I've been an educator for the past 35 years, both as a teacher and administrator, but I am not here to discuss my career or to ask for more money. I only want what is best for my children and other children in this state.

You have listened to business and industry, you have read research, you have consulted experts to help make your decisions. Before you, here, stands an empty chair (indicating chair). That chair represents my children -- Christopher and Carlea. It represents your children, all of your grandchildren, your nieces, your nephew, your friends -- real kids with real potential and real kids with real problems. When you go about your task, put their faces in that chair. Consider what type of education you want for them, what type of teacher you want for them, what type of extra-curricular activities you want, and so on, before you decide on finances.

It's time we consider the students and the future leaders of our local, State, and Federal government, and what is in their best interest, before we cut away their future.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, Mr. Alfieri.

Next, we'll take Ms. Halina Erven.

And after Ms. Erven, we'll take Bonnie Weeks.

J E F F E R V E N: Hello. This is my wife, Halina, and this is my son, Adam.

I am the proud parent of a severely brain-damaged child. My son is 13 years old, and his disability was caused by complication during his birth. He is currently attending Horizon High School, a private school in Livingston, New Jersey. He loves going to school. He gets up at 4:30 a.m. and waits for the van to pick him up. He does not understand that, even though he is ready, it is not time; he must wait until 8:45. When I get him off the van at the end of the day and ask him, "How was school," he always has a big smile and he shows me a sign for "more."

It wasn't always so good. Up until March of 2006, he was attending a publicly supported school. My morning would consist of chasing him from underneath the bed, out of the closet. He would throw his shoes in the garage, hide his backpack, and put his pajamas back on. (laughter) He would show me his sign for school and shake his head, "No." He would even fake illness. It was very difficult for me to send my son off to school knowing he was mistreated. When I would visit his old school, I would hear his teacher yelling at my son and other children because they were so much trouble. Yes, disabled children are a great deal of work and difficulty. Children like my son need constant attention and have the ability to learn. Previously, he would spend his day at school restrained in a chair, denied his lunch and snack because he was being punished. My son has the ability to use a bathroom, but he was denied access. Almost every day when he would come home, his clothes would be soaked with urine. He would have to sit in his feces until someone would be kind enough to change him, and if not, he would be sent home like that. While at the publicly suggested school, my son also suffered injuries. He came home with blood coming from his ears, marks on his body, and in December 2005 a staff member broke his hand.

Since he has been going to Horizon High School, a private school, he no longer has these problems. When he comes home, he tells us how he feels, tells us about the fun things he does in his school. When asked if he had lunch, he shakes his head, and I would ask him how much he ate. He opened his arms wide and shows me two fingers -- that means he had two plates.

My son has made so much progress in the few months that he has been to Horizon High School, a private school. Previously, no progress or interest was made in helping him. I was told he had no intelligence and needs to be medicated to make him sleep.

When you visit Horizon, a private school, you are greeted with a smile by all the staff members and smiling students. There are no offensive odors and the school is immaculate. Each is being educated and made to feel part of a class. The work is up to their level. No student is penalized because they can't do any work.

Please, I am begging you, for the sake of my son and other handicapped, disabled children, do not close down these wonderful schools. These children need the love, support, and nurturing that they receive at Horizon, a private school.

If my son has to return to the publicly supported school, he will regress. He will continue to lose weight, because he was denied, punished, and not permitted to eat. He was forced to sit in the front of the class without his pants on because he wanted to go to the bathroom, and continued to come home with marks and injuries. Put yourself in my son's place. Would you want to go to a school where you were neglected and continually told that you were a burden, don't deserve to live, and get yelled at all day long? Would you like to go to a school and not be allowed to use a bathroom or eat? Would you like to have a staff member -- pulled by your arms? Would you like your child or your grandchildren to be treated like that? Would you like to receive a daily phone call informing you that, "Your child is too much trouble, we don't know what to do with him"? My

daily phone calls also were informing me that I should punish him further when I get home.

I have attached -- I think there's handouts. I have attached the last injury report, from December 2005. Please take this into consideration and protect these children, our most precious possession. We need to have a safe and nurturing environment for our children. Our private school, Horizon High School, celebrating 30 years of educational excellence, is a special place, one of many private schools that do wonderful things for our children. Please do not deny them.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: There's a little bit of time left. I did want to ask a question. Could you talk about the process of getting your child placed at Horizon -- what you needed to do to get that accomplished?

MR. ERVEN: Our school district placed him. They took him out of the other State school for his own good and found this other school, Horizon.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Was that a special services school?

H A L I N A E R V E N: A child study team.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Come in, please? (referring to PA microphone)

MS. ERVEN: My child's study team visited several schools, and then, based on their visits, they selected three schools that they felt were appropriate. And we visited them, and then it was up to us make the final selection.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: So you were -- it didn't involve lawyers, or anything like that?

MS. ERVEN: No, no.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: You worked collaboratively and got--

MS. ERVEN: No.

MR. ERVEN: No.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Good.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your testimony.

MR. ERVEN: Thank you.

MS. ERVEN: Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Ms. Bonnie Weeks, on her way.

And next we'll have Mr. Al Annunziata.

B O N N I E W E E K S: Hi. My name-- Can you hear me? This one. (referring to PA microphone)

SENATOR ADLER: No. Use that one, if you would.

MS. WEEKS: Hi. My name is Bonnie Weeks. This is my son, Nicholas. He is 16 years old. He goes to Horizon High School. Say hi.

N I C H O L A S W E E K S: Hi.

MS. WEEKS: He has monotonic dystrophy, severe scoliosis, learning disabilities, and problems with his expressive speech, but he is the happiest, sweetest child you would ever meet. He started school at A. Harry Moore in Jersey City. The school was good for socialization and nothing else. He had an IEP that stayed the same for four straight years. It

took me two years to get him out of that school and into Horizon High School.

At Horizon High School, he has improved 100 percent in the first 10 months that he was there. Since then, he's making improvement in all areas. His speech is making more sense, too. He's saying more words every day. He has PT/OT, speech therapy, water therapy. He works in the school store. He goes to Costco and buys the products that are in that store. And he helps me shop too. He also packages goods for local businesses in the area -- little packages of things that they sell.

He loves school. And in A. Harry Moore, when I went and visited, he was roaming the halls. He was never in class, and now he doesn't do that anymore. He goes to class. He learns numbers, his letters; he is learning a lot more than he did in our district. Without Horizon High School and the staff and the environment, my son would not be thriving as well as he is. He would be stuck in the same spot for years and years and years. He would not improve at all in Jersey City.

The children are our future, and they need our help to be the best that they can be. And I appreciate you letting me speak. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you for coming and testifying.

MS. WEEKS: Do you want to say thank you? Say thank you.

MR. WEEKS: Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

Oh, yes, we have Mr. Annunziata, Hope Township School District.

A L F R E D J. A N N U N Z I A T A: Good afternoon.

In consideration of time, I will highlight my written testimony and keep it under a five-minute limit. Please refer to the packet I have prepared for your consideration.

Co-Chairmen Senator Adler and Assemblyman Conaway, members of the Joint Legislative Committee on School Funding Reform, thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I am Alfred Annunziata, Superintendent and Principal of Hope Township School District, in rural Warren County. Hope School is a small, successful Pre-K-to-8 school, and supports high student achievement levels, innovative and effective school programs -- including a general education preschool available to all Hope residents ages 3 to 4. Our school is highly regarded in Hope Township and within the educational community.

Hope School District is also a member of a sending/receiving district with Belvidere High School, where most of our 9th through 12th graders attend on a tuition basis, which is included in our modest \$4 million budget. Unintended consequences and circumstances have led me here to testify here today. The unintended consequences of S-1701 legislation and the circumstances of flat funding for the past seven years, and the residential and rural composition of the Hope community taxpayers, have contributed to a financial crisis for our school. During the past several years, we have been able to delay the impact of the prices and minimize the negative impact on student programs and services for '04-'05 and '05-'06, through many innovative and frugal financial efforts, with also some good fortune. Now, though, our resources and good fortune have run out.

Realization of unintended consequences of S-1701: the inability to meet unanticipated special education needs due to only 2 percent surplus; reduced bank cap may not be sufficient for '07-'08 due to the nonuse in our '06-'07 budget; (indiscernible), the precedence setting for returning of funds to taxpayers, now we have to find \$69,000 -- almost five cents on our local tax rate every year -- or pass that cost on to taxpayers to fund.

With reference to administrative costs, consolidation within the district: We have only two full-time administrators -- the business administrator and myself. For example, I serve in three positions -- Superintendent, Principal, and Director of Special Services -- all for one fair salary and pension. Inclusion of attorney and architectural costs are problematic. Protracted negotiations and current litigation due to a building issue have forced us to increase our costs in that area.

Please refer to the first bar graph in your packet. The last three school budgets have failed, due to consequences of seven years of flat funding at Hope Township School District. From '02-'03, with its 3 cent increase, which passed; to an '06-'07 budget increase of 18 cents, which failed by 85 votes. And, yes, all the budgets were under cap.

The increase in '05-'06 and '06-'07 were due primarily to the increases in special education placements and costs, currently totaling more than \$360,000 for six students in grades 1 through 12. And, yes, all those students need to be in an out-of-district placement.

High school tuition and enrollment increases: County Technical School now has decided to charge tuition at an additional cost of \$25,000 for this year -- another 2 cents on a local property tax rate.

Increased health-care costs: The State Health Benefits Program has increased 150 percent in the last five years.

Negotiating cost-of-living increases for increased salary for our staff; general education preschool tuition charges, which we began in '05-'06 have now increased in '06-'07; and finally, there have been no financially significant new programs, pre-K to 8, that have been added to our budget.

Accumulative State funding shortfall for Hope Township School is now at \$152,460, or 10.87 cents on the local property tax rate. This is more than our revised '06-'07 budget increase. Furthermore, if the State had maintained a 33 percent funding rate, Hope Township property taxes would have significantly declined. For '06-'07, in order to address the inability of current school budget to address the unanticipated special education costs of over \$100,000, the district did not fill a 7th and 8th grade teaching position, which in turn reduced our level of basic skill instruction for this year. Additionally, we will apply to the Commissioner for extraordinary aid in April of '07.

If we can successfully navigate this year, the continued flat State funding and another school budget defeat will result in reducing programs and services for pre-K-to-8 students in '07-'08. Hope School has a competitive per pupil cost of \$10,954, when compared to other pre-K-to-8 districts in Warren County and especially within the State of New Jersey. We have implemented many cost-saving measures which I have outlined for you in my written text.

In summary, the combined effects of S-1701 -- reduced surplus to 2 percent, the precedence setting contribution from surplus, flat State

funding for the last seven years, unanticipated special education costs of almost \$100,000, and the escalating costs associated with the out-of-district placements without appropriate State reimbursement -- have all created the perfect storm for Hope School, and I'm sure many other schools like ours. Districts financial resources-- It has and, if left unchecked, will force the Board of Ed to further reduce programming from Pre-K to 8 so we can meet the mandated obligations for high school tuition and out-of-district special education placements. This is no longer acceptable -- to fund programs for some students at the expense of others.

On behalf of the Hope Township educational community, taxpayers, and most of all our students, I respectfully request that the adequate financial State funding be restored to the Hope District effective '07-'08, or sooner if possible. It is time to restructure taxation to shift the burden from the local property tax for schools to the State income tax, to provide adequate State funding for schools.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you very much.

MR. ANNUNZIATA: Thank you.

Next, we'll take Ms. Jacqui Greadington.

What's that?

SENATOR ADLER: We said no applause, and that lady started clapping. (laughter)

JACQUI GREADINGTON: Good afternoon.

My name is Jacqui Greadington, and I'm President of the East Orange Education Association. On behalf of the members of the East Orange Education Association, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee on the issue of public school

funding reform. No one disputes the fact that we need a new school funding formula in New Jersey. The one we are working under now is outdated and unfair. New Jersey needs a new school funding formula that will provide the necessary resources to ensure a high-quality education for students in all districts, regardless of zip code.

However, in the current fiscal climate, it's understandable that we need to find better, more efficient ways of providing services. At the same time, we must preserve our State's historic commitment to public education. Thanks to New Jersey's investment in education, we lead the nation with the best graduation rate. In urban districts like mine, students scoring proficient or higher on standardized tests have more than tripled. We must continue to build on our successes.

In my testimony, I'm going to provide you with two ways that I think we can find efficiencies and save money while continuing to provide a quality education for every child. I also am going to discuss one way that New Jersey will not save taxpayers money, despite others claims.

As we all know, providing special education services is a costly, but critically important, service. By making a few modifications in how we provide this service, we may be able to find savings. For example, many school districts use out-of-state placements to educate their special education students. Out-of-district placements are extremely expensive. If appropriate in-state services are available, school districts should be encouraged to use them. In addition, some school districts may realize savings by regionalizing some special education services. Finally, the bureaucratic process should be streamlined, which would save time and money.

Another way the State could find efficiencies would be to study and evaluate school districts that are already sharing services. Particular attention should be made to the impact on the quality of education and the realized cost savings. If the districts have been able to reduce costs without negative impacts, the State should inform other districts of best practices to employ.

While these strategies are likely to save money, another approach that has been proposed would not. In fact, it would cost money. Some have claimed that private school vouchers could save taxpayers money. Actually, the opposite is true. Vouchers drain money from public schools by taking public tax dollars and sending them to private and religious schools. There is currently-- Excuse me. Public schools lose desperately needed money, leaving them with less money to educate the majority of children who would be left behind. Research has shown that when a student leaves with a voucher, he or she takes the entire per pupil expenditure cost with them, but the school's fixed expenses remain the same. The teacher must be paid and the building must be maintained, cleaned, and heated. But now there's less money to pay those costs, which forces the schools to cut corners on textbooks, supplies, and programs. That shortchanges the remaining students.

There's currently a voucher bill in the Legislature. Some call it a *tuition tax credit*, but no matter what you call it, it is a voucher program. This legislation comes at the worst possible time for the public school students of New Jersey. It's important to note that nine out of 10 students attend public schools and always will. Considering the State's fiscal condition, it's irresponsible to even consider a proposal that would drain

\$360 million from the public schools and our communities, and divert that money to private and religious schools. This legislation would strip money from the State Treasury, money that could be used for public schools and property tax reduction.

The bottom line is that New Jersey needs a new school funding formula, one that is fair and equitable, and provides the resources our schools need to continue to provide a quality education for every child.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Next we'll have Reginald Jackson, also from East Orange.

Are you going to have a contrary view there, Reverend?

R E V E R E N D R E G I N A L D T . J A C K S O N : I'm from Orange.

Good afternoon.

I come to you today to voice my support for Senate Bill 1332 and Assembly Bill A-257, the urban schools scholarship act. As I am sure you are aware, there is a great deal of support for this legislation from a purely educational standpoint. In my conversations with legislators on both sides of the aisle, it's clear that they believe the children in the bills' targeted districts -- Newark, Trenton, Orange, and Camden -- deserve better access to a quality education.

This bill, which would provide corporate tax credit scholarships of up to \$6,000 for grades K to 8, and up to \$9,000 for high school, would give significant leverage to this Committee in its efforts to revise the State's

school funding formula, and control both the cost of public education and the property tax crisis that threatens us all.

Urban, nonpublic, and parochial school closings present a clear and present danger to any school funding formula you develop for a variety of reasons, some of which are purely educational and many of which are clearly financial. The loss of this educational capacity constitutes an institutional loss for these cities. These schools, such as the recently closed Chad Science Academy and Our Lady of Good Counsel here in Newark, are cornerstones of their respective communities and have a long history of educating minority and low-income students. Their loss both destabilizes neighborhoods and vastly decreases the inventory of quality schools in the city.

When these schools close, students normally pursue one of two options: They return to the public schools and, in effect, constitute an unforeseen enrollment increase in some of the State's most expensive school districts. As *The Star-Ledger* reported recently, "at \$19,418 per pupil here in Newark, every 100 students returning to the public schools, as a result of a nonpublic school closing, adds almost \$2 million to the city's nearly \$1 billion budget." By virtue of the *Abbott* decisions, this financial burden falls almost entirely on the State, as it pays in excess of 80 percent of the Newark school budget.

Or parents simply falsify their addresses and send their children to school in a neighboring district. Aside from the tragedy of a parent having to break the law so that their child can have access to a quality school, we all know what out-of-district student enrollments are doing to the budgets and property taxes in Abbott-rim districts. As these students

do not live in these districts and their parents do not contribute property taxes to these same districts, these children are an unanticipated cost driver that unfortunately falls directly upon the property taxpayers.

Leveraging the bill to support nonpublic capacity will also relieve the need to build new schools in these districts. Again, as *The Star-Ledger* reported recently in an article titled “School building bottom line tops \$6 billion,” taxpayers are already obligated to repay nearly \$450 million annually for the next 20 years as a result of the first Schools Construction appropriation. Though there are projects that remain in dire need of completion, it seems unwise not to use pre-existing, nonpublic schools in the target districts that already have a proven track record with our urban students. This will also relieve overcrowding in our public schools, many of whom, despite a court order, are unable to meet mandatory Abbott class-size restraints.

Lastly, Newark, for instance, has seen a nearly 40 percent increase in its budget since school year 2003-2004, when it was \$670 million. As I stated earlier, the budget now stands at nearly a billion dollars. Controlling enrollment by using local, lower-cost capacity is critical to containing enrollment-driven budgets in the target districts. Though I am not advocating a diminishment of the State aid ordered under the *Abbott* decision, it seems clear that this constitutional obligation has placed the Legislature and this Committee at a crossroads. And simply, if you are able to educate students for \$6,000 and \$9,000, you do not have to educate them for \$20,000. And in a district that pays 9 percent of its own school costs, or 2 percent as in Camden, these savings will fall directly to the

State's bottom line. It's a win-win for both the urban student and the property taxpayer.

I've spoken to many legislators recently that now support the idea of the money following the child. In a recent Monmouth University poll, it shows that a majority of New Jersey residents favor a system of funding children directly under the based need.

I ask this Committee to seriously consider supporting this legislation.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, Reverend. Thank you, Reverend Jackson. (applause)

Next we'll have Cecilia Zalkind, Association for Children of New Jersey.

And after Ms. Zalkind, we'll take Paul Tyahla -- you're on deck.

C E C I L I A Z A L K I N D: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I'm Cecilia Zalkind. I'm the Executive Director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, which is a statewide child advocacy organization located right down the street here in Newark. As I've listened to the testimony this afternoon and the compelling issues that have been brought before the Committee, I really don't envy you. This is a daunting task.

My roll here today was really to bring you some information, which we hope will inform your deliberations as you take on this issue. This Fall, ACNJ decided to ask citizens across the state -- old and young, with and without children, suburban and urban areas -- what they thought about school funding. We were very concerned about the discussion

around shifting money from the Abbott districts to other districts, and whether that money was achieving results for children.

Our concern is that this has been an underpinning to the discussion around school funding, and we really wanted to ask citizens, and more importantly voters, what they thought about this. We commissioned the Polling Institute at Monmouth University to conduct a telephone survey of 803 citizens of New Jersey -- 80 percent of whom are registered voters -- from September 28 to October 3. And the packet that you just received contains the results of that poll, which we hope you'll take into consideration as you think about the school funding formula here in New Jersey.

