

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION - DIVISION OF
PORTFOLIO PLANNING
Performance School - 2/21/13**

1 [START RECORDING]

2 MR. JESSE MOJICA: Good evening, ladies and
3 gentlemen. Good evening.

4 MIXED VOICES: Good evening.

5 MR. MOJICA: My name is Jesse Mojica, and
6 I'll be acting as facilitator for the joint
7 public hearing. This is a joint public hearing
8 of the Department of Education Community
9 Education Council and School Leadership Team to
10 discuss the proposed phase out of performance
11 school 07X385 beginning in 2013/2014. Tonight's
12 proceedings will be recorded and transcribed.

13 Before we begin the hearing, we ask that
14 anyone who wishes to speak during the public
15 comment portion of the evening sign up at the
16 table in the back. So, ladies and gentlemen, as
17 you entered into the auditorium, there was a
18 table right outside the auditorium. So, if you
19 would like to speak, you would sign up at that
20 table. Sign up will end at 6:15. If you have a
21 question that you want to be addressed during
22 the question and answer portion of the agenda,
23 please write that question on the index cards
24 provided at the back and submit them to a
25 volunteer by the table. Only people who have

1 signed up to speak will be able to participate
2 in public comment. All panel participants were
3 asked to be here no later than 5:30. Now that
4 we have started, if a panel participant arrives,
5 he or she will be given the time to speak at the
6 first opportune moment. We want to be
7 respectful of everyone's time.

8 There may be elected officials or
9 representatives who arrive at different times
10 throughout the evening. If they wish to speak,
11 we will do our best to accommodate them at the
12 first opportune moment. Those who are here at
13 the start of the public comment segment will be
14 asked to speak first.

15 The format for tonight's joint public
16 hearing will include a presentation of the
17 proposal and presentations by hearing
18 participants followed by public comment.
19 Speakers should have already signed up as I said
20 at the sign-in table in the lobby. Public
21 comments can be no longer than two minutes each.
22 The time will be followed and speakers will be
23 informed when their designated time has ended.
24 There will be a question and answer period.
25 Ladies and gentlemen of the audience, if you

1 have a question, please write your question on
2 the index cards that were supplied at the sign-
3 in table when you arrived this evening. While
4 the public comments are taking place, staff
5 members will organize the questions into
6 categories and get them ready for our question
7 and answer period. Some questions will be asked
8 directly from the index card, and others will be
9 batched under headings in order to avoid
10 repetitiveness. Even though all individual
11 questions will not be addressed in the forum
12 tonight, answers to questions will be posted on
13 the DOE web site prior to the panel meeting. If
14 at the end of the hearing, you still have
15 questions, we encourage you to direct them to us
16 by calling the phone number on the bottom of the
17 fax sheet or sending them to us via e-mail to
18 the e-mail address provided on the fax sheets,
19 and ladies and gentlemen as we conclude those
20 numbers and those e-mail addresses are on the
21 fax sheets. I will also repeat those numbers
22 and the e-mail addressees at the conclusion of
23 tonight's hearing.

24 I would like now to introduce the panel,
25 which has been assembled this evening for this

1 evening's joint public hearing. To my right we
2 have our deputy chancellor, Kathleen Grimm; our
3 superintendent, Yolanda Tores [phonetic]; from
4 the School Leadership Team we have Mr. Ernest
5 Suarez; also from the school--I'm sorry from the
6 Community Education Council we have Ms. Gorsino
7 [phonetic], Gloria Gorsino; and also from the
8 School Leadership Team we have Ms. Hope
9 Rodriguez. I will now turn over the program to
10 our deputy chancellor who will, Kathleen Grimm
11 who will present the proposal.

12 MS. KATHLEEN GRIMM: Thank you. Thank you
13 very much, Jesse. Good evening, ladies and
14 gentlemen and thank you all very much for being
15 here this evening. This joint public hearing
16 was convened to discuss the proposed phase-out
17 and replacement of 07X385, the Performance
18 School.

19 There will be a joint public hearing to
20 discuss the proposed expansion of the co-located
21 Bronx Global Learning Institute for Girls
22 charter school in this school building next
23 Monday, February 25th. The decision to phase
24 out the Performance School is a difficult one,
25 and one we do not take lightly. We examine many

1 factors and data before we propose a course of
2 action. We engage families and communities in
3 discussions about what is and what is not
4 working at the school before we determine
5 whether a phase out is appropriate.

6 All of us count on our schools to provide a
7 high quality education to students, and we must
8 hold all schools to the same standard of
9 excellence because every child in the city
10 deserves the best possible education. When a
11 school is not serving its students well and we
12 have to take action to currently ensure students
13 don't fall even further behind, and that future
14 students will have a school that prepares them
15 for success in college and in the work place. I
16 want to acknowledge the students who are here
17 tonight and the families who feel that their
18 children are being well-served by the
19 Performance School. Tonight we will hear about
20 some success stories that are happening here,
21 and we honor those, but we also need to consider
22 the other students whom the school is not
23 serving well and who have not experienced the
24 same success. These students deserve better.
25 As I mentioned earlier, tonight we will be

1 discussing the proposed phase out and
2 replacement of the performance school. In
3 addition to the proposed phase-out we are
4 proposing to replace performance schools with a
5 new elementary school and to co-locate a new
6 site of a District 75 program in this building.
7 As you all know, performance school is located
8 right here in school building number X156 at 750
9 Concourse Village West, the Bronx, New York.
10 Performance School is currently a zoned
11 elementary school that serves children in
12 kindergarten to fifth grade and offers a pre-
13 kindergarten program. On January 22nd, 2013,
14 the New York City Department of Education
15 published proposals to phase out and replace the
16 Performance School based on its performance
17 struggles. These proposals discussed the track
18 record of Performance School and why the
19 Department believes that the phase out and
20 replacement is the best option for the
21 performance school community.

22 Performance School's data indicate the
23 school has struggled and confirmed the
24 Department's assessment that the school lacks
25 the capacity to improve quickly enough to meet

1 the needs of its students. For example,
2 Performance School earned a D on its most recent
3 progress report. Now, this D grade marks a
4 further decline in performance after the school
5 received a C grade in both 2010/2011 and in
6 2009/2010.

7 Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of
8 students remain below grade level in English
9 Language Arts and in math. In 2011/2012, only
10 14% of students were performing on grade level
11 in English language arts putting the school in
12 the lowest percentile of elementary schools
13 city-wide. Only 12% of students were performing
14 at grade level in math putting the school in the
15 lowest percentile of elementary schools
16 citywide.

17 Performance School was also identified by
18 New York State as a priority school, one of the
19 bottom 5% of schools in the state. Given the
20 school's continued decline in performance, the
21 Department believes that only the most serious
22 intervention, the gradual phase-out and eventual
23 closure and replacement of Performance School
24 will address its struggles and allow for a new
25 school option to develop in this building that

1 will better serve future students and the
2 community. In a separate educational impact
3 statement, the Department has proposed to open
4 and co-locate a new District elementary school
5 and a new site for an existing District 75
6 program in the building. If this replacement
7 proposal is approved, the new elementary school
8 will serve students in kindergarten through
9 fifth grade and will include a pre-kindergarten
10 program. Students will be admitted as part of
11 the District 7 elementary school choice program,
12 which will be new for District 7 starting next
13 year. The Department has also proposed to open
14 and co-locate a new site of an existing District
15 75 program. This District 75 program will serve
16 students with an individualized education
17 program, an IEP classification of autistic in
18 kindergarten through fifth grade. As I said
19 earlier, the Department has also proposed to
20 expand the co-location of the Bronx Global
21 Learning