We believe that this poll sends a strong, consistent message. Overwhelmingly, New Jersey residents support the State's investment in poor city schools and oppose cutting this aid to reduce their property taxes. They also think schools, both urban and suburban, must be held more accountable for how they spend public funds to ensure that every penny actually does benefit children. Here's some of the highlights from the poll:

One, most people, contrary to what we thought, 59 percent, are unfamiliar with the term *Abbott districts*. They've not heard of Abbott. Yet the majority of the respondents, 75 percent, support the concept of providing higher levels of State aid to school district with high child poverty rates. They may not be familiar with the Supreme Court decision, but they certainly support the idea of educational equity. Nearly all, 96 percent, believe that children growing up in poor cities deserve the same quality education that children in wealthier towns enjoy. Seventy-one percent feel that many city children are denied good schools. Only 19 percent say that

educational quality is equal in poor and wealthy communities. Fifty-six percent say that poor city schools need a higher level of funding to deliver a quality education. Only 8 percent in this poll said that the urban schools are receiving too much money.

Across the board, most people wanted to see stronger accountability from both local school districts and State government. They want to know that their tax dollars are being spent to benefit children and provide a quality education. In fact, more than half, 55 percent, say that their home districts need stronger accountability measures. And a somewhat higher number, 72 percent, feel the same about urban districts.

Now, on to the solutions that they recommend: When the poll asked them what they would recommend to reduce property taxes, the majority, 58 percent, said they were willing to consider a centralized, statewide property tax collection, where the State collected taxes and distributed to the school districts, or 56 percent talked about a countywide merger of the their school district as a way to lower property taxes. A solid majority said, 64 percent, that they would oppose any property tax relief that would reduce overall funding for schools. They opposed cutting supplemental aid to the Abbott districts to lower taxes. They opposed, even more strongly, cutting extra curricular programs to lower taxes. So we think that this demonstrates that citizens of our state understand that it costs money to provide education, and they're willing to pay for it so long as the money is spent wisely to benefit children.

The other issue I wanted to share with you today, and we've distributed our latest Newark Kids Count report to you as well, is that we're publishing a broader City Kids Count book next month. That's looking at

10 cities in the state that are also Abbott districts. Some of that preliminary data is very interesting, and I think would be useful to the Committee today.

In looking at -- and we've certainly heard a lot of questions about -- what has been the result of the Abbott funding, we're beginning to see that result. We're beginning to see improvement in test scores. Looking at these 10 cities across the state, the percentage of students passing statewide tests at the fourth grade level climbed 9 percent from 1999 to 2005. It's almost important to contrast that to what's also happened -- poverty in these districts has increased dramatically as well. When you look at education as a way to help lift children out of poverty, and become confident members of society, education and spending on some of the poorer districts is still critically important.

Thank you very much. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you for that testimony.

I heard a lot of very interesting things over the past several months, and this is at the top of the list -- that poll. So very interesting.

Let's see. Who did I say was on deck?

Mr. Tyahla, Paul, was.

Emma Anderson will be on deck.

PAUL V. TYAHLA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Paul Tyahla, and it is my pleasure to speak to you on behalf of the members of the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey, as the group's Vice President of Government Affairs and Communications.

This is an issue that is of great importance to the business community. And the business community often feels that it is one of the forgotten stakeholders. On the property tax side of the equation, businesses pay property taxes in a very real way twice. They pay once in the sense that they pay 30 percent of all property taxes collected in the state, and they pay again in higher wages to employees in an attempt to attract talent and stay with such a high cost of living.

In the education discussion, businesses need an educated workforce. Businesses that are members of our Association are finding that they are unsatisfied with entry-level employees that come directly from the state's high schools. And while there are a variety of solutions to this, including regionalization, and dollars following the child, and rewarding schools that are performing well with extra dollars, there is one solution that I wish to speak to you directly today. And that is, A-257 and S-1332, the urban school scholarship act. This bill, as you know, will leverage tax deductible corporate dollars to fund scholarships for K through 12 students in Camden, Newark, Orange, and Trenton. It guarantees cost savings at the outset, as it grants scholarships between \$6,000 and \$9,000, while the average cost of educating a child in these districts is \$18,000. It's modeled after an already -- a system that we know is successful. We look no further than the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and their education improvement tax credit. It's a very similar system, only the model in New Jersey is even better, which already serves 25,000 students and has the participation of 2,200 corporations.

The reason I say that this act can be better than the Pennsylvania model is the oversight at the beginning. This is set up as a

five-year pilot program. After four years, there will be a review process to measure success through a variety of metrics, from cost savings to increased graduation rates. And in short, if this system doesn't work, the Legislature is free to not push it forward in the future. The Governor, General Assembly, and the State Senate will all be aware and can act accordingly. That, and results-oriented approach works in business and will work in a scholarship program funded primarily by business. And for all these reasons, we ask you to consider and support these actions, and allow businesses to do what they do best -- help solve the problems in the state and help solve the problems of their own workforce.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Right. Before you go?

What does it cost -- any idea of what it costs the state of Pennsylvania for these -- the tax credits?

MR. TYAHLA: I don't know what the cost to Treasury is now. I believe that they also use \$6,000 grants, though.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Six thousand dollar grants.

So the corporation would not get a tax credit for that?

MR. TYAHLA: The corporate-- I don't know what the--

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Or they get a Federal tax credit of the--

MR. TYAHLA: I don't know what the corporation's tax credit would be. The money that goes to the student, I believe is \$6,000, though. I can certainly get that number to you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

MR. TYAHLA: Thank you.

Ms. Anderson? (no response)

Oh, by the way, for those folks in education -- teachers, administrators -- if you come forward and just save a little piece of your testimony to educate us on how we might deal with the climbing enrollments and how the State should handle that in terms of a formula?

Ms. Anderson again? (no response) Private parent, Prospect Park. No.

Paula Lieb, New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education?

P A U L A S. L I E B, ESQ.: Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Paula Lieb. I am the President of the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education, which is an organization of professionals, and administrators, and parents, whose mission is to develop inclusive public schools where children with disabilities can succeed with their nondisabled peers.

I'm here to urge you today to address the present disconnect in the State and county educational system, which are resulting in the waste of public funds. The New Jersey Department of Education is strongly encouraged by Federal special education law to move students with disabilities from out-of-district, separate special education schools back into their local public schools, to ensure that our students with disabilities are educated with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate. This Federal mandate is based on the law's least-restrictive environment requirements and on 30 years of research that shows that children benefit -- education is most effective when children are educated in

their neighborhood schools with peers, with appropriate supports and services, and maximum access possible to the general education curriculum.

In line with this, the New Jersey Department of Education is operating under a federally approved State Performance Plan to reduce by 4,000 the number of students with disabilities in separate schools by 2010, because we send a higher percentage of students with disabilities to separate schools than any other state. Activities will be targeted to train teachers in research-based practices to build needed human capacity to support these students with disabilities in their public schools, and many other activities and funding will be put toward that.

At the same time that the NJDOE has embarked on a State Performance Plan, New Jersey's counties are spending money to create new separate schools. Middlesex and Gloucester Counties are spending approximately \$50 million in public dollars to build three new separate schools for 375 students with disabilities in this year. They're spending money, and the children will not be coming because of the State mandate to bring students home. The same pattern of building separate schools has been repeated in other counties, such as in Mercer, which opened a new, separate school in September 2005, which it could not fill. While the State Board of Education is ultimately in charge of the education of children with disabilities in our state, the relationship between the State Board of Education and the county educational entities is unclear in the statutes.

Furthermore, as far as we can determine, the NJDOE does not even keep a list of county-funded, separate schools now in existence or being planned. Consequently, to say that there is a lack of coordination between the actions of the State and county policy is an understatement.

Rather than allowing counties to build new separate schools, the Legislature should consider mandating that the Department of Education and counties partner to set up a system of special education regional resource centers, as has been done in other states, such as Ohio. In Ohio, they provide professional development, and extensive services, and training to local schools, among other services to support the education of students with disabilities, including those with low-incidence disabilities, such as autism, Down's syndrome, and other more significant disabilities. This is a statewide mechanism that was designed to develop and implement a multitude of research-based practices within districts, prioritize delivery models in keeping with the IDEA, and serve as a statewide clearinghouse for information.

New Jersey could also look to other states, such as Maryland, which has organized successful state-county efforts within the last 10 years to move students with disabilities into less-restrictive settings with appropriate support and trained teachers. In addition, different departments within the NJDOE appear to be acting at cross-purposes to each other, which sends a confusing message to the counties and districts.

For example, at the same time the NJDOE Office of Special Education program was publicizing the State Performance Plan to reduce the number of students in separate schools by 4,000, other offices within the Department were issuing approvals to enable the Middlesex County Freeholders and the Middlesex County Educational Services to move ahead with obtaining \$40 million in funding needed to buy land for and build the new separate schools.

Clear directives must be given by the Legislature to the Department of Education so that it does not issue such contradictory orders, which will result in waste of money to build schools to which Federal law is telling us not to send additional students.

I thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Just a second?

MS. LIEB: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: You would therefore consider that if you go to -- because we have 20 seconds. If you go to a special services school, that that's an out-placement. And in your view, that's inappropriate, or may not be, or is often inappropriate? You might want to use that term?

MS. LIEB: I guess the point in New Jersey is that when the Federal Government looks at separate placements, whether it's public or private, it still is not considered, for many, many children, to be an appropriate placement. For example, with our numbers in New Jersey, we sent out twice as many children as the national average of children with specific learning disabilities to other district schools, whether it be county or private. Children with specific learning disabilities, by definition, don't have emotional disturbance. They do not have cognitive disabilities.

So I guess the point is that we have an over-reliance, and we have the capacity now to support many children, but many children could be brought back into district if the appropriate supports were provided.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: One just wonders about appropriate placement in that sense. I mean, New Jersey, I understand, is also ahead and maybe has more of such kinds of schools. That is, the

public special services school, and perhaps that's why. And if you lump them together -- the public and the private -- maybe that's why we're outliers on this score. Maybe somebody else will offer some thought about that.

MS. LIEB: Yes, that's probably very true.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Very good.

Thank you very much.

I don't know if Emma Anderson has returned, because she was next. (no response)

Next, we'll have, then, Gloria Barten, Tamerla Lawrence, who is the spokesperson, and Dr. Neville Matadin -- teacher, East Orange; student, East Orange; and supervisor, East Orange Adult High School.

Barten, Lawrence, and Matadin?

Susan Carlsson will be next.

T A M E R L A L A W R E N C E: Good afternoon.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Good afternoon.

MS. LAWRENCE: Distinguished members of the Committee, I am here to give you a student perspective on the matters of funding adult education. My name is Tamerla Lawrence, and I am speaking with the express purpose of the Committee's establishment of the New Jersey Leg Web site. I am here, like many others, to support passage of S-284 and A-1391. And I will repeat this -- to support passage of S-284 and A-1391. This bill would require that State aid shall be distributed to school districts with approved high schools, on an unweighted per-pupil basis, for pupils enrolled in approved adult high schools.

I am here to speak on the behalf of adult high schools, specifically the Bernie L. Edmonson Community Center located in East Orange, New Jersey. Through Bernie L. Edmonson, I have completed high school, and I am now enrolled in my first year in college. And I also have a diploma, not a GED. There are so many things that I can say about BLE, but first I'll start by saying that there are many students who come through the doors every year, and there are many students who finish and go on to better themselves. Many of them come from broken homes or are homeless themselves. But Bernie L. Edmonson helps to make it possible for them to get the support they need, get their education, and finish school.

A certain percentage of them may have had a drug problem or a problem with the courts, but they were not fortunate enough to be raised in *Leave It To Beaver* or *Cosby*-type homes. Many of you have been fortunate enough to have been raised in a loving, nurturing environment, which may have motivated and encouraged you to go on to be successful. But suppose you had been raised under some of the circumstances which our disadvantaged were? There but for the grace of God--

So take advantage of the situation you are in to make a difference. Help people be all they can be, instead of being a negative statistic that may harm themselves or society. It is vital for our State and our society and for adult students that districts can confidently maintain adult high schools, knowing that they are supported by a State aid formula based on program enrollments.

Put yourself in our place, because it could have been you -- any of you born to adverse circumstances. By supporting adult high school, you

are supporting the future of many people, including yourself, because lack of education can lead to crime, and crime affects all of us.

I need to say, I came to Bernie L. Edmonson in the year of 1997. I came there for a Home Health Aid course. I passed top in my class. I also wanted to say I used drugs for 23 years of my life. I have since then got my diploma; I go to Essex County College now. I work for the East Orange Police Department; and I'm also a Home Certified Home Health Aid. So the school does help. (applause)

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you very much for your testimony.

I said-- Who did I say was on deck -- Carlsson?

Ms. Carlsson, Superintendent of Bernards Township--

S U S A N C A R L S S O N: No, I'm not the Superintendent. I'm a school board member.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: School Board member, okay.

And next we'll have Elisa Luciano.

MS. CARLSSON: Thank you.

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Susan Carlsson. I'm a member of the Board of Education in Bernards Township, which is located in Somerset County. We are a K-through-12 district with 5,800 students. Our district enrollment has grown by 89 percent over the past 10 years. We've had to expand some of our schools twice. We've also built an additional elementary school in that time frame.

I'd like to raise three points with you:

First is, last September our voters approved a \$54 million construction project that would add classrooms to several of our schools, in addition to the (indiscernible) of the high school, an elementary school cafeteria, and special education classrooms for a preschool autistic program -- which saves us a tremendous amount of money by keeping our students in district.

Our voters approved the project certainly because of our demonstrated need, but definitely because of the promise of \$9.5 million in State aid. To date, despite repeated requests to DOE and our elected representatives in Trenton, we have not received any word on the status of that promised aid. We are approaching the time when our Board will have to make a decision about borrowing the 9.5 million that we believe we are receiving from the State. As you can imagine, this will be an extremely difficult decision for us to make and for our community to accept. We ask you to please consider those districts that went to the voters in good faith, and are now in a position of losing that faith with their constituents and the support that we are totally dependent upon for the annual approval of our budget.

Second, according to the most recent New Jersey School Report Card, our per pupil cost in Bernards Township is \$1,239 lower than the state average. The average SAT score in the state last year was 519 in math and 501 in verbal. Our lowest 25 percent students scored above those state averages. In short, we are a high-achieving, low-spending school district. And each year we feel we are penalized for that efficiency. Assigning the same budget cap formula to low-spending districts as high-spending districts is impractical, and serves the opposite purpose from its intent. Districts

with excess in their budgets can stay within a cap easier than we can. Districts like ours, meanwhile, have to cut into basic programs to stay within cap. We have privatized every service we legally can. We contract for food service, transportation, custodial, maintenance, and grounds. We participate in consortiums for purchasing and insurance. We maintain a health insurance program that saves us over \$2.1 million annually in claims, as compared to the premiums we would have to pay if we were forced into the State Health Benefits Plan. Just this past year, we were forced to cut our elementary Spanish program in half. Every other week, students just watch a videotape of a Spanish lesson. We cut our elementary enrichment program in half and eliminated our staff training in enrichment. We are beginning to hurt our students' college admissions process because we had to eliminate our Director of Guidance. Our middle school is almost 1,300 students, and we endanger the safety and welfare of those students when we had to cut one assistant principal.

Third and last, just 5 percent of our budget is derived from State aid. Our residents, through the property taxes, bear the burden of funding over 90 percent of our budget. This does not seem intrinsically fair. It causes tremendous backlash at the polls each year, forcing us to continually reduce the budget and basic programs.

In summary, I urge you to consider three issues: The construction State aid that was promised to us, the budget caps that penalize efficient districts, and the fairness of receiving only 5 percent State aid. I believe our district is providing a cost-effective, high-quality education. Lack of State aid and oppressive spending caps threaten our

progress. I urge you to provide fiscal relief to districts like Bernards Township.

Thank you very much for your time today. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

Next, Ms. Luciano.

ELISA LUCIANO: Good afternoon.

Hi. My name is Elisa Luciano, and I'm here on behalf of my son. Thank you for giving me time to speak. I want to start by saying if it wasn't for my son, Tyler, I wouldn't be here. If it wasn't for my son, Tyler, I wouldn't know what autism is. If it wasn't for always wanting him to talk, I wouldn't be asking any questions. I'm here because of my son and so many other children like him, for those that couldn't be here, or can't speak for themselves. As a parent and a single mother of an autistic 9-year-old boy, I am here to give testimony on the importance of much-needed support to children, especially at home. If it wasn't for the occupational therapist, speech therapists, teachers, teachers' aides, staff, school nurses, friends, and professional friends from other schools that I know, my son would not be in the school that he has been in, that has been a tremendous influence with his daily process. In finding out that my son was autistic, to today, here, it has been a journey and a struggle. On that, I have been able to cope with it because I talk. When he was in preschool, I worried, so I volunteered time in school, in a day-care center. I needed help, so I talked to anyone who would listen. My son attended school in September and an aide was assigned to him later that semester, and an occupational therapist the next semester, into April. That means I had to wait. Fortunately for us,

the classroom teacher had previous experience with children with autism, so we were able to work together for the benefit of my child.

He was in the Summer program briefly, and there was talk about mainstreaming him. My concern was more for the children in his class and in recess, for their safety, and his aggression at that time. It's been four years for my son, that he has been attending Virginia H. Sawtelle in Montclair. He gets bused every day, Monday through Friday. He goes to school full time.

I came here today out of concern for my son and so many children like him. I can only imagine what it would be like to have to be the one to take my son to and from therapy and special programs out of town with public transportation. I'm fortunate with a 24-year-old daughter who gives tremendous support. She has been my rock in handling him when he gets out of hand.

Along with teachers and staff, and professional programs that have reached out to one -- we are the better for it, for his future. Education and early intervention is the key. And I always hear about private schools that dedicate themselves to the service of children like mine -- schools would be -- doing it-- I'm sorry. (son plays with microphones) Along with the teachers, staff and professionals at schools, I reached out and my son is better for it.

Education and early intervention is the key, and I always hear that without private schools that dedicate themselves into these services, that there would be a disservice to (indiscernible) the children. What I'm trying to say is--

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Gotcha.

MS. LUCIANO: --my experience has been, with this school, that the teachers and the staff -- they go to school to provide care and education. I'm his mother. I don't -- that you pay them to do this; and I'm involved in the school and I see they do it out of their heart, not because they get paid for it. They go to school to be special care instructors, nurses, and can deal with children like this on a daily basis. This is my son. If it wasn't for that school, he would not be sitting still here, right now. I truly believe that. I just believe that.

I'm one of the fortunate families, I know that. And I just don't do it, just for him, but I do it, like I say, for those who can't speak for themselves and those who couldn't be here.

I thank you for the time. (applause)

SENATOR ADLER: Thanks.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

Great testimony. And that's one happy boy.

Deborah Grefe, Principal, Randolph school district -- might comment about what we do about declining enrollments. I've been asking these principals to comment on that. I've reserved some time for that, because it's a big problem that we have.

D E B O R A H J. G R E F E: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our concerns regarding the issue of school funding.

My name is Deborah Grefe, and I'm an Elementary Principal of Fernbrook School in Randolph Township school district. I've been a principal for 16 years, and I've experienced numerous changes in the educational system over my last 30 years as an educator.

Randolph is a high-performing district, Factor Group I, located in Morris County, with approximately 5,500 students. Our district consists of four elementary schools. Each school consists of 600-plus students in each building; several preschool handicap classes; one middle of 1,200 plus; and a high school of 1,600.

This year, for our district to maintain present programs and services, our budget needed to be \$3 million or higher than what the voters approved. Therefore, in order to reduce spending by \$3 million, 27 individuals lost their jobs. Fortunately, these reductions did not have an impact on classroom instruction. However, any loss in revenue in this next school year, 2007-2008, will directly impact classroom instruction. We will face reductions in force, which is instructional force, resulting in an increase of class sizes, K through 12, due to consolidation of classes. Our high school classes are already at 30 students per class. Buildings will no longer be able to be maintained efficiently, resulting in a slow deterioration of our facilities. We are also concerned that instructional materials will need to be shared among our students.

The current school spending cap law does not take into consideration the fixed expenses school districts incur, such as the following:

The legal obligation to educate our special education population as directed by a child's individual education plan, IEP. Unfortunately, when the district funds are dedicated to this population, as mandated by Federal law, our general education students are negatively impacted. This situation will worsen if revenues are further reduced. An additional financial burden on districts are those students whose IEP

require a private placement. These outside placements range from \$55,000 to \$100,000-plus, depending upon the needs of that individual.

Financial obligations to charter and nonpublic schools, and to those students attending institutions -- these costs will then be absorbed by local taxpayers.

Employee contract obligations have already been established at 4 percent.

As we struggle to meet our students' needs, the entire burden of flat spending has been passed onto our local taxpayer.

Furthermore, in our \$68 million budget, with a 3 percent cap increase, the budget could increase -- could -- by 2.4 million. Approximately 85 percent of our budget expenditures are employee salaries. We will need 1.89 million to cover contractual obligations for payroll increases. This leaves our district with \$250,000 to cover pending increases such as health benefits, heat, electric, other operational expenses, and additional special education student enrollments.

Our schools are facing a future of catastrophic proportions. I am here to ask you for your help. I also ask you to consider these questions, that have not been posed to you at this moment:

Where were you, ladies and gentlemen, if it were not for those teachers who spent hours of preparation and planning instruction, challenging your thinking and opening your minds to the endless possibilities awaiting you? How many of you can remember the first time you were able to read and couldn't wait to tell your mom and dad?

The future of our nation will continue to be at risk until we address the system of funding our schools. Our children are the innocent

victims of this controversy. They come to school eager to learn and experience success.

On behalf of the children, please evaluate the school funding law and seek ways to ensure their education will not be compromised. There is just too much at stake.

Thank you for your attention.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Ms. -- let's see -- it looks like Fano. Christine Fano, Arevoo Ganjaei (phonetic spelling), and Judith Doorn-Mury (phonetic spelling), Children's Institute of Verona.

(sets up easel and picture)

It's not counting against your time, so--

C H R I S T I N E F A N O: Oh. Well, I'm the only one speaking.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Okay.

MS. FANO: The other moms won't be here.

Good afternoon. My name is Christine Fano. I'm a resident of Montville, New Jersey. I'm the proud parent of two children: Dominic, who is 8; and my little Christopher, who is 6, and has autism. Christopher is a happy-go-lucky little angel. He can only speak a few words, but we all know that he understands how much we all love him. Christopher has been attending the Children's Institute -- and I'll call it TCI, because it's easier to say -- a private, nonprofit school in Verona, New Jersey, that serves children ages 3 to 21. It goes from preschool to career education. I'm also the President of our Parent-Staff Organization and am involved greatly with this excellent school.

My husband and I discovered TCI through our nephew Steven, who acquired the skills he needed to successfully return to a public school setting after attending TCI for three years.

Our town's disabled preschool program was not an appropriate placement for Christopher's many needs, since they did not have an autistic program or a self-contained program. His case manager started looking for an out-of-district program school to meet Christopher's educational and social needs, but informed us not to be too hopeful due to the long waiting lists for schools such as TCI -- those with reputations for educating and helping children with autism and severe learning disabilities.

But miracles do happen -- one month before Christopher's third birthday, I received a phone call from his case manager. She said happily, "Christopher got in." On May 12, 2000, Christopher began his school days at TCI. He has grown so much since that day, more than three years ago. On his third birthday, he couldn't speak at all. Today, he can say, "Thank you," "good night," "mommy," and "I love you." And now he's learning to read.

It seems so simple, but it certainly wasn't for our little boy. TCI has gone beyond what any public school would or could do. At my request, the school purchased a laptop computer for Christopher so he could communicate all of the things he had learned in class, but because he was not speaking could not share with his teacher. My district did not pay for his laptop, TCI did. TCI has a state-of-the-art autism program that Christopher is so lucky to be a part of. At my request, the school contracted with Dr. Vincent Carbone, a leader in the field of verbal behavior. And I'll explain an easy-- It's a proven way of increasing

communication skills of children with autism. This contract cost the school a great deal, but was necessary, as many of our students come to TCI with major communication deficits. My case manager was thrilled when she found out. Private schools can quickly adapt programs for the needs of its students, while public schools may take years to address concerns, and budget restrictions may even stop or eliminate crucial programs. I mean, if it's not passed, the budget, forget about any new programs that arise.

I reached out to the TCI families who have experienced public schools, and these are their stories:

Mark Defurio was unsuccessful in public school because of the high student-to-teacher ratio. His one-on-one resource room time was, in fact, a teacher with a room full of kids who all needed different types of attention. His mom told me he was lost in every way, and that one of the best things she ever did was to send Mark to TCI.

Danny Boronat was educated at a private school for children with autism for about five years and then back at his home district for three. When he approached middle-school age, his parents knew that their school district could not address his needs for vocational training, with functional academics. They advocated for him to be sent to TCI because of its proven outcomes with these two important programs.

Connor Orsi tested very well on his IQ test conducted by his school district and was brought back into the school district after leaving his private placement. It took only a few days to see the impact of the new environment on Connor and his family. Connor's self-esteem plummeted due to the lack of appropriate facilities and properly trained staff -- a clear violation of his IEP. This exacerbated his behavioral issues to the point

where Connor's parents were called daily to remove him from the school before lunch. These issues continued to escalate and Connor lost valuable time. He was placed at TCI a few months later, but it took at least a year for Connor to emotionally recover.

TCI's administrators constantly send staff to workshops and bring in professionals to support the staff and families. They are a model school to universities such as Seton Hall, Montclair State, and William Paterson, and many others who use TCI to train the next generation of therapists and teachers.

Our staff-to-student ratio for the younger children is almost one-to-one, so our children can receive intensive therapy and instruction required to help them reach their potential, including specialized training techniques that have benefited my son Christopher and many others.

TCI has amazing therapeutic staff, including certified school psychologists, social workers, behaviorists, crisis intervention staff, and even a top psychiatrist. The school nurse is even a teacher of the handicapped. TCI offers an array of programs free to parents, including family support groups, workshops for parents, and services for siblings.

Public schools need private schools, and they clearly cannot support the special needs of these children. There are 70 different school districts that depend on TCI to provide the necessary and appropriate specialized resources that cannot be delivered as required by their children's IEPs.

I just have two more paragraphs, can I read them quickly?

SENATOR ADLER: I say yes, he says no. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Just read the one.

MS. FANO: I'll be very fast, I promise. Thank you.

If you cap the school's tuition, what will happen to my son's IEP? TCI can't charge -- private schools can't charge what they want to, because tuition is based on IEPs. Private schools do not have a State pension plan for staff, they do not have access to State grants, or the State health plan. We would have to cut our programs, but these programs are necessary in meeting our children's needs. If TCI's funding is cut, it will affect every single aspect of the school, from the curriculum to necessary therapeutic services, to staff in the classrooms.

Please do not threaten the placement of Connor, Mark, Danny, and my son Christopher. Shame on anyone who tries to steal away our children's legal right to a free and appropriate education. My Christopher and all the other children who attend TCI now, and in the future, deserve what the Supreme Court of the United States gave to them.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, Ma'am.

Jonathan Hodges, Paterson Board of Education, on Abbott funding.

JONATHAN HODGES: Good afternoon.

SENATOR ADLER: Good afternoon.

MR. HODGES: I was going to submit a written testimony, but I'm listening to some of the testimony here -- I was forced to change mine. And I'll submit to you at a later date.

I'm a physician, and I encountered the children of Paterson by watching their behavior in the emergency room, listening to their conversations, and hearing that 91 percent of the males that I encounter

want to be football players, as opposed to physicians, lawyers, dentists, doctors. Worse than that, I saw many children -- 16, 17 year olds -- die in front of me in the emergency room. I had to go out to their parents and explain to them that their loved ones weren't coming back; which forced me to leave my profession and to run for the Board of Education in Paterson to try to make a difference, to be serious about a commitment to change the lives of children.

I am here today as a member of the Paterson Board of Education to help you understand the importance of Abbott funding to the Paterson School District. Prior to Abbott, we had funding levels at \$5,000 per student. We had a drop-out rate that approached 15 percent. Students in elementary schools rapidly fell behind their grade levels in language arts skills. The high schools that were producing 18 percent passage rates of the high school efficiency tests -- a thousand students would enter each of our major high schools and we would graduate less than 250 a piece. Now the drop-out rates have declined to less than 10 percent. We have nearly tripled our passage rates of the HSPA. Paterson students, as a group, have the highest GPA and the highest graduation rate of any single group of students on the Syracuse University's campus. This, secondary to a program that was funded, in part, with Abbott dollars.

Recently, some of our students participated in a frontline research internship at UMDNJ, through the auspices of a medical arts academy that Abbott helped create. These changes are the direct result of Abbott funding. Paterson is frequently blamed for the misappropriation of millions of tax dollars. I submit to you that those dollars were lost because of the hasty and ill-conceived legislation that created the takeover law, and

that failed to obligate the State Department of Education to institute appropriate oversight or provide the building, within the district, of the capacities they determined was so lacking. Worse yet, State employees sent to shepherd the district were complicit in the mismanagement.

Members of the Paterson Board of Education were reduced to angry voices on the sidelines, begging the Department of Education and the State of New Jersey and other agencies to intervene to stop the wasteful and subsequently determined illegal practices that the takeover law institutionalized. Our children, already victims of well-meaning but ill-conceived legislation, hope that your deliberations will consider the Abbott dollars, when appropriately directed and shepherded, have begun to do great service. But shortsighted, knee-jerk measures that don't truly address the needs of the neediest among us will only compound the educational problem that the takeover legislation in part created. Children don't cause the mistakes of adults, they only suffer. (applause)

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

Next, Mr. Frank Gargiulo, together with Thomas Killeen and Jorge Hansel.

FRANK GARGIULO: Good evening.

SENATOR ADLER: Good evening.

MR. GARGIULO: I'm here to -- and Tom and Jorge are here today -- to talk about a couple different things: One being vocational education in general, and specifically, most especially for them in adult education. I'm the Superintendent of the Hudson County Schools of

Technology, and I'm representing here, today, every vocational school in the State of New Jersey, from the Council.

Honorable Chairmen and members of the Committee, thank you for listening this morning -- this afternoon. It was this morning when I got here. (laughter)

New Jersey's 21 county vocational schools are different from the regular comprehensive high schools. For example, my district operates two full-time high schools, one in North Bergen and one in Jersey City, that integrate high-level academics with a range of career and technical programs such as business, technology, performing arts, architecture, construction, and medical sciences. We run a shared program with the Jersey City school district, the New Jersey (indiscernible) program, which again reduces some of the very funding you're addressing today. We also offer a middle school program, an alternative school for disaffected teens, an adult high school, cyber school, and an adult career institute.

I'm here to talk to you today about the funding mechanism for these -- maybe just to bring to you, for attention, what that means to us. We are a market-driven school of choice, as a public education school. In order to keep our school current in terms of technology, in terms of programs, it is necessary to eliminate, and to add, and to change, and to update on a continual basis. Those programs are expensive.

A new funding system must support the delivery of career and technical education in several key ways:

Core curriculum aid -- which is the basic funding that the State gives to most school districts, of course the money we all get.

Categorical aid for vocational programs, which is specific just to vocational schools, is critical for our maintaining those high-cost programs that we run and keep them updated. You know yourself that technology changes every couple of years. And if we're going to stay in the forefront of technical education, it is absolutely essential that we have funding for other things.

Most of our students are at-risk students. In my district, 75 percent of our students come from Abbott school districts. I would support, and the district supports that the Abbott school funding follow the student. Ferris High School, which is directly across the street from my Jersey City High School -- if a student walks out that door and walks across the street and registers in County Prep High School, which is vocational school -- as he's walking across the street, we lose \$4,500 in funding and so does the Jersey City school district.

And I recommend that the money follow the student in terms of the (indiscernible). Of course, the special education, which was spoken about by many people is supported.

Adult high school aid: I want to say one thing about it and then turn it over to Tom. The State Department of Education has line-itemed out the adult high school aid and replaced it with a line item called *consolidated aid*. So in effect we didn't lose -- not one penny -- except until this year. Because as you're redoing the formula and there is no formula for adult education, what happens is that the consolidated aid I'm sure is going to disappear. As a result of it, the aid for adults disappears. And we have, in our school district, the largest adult high school in the State of New Jersey. We have 2,500 students in that program at present, and always a

big waiting list. I implore you to restore that aid, even at the low level that it was, \$1,443 -- of what the aid was. In our county, we have approximately 180,000 people without a high school diploma. It is unconscionable to eliminate that aid, and on top of that to also say, "You couldn't even charge tuition if you wanted to, if those people wanted to get an education." That's what's coming out of the legislation. That's why I implore you to help.

In closing, as you hone in on the recommendation to revise public funding in New Jersey schools, I ask you to consider this: The state's 21 county vocational-technical schools provide a critical, shared service that reduces the overall costs of delivering career and technical education programs and other specialized programs that meet regional, economic, and educational needs. We have a strong track record of success, and we want to continue providing these important programs and services. We urge you to support a fair and equitable funding formula.

Thank you. (applause)

T H O M A S F. K I L L E E N, Ed.D.: Do I still have time?

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: They didn't know that, I don't think.

SENATOR ADLER: Do you have a different perspective than what you just heard?

J O R G E G. H A N S E L: Short and sweet.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Two minutes.

DR. KILLEEN: Frank deals with the budget and money, and I deal with the people. I'm the Assistant Principal with the alternative high

school and the adult high school. And I have a number of statistics here. I'm not going to bother to get into it, you'll see it in my testimony.

All I can say is that all of you are invited to our graduations. Our graduations are solemn ceremonies. They're celebrations. When you see people who are 40, 50, and 60 years old receiving their diplomas, walking down the aisle with tears coming down their cheeks, you have to be proud for them. I am so proud in the accomplishments of all our graduates. Adult high schools are a necessity, and it's important that you support the complete funding of adult high schools.

And I'm going to turn it over to Jorge Hansel, who is a graduate of our adult high school. (applause)

MR. HANSEL: Ladies and gentlemen of the Committee, my name is Jorge G. Hansel. To me, the Hudson County Schools of Technology Adult High School, in North Bergen, has given me a second chance to better my life and the lives of my family. I worked very hard at my studies and earned my diploma last June.

This would not have been possible without the program I attended at Hudson County Schools of Technology. The program gives adults like me the opportunity to study in the evenings after work. It is geared to the adult learner.

The administration and teachers realize how important earning a real diploma, not a GED, is to the adults in our community. A high school diploma opens the door to bettering our lives and our families. For many of us adults, opportunities for advancement at work are closed unless we can provide our employers with evidence that we have graduated high

school. These opportunities may provide us with an increase in salary or the opportunity to leave the warehouse for a less manual position.

I understand that the funding may be cut for our programs. I ask that you consider the adult students of the high school, who have given up time with their families to study with the hope of earning a high school diploma. Our future and that of our families depends on the continued operation of the programs like that offered at the Hudson County Schools of Technology.

Thank you for your time.

MR. KILLEEN: Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you, sir. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Next, Mr. Junius Williams.

You're going to have to live up to that clap. (laughter)

J U N I U S W. W I L L I A M S: You take what you can get. (laughter)

Thank you, gentlemen and lady.

I'm here representing the Abbott Leadership Institute, across the street at Rutgers, and also a committee of advocates, also a Newark-based group.

I just want to start out with two propositions: Number one, Abbott has established a benchmark for school funding to meet the needs of disadvantaged children; and number two, the Abbott formula should be expanded to all districts that establish a need based on numbers of students from low-income households, English language learners, and children who live in concentrated poverty. What we really want to establish, gentlemen, is that we already have a formula that you can look to, to base any kind of

changes. What do those numbers really call for? Abbott is formula-based, upon the I and J districts. If you look at some of those districts -- Montclair costs \$12,379, Millburn \$12,464, Summit \$12,139, Livingston \$12,507-- And you see we have a partial list here -- so all of those districts, all the way down to \$9,967. That's what it costs in those districts; why should it cost any less anywhere else?

The point is, we need to leave the Abbott remedies alone and expand them based upon need. I think you've also heard from Ceil Zalkind here today, who points out that the New Jersey taxpayers are willing to accept that. The taxpayers have said that poor kids need more money. The vast majority of respondents -- 75 percent -- support the current practice of providing higher levels of State aid to school districts with higher child poverty rates, and so forth, and so on -- you've already heard those statements. I won't read them again, but it does give us a base of operation.

Finally, gentlemen, we have to talk about accountability. The taxpayers also said they wanted more accountability from all schools at all levels. We believe that there should be stronger accountability mechanisms implemented to ensure that public funds are put to the most effective and efficient use to educate the children. These mechanisms must apply to educators at all levels of educational governance, from the local school districts to the New Jersey Department of Education. It's very important to point out, gentlemen and lady, that the Supreme Court said a long time ago that the Abbott program should be assessed. The Department of Education has yet to assess any Abbott program. I don't see how we spend billions of dollars without an assessment. If there were an assessment, maybe all of us

here would be more familiar and more friendly toward what the Abbott districts have already said and done.

What I want to finish with is just a Bible quotation, because it says, “Without vision the people perish.” And we ask that you leave the Abbott funding alone, that you expand its benefits, and that that vision include something so that every child, all over New Jersey, can thrive and nobody’s child gets left behind.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Ms. Witcher. Kathleen Witcher.

KATHLEEN WITCHER: Good afternoon, members of the Committee.

I’m Kathleen Witcher. I’m a retired educator. I am the President of the Irvington NAACP and member of the Education Committee of the Statewide Conference of NAACPs. First, I take the position, as President of the Irvington branch and statewide education member, that all children of New Jersey are entitled to a thorough and efficient education. I was an executive board member of the New Jersey Association of Black Educators, and we were amicus curiae in *Abbott I*. I was present in the State Supreme Court when the *Abbott* ruling was made, which allowed for education and equal opportunities for the poor districts in our state.

For the record, the NAACP is concerned about persistent racial disparity in the allocation of educational resources, and the quality of educational practices that benefit all students. The NAACP has specifically developed 13 recommended actions for pre-K through grade 12, including

increasing the resource equity and improvement of teacher quality, increased access to early childhood programs, increase and access to college-bound course work, reduction of class size, closing the digital divide, improving academic achievement, reducing drop-out rates, increasing parental involvement, reducing the numbers of minority children who are classified and placed in special education, the elimination of racial disparity in suspensions and expulsions, the reversal of resegregation trends, and the provisions for language assistance and bilingual education.

The NAACP believes that a fair and equitable allocation of educational resources is a key component in the effective reduction of racial disparities in public education. We agree that there should be a definition for educational accountability, in terms of how racial disparities are addressed, and in terms of tracking, monitoring, and submitting data that looks at meeting the mandates of equal educational opportunities.

The New Jersey Department of Education Office of School Funding needs to release the 2003 study certifying the cost of education in this state. The Legislature has failed to release findings for our schools that were reported in October 2005. Thousands of public school children await the promise of quality education. Educational experts have given three ways of funding school districts to this Committee. They have given ideas on consolidation and ways of cost savings. But there must be progression by this body to insist on the cooperation and adherence to mandates that the Department of Education in this state delivers. There must be a move to disclose what the report says is needed to operate schools in this state to provide thorough and efficient education for our children.

Equal educational opportunities, quality education, thorough and efficient education are all that we can accept for the children of this state. Our children's futures depend on the due diligence of this Committee to demand that the Department of Education adheres to complete disclosure of requirements, of programs, of services, and of strategies and requirements that operate the schools of the state for the children's benefit. To allow the Department of Education to limit its findings, to withhold the reports, to keep back the information and the strategies with such organizations as the Education Law Center is in defiance of the court orders. We demand that this body act with all due haste to remedy this and to provide thorough and efficient education to all schoolchildren now.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Lowenkron -- where is she?

Ruth Lowenkron?

R U T H L O W E N K R O N, ESQ.: Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am here both representing the Education Law Center, an organization I'm sure you're very familiar with, but I come to talk about perhaps one of the less familiar areas of work that we do, the special education advocacy that we do. And I'm also here representing the New Jersey Special Education Practitioners, an organization of attorney and nonattorney advocates, who assist children with disabilities who experience problems receiving an appropriate special education.

While we laud your efforts to establish fair property tax for all in New Jersey and to deal with the intricacies of educational funding, we want to ensure that any way of differing from the system today, any way of

reviving public school funding does not come at the expense of children with disabilities. (applause)

It's perhaps important to remind you that there is more than little me or the other little people in the room who talked to you about the importance of special education. There is a critical law that says children with disabilities are entitled to an appropriate education; and not to be given short shrift, to be given whatever the few pennies that, unfortunately, we are limited to -- recognizably in the city, in the state -- can afford for them. They are entitled to an appropriate education. We urge you to disregard the rumors that are percolating that special education parents want, want, want. They want the Cadillac for their children. They want their kids at the finest private schools. They are ripping off the system in some which way. That's not what we see. We see parents of children with disabilities want, want, wanting what all parents want, want, want. They want an appropriate education for their children. (applause)

And it's very, very important to recognize, when we're talking especially about finances, that it's very clearly documented that early intervention for children with disabilities pays off. Spend the money now to educate children with disabilities and you will have produced productive citizens. (applause) You will have saved money when you do a financial analysis. Don't be penny wise and pound foolish.

And while talking about financial ways of saving money, here's another hot tip, if you will, from our organizations. One of the things that we think is, perhaps, a little known way of saving money is if the Legislature would pay attention to ensuring that the special education law mandate, regarding the least restrictive environment for inclusion of children with

disabilities, is, in fact, adhered to. Again, studies are very clear in showing that if you educate children in the least restrictive environment in the local neighborhood school that's appropriate for them, with the appropriate aides and resources, you will be saving money over sending those children out of district to segregated placements. Now very, very clearly in saying this, please, that does not mean what is all too apt to occur among school districts -- that the school districts say, "Ah-ha, let's just bring our children in and dump them in the classroom with no supports." That's not at all what we're talking about. (applause) We're talking about adhering to the law, and something we encourage the Legislature to do to ensure that that mandate is adhered to.

And perhaps it's best to close with what I think is the mantra of the day from my groups, and that is, inclusion is cheaper than segregation. Repeat after me, inclusion is cheaper than segregation. And while we're repeating it, remember, too, it's the law. (applause)

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Now, I'll take -- we'll have Carolann Garafola, Mayor of Warren Township.

MAYOR CAROLANN GARAFOLA: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I appreciate your time. I know this is a long day for you, particularly.

My name is Carolann Garafola. I'm Mayor of Warren Township. I'm in my 11th year as an elected official. I'm also the Principal of Horizon High School. You met a couple of my kids -- I call them my kids. I'm also the aunt of a 41-year-old man with autism. Let me tell you about my nephew. He is tall, good looking, dresses very well, has an IQ of

168, and spends his days handing out towels at a sports club. He went to school at a time when the programs for autistic individuals did not exist and schools did not know how to educate and meet the needs of these special children like my nephew. But I know now that there is hope in New Jersey, that the many private schools for children just like my nephew exist now and for those ahead of us.

I'm here to lay out my concerns regarding the possible direction of the Legislature and the New Jersey Department of Education to put a crunch or eliminate private schools. There are over 11,000 children/students with multiple disabilities in private schools who have not been accommodated in the public schools for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons include: a lack of space for our students in the public schools, the inability to address the seriously handicapping conditions and medical issues, the lack of staff with the expertise to manage the learning and behavioral issues that are exhibited by these children. Approximately 5 percent of students in New Jersey have been placed in the private schools because there were no appropriate services for them.

Senator Doria, I have two students from your district of Bayonne. Assemblyman Stack, who must have stepped out, I have a student from Union City. I have students from all over, as far as northern Warren County from Sparta, to as far east as Bayonne and Jersey City, to as far south as East Brunswick. We cover close to 36 schools who are sending children to us because the services in the schools may not be appropriate for those children. These children have daily seizures, they're on gastro-tube feedings. They will never eat like you and I do -- to enjoy pasta, meatballs and spaghetti, and the things that we enjoy when we go out to dinner or

when we eat at home. They have specialized equipment. They need oxygen, they're on respirators. They need standers, power wheelchairs, walkers, electronic equipment to communicate. They need mobility training, special facilities with occupational therapy, speech therapy, a place for changing diapers -- even for some of our 18-, 19-, and 21-year-olds, who still are in diapers because of their own personal needs. They have personal aides to feed, diaper, change their clothes, and the list can go on. These are some of the issues that prevent our students from being educated in the public school setting.

I will tell you, I spent 33 years -- 21 as an administrator in the public schools before I went to the private sector. I was a mover towards inclusion in 1990. I was one of these people that they laughed at in Bergen County because they said it wouldn't work. I will tell you, it is not cheaper. Does it work for some children? Yes. If you do a cost analysis, which I actually did and presented at New Jersey School Boards, you will find it is no less expensive -- if you have the right support and the right training and curriculum, for moving children of severe disabilities back to the public schools.

Children in the private schools have an opportunity to return to their neighborhoods. And ASA, our parent organization, has found in their outcomes that 45 percent of them did so. Some of our students have the ability and the opportunity to go on to mainstream activities, and 95 percent of them do so. Of the four students who graduated from Horizon High School this year, one is in Essex County College, not far from here; one went to an occupational training center; one has become a volunteer; and one has gone on to an adult training center out of state. All of them

took their place within his or her community. They are not out on the streets, but rather were embraced by family, friends, and their community to become a part of their community. Just as you want your children to grow up, leave your home, have a family, take their place within the community, so do parents with children of special needs. But you will see -- from Nicky who was here, the redhead; and Adam, the boy with the Horizon High School sweatshirt -- they will not be able to do that. But we have a responsibility to help them to have as fulfilling a life as possible.

A review of the data of the New Jersey Department of Education shows that there are -- there's an ever-growing number of students.

And I will stop here, because I don't want to go over in time.

I just ask you to consider options such as developers' fees, looking at what other states are doing. And my proposal to you does have some suggestions.

I am a Mayor in Warren Township. I'm very concerned about the rising real estate costs. And I ask for your help in the school funding issue, with some of the suggestions that have come forth.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

Craig Dellegrippo, School for Children, Tinton Falls. Craig Dellegrippo. (no response)

Mary Louise Malyska, Superintendent, Watchung Borough.

You might want to mention if your enrollment is going up or going down in your school.

MARY LOUISE MALYSKA, Ph.D.: Our enrollment has gone up slightly.

Good afternoon.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you.

I'll begin by briefly informing you of the qualifications for me to speak on this important subject. I do have a Doctor of Philosophy in Education, and I have served as Superintendent of Schools in four districts in New Jersey. And from 1996 to the year 2000, I was the Essex County Superintendent of Schools, with oversight over four Abbots: Orange, East Orange, Newark, and Irvington.

You can read some of my public testimony before the Senate Abbott budget committee hearings that was submitted, in the form of memoranda, to the Department of Education, when we found that the Newark public schools were having problems with their financial procedures. We were flagging that to the Department of Ed for quite some time. And it finally was determined that there was a problem.

In the past six years, I've helped organize and participate in three forums dealing with New Jersey public school funding. The point is simply that we have spoken with you, we've shared our information with you, we've examined other school districts, and we've examined other states, other funding formulas, other allocation formulas. And we've shared all of that. I'm very pleased that we now have the attention of the Legislature, and hopefully this will be resolved.

There is an inequitable State funding of public schools in the State of New Jersey. And as an example, I would like you to know that Watchung Borough -- the district where I work -- receives \$825 per pupil in

State aid. That's our total, \$825. And, you know, they're not all rich in Watchung. I just want you to know that. We have to raise the balance. And we spend about \$10,000 per pupil in Watchung. We have to raise the balance from our local property taxes.

The \$825 is the total amount that we get in State aid. That's made up of transportation aid, special ed aid -- that's supposed to take care of all of our special ed, by the way -- our stabilization aid, and our consolidated aid. We have to provide English-language services, we have to provide all of our special ed programs, our world language programs, pre-K for our special ed kids ages 3 and 4, and all of the curricula programs required under the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

We have averaged \$851 per pupil in aid for the past five years, every year -- approximately 800-and-something. I believe there should be a per-pupil amount of State aid that is representative of equitable sharing of State's revenue. With the current Abbott formula for the distribution of revenue, non-Abbott districts are dependent upon property taxes. And that's the reason why you have your commission. That's what you're studying; and I understand that. But there are other states where other taxes are used to generate revenue. Many of those states use *sin* taxes -- taxes on alcohol, taxes on tobacco -- and they allocate that toward education funding.

In New Jersey, the voters approved gambling and lotteries with the understanding that education would be funded. But we now know that doesn't happen. If those revenues were applied to funding education, and if Abbott districts received greater financial support from their municipal

coffers, there would be more equitable funding of the non-Abbott school districts. And there would be relief for property owners.

Our New Jersey State Constitution does call for a thorough and efficient system of education for every child age 6 to 16 (*sic*), and it is incumbent upon the State to fund this system. A State aid amount of \$7,000 to \$9,000 per pupil is really not too much to expect. That is what other states are giving per pupil. And if districts need more than that, they need to go to the voters to get it. This would provide for the basic educational needs of our children.

You have been considering creating larger districts with the belief that this would reduce your costs. I've worked in large districts and I've worked in small districts. I believe the small districts are really much more cost-efficient. You've heard testimony today about private schools and why they are so cost-efficient. I'll tell you that when you are very, very involved with children, you catch their problems before they become big problems. When you have an intimate working relationship with children, you can help them, you can fix what's happening at a lower level of cost. We do that all the time.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thanks.

DR. MALYSKA: I just have two more points, real quick. I would just like to say, the average COLA -- the cost of living -- that limited our budget growth, as required by 1701, was not the same limit that was applied to the private, special ed schools. And I would like you to look at that. We had a 9 to 10 percent increase in our special ed private school tuitions. And I know they're doing a great job, but we're cut down to 3.5 or 4 percent, and yet we have to pay 9 and 10 percent.

And it's also incumbent on you to look at the health benefits cost. We do our best, but a 12 percent increase is really a killer.

Thank you for your attention. And I wish you the very best of success. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, Doctor.

Anna Taliaferro, President, New Jersey Association of Parent Coordinators.

A N N A N. T A L I A F E R R O: Good afternoon, gentlemen, ladies.

Since I am of African decent--

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Oh, ma'am, you'll want to use that microphone there. (referring to PA microphone)

MS. TALIAFERRO: Since I am of African decent-- The way we say hello in Africa is to say, "And so how are the children?" Let me ask New Jersey that this afternoon.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Ma'am, are you Ms. Taliaferro?

MS. TALIAFERRO: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Oh.

MS. TALIAFERRO: You did call my name.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: I did, but I see two people. So I was trying to--

MS. TALIAFERRO: That's right, because I represent the New Jersey Association of Parent Coordinators. I'm their President. But, more importantly, I represent the parents and the children who are black and brown.

I come before you this afternoon-- I was going to give you my printed testimony. But it doesn't come out quite as much as when I give you my heart. And my heart is, that New Jersey has not done right by the black and brown children. We still live in a very racist society, which -- our children must carry the burden every day they walk in a schoolhouse that is not up to par.

I listened to Bill Gates, this Summer, talk about putting his money where his mouth is, because America now ranks last on the world stage in education. I know another country who did that, and they were brought to their knees. It's called Russia -- when they put more money in military than they did in education. I now know that prisons are on the stock market. Investment bankers are investing in prisons, based on our children's third and fourth grade test scores.

So that's why I come to you with a heavy heart today. My district, which is a State-operated school district, was forced to accept flat funding. There's no way we intend to educate our children off of flat funding, because in January we're going to have to look at layoffs.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: What district is that, ma'am?

MS. TALIAFERRO: Paterson.

Precious resources will not be available. We're already looking at cutting staff. Our children are already behind the eight ball. We don't have too many stories that we can tell like this one.

I had a parent in my office -- I'm also the supervisor of parent involvement in the district of Paterson -- where a parent came to my office yesterday, because her youngster had been a straight A student since she was in school. But she was concerned, because the Ivy League colleges were

beginning to look at her child -- she's a senior -- and she could not get the one honor's course that she would need -- one honor's course -- in order that her transcript would look like Yale, and Harvard, Dartmouth, and all the rest of the Ivy League schools -- would go after her. And she wanted to know why her daughter could not have that one honor's course that she would need. And she was told, "We don't have enough money to hire the teacher that she needs, and the other youngsters in her class." She's at an academy called Panther Academy, which is math and science.

She just recently returned from Rutgers University. She is so bright, and she is just an example of what we can do when we fill out the capacity to teach our children. They have the potential. She was at Rutgers. They offered her a four-year scholarship, but that's not where she wants to go. And she said her professors didn't believe that she had maxed out the test that they gave her. So they wanted her to give her mother and father her pocketbook and her coat, because they thought she had cheated on the test. She said, "I'll take it with you sitting right here." They didn't believe her. And they began to dialogue in Spanish. This young lady from Paterson, New Jersey-- Weren't they stunned when she responded in Spanish. "You're sitting here talking about me, and I understand everything you're saying." And she said, "I want that last course in honors. If I want to become a scientist, a mathematician -- that I have what is necessary." But we can't provide it.

So when you look at the school funding formula, you think about the children like her. Because we are supposed to be responsible for all of our children, not just some -- all of our children.

The governors of this country met this Summer, and they had top corporate America in their conference. And they said, in essence, “If we don’t learn how to reach our children from preschool, we will stay last on the world’s stage in education.” And I submit to you that every child who lives in the Abbott districts is entitled to a world-class education. Do it. You’ve got the power, do it. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, ma’am.

Who--

D O N N A J A C K S O N: Although my name is not on the list--

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: That’s why there’s a problem, because a lot of people who are on the list are waiting to speak. How do you think we should handle that?

MS. JACKSON: Well, I was not-- There are other people in the audience who were given an opportunity to sign in when they came in. I was not given that opportunity, and I was here at 2:15.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Well--

MS. JACKSON: So I don’t know how you want to handle it. If you want me to come back, I’ll come back. But I’m from Newark, and I have a lot to say--

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Well, why don’t we--

MS. JACKSON: --that I can get in four minutes. So you tell me how you want to handle it.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Well, you can have two.

MS. JACKSON: Not a problem.

Donna Jackson, hell-raiser for the State of New Jersey. I live in Newark, but I’m here to talk about all 1.3 million children.

Thirty-one districts in the State of New Jersey are only certified this school year, and you're talking about cutting money?

We have an SLT structure in Newark that you forced on us.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: No one is talking about cutting money, by the way.

MS. JACKSON: You aren't talking about it today, but you will be tomorrow. You already cut it.

SLTs in Newark, right now-- We have five of them. We didn't have this structure before the State took over Newark, where we had 18 assistants before-- We got over 400 people from you guys that are now running Newark, and doing a worse job than when Gene Campbell was in place. They can't seem to find where the kids are, where the chairs are. We've got kids sharing books, we've got kids with no books. And this is before you even started flat funding.

I have a young lady in here from New York who got a letter from President Bush, because she's the number one student in the country -- so he told her -- black young lady -- who was at our Science High School. You want to talk about out-of-district funding? Seventy percent of the children in Science High School, right now, do not live in Newark. They live in your area, and we're paying for them to be here. They come in with the Prudential, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and other folks who fly down 78, 280, and 80 to come into my city every day, make nice incomes while the people here don't have that.

Adult education-- We couldn't even fit the people in West Side High School in our evening program that need adult education. I'm talking about a district, right here--

We do 15 to 25 murders a week. Do you think it's more to your advantage to put money into prisons? Keep right on doing it. You won't have but 10 districts certified next year.

We had a young man, this last week, who walked into a suburban school -- one of your schools -- and shot and killed the principal, because he was put out.

When are you going to get the message that this shouldn't even be a discussion? Why are we even talking about urban scholarships? They are a joke. Because if I wanted to send my child to North Academy, that costs \$19,000 a year, what am I doing with \$9,000? Where am I getting the other \$10,000 from? So before we start diverting money, we need to look at where the money is really going.

And, lastly, I'm going to tell you this. You guys have a boy called Gordon MacInnes, who is over all the Abbott districts. If he did a day's work for the dollars you've been giving him-- You could fire him tomorrow for the last 10 years that you've been paying him, for the nonaccountability that he has and does, and save us a whole bunch of money. Take him and his whole office. You can abolish it tomorrow. Let me know how much money you save from that.

You can take these SLTs that are in Newark -- all these little folks that you made me take that don't live here, that ride over an hour to get here, that make exorbitant salaries of over \$150,000. Guess what? I don't want them. You take them. They should have left them all in Trenton where they belong. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thanks. Thank you very much.

MS. JACKSON: And I'll type the rest of my comments so that you can get them.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

MS. JACKSON: Next time, let the public know you're coming. Because, trust me, it wouldn't have been this empty.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Next we'll have Ms. Evelyn Rodas, the Phoenix Center.

EVELYN I. RODAS: Good evening.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Make sure you speak into that mike, ma'am. (referring to PA microphone)

MS. RODAS: Good evening.

My name is Evelyn Rodas. I'm here as the mother of an autistic and severely handicapped--

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: We can't hear you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Ma'am, you'll want to pull that mike closer.

MS. RODAS: Good evening.

My name is Evelyn Rodas. I'm the mother of an autistic and hearing-impaired child. He is currently attending the Phoenix in Nutley.

I'm sorry, I'm nervous.

I'm here to inform you that I have witnessed, and my son is living proof, of how well a private school works. When Adolfo was diagnosed as autistic, it was very difficult finding schooling for him. I went through a lot of schools, public and nonpublic. And I did have the experience, as a matter of fact, of placing him in other schools, prior to

Phoenix. And it was heartbreaking. It was the most terrible moment -- terrible days of our lives.

Adolfo (indiscernible) was -- when he started Phoenix, he was nonverbal and severely handicapped in all aspects. I cannot remember him looking in my eyes, or even approaching me when he was hungry or not. In less than a year, Adolfo was over -- after he started Phoenix, he started mimicking speech. He became knowledgeable in other areas. And today he is verbal, he has developed a talent for music and art, he's a basketball player, he's in the drama club, he's a cafeteria worker, and he's a volunteer at (indiscernible) hospital.

And I'm very proud of my son, because he has made so much progress. But this would have never been possible without the help that I received at the school. The quality education that I have seen, the way that the teachers, staff, everyone comes together and works in the school and at home -- because I try to follow up with what they do with him in the school -- is precious and priceless. I'm looking forward to the continued development of my son. And I truly believe that the small setting, small class, the individual attention gives -- provides a special touch, free of charge, that we -- well, that our students need.

I'm sure you're all parents. And my kids are very valuable to me and priceless. And coming to Phoenix was the best thing that happened to me -- but not only for Phoenix itself, but any type of private school setting. I am the mother of two other children, and I value quality education more than buying them a pair of brand new jeans.

My other two are currently also attending private schools. And I have to work two jobs to keep them going. And I don't mind working a

third job. But I value -- priceless -- and value quality education. And if I have to do -- work myself down to the bone.

A voucher would help me tremendously, yes. But while that happens, I will continue working my two jobs to keep my kids getting the best education that I have seen happen.

Thank you for your time. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you very much.

Just for the record, we are trying to create school funding formula. We don't, in fact, have one that has passed Supreme Court muster. I think someone said we did have a formula. Parity aid is not a formula. That's why we're here trying to come up with a formula so that we can get out from under Supreme Court supervision on this point.

Caroline Knauss, Chair, NJEA School Finance Committee.

CAROLINE KNAUSS: Good evening.

My name is Caroline Knauss, and I'm a school librarian in Ramsey Borough, Bergen County. I have worked in Ramsey for 11 years, and spent 19 years as a librarian in Wallington before coming to Ramsey.

Ramsey is a K-12, suburban district with five schools. Our current enrollment has approximately 3,000 students. I am proud of our schools in Ramsey. Our students are high-achieving. Our teachers and educational support professionals are top-notch. Our parents and community members care about our schools and support our efforts. As a matter of fact, people move to Ramsey and Saddle River because they want their children to attend our schools.

But I have to admit, it gets harder each year to stay at the top of our game, as we all know why. It's flat funding. It's hard to maintain a

well-stocked library or embark on innovative, new projects when our school budget is consumed by day-to-day operating costs. As our curriculum becomes more demanding, students need access to the latest books and databases. Unfortunately, every year my library budget is either cut or calls for no increases. I can't provide our students with all of the tools they need.

We are fortunate in Ramsey, because our community supports our schools. Taxpayers pass our school budgets, even though they know that the burden will ultimately fall on them. But we can't continue this practice of hitting up property taxpayers for more money to keep our schools functioning. We need a new school funding formula, a fairer system that increases State aid to the level they should be.

As a 30-year educator, I have some ideas on how that can be done. The Federal government is doing New Jersey a grave disservice. The Federal No Child Left Behind Act has increased the amount of costly standardized testing required each year. These tests dramatically increase our schools' operating cost at no real benefit to the students.

We support IDEA and believe that all children deserve a great public education, regardless of ability or disability. But the Federal government is supposed to fund 40 percent of the State's special education costs under IDEA. It currently pays only 12 percent. This is a disgrace. If New Jersey were to recoup its losses from under -- these underfunded mandates, we would have over \$500 million to invest in our schools.

As a public school employee, I value my medical benefits. They are an important part of my compensation package. But the State Health Benefits Program could be improved to run more efficiently. For example,

the State should audit the program and make sure that only eligible individuals are enrolled. Hiring a pharmaceutical benefits manager could also bring down the cost of prescription drugs. Why not encourage bulk purchasing, and greater use of generic drugs and mail orders? The State Health Benefits program could realize significant savings, and attract more school districts to participate in the program to increase its efficiency.

As educators, we are being asked to do more with less each year. But instead of balancing the budget at the expense of our public schools, let's look for ways to operate more efficiently. Let's play hardball with the Federal government and make sure New Jersey gets the funding it deserves.

It's time to renew our commitment to public schools. It's time to revise the school funding formula to make it fair for all public schools and all taxpayers. Every child in New Jersey deserves a chance to be successful. I think we all agree that an investment in our public schools is an investment in the future of New Jersey.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you very much.

Next, Michael Cohan, Chair, Professional Teaching Standards Board.

MICHAEL COHAN: Good afternoon.

I am Michael Cohan. I'm the Chair of the New Jersey Professional Teaching Standards Board. But I'm also the Coordinator of Staff Development for my local school district in Union Township, in Union County, and I teach seventh grade social studies. I bring all my hats with me when I come this afternoon.

And like most of the people that you heard from this afternoon, I can testify that schools have had to cut budgets each year because of the flat State funding that we've seen.

I'd like to jump in and talk to you about a lot of the issues you've heard about this afternoon, among them school improvement, special education, and effective practice and professional development. But I know you're interested in hearing about ways that you might implement a fair funding formula and also save some money in the process.

Let me tell you a little bit about my local school district first. The Union schools are a very cost-efficient operation. Our average cost per pupil is \$1,000 less than any other school district in Union County, and we're \$1,300 less than the statewide average. When we calculate that out, in terms of impact on our local programs, even if we spent the Union County average, we'd have \$8 million a year more. Now, obviously, we're not able to do that because of the provisions of the State law -- the cap increases in our budget. We've always been efficient. And when the budget cap was put in place, we were stratified where we were. And we've only been able to grow at that lower rate for years.

Even though that's true, our costs have increased. You heard about special education earlier. Five years ago, 15 percent of our budget was devoted to costs for special education. Today it's 25 percent of our budget.

Now, because of our efficiency, our budgets were approved for 10 years in a row. But last year -- largely due to the negative publicity that was throughout the media in the state, and a loss of \$647,000 in State aid

late in the budget season -- our budget was defeated for the first time in many, many years, by less than 100 votes.

Now, you've asked for ideas about how we can be more efficient and save money in the process. Let me offer some suggestions. First, I would urge you to consider raising the 2 percent cap on the surplus the districts are permitted to maintain. This would allow schools to use their dollars more wisely for unexpected expenses like building repairs. The 2 percent cap is so restrictive that if there is an emergency that must be dealt with by a local board of education, they either need to exhaust the last nickel of their surplus or spend money out of their current fiscal year's budget, perhaps to the detriment of other programs. It also isn't helpful--

And enable them to engage in good planning. Just like any homeowner -- we like to try to make sure that we maintain our homes -- we should be maintaining our schools, too. Delayed building maintenance, whether the result of inadequate funding or inadequate surplus, is a more expensive choice. Schools should be encouraged to have the most cost-efficient maintenance schedule possible for the long-term.

Secondly, I think we need a new funding formula that provides some predictability. The new formula should include consistent, reliable State aid to give districts an opportunity to plan and grow. Flat funding and budget cuts have left many districts unable to deal with growing enrollments and unexpected expenses. Districts need to know that adequate aid will be available every year.

I'd also suggest that the State research the possibility of creating a two-year budget cycle for State aid. It would allow districts to plan further into the future and capture savings accordingly. Even if the

State maintains the current, one-year cycle, a new, more predictable formula should be created that gives the district enough time to plan resourcefully so that our district doesn't have to deal with losing two-thirds of a million dollars as they're ready to present the budget to the public.

These suggestions would save money without impacting the quality of public education in our state. Safeguarding educational quality is a critical consideration. In addition to providing districts with certainty about the funding they'll receive, the formula must also provide enough resources to ensure a quality education for students in all districts. While New Jersey residents are clear that their property taxes are too high, they're equally clear that they value and expect high-quality public schools.

As Coordinator of my district's staff development program, I can tell educators believe in constant professional growth and improvement. We never say, "Things are good enough." I believe the State should have the same high expectations for its public schools. We hope you'll help us. Resources will require us to be accountable, but we're not afraid of that accountability. As we create new efficiencies, let's take care to protect and advance the quality of public education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you very much.

SENATOR ADLER: As you walk away, Mr. Cohan, I wanted to thank you, Ms. Knauss, and Ms. Greadington -- all of whom I think are representatives of NJEA from different types of districts. We had another public hearing a week ago. And I was, at best, abrupt with NJEA representatives who spoke there, who basically were saying, "Give more money to my district." And I was kind of hoping to get different ideas,

other than just give more money to each of their districts. And you and NJEA, collectively, answered the call for ideas on what we can do to help address some of the spending side and some of the cost-control side.

So I really thank you and the other representatives of the Association, and leadership of the Association in Trenton, for having understood our mandate from the Legislature to address issues.

So thank you very much.

MR. COHAN: We're happy to do so. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

Mr. Peter McKeegan, parent.

P E T E R M c K E E G A N: I kind of rewrote the speech on your instructions earlier to try and get a couple other things done.

I was going to say good afternoon. I'll say--

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Just on the fly? That's good, that's good.

MR. McKEEGAN: I'll say good evening instead of good afternoon, too.

My wife told me to make sure I show you a picture. It's a picture of my daughter.

My name is Peter McKeegan, and my daughter's name is Jenna. Jenna is 13 years old and has been attending the Institute for Educational Achievement, or IEA, a special school for autism, for the past 10 years. Jenna was enrolled in IEA after her third birthday, with the advice and support of our school district, and the understanding that it was the most appropriate program available.

Jenna has made dramatic progress since she began school. She started out with very little language and seemed oblivious to the people around her. She would sing to herself throughout the day, often times having tantrums.

Jenna's teachers have worked over the years to reduce her disruptive behavior. Now her tantrums are practically nonexistent, and she has become a participating member of her family and community. It's like a miracle, but it is the result of a school that specializes in teaching children with autism.

IEA is successful at teaching our children because we have an excellent director, Dr. Dawn Buffington Townsend. She has the qualifications necessary to train our teachers in the kind of scientifically tested and proven teaching method that is used at IEA, but also the dedication and the patience to see that it is fully implemented and monitored.

At IEA, Jenna's education has progressed at a consistent pace, developing her reading, math, and comprehension skills. Additionally, IEA has taught her to sign her name, have conversations with other children, tell time, type on the computer, cook, take a shower independently, and to make purchases at a store -- all skills she will need to live an independent life. She has learned to manage her schedule and complete tasks on time using a Palm Pilot, again, preparing her for life after IEA.

Jenna's teachers meet with the directors after school to discuss programs and plan strategies that will help our children to succeed. They continually look for ways to help unlock even greater potential. They work

extremely hard to help these very special people deal with their unique challenges today, and prepare them for tomorrow.

There is so much that Jenna still needs to accomplish in order to someday be able to live independently. Today, at age 13, I see a child who can type at high speeds and high levels of accuracy; do multiplication in her head faster than me; play songs on the piano by ear; and draw complex, detailed pictures on the Paintbrush computer program, which I'm going to make you look at, at the end, because I bet you guys can't do it. (laughter) Try and draw a circle on that program -- and I'll show you what she does.

Seeing these skills developing today gives me the hope of independence for Jenna tomorrow. Will she work transcribing and typing legal or medical notes, play piano for children or senior classes, or maybe even work as a graphic artist? What I see is IEA unlocking her potential and allowing her to eventually get a job, pay her taxes, and some day be able to repay the people of New Jersey for the investment they've made in her.

Budget deficits are the result of expenses outrunning revenues. We need to continue to address expenses, but the focus should be attacking inefficiencies rather than efficient, supportive programs.

Listening to the Councilwoman from River Edge with all her reports-- There's probably some fat that can get pulled out of the expense-side. I mean, I work in business, and I've had to do reports on the reports, so I understand where that's coming from.

This is the part I wrote out myself.

Obviously, the expenses -- the expense side can only fix the problem so far. In business, revenue can be boosted by new products. In government, it's new taxes. But nobody likes to be politically suicidal and say, "Let's have new taxes." But we're talking about special ed, and how do we address it.

These are the kids that are handicapped. This is quasi-medical, this is quasi-educational. I mean, these kids are born with it. We're not talking about kids that just didn't make it, or didn't put it in, or are trying to re-get it -- regroup and refocus their education. We're talking about kids that are born with the problem. All right? I don't think there is anybody who sits there and complains about helping somebody who is born with a handicap.

Maybe it's time that we look at a fat-cat tax, or something like that. And if you can identify it just for special ed-- Whether it's in-district or out-of-district, you don't want to see the private schools-- I mean, we've heard enough testimony about the private schools. A kid was 16 years old; he was working at a job -- I wish every 16-year-old kid would go out and get a job, and work. Maybe we'd have a lot less problems.

But when somebody's driving an 8-cylinder SUV around, charge them a hundred bucks a year extra on their registration. I drive an 8-cylinder car. If I had to pay an extra hundred bucks, who is going to feel sorry for me? We have-- In New Jersey, there's a surcharge on traffic violations for autism research. Who is complaining about that? And if they did complain, who would care? If you get a speeding ticket, you pay. Luxury taxes, things like that-- Those are the kinds of things that maybe can offset the State deficiency, the State underfunding, and then help offset

the school districts. Those are the things that maybe we can do to help it. But you focus on it as a medical/educational issue.

SENATOR ADLER: Mr. McKeegan, thank you so much for taking the time to be here today. (applause)

MR. McKEEGAN: Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Next, we're going to have Dr. Rex Shaw, followed by Richard Snyder.

R E X F. S H A W, Ed.D.: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Rex Shaw. I'm the Director of the Teaneck Charter School. And I'm here to raise some hell, because I've been in education almost 40 years in the State of New Jersey. And I'm concerned that this issue continues to go to money and not to the issues at heart of what we're talking about, and that is the need for systemic reform in education in the State of New Jersey.

We're talking about Abbott districts, Abbott money. I've been around so long, I was here during the *Robinson v. Board of Education*, way, way back in the '70s. I was here for the T&E, I was on the T&E monitoring teams. I worked in Newark for 18 years, and I left there because nothing was happening. Children were graduating without competent education. They could not get a job from these high schools. And half the district could not read.

Not much has changed in many areas. We need systemic reform. We need willing reformers. We need to apply business practices to education. There's no secret that education in the United States is in decline. Our SAT scores are falling, our rankings in the industrial world are in the mid-teens, when we were one and two for the entire history of the

rankings. New Jersey has failed our urban districts. We have five of the largest districts under State control, and what has happened?

What has happened? The gap has begun to increase between minority and majority students. We've seen-- We saw a minor decline in the late '80s, and it's begun to widen again, and again, and again. Equity is not dollars, equity is not bricks and mortar. Equity is equal opportunity, whether it's in urban districts, suburban districts, or rural districts.

We need to take the tension, and stop the competition between the cohorts. We need to try new models of education that are cost efficient. There are districts in the State of New Jersey that have demonstrated competent, educational performance on a cost-effective basis.

I come from a charter school that was created because the folks in my community were not satisfied with what was happening in their district. They were not satisfied with the performance in their high school. We've been in existence 10 years now. We operate at 90 percent of the program operating budget and allocate 23 percent of our budget for a facility. I pay \$575,000 a year to rent 15,000 square feet, because I get no assistance from the State. Our scores have outperformed the district, the AYP for the Feds, the State averages, etc. We outperform the district on a regular basis.

I'm not a lone wolf. There are tons of people doing this. You have six charter schools in Newark that have outperformed the district over, and over, and over again on 65 percent of the program dollars. Look at the models that work. Look at the suburban and urban districts that work. Don't take cohorts and pit them against each other.

We have many suburban districts that are at risk, including one like mine, where you're beginning to see the at-risk district have minority people who have come to that community to buy into the community, leaving because they cannot afford the taxes and private school, and will not subject their children to the public education. We need systemic reform. We need leaders, we need commitment, we need leadership, we need new models, we need the application of business practices to education. And we have to stop talking about it and get something done.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you, Dr. Shaw.

Mr. Snyder, followed by Brigette Blake.

RICHARD SNYDER: Hello.

SENATOR ADLER: Hi.

MR. SNYDER: Thank you for being here, and thank you for saving me the two-hour drive each way.

Dollar\$ & Sense is an organization that is designed very specifically to do research and provide constructive solutions. What we have done--

The constructive solutions that we are intending to offer are specifically designed to look at the structure of how we deliver education in the State of New Jersey, and to offer you cost-cutting measures that will enable you to come up with a formula that might actually be affordable.

I might point out, if we remember Assemblyman Bagger's bill for extraordinary aid, our district put in a total qualified number of \$2 million. We received back \$350,000. The differential of \$1.65 million would mean that we would no longer have a property tax problem.

I would like to ask you to consider these very educated suggestions to cut costs and maintain standards: To establish a number of county or regional-level superintendents required to efficiently distribute newly defined responsibilities for leadership. Utilize existing code to establish responsibilities of authority for newly fashioned, hands-on county or regional superintendents -- and hands-on, not strictly administrative, is critical; rewriting job descriptions and specifying job requirements does not cost additional tax dollars. Establish a county or regional level -- the authority to recognize problems before they grow and become costly; include financial and special education expertise, and the ability -- authority to waive unnecessary mandates. Establish a county position that proactively seeks opportunities for sharing and consolidation, interlocal agreements; utilize and promote existing models for shared services between municipalities and school districts. Advance the highly skilled professional program to address targeted interventions and to remediate district needs; facilitate public schools in developing appropriate county-level special education programs -- working examples exist within New Jersey and within the Pennsylvania intermediate unit system; please see -- I have attached a report on that system that a field trip provided. Promote regional special education services to effectuate economies and establish fixed costs for service providers, as an example, in the areas of occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech services. Promote efforts to share transportation services and instructional programs, as an example, which you heard from Ms. Gotthilf and Mr. Finkelstein. Promote mediation services, as currently exist in the state of Michigan -- details were provided, as well as documentation, previously; the current system in New Jersey is a

severe financial drain and does not serve children, parents, or school districts. Educate administrative law judges as to the needs of special education families and school districts, and please increase their numbers.

Utilize and promote existing models for shared educational services and professional development, as currently exists in the Northern Valley; and you have part of testimony -- report -- on how they've been doing that for 40 years very effectively. Allow school districts to negotiate all aspects of the State Health Benefits Plan. Provide collective bargaining tools that protect established priorities for children and taxpayers. Take heed of the report from the special education Mandate Review Commission -- forgive me -- the Education Mandate Review Commission. And limit reimbursement for aid in lieu of busing to one payment per family when more than one child is attending the same school.

The idea is to offer you very specific, very constructive suggestions that address the structure as it now exists so that we don't need to reinvent the wheel, and to make what you do more affordable.

I'd like to share with you-- Approximately three years ago, when I approached the Michigan court system about their conflict resolution, they not only were cordial, friendly, and made everything accessible, but they provided me -- you'll see how it was. They gave me a VCR tape about their system, which I would like to give to you here -- I only have the one -- and a lovely poster showing children. The approach is very different to how we do it here, in New Jersey. I saved it for three years to give to you.

Thank you for your time. And I thank you again for traveling almost north. (applause)

SENATOR ADLER: Mr. Snyder, thank you so much.

I want to acknowledge Assemblyman Stanley was here for many hours, and left, and I guess passed the torch on to Assemblyman Payne, who just arrived. Thank you both, Assemblyman Stanley and Assemblyman Payne, who've shown a lot of interest in this Committee and the other Committees, to make sure we meet the needs of children and taxpayers throughout the state.

So I appreciate your attendance, sir, and also Assemblyman Stanley's.

We have busy schedules. And people in this audience have busy schedules. But for Assembly people, who are torn in many directions--

Thank you for taking the time to be with us tonight.

If Brigitte Blake is here, and hasn't spoken yet-- (no response)

Diane DeMarzo.

D I A N E D e M A R Z O: My name is Diane DeMarzo, and I'm here today as a parent.

My son Sam is 16 years old, and my school district is Livingston. My son Sam has cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and he's blind. He is presently placed out of district in Horizon High School, run by Cerebral Palsy of North Jersey.

Before I begin, I'd just like to make a comment about the scheduling of this hearing. Having it at 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon, I feel, was kind of a bad time -- to discourage a lot of people from trying to be here.

My son Sam has been out of district, now, since he finished with Early Intervention. I've never questioned these placements, because

here he received all the specialized therapies that he needed: intense physical, occupational, speech, and aquatic therapies. My son needs to be taught how to feed himself, how to walk, and simple words like “yes” and “no.” Every day, in his classroom, the children and young adults there receive a customized academic curriculum integrated with the customized supports, therapies, and life skills that our children need to survive in this world. As a parent, I feel confident and secure that my son is in caring, knowledgeable hands throughout the school day.

Horizon High School, as do a number of these schools, also holds a specialized after-school program. Let’s not forget that besides our children’s very specific academic needs, they have very specialized recreational and social needs that must be met, as well. I wonder if they will be addressed by our in-district schools.

Transitioning out of school is another issue entirely. Are the districts ready to keep our children until they’re 21? Then what? Who will be helping them, preparing them for the challenges of life after school? The partnerships that a lot of these nonprofit agencies, like CPNJ, have with DDD and the many agencies that provide jobs and workshops for our adult children is really unique.

My school district, Livingston -- in just the last few years -- has put additions on about five of their six elementary schools. And I can tell you already there is no new space in any of these schools. We are reaching capacity again. We are also in the process of a massive \$50-plus million -- this is just an addition onto our high school. The district is barely keeping up with the students they already have. I can’t imagine that adding our kids, plus all the excess baggage that many of us come along with -- meaning

our walkers, our wheelchairs, our standers, our adaptive and specialized medical and recreational equipment -- fitting into these hallways and classrooms. To me, we're really just *warehousing*. And I know this is a cruel term, but this is the reality of it.

It is more cost-effective for my district for him to be in a school run by a nonprofit agency that works hard to assure that there is funding to support its schools. The majority of this funding is from private sources. Most of these specialized programs, equipment, and staff are funded with these resources. And as a parent, again -- part of an organization there -- we work very hard to raise a lot of those funds.

I would like to end on this: I also have three other children who have all attended in-district schools, besides my son who is out of district. One of those other sons is also classified with a learning disability. And let me just say, I meet more with his study team during the school year, for the lack of supports and services that he is not receiving and not meeting his goals, in-district, than I have to do for my son Sam, with his severe disabilities at the Horizon School.

Thank you for giving me the chance to speak today. (applause)

SENATOR ADLER: There are a number of other people in some ways affiliated with the Horizon School, either as parents, as spokespeople. Another principal, in addition to Mayor Garafola -- another principal for Horizon signed up. I would assume that all of you are here to testify -- to say that Horizon School is a good school and we should protect it. Is that a fair--

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: Great.

SENATOR ADLER: Great school, I apologize.

So I'm going to not have you come up. But please know that we heard the previous witnesses who talked as parent representatives, as educators at Horizon School. We understand the testimony. And please assume that if you had said more, if anything, it would probably take away from the powerful impact of the previous speakers with respect to Horizon School.

So I mean no disrespect, just as a week ago I meant no disrespect to the NJEA when I asked for less repetition on the same point there. I mean no disrespect to Horizon School. But I'm hoping to solicit a diversity of opinions about the issues and the possible solutions facing the Legislature and facing the people of New Jersey.

So thank you for your forbearance in that regard. I do appreciate it.

Robin Sims.

Are you Horizon School?

R O B I N S I M S: No.

SENATOR ADLER: Come on up. (laughter)

MS. SIMS: Thank you. It's been a long afternoon.

I am a parent of two children who are developmentally disabled. I'm also a parent advocate. I work for the Epilepsy Foundation. I'm a parent advocate at the Autism Center, at UMDNJ; the Vice President of a national organization called VOR, which speaks out for people with severe and profound mental retardation.

Again, I will let -- but they have already left -- my fellow parents discuss their children and their need for their chosen school placements, as I

know that my comments will only echo theirs. I will, instead, point out some truths that I'd like considered in this discussion.

Parents of children with severe special needs use several different systems in the care and education of our children. The DDD system began a deinstitutionalization process that cut off access to our State developmental centers as placement options for our children. One of my two children actually lives at the Hunterdon Developmental Center. And I'm a strong advocate for that as a placement option.

With that being said, the development and growth of the private and specialized day programs comes out of the desire by both parents and government to "keep our families intact and to keep our children at home as long as possible." To that end, the specialized educational programs have replaced a great number of the residential programs and a great number of needs to place children prematurely in the kind of developmental or residential settings that we have for teens and adults, going forward in our state.

Our children can get the therapies, the skill development training, and supports that are needed to sustain them and their families. We are -- and I don't want to talk about children necessarily who are learning disabled. I want to be very clear. I'm talking about the intensive care end of the disability spectrum, those children who have severe special needs, who do not recover, who do not have the wonderful happy stories -- some of whom you've heard today. I talked to one mom who wasn't able to stay. And I said to her, "Wow, it sounds like you're getting ready to quit the club." And I was quoted as saying that in the *Bergen Record*, in the

articles on autism. It's a club we all want to quit, but unfortunately we don't all get to do it. (laughter)

With an expectation of longer life spans for our children, we are looking to gain the skills and tools needed for an inclusive life. And many of our children are ready for that life at age 22, and many of them will never be ready. They go on to self-contained workshops, they go on to residential programs. Some of them always will need a job coach with them, even for the total time they're even able to work.

When my daughter went to the developmental center at the age of 14, her educational funding went from the local level to the State Department of Education, under the Department of Human Services. Now, one was never really sure exactly how that happened, because the local district was still responsible -- although they didn't show up for five years (laughter), for the first five years -- through her IEP. And they were also responsible for issuing her a piece of paper, which they also delivered three days afterwards, which represented her diploma. But it's really not clear as to how the funding goes.

At the age of 21, we requested compensatory time. And the issue came to light that although there is supposed to be an interagency agreement on the funding flow for this, there was not. To this day, I have not been able to find the so-called *interagency* agreement that is written in the special education regulations, of the discussion of burdens on local school districts, when a child with extreme special needs comes along. There must be a way to create an interagency agreement when local funds for that child are lost to the local municipality and managed through the State. For the local municipality to get the funding back, they must prove

that they have in place the programs and services under which that child can receive a thorough and efficient education, where progress will be likely to occur. That's the whole sentence: thorough and efficient education where progress is likely to occur. It's not about whatever.

This Committee must ask the State agencies involved to tell them about all current interagency agreements. We not only have an infrastructure of private schools for the disabled, we also -- and we haven't even discussed this at all today -- have hundreds of children in out-of-state placements that I, for one, have been trying to get an accurate number on for many years. Between the Department of Education and the Division of Developmental Disabilities, they have been unable or unwilling to come up with that number.

The programs that are being provided in specialized placements are making the difference in so many lives. It is unfair to allow this *us versus them* attitude to continue. When a child with extraordinary special needs comes along, they should not be considered the enemy of the football team, the gifted and talented programs, and the soccer moms. Our children are included in programs that help them on their difficult journeys. A philosophy called *inclusion* is merely that, a philosophy. And the outcome should be based on appropriate programs and not on geography.

The current funding must be addressed. Where the beans go under interagency agreements must be investigated, and a more transparent agreement must be written that will hopefully help the local school districts and, more importantly, protect the educational rights of our children. A full range of educational choice must exist. A way to fund it must be found by

examining all facets of current funding, including the interagency agreements.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR ADLER: Thanks for coming here tonight.

Next, Kenneth Williams. Last call, Kenneth Williams. (no response)

Aileen Davila. (no response)

Susie Douglas.

SUSIE S. DOUGLAS: Good evening.

SENATOR ADLER: Good evening.

MS. DOUGLAS: Senator Adler, Assemblyman Conaway, and the members of the legislative Committee, I'm here in support for continuing funding for private schools.

I have a nephew. His name is Chanton Flott-Brown, and he is a student at the Lakeside School, in Orange, New Jersey. He's expected to graduate in 2007.

I'm his aunt and custodial parent. For the past two years, Chan -- as we call him -- has attended the Lakeside School, in Orange. Prior to that, he attended a special school in Westfield. Prior to that, he was in the public school system in East Orange.

Chan was born in Alabama. At the age of 3, he came to New Jersey to be adopted by his biological uncle and his wife, my sister. DYFS was aware that he was slow, having special needs, and indicated that information on his kinship adoption documents. Shortly after his arrival, his uncle expired in his presence from a heart attack, prior to the adoption. His adopted mother raised Chan as a single parent. When she expired from

a heart attack during her sleep in August of last year, she had a binder at her bedside opened to the section related to her son, including his birth certificate, Social Security, and all his identification.

Chan attended a very nurturing preschool that allowed him to attend the after-school program beyond the third grade. Chan's culture shock began when he attended the public school system. Although he was evaluated, classified as developmentally disabled, he remained in the general student population. However, as time passed, his academic, emotion, and social skills did not grow with his grade level. Subsequently, his behavior suffered, mostly due to the lack of attention given to his special needs. He suffered humiliation, scorn, abuse, and just regularly taken advantage of by the "regular" students. His mother advocated for Chan, fighting against the board -- district. And approximately four years ago, finally he was placed in a special school in Westfield. It was at this school that Chan began to feel safe from the other students and began developing confidence to pursue his academic, emotional, and vocational skills.

Today, Chan attends the Lakeside School in Orange, New Jersey. In 2007, he is scheduled to receive his academic -- his high school diploma, completing all the academic, life skills, and vocational skills which will be absolutely necessary for him to become a productive, adult member of this society. He is sort of a peer mediator for his students. He is beginning to recognize that it is not always important to be a part of the crowd, like the gangs that have tried to take over the city of Newark. He is comfortable enough to take advantage of the special professional services provided at his school. He can now communicate well with the staff, from the principal, social worker, the vocational specialist, and all the other

members of his school who know and recognize him, and the other students individually. They are not alienated because of a large student population, and I was consoled that the faculty gave him special consideration when his mother passed away last year.

There is often a dichotomy relative to the life with Chan. He is a young adult with teenage or even, sometimes, pre-teen concepts. His appearance is important to him. Cleanliness is godliness. He was sexually active prior to coming into my household last year. I'm still learning how to deal with that, but I've explained to him about protection. And all the other specifics I leave to my older sons who are grown. I have a daughter who discusses current issues with him, so he has that peer relationship with the family.

He is a strange one. He'll stay up all night watching the History Channel. He's good at math, could recite sport statistics like I breathe air. Last year, he received awards from his school for excellence in these subjects, as well as physical education, which he received a trophy that he proudly displays.

Chanton celebrated his 21st birthday last week. For months, he was telling me that once that day arrived, he would go to the liquor store and purchase a bottle of liquor, no specific brand, just the liquor. When his birthday did arrive, he told me he wanted to go to Chucky Cheese. (laughter) He spoke of the memories of years gone by, and he enjoyed the games.

At the present time, Chanton is learning life skills. He's assisting the school chef, and he feels very important. He was employed

during the Summer for a few weeks. And it was a struggle, because he also has Summer school. He was tenacious, going to work and school.

Along with the social and emotional preparation that he was given by the Lakeside School faculty and staff, I constantly remind him about his goals and that he needs to be an independent adult; which is going to be hard, because people assume that a person's disability can be seen. His can't be seen.

He has a loving and compassionate family. And although I've only become Chanton's custodian parent since 2005, when his mother expired, I've been a part of his life, advocating with her with the school system.

Teaching is not always an acquired skill. It takes a lot more than being a teacher or administrator to successfully work with a developmentally disabled student. It takes time, patience--

SENATOR ADLER: Ms. Douglas.

MS. DOUGLAS: I just have one line.

SENATOR ADLER: Okay. Go ahead.

MS. DOUGLAS: Private schools, such as Lakeside, are necessary to fill the gap to provide for the special needs of the developmentally disabled students.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, ma'am.

SENATOR ADLER: I may have inadvertently skipped over Nanette Harrington. If Ms. Harrington is here, I apologize to you.

NANETTE HARRINGTON: Good evening.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to express my comments and concerns.

My name is Nanette Harrington. I am a resident of Long Hill Township, which is in -- which is a very small community in Morris County. I spent nine years on the Long Hill K-8 Board of Education, and another three years on the Watchung Hills Regional Board of Education as well.

Long Hill is a town that funds nearly 95 percent of its school budget out of property taxes. Our test scores are some of the best in the state, and our per-pupil spending is certainly far below the state mean.

In talking about property taxes, we are the communities, in part, that you are trying to help and reduce the tax burden on. Unfortunately, if history is any indicator, help from Trenton has done more harm than good for our communities, often because the solution that comes from Trenton is a one-size-fits-all solution. My biggest fear is that restructuring the way we fund public education in New Jersey will ultimately increase the cost to taxpayers in communities like Long Hill and leave us with even less control than we have today.

With that in mind, I humbly ask that you consider the following suggestions: First, minimum and maximum funding levels. The State should establish benchmarks -- spending benchmarks. And I know some of this has been done. This is not new. The State should establish spending benchmarks based on demonstrated best practices, as well as actual costs the districts face. From there, the State should provide both minimum and maximum funding for all districts. As a suggestion: 20 percent minimum, and a maximum of 80 percent. With districts currently receiving only 5 percent of their funding from the State -- yet there are

other districts that receive upwards of 95 percent from the State. Frankly, it is not unreasonable to expect us to -- for us to expect 20 percent of our funding to come from the State; nor is it unreasonable to expect other communities to fund 80 percent -- to fund only 20 percent of their school taxes.

Second: Reduce the burden and increase incentives for efficient and high-performing districts. Districts with high-quality educational programs that are operating efficiently are obviously doing something right. The State should allow these districts to operate more autonomously and incent them to continue the academic and financial performance.

As an example, our last budget contained a very modest 3 percent increase, despite a 6 percent increase in enrollment and opening new space in all three of our schools. That's an achievement, gentlemen. That's quite an achievement.

Imposing more spending caps beyond those already in place may be an option for less-efficient districts. But it will cause us to cut programs entirely or jeopardize the quality of our current programs.

Common-sense consolidation: One of the things that has been bantered about and has been talked about considerably is the consolidation of districts. And that is a viable option. I'm not opposed to consolidation in any way. But whatever legislation you provide and recommend needs to ensure that the financial savings that we expect are actually realized and that educational programs are not harmed.

There are savings to be had from consolidation. Unfortunately, they're not as large as some of the public rhetoric would have us believe. But there are significant savings there. As an example, the districts -- the

sending districts and the Watchung Hills Regional District comprise-- There are five separate districts right now. Consolidating those five districts into one obviously has some savings. Five superintendents to one superintendent; probably would increase maybe two assistant superintendents. So there are savings to be had. Eliminating two positions would amount to about \$250,000, which is a tax point in our community. It may not sound like much, but it's a tax point to us.

However, these savings will clear -- will dissipate very quickly if the legislation -- if in consolidating those five districts, and trying to bring five negotiated agreements-- If we must -- which-- What we would have to do today, is to take the most generous provisions out of each of those contracts. Those savings would dissipate in a heartbeat. And in fact, even worse, it would cost us more. Collapsing the K-8 districts with the regionals -- with which we're already educationally aligned -- would also preserve educational -- would also preserve our educational quality.

Reform the State--

Am I out of time? (referring to timer ringing)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Yes.

MS. HARRINGTON: Just about?

Let me just quickly go through-- Reform the State Health Benefits Plan, you've heard that. You don't need me to tell you that we need the flexibility to maintain what we've agreed to.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Got it.

MS. HARRINGTON: Prevailing wage requirements would allow local trades people to do work for our schools at reduced costs that,

right now, they can't. And offer ways for tax -- for seniors to defer taxes. Twenty-four states offer those programs.

Hopefully I've offered you some solutions. But the message here is, give us the legislation to realize the savings. If we're going to consolidate, make it so we can do that without having to lose what we've gained at the negotiations table.

Thank you, gentlemen, very, very much.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

Next, we'll take Ronald Lee, Newark Public Schools.

R O N A L D L E E: Good evening.

SENATOR ADLER: Good evening.

MR. LEE: I am the School Business Administrator for Newark Public Schools. I think I should come up here with a bull's-eye on my back, based on some of the statements that were previously stated.

Let me give you just some background. I'm the Business Administrator. I've been there four-and-a-half years. Prior to that, I was 12 years in another Abbott district. And prior to that, I was in the private industry.

Although you have heard from many of the previous individuals giving testimony about the Newark public schools, and what their personal opinions are, I must state -- and I don't think it can be disputed -- that, under Abbott and under the current administration, there has been improvement, not only in Newark, but in most if not all Abbott districts. And I'm not here to just defend Newark, but I'm here to defend the needs of disadvantaged students.

We've heard testimony regarding charter schools, we've heard testimony from private schools, we've heard testimony regarding special education. We're not here to testify against any of those. We feel that all students should be properly educated, and funding should be provided for all students. Disadvantaged students have needs, just like special ed students. There should be no differentiation.

But let me give you some quick statistics on Newark. The graduating rate in '95-'96 -- approximately 10 years ago -- was 45.7 percent. Last year it was 79.9 percent. Reported school incidents have declined 48 percent over the last three to four years. We have quadrupled the number of AP courses. Under Abbott, we've been able to provide, as you well know, early childhood programs. We have developed small learning communities. We have an after-school program that is second to none in the nation. That is not what we have said, that is what outside organizations have said. We currently, in our after-school program, service 10,000 students. But we also have 8,000 on the waiting list. Because of budgetary needs, we can't service all of those students.

We have school-to-career academies. One of the reasons why we can keep students in school is because we are now addressing their individual needs, and also what they are interested in. We provide them and assist them with -- going on to secondary education and/or work. We have a lot of school-to-work programs, where we work with partners in order to provide them with work.

One of the things that we also have is-- We spend a lot of-- We do spend a lot of money on education and, specifically, special education. You've heard testimony -- I'm not going to go over it -- of the

cost for out-of-district placements and those various different costs. It would have been nice, had we been able to build schools and we could keep some of those students in district, providing the quality programs, as you heard before -- not just bringing students back, but providing quality programs.

So that's just to give you a synopsis of what we're doing and what's going on in Newark.

Again, we feel -- and I know your body here is to discuss the funding formula. But it confuses me when we have discussions about -- and everyone's talked about flat funding. Because Abbott districts, and the Newark public schools, are flat funded this year. Our costs went up over \$60 million, and we reduced our budget -- our costs by \$60 million. We went into programs. But the charter school costs went up \$4 million. We had to pay charter schools an additional \$4 million. The private school costs in our budget went up \$7 million, but we had to pay them out of that flat-funded budget. And, of course, we had increases in salaries. And you heard testimony regarding the State Health Benefits Plan.

It is a very confusing issue, when you try to deal with the funding formula. But what I ask you to do is, when you consider a formula, that you consider all needs of students. When you don't give municipalities and school districts funding -- and we talk about the concerns over property taxes. If the money doesn't come from the State, it's taken out of the pockets of the folks in property tax. If it's not given on one end, you're going to give it up on the other.

Now, unless you're willing to take -- and my suggestion to you is to seriously consider -- maybe look at -- unless you're willing to take

property taxes out of the whole funding formula for school districts, period, you're still going to have the same problem. The young lady before me said that you should have a minimum and a maximum. But if you still allow those communities that can provide additional funding and resources to their school systems, and you have disadvantaged school districts that cannot provide it because they don't have the financial wherewithal, we're still going to be sitting here, three to four years from now, with the same problem and the same issue. Those that have, and those that have not -- property taxes are still going to rise. It will only be a temporary solution and not a permanent one.

So unless you're looking at a permanent solution, and not a quick fix for financing for school districts, we're still going to have the issues. We're going to have everyone up here fighting against each other, everyone -- all the crabs in the barrel -- everybody pulling each other down, but don't realize that we're all in the same barrel, that we have and we are charged with educating our young people in this state.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

You make a very good point about base funding.

Let's see, I think Aileen Davila--

Linda Ferrara.

L I N D A F E R R A R A: Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Linda Ferrara. I live in Bergen County, New Jersey. I'm the mother of three. My son is a college student and National

Guardsmen, who has recently returned from a tour of duty in Iraq. My eldest daughter is a graduate of Seton Hall University with a BA in Special Ed and Elementary Ed. She is now teaching at a private school for children with autism.

Her thoughts on cutting funding: Any less support personnel and any more budget cuts would not be safe for her to teach in her school or for her children to attend.

I also have a 15-year-old daughter with Down syndrome and mild cognitive impairment. This (indicating) is her eighth grade picture. I would have brought her with me, but she would have never shut up, so it wouldn't have gone with the timing. She loves to talk.

Sam -- my daughter attends a private school in another county. It's approximately 20 minutes from our home. She attends the school because there is no public school that can provide a suitable education. And that is a child study team quote. My child has been in programs since she was 3 months old. From pre-K to third grade, she attended public school resource room. From the fourth grade on to eighth grade, she attended regular education classes, except for math, reading, and language. Those classes were in a remedial classroom.

Depending on the district's point of view -- should she stay or should she go -- she had (indiscernible). Attending public school was not an easy task. It was a fight to keep her in the school. Physically, emotionally, and monetarily wise, it took a big toll on our whole family. The school district held it over our heads on a day-to-day basis. Despite the fact that children with Down syndrome, like children with autism, are -- spectrums

from mild to severe -- the child study team couldn't get past the words *Down syndrome*.

We finally had to obtain a lawyer and spend thousands of dollars. The end result was, she graduated from school and the school board denied knowing anything was going on for the past five years.

The most disturbing part of this is that Sam does have mild learning disabilities. She reads, she writes, she's very opinionated. She's participated in several mainstream activities: cheering, band. She's an exceptional dancer. Most people have to be told that she has Down syndrome. Her social skills are excellent, and most people don't even know she has Down syndrome. When they're told, they go, "Oh, we don't believe you. She has a little, right?"

I agree that public schools can and should be a place for a lot of special ed kids. But the problem is that you have to reeducate the educators. The need for this to happen-- Reeducating the community and support staff-- If my daughter's story is what it is, what do you think it would be like for students with more severe learning difficulties? What about their families? Where do they go?

Before you cut moneys for private schools, we need to fix the public schools and accept more children that can attend them. We also need to consider that we must accept that some students need these schools, because they cannot fit into the public school because their needs are great. To cut funding doesn't make any sense. Private schools work, and they do make a difference.

The fact is that public school high school was not a willing placement for my child. I was told I'd have to home school her if it wasn't

for the current placement she has. Although her current placement is -- we're grateful for it -- it's really not the best placement. Our daughter is learning, making friends. She is developing into a productive member of society. Right now, she's mostly a happy teenager.

Please consider the benefits and needs for private schools, and don't let the children have to struggle more than they already do on a daily basis. If we don't do better for our children, then they're just going to be out of luck. And if our children are our future, then what will New Jersey's future be if we fail to educate all our children today?

I appreciate the late hour; I thank you for your attention. And I'd just like to say, I hope I made my point that the public school has to be willing to work with the parents, because you can't have struggle on a daily basis to keep your child in school when you're being told, "He can't be here." I don't wake up in the morning with amnesia. (laughter) We know our children have disabilities. They don't have to remind us on a daily basis.

Thank you for your attention.

SENATOR ADLER: Thanks so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thanks for your testimony.

We appreciate it.

Wilhelmina Holder, with an entourage apparently. (laughter)

WILHELMINA HOLDER: No, the entourage is at home.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

SENATOR ADLER: Good evening.

MS. HOLDER: I'm a mom of three who attended West Side High School, who are in various stages of college completion and grad

school. And I'm a product of the Newark Public Schools system, myself, Weequahic High School, and a working mom, as well.

I believe that every person is born with a talent, so says Maya Angelou, so says I.

The poor children of the State of New Jersey should not be a lightning rod because of the failure of the State of New Jersey to equitably fund public schools. It's always easy to blame those who are economically challenged for the failure of decision makers to make decisions that are equitable and fair, yet unpopular.

The highest moral code challenges us, as a society, to protect those who are least able to speak for themselves: the elderly, the infirmed, and our children, especially the poorest of them. Public education is the vehicle in which a majority of our children will be educated, and public funding, via tax assessment, has been the way to do that. Thus, a widely disparate education system based on a property tax coexists, resulting in schools that remain uneven in stature unless bold steps are taken to correct the wrongs.

The New Jersey Supreme Court wisely remedied this inequity through its Abbott rulings and devised a method of parity so that all children would have the tools they need to learn and to receive a thorough and efficient education. But because of politically convenient and expedient short-term memory of the legislators, poor children still suffer the brunt of an unfair and discriminatory education system simply because of where they live and the color of their skin.

The State of New Jersey's Constitution mandates that every child is entitled to a thorough and efficient education. The New Jersey

Supreme Court ruled that heavy reliance on property tax discriminates against poorer school districts, which creates education disparities. Unequal funding denies children in urban districts a thorough and efficient education. Plain and simple, ladies and gentlemen, money does matter.

Money buys modern, state-of-the-art school facilities where teaching and learning is competitive and world class. Money buys small learning environments. Money buys curriculum with rigor, and money allows personalization in otherwise stilted, large warehouse school environments that our children presently attend. Money buys chemistry classes with real chemistry teachers and state-of-the-art laboratories.

Money buys Advanced Placement classes, with teachers who have advanced training. Money buys a full complement of foreign language classes with laboratories and ancillary, out-of-school experiences. Money buys books with current information. Money buys choice in curriculum.

Money buys environments that support learning -- teaching and learning. Money buys school psychologists, the sociologists, the nurses, the attendance officers, the child study teams, behavior specialists, as well as parent trainers.

Money buys tutorials, vital after-school programs, Summer enrichment experiences, and supplemental breakfast and lunch programs. Money pays for transportation for those who need it. Money affords children with special needs a context within which to meet their needs: classroom and instructional aides, facilities that are special-needs friendly. And money permits enriched educational experiences that enhance the abilities of all children to be citizens of the world.

From where I sit, public school reform sounds like “Kill Abbott.” The reluctance of the legislators of this State to deal fairly with our children is well-known. Let’s take the Schools Construction Corporation for example, whereby billions of dollars have “disappeared,” and entire middle and stable working class African-American and Latino neighborhoods have been decimated, all without the building of a single school. Yet the 40 percent/60 percent formula allowed the non-Abbott school districts -- the revenue-rich and resource-based districts -- to build their schools in record time. I challenge you, ladies and gentlemen, look around Newark, Jersey City, Camden, Paterson, and other urban centers where there is more than a lion’s share of State-operated, nonprofit institutions which are not revenue-producing. It may be desirable to be a college town, or have multiple research medical facilities in town, but only if the children of the town are not penalized because they live in the town and can benefit from those institutions.

With a less than 50 percent graduation rate in most of the Abbott school districts, the cost of high school drop-outs run in the billions, and the cost of incarceration of a single youth runs approximately \$33,000. I would venture to say that even the most unsavvy investor, like myself, would recognize the lunacy of not paying for preventative care. The entire economy of the State of New Jersey suffers when one, just one, child drops out of high school. We lose that talent, we lose the tax-base contributions and the ability to stay competitive, and we lose stability in our community.

So here we sit. I ask you, if it’s hard, unpopular decisions that have to be made-- They absolutely do. Does the Legislature have the willpower and the courage to make those hard, unpopular decisions?

Hmmm. Will the future of education in New Jersey be forever mired in bad horse trading? I certainly hope not. But given the history of education in this country, and New Jersey in particular, we call upon the legislators to commit to actions that sustain the Abbott court rulings, while moving forward to ensure that the future of all children in this state who deserve a thorough and efficient education receive one.

So I ask you again, if a person is born with a talent, what price are we willing to pay to nurture that talent? And I might add that I have three girls who have three different learning styles. One is special needs. And as I said, they all went to college, but not without a bad fight for money to sustain the support services that they needed.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you. It was very powerful testimony. It was very important and helpful.

Thank you, again.

Mr. Kevin Brothers, Executive Director, speaking for the Somerset Hills Learning Institute.

Ma'am, you left your purse.

SENATOR ADLER: Ms. Holder.

MS. HOLDER: Oh, I'm--

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Although, it's a down-payment on the-- (laughter)

KEVIN J. BROTHERS, Ph.D.: Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here this evening.

I am Dr. Kevin Brothers, Executive Director of the Somerset Hills Learning Institute, a private, nonprofit school for children of autism.

I've been meeting the needs of children with autism for over 23 years, directing programs for toddlers, children, teenagers, and adults with autism in both public school and private school settings. I'm here, today, to give a voice to the over 50,000 children with autism in New Jersey who can't speak for themselves.

As you consider options that will affect students with autism, I urge you to consider the following: One, there is scientific evidence that if we do intervene in certain ways early enough, intensively enough, and for long enough, 30 to 50 percent of those children receiving such services can be returned to the public school system to finish their education, indistinguishable from their peers.

Those outcomes come from published peer-review literature, journals, and replicated -- excuse me -- are respected the world over, from university-based programs and one private school here in New Jersey -- the Princeton Child Development Institute -- not from the public schools.

I've spent many years delivering services to children with autism in public schools and conducting my dissertation research in that setting. We learned the following from that work: If you build it properly, they will come, as this graph shows. And it's included in my copy to you. It represents the rate of growth of students in the public school program, where families moved from all over the country to Kansas.

Two: Simply including children with typically developing peers is not sufficient to treat autism. Public school students -- public school programs do not send staff to work with their parents to continue the education services at home. Autism doesn't go away at 3:00. Families need support and help to improve the educational outcomes of their children.

Public school students -- programs don't ensure that the same staff work both a 10-month and the 12 -- the extended school year program. And autism doesn't take a Summer vacation.

Data from my work in the public schools and at the Somerset Hills Learning Institute demonstrates that more than 80 percent of the instructional programs delivered at the private school program produced desirable outcomes, compared to only 67 percent in the public school program.

Somerset Hills Learning Institute has been operating for seven years. We are one of a number of New Jersey schools operating from the science I referred to earlier. Here's what you should know about our work: First, we have returned 50 percent of the students, who came to us before age 5 and have spent at least two-and-a-half years with us, back to their public schools, saving New Jersey taxpayers over \$13 million in the last four years alone.

Second, we are fiscally responsible partners with the State and with school districts. We have always had a self-imposed tuition cap of about 70 to 80 percent of actual costs. That means that our parents are working diligently, month after month, to raise the nearly \$500,000 we need to deliver the services that our children need. This year it will cost us under \$49 an hour, per child, to give them the chance of life. I urge you to name for me any other professional -- a lawyer, physician, architect, carpenter -- who can -- car mechanics for that matter -- who can do their work for less than \$49 an hour, and then only bill for 70 or 80 percent of it.

For decades, New Jersey was admired for being a leader in meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities by supporting

approved, private schools for the handicapped. Over the last five years or so, there has been tremendous growing pressure from the Federal Department of Education and the New Jersey Department of Education to cast New Jersey's proud distinction in a very negative light by saying that New Jersey now is 50th out of 50 states for keeping children in their neighborhood schools.

Similarly, statistics that I believe you -- I understand that you heard from Barbara Gantwerk during her testimony to you on September 12 -- such as that New Jersey has 8.9 percent of its students in out-of-district placements, where the national average is only 3 percent -- are being cited as evidence that New Jersey is doing something wrong for kids.

Comparing New Jersey to the rest of the nation, where for decades individuals have not had options outside of the public school classroom, is preposterous. Her urging is for you to be shortsighted and join the ranks of the other states, and be mediocre at best in meeting learners' needs. By meeting our needs, we are decreasing the tax burden for the long-term.

I'll leave you with this: Perhaps a win-win for the State and for the people with autism would be that you mandate that the cost of treating autism be shared between the public school system and health insurance providers. I know that's radical, and I know that's a different way of looking at it. But it is a disability that is, as another individual testified earlier, more medical in nature, and presents much earlier, and past -- earlier than age 3 and past age 21. Under such a system, the question would stop being: "What do we need to do, to do this job cheaply," and instead, "How

do we do this job effectively so that more children can leave the special services behind them?" (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you very much.

We appreciate it.

Ms. Byrne.

NANCY J. BYRNE: Good evening.

I am here without pictures or a child. I feel like I'm sort of naked or something.

My son is in school today. He is autistic. I am coming under several hats. I'm a retired New York City public school teacher; I spent 20 years in the classroom in Central Harlem. We live in Newark. I'm a parent of an autistic child, and I'm the President of the Parents Association of Midland School, in North Branch, which is a nonsectarian day school which serves 245 students, from 90 northern and central New Jersey districts. For over 40 years, the Midland School has met the needs of special education children, from ages 5 to 21, with developmental disabilities. It is also a U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. It's known nationally for the work they do.

I believe that the State bureaucracy is ill-informed about out-of-district schools. In an effort to save taxes, the Legislature has decided, probably against Federal law protecting the education of the severely disabled, to freeze admission to schools that provide for their needs. Once the admissions are frozen, placement at out-of-district schools for the severely disabled -- placement for these schools slots will be rationed among the districts. Any districts that insist on placing too many children will be financially sanctioned. The rationale is that the schools are expensive. As a

parent of an autistic child, I do understand how expensive it is to educate an autistic child. But not educating one is more expensive. Please remember that until 20 years ago, all of these children were institutionalized. So we're comparing apples to oranges: the cost of institutionalization versus a day program.

The first fallacy in the thinking is that the money that used to be used for institutionalization has just been cut from the State budget. That money should have been transferred from institutions to the education of these children. The State institutions were closed as a policy to integrate the disabled into society. The expensive education is the price that we have to pay for dismantling the State institutions.

While some of these children will not be self-supporting because of the severity of their disability, other children -- because of this expensive education -- will eventually become taxpayers. There's a moral responsibility for the State to fund the education of these children, simply because the State closed the institutions that used to care for this population. Even if some of the most severely disabled will not become self-supporting, funding their education is the only right thing to do.

I'm a retired New York public school teacher, and I lived through the inclusion into the mainstream of autistic children. In my school, two autistic children were placed in a normal class with normal children. The result is that one teacher is now brain-damaged herself, because one of the autistic children threw a desk at her and hit her in the head. She will never work again.

Autistic children are like an ADHD child on steroids. A main part of their disability is an inability to filter out outside stimulation. The

child who threw that desk was unable to function in a class of so much stimulation. This was a predictable result, for professionals who work with autistics.

My own son has made wonderful progress in his out-of-district special education placement. When we adopted him at age 4, he could not talk, and he was not toilet trained. The first notable progress he made was when his speech teacher informed me she was able to work with him individually with her office window shade up. Prior to that, she had had to have the shade drawn, because he was so distractible he got absolutely nothing out of the session.

At age 14, he can not only speak, but he does so well socially that he went to his first teen dance. My observations regarding his progress are confirmed by the neurologist at UMDNJ, at the Autism Center. She informed me that our son is so improved he no longer fits the classic definition of autistic.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: You've got a minute left. So if there are big points you need to get to, I would get to them.

MS. BYRNE: This miracle was not performed by leaving him in an out-of-district mainstream classroom with a few pullouts. This miracle was performed by putting him in a special education school that had the facilities that only a tiny number of local school districts have, who are willing to put six autistic children in a small class -- yes, even the room size is important -- with a teacher and aide, while providing a curriculum that not only provides usual academic areas, but independent living, study and social skills; while providing individual speech, occupational, physical therapy, social skill training, health services -- yes, nurses are needed for

most of these children -- counseling, learning consultants, behavior management, psychologists, family support services, as well as recreational services.

The current, out-of-district schools for the severely disabled eliminate the need for each district to maintain a huge bevy of professionals. They, in effect, are cost-effective.

The current proposal to radically-- (timer rings)

You can see the rest of it.

This is also a direct attack on the Abbott funding, because there are more needy children in Abbott, low-income districts. Instead of giving the funding to go with the needs of the district -- what is proposed is to take away funding from districts, because they have severely needy children. It's the exact opposite of the Abbott funding.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: That's just not proposed.

I thank you.

MS. BYRNE: All right. This is what I'm hearing. I'm hearing a lot of gossip, and I'm hearing a lot of things through case managers.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: I think you are hearing gossip. There are things on the funding that are just not so.

But thank you for your testimony. It's been very helpful.

Let's see, Emerson Simmons.

EMERSON SIMMONS: Now I can say good evening.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Good evening.

MR. SIMMONS: I want to talk about steak and eggs, you want to talk about funding. I want to talk about chicken (indiscernible), you want to talk about funding.

For an example, Joseph Doria-- About five years ago, I was on a committee -- a State committee set up to -- and I discussed it with him before he left -- to look at funding formulas. We had a committee of about 60 people to sit down, and we did the work to send recommendations to Governor McGreevey. They were never instituted. I served on another Governor's committee to rewrite the facilities-- You know how that went out. I sat on the Whole School Reform committee -- and a couple other people -- and we sat on those committee.

And we want to talk about funding -- it's steak and eggs. What I'm saying to you is this: By not having a committee made up of representatives from the communities and the other school districts, you do us an injustice. For example, Trenton: We have five schools done, but we should have had 17 schools done. We were the first district in the State to have 10 projects submitted to the SCC. But because a game was played that the Abbott districts had to do their safety and health issues, put off a year to two years. Then, because SCC was the new organization -- or structure, whatever you want to say -- we were put off another year. So the other districts that didn't have to go through the red tape were allowed to build their schools. Okay?

What did that do to our school district? Why did it affect funding? In our district, we had up to nine charter schools about five or six years ago. We're down to about three. All the Catholic schools in our city closed. So now our school districts have to rent all the facilities in that district. Do we get all the funding back to support that? No. We're busing children all over the city. How can we keep test scores up?

I heard you make a comment -- something about -- she was saying about the special needs children. Well, four years ago, Trenton took the State to court over our family support teams, because whole school reform was forced on the Abbott districts. The Law Center fought for us to have family support teams. Well, when Trenton took the State to court, we were fighting over 16.5. What's his name? The commissioner over the Abbott districts. What's his name?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: MacInnes.

MR. SIMMONS: Oh, that's that guy, MacInnes. On the witness stand, he said if he had his way, he would mainstream all the special needs children in the district. He's having his way, because the way you have cut -- allowed them to cut funding to our school districts, they're bringing these kids back in districts and dropping them in the class.

How did that play out? It played out with No Child Left Behind, because if one subgroup fails, our schools are considered failing schools. I never heard anything in my life-- A failing grade is about 60. So if one subgroup fails, we have all these so-called *failing* schools in our district. Schools have never failed children. Communities have failed children and we do not hold people accountable.

Federal law says that we're supposed to have family support teams for the last five or six years. If we had family support teams in these Abbott districts, we could hold these principals, these administrators, and superintendents accountable. No, the State has not enforced it so parents would be involved. Anybody with good sense knows that when parents and communities are involved in children's education, they're being educated. Well, in the Abbott districts, the family support team was that way.

Also, on the witness stand, he said, "I do not understand what drop-out counselors have to do with kids learning education." This is testimony. That's what he said. He also said that he didn't understand what was the importance of a social worker in an urban school district. "Can you prove to us that by having a social worker, a drop-out counselor, and a parent liaison, that your children will learn?" So he went on. So the whole family support team--

Now, in the last couple of weeks, what he is saying is, "No, we're not going to say you need full-time parent liaisons, parent coordinators." But under No Child Left Behind, the family support team is based around family involvement, parents and people being allowed to look at that budget.

Also, the State of New Jersey, three years ago, asked the Federal government for a waiver. What the Federal government did -- allowed the superintendents to take that money, that is supposed to be going into our schools, and spend the money district-wide. Being that you don't have a parent counselor, seeing that the money is coming down to your school, these districts are now allowed to sign 95 percent of that money to the schools.

QSAC: good legislation, because at least you will be holding the people accountable.

The one thing about No Child Left Behind-- The only people they hold accountable in No Child Left Behind are teachers and principals. Well, what about these administrators making \$200,000, \$250,000 in failing schools? But if we had these counselors in place, we could work to get rid of these types of superintendents.

What about the parents? The parents, if we would give them the opportunity and train them -- then we could get them in the building. But the law is a secret.

Funding formulas: Also, when I was on that committee, we had a person that used to work for the State of New Jersey. He was called Mel Wyns. He worked there for 30 years. He wrote the funding formulas. Those are the kinds of people we would like to sit down, because he was our business administrator in Trenton before he retired. But those are the people who can tell you about the horrors that you don't hear about, how we do try to deal with these issues and stuff. And this is not the type of forum that is going to give you the right kind of information to say what will work in the Abbott district and what won't work in the Abbott district.

Because what I'm saying to you is this: There's a lot of other things playing into educating children in Abbott districts. I haven't heard anybody say anything about the emancipated students that we have in Abbott districts. I haven't heard anyone talk about how, over the years, you got rid of vocational school, night school, and Summer school. No, you didn't do it, but the Department of Education--

So if you really want to save money, here are some suggestions: Get rid of the Department of Education. If we've got to go to court on studies that they did on Abbott districts, and nobody can see them; you can rewrite funding formulas and don't know what's working in our districts and what's not working in our districts-- That's what's going on. (applause)

We talk about SCC, for an example -- Trenton, for an example. Contractors came in there and brought contaminated soil into our school district and started building the school. We had to fight SCC, DEP. And

why did the Inspector General said it was a deal between contractors and politicians?

I noticed no one has been indicted. Eighteen percent operating cost when you set up SCC-- Why hasn't anyone gone back to get that money? Because in our school district, now, we have to get out of those Catholic school buildings. But where are we going to put our children? Our high school -- 4,000 students in our high school. We had to divide it up into other buildings. We were one of the first high schools -- had a plan to get it done. Today, we do not have that high school. And our children are divided over the city.

So when you talk about test scores-- Do they understand the busing that goes on in our district? Do you understand 300 and 400 special needs children are being dropped back on our districts every year? Now we're putting these children in classrooms with normal children so they cannot learn.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Understood.

Thank you very much. We really have to--

We appreciate what you said, but you're way over. And we've given you some latitude. We appreciate what you've had to say.

MR. SIMMONS: Okay. And all I'm going to say-- When I say chicken -- I mean, steak and eggs, you're all elected officials -- my grandchildren, who are in those schools, are my life. And the mistakes that are allowed to be made, and no one has been held accountable, are at the sake of my grandchildren, and my children, and my nieces and nephews. And I think that's a crime.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you, sir.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you so much.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the risk of offending the many people who might be remaining to testify, we have only time for one more speaker. The people at NJIT were very nice.

There are three left. I'm hoping somebody wants to come up and speak about something we haven't heard about. Whoever gets to the microphone first, I'm going to call on.

DEBORAH SCHMALZ: (speaking from audience) Can I just state that I was at the Camden meeting last time, and I wasn't able to (indiscernible).

SENATOR ADLER: Outrun her. (laughter)

No, I'm kidding. You, then you.

ANNETTE ALLSTON: Good evening.

SENATOR ADLER: Good evening.

MS. ALLSTON: My name is Annette Allston. I'm President of the Newark Teachers' Association. I'm also a teacher -- fifth grade language lit, social studies teacher; product of the Newark school system.

I understand the concern of the legislators is to please their constituents. However, by targeting public school funding as a means to cut taxes, you are playing to the lowest denominator of your base. Legislators need to stop being so parochial and racist, and fully fund public schools.

Abbott money has only come into urban and low-economic districts for the past 10 years. This was a means to begin to repair a

shameful chasm of disparity that existed between poor and the more affluent districts.

Newark, for one, has made strides in spite of the past mismanagement under State District Superintendent Beverly Hall, and the State's SCC scandal, which left Newark with only one of three schools nearly completed, and about 69 more to go.

When you talk about cutting funds from education -- and the State's not concerned about cutting money going toward new prisons -- you're being shortsighted and, really, just wrong. Tell your constituents that their taxes will decrease when there are better qualified people in the job market. And when the Newark economy improves, the economy of New Jersey will improve as a whole. Money is sunk into the welfare system, because people cannot find jobs. Jobs aren't available for students without a thorough and efficient education, but prisons are available.

Tell your constituents that crime will decrease when children have a thorough and efficient education, and can go on to become productive citizens. The cost of keeping the prisoner in school for a year is the cost of putting a student through four years of college.

Tell your constituents that what's good for Newark, and other urban districts like Newark, is good for New Jersey as a whole.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: One question: It's been suggested that it's important to get -- have teachers in school systems who have lived in the communities. And you mentioned that you went to school here, and now you teach here.

Do you have any suggestions for how we should do that? If they're right, and we should create incentives to have folks who grew up in

communities teach in those communities, do you have any suggestions on how we ought to do that, in 30 seconds?

MS. ALLSTON: We're talking about urban and Abbott district communities. We need to continue to fund them. They need to have all the things available to them so they can go on to college.

I went through school at a time when the doors were kind of open in college. There are so many students that go through-- There was more funding available.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: So the first thing to do is make sure kids get educated -- so they get a good education.

MS. ALLSTON: Make sure kids get educated.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Anything else?

MS. ALLSTON: When kids get educated, they want to give back to their community. They want to come back into the community and work. Let's get them educated.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Great.

Thanks. Thanks very much.

Are you Ms. Schmalz?

MS. SCHMALZ: Yes, I am.

I thank the members of the Committee for this opportunity to speak today and for the very important work that all of you are doing.

I am Deborah Schmalz. I'm a mother of four children in the public school system. I am co-founder of an education foundation, which gives all our district children opportunities to take interesting, educational-based electives in an after-school venue at no cost to the taxpayers. I also

serve as a trustee on an education foundation in a town where I now currently reside.

You don't have to look far to find solid-performing school districts in New Jersey who are getting battered by these budget caps -- eight years worth of stagnant State aid. Their ability to continue to receive good marks is hanging in the balance of these important next legislative steps.

There are a few high-performance school districts that operate well below the State average of cost-per-pupil and have practiced fiscal responsibility for years. In these districts-- It is these districts that, over the past years, have been forced to cut into the educational part of their programs with 1701 budget caps and surplus fund restrictions.

We look beyond the exorbitant property taxes and income taxes, and our community has supported us by reaching into their pockets even more to offer their support and have been able to further supplement our budget by funding items, including classroom technology, libraries, field trips, teacher staff training. These are all normally budget items for the school. And this does not make up for the loss in programs and staff, which then add to the challenges of our overcrowded district.

Due to responsible and lean budget practices, our district and many districts like ours will be forced to make deeper cuts into the educational part of our budgets again, which our district has already minimized. Now it hurts our children's education.

Penalizing school districts for fiscally sound practices, I am certain, is not the intention of our legislators. Last year, our district lost half of our elementary enrichment model, half of our world language model,

high school teaching staff, administrative staff in a very large middle school, at a time where safety of our students is so tenuous. We lost all of this, despite a passed budget. These items were supported by our board of ed, but along with deep cuts in the noneducational side of the budget, it just didn't fit under the tight caps.

The clear message here is, blanket legislation is crippling your good value districts. Don't continue to hurt these districts by restricting those that play by the rules, please. There are a few similar districts that have received very high marks in performance and operate at below average cost. These are the very districts we should be using as a model to the other districts. Instead, we are treating all districts as though they are the same and forcing great school districts, with responsible spending records, backwards and down.

Unreasonable caps on fiscally lean districts threaten the high quality of education for which New Jersey is known and for which we're proud of. I would suggest that if we continue with these models of blanket legislation that hurt low-cost great school districts, New Jersey's attractiveness to corporations staying in -- currently in New Jersey or potentially moving into the state will decline significantly.

It is easy for you to help these value school districts by just loosening the caps. This doesn't cost the State money. Just let our town voters decide on the school budgets and align the school budget caps with right spending, not less spending.

For the towns with value school districts, this issue is at least as important as the amount of State aid that we receive, which is next to nothing. Help the value school districts so that we can continue to deliver

the high-quality education that we wish for all school districts. We're asking you to base your budgeting of cap allowances and State aid on two things that they should be based on: financial performance -- I'm sorry -- yes, financial performance and educational performance.

It's time to make some changes. Our tax dollars already fund our school districts and the lion's share of the Abbott districts. And we do this willingly, and we understand it's important. Please do not ask us now to accept cuts into our own children's education, while our tax dollars go to school districts that are less frugal. We're asking you to consider the value districts in your upcoming special session by loosening our caps and moving into State aid based on financial performance and educational performance.

I support the value New Jersey proposals.

Thank you. Your consideration and thoughtfulness surrounding these issues are deeply appreciated.

And thank you for letting me speak.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you for coming twice.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you for your patience. You've come twice.

SENATOR ADLER: Collingswood, and now Newark. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: And here at the end of this one.

MS. SCHMALZ: I had to.

SENATOR ADLER: Newark is a lot closer than Collingswood for you, I think.

MS. SCHMALZ: Excuse me?

SENATOR ADLER: Newark is a lot closer for you than Collingswood, though, right?

MS. SCHMALZ: I know.

SENATOR ADLER: A lot closer.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: You're a real trooper.

Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Ma'am.

A D E L A M A R I A B O L E T: Ladies and gentlemen, legislators, and fellow citizens of New Jersey, I am here with my 16-year-old son, Michael Betts, to give voice to many parents of children with disabilities in Teaneck, New Jersey, and throughout Bergen County, who are gravely concerned about continued funding for their children's specialized schools of private special education.

I am a parent of three children, two of whom have attended the public schools of Teaneck. And Michael, our middle child, is now in a private school of special education, because there was no other public placement that was providing all the appropriate services he needed.

Years ago, Michael was the first child with Down syndrome to be included in the Teaneck school system. That placement was only successful because of the willingness and coordination of many people. In later years of primary school, things did not go so well and Michael became depressed as the social gap got bigger with his peers.

In middle school, he attended a private, special ed school in Paramus, and was brought back on track emotionally and socially. In high

school, his first year, he attended a county program embedded in a regular high school. But there was no integration of Michael's activities with the general population. At present, he's attending ECLC, a private, special ed school, where he's receiving both the level of academics and social and special services he needs. Michael has made much progress at ECLC and is preparing for community college and entering into the job world. None of the specialized services he is receiving at ECLC are available at Teaneck High School at the moment. The costs of Michael's placement in Hohokus are comparable to the per capita expenditures at Teaneck High School.

When Michael was in preschool, I was the co-founder of the Teaneck Special Needs Network, and I continue to attend both parenting groups and be active in SPAN and other special education organizations at the local, State, and national levels.

I have been a part of many years of debate about inclusion versus private schools. And I have come to the conclusion that there is a need for both in our state. The increasing number of students with autism is dramatic, and many of these children's educational needs cannot be met in a public school setting. Many other young people with severe disabilities can only be integrated into the community after years of specialized education.

In sum, I request the Committee members recommend continuing support of a broad range of educational choices for children with special needs, and continued choices for the families who want the best education possible for all of their children.

Thank you very much. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Ma'am.

C H E R Y L O ' B R I E N: Thank you.

I appreciate your patience and your willingness to listen to one more voice. I know it's a long afternoon.

Good afternoon. My name is Cheryl O'Brien, and I'm Principal of Thomas Edison Intermediate School, in Westfield, a suburban district in Union County with about 6,000 students. I've been an educator for most of my professional life, a teacher and administrator for more than 20 years. I began my career as a high school English teacher in Wisconsin, and I have taught in international schools in India and in Africa.

Since I became an administrator in Westfield 12 years ago, I've seen enormous changes in public education that have had a great impact on the day-to-day work of principals. What are some of the changes? One change is more students. In our district, the student population has increased by more than 40 percent. And across New Jersey, 78,000 students have been added in the last five years alone.

Another change is more State mandates. Think for a moment about New Jersey's State mandated assessments. From a program that used to take three days and involved one-third of the students in my school, we now -- testing now requires seven days to administer and involves 100 percent of the students.

And a third change is fewer administrators. Using my own district as an example, again, in the same 12 years, I saw a huge increase in enrollment and a three-fold expansion in testing. The number of supervisors and administrators responsible for overseeing those tests and

working with those students has decreased by 15 percent. More students, more mandates, and fewer administrators -- a situation in which fewer and fewer resources are available to address greater and greater student needs. Educators across the state -- in Abbott districts, in suburban districts, in middle-of-the-road districts -- educators have lived up to the call to do more with less. As members of the Legislature, you know what it is to have constituents. As public school educators, we have constituents too.

In our case, our constituents are our students, from the 5-year-old Kindergartener to the 18-year-old graduating senior. And we want to do everything we can to help them get what they need. We want every child in New Jersey -- poor, rich, special needs, high-achieving, Hispanic, black, and white -- every child to get what he or she needs.

I just want to take a moment and tell you about one of my constituents. A young man -- I'll call him Sam -- who is bright, pleasant, and wanted to do well, but he always seemed sad. Every day Sam came to school. And although he was bright, and although he worked hard in his classes, he never seemed to do as well as expected. His teachers noticed that he started the day looking tired and, sometimes, even ill. But by afternoon, he seemed to be much more energetic and attentive. A staff member who had a real connection with Sam found out that the reason was really quite straightforward. The only meal Sam ate every day was the free lunch he got in school.

So staff members put their heads together, staff members opened their wallets, staff members found a way to make sure that Sam had three meals a day, like every kid needs. He came to school a little early, and the teachers took time bringing him -- took turns bringing him breakfast,

and he left school in the afternoon with a carry-out meal for supper. Sam's life changed for the better not because of laws, not because of funding formulas, but because educators connected with him, took the time to learn what he needed, and went the extra mile to make sure he got it.

Sam is our constituent, but he's your's too. Every child in New Jersey is your constituent. As we have these important conversations about public school funding, I beg you to work with education professionals to ensure that we do not sacrifice education quality for any child in New Jersey, and the needs of any child in New Jersey in the name of efficiency.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR ADLER: Thanks so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Great testimony.

Thank you.

Ms. Rivera, you are the last one.

N I N A R I V E R A: As you can see, I have two special needs sons, and they're here with me. So it's kind of difficult.

Good evening. My name is Nina Rivera.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: You want to--

SENATOR ADLER: Right in the microphone.

MS. RIVERA: Good evening.

My name is Nina Rivera. How are you?

These are some things that we have from the SEOC, and one thing is, the New Jersey voters value education and want all children to benefit from good schools. The next is, children in our poorest school districts are finally benefiting from a student subsidy -- I mean investment in their schools. We must continue that investment, as test scores are

steadily improving and these children are finally being given a shot at a better future.

We do not blame poor children for our high property taxes. Lawmakers have to find other ways to lower property taxes. It cannot be done at the expense of our most valuable students.

I have-- I'm a mother of five. I have two special needs-- My sons are special needs. My baby son has autism, and my oldest son has dyslexia and ADHD. So we really want to keep this lower, and to just ask us--

I'm a cancer survivor, and I'm doing all I can. Because at this time, my husband-- I just buried my husband. So I'm raising my sons, now, on my own. So we definitely need help with finances.

Thank you.

SENATOR ADLER: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONAWAY: Thank you very much, indeed.

We're adjourned.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)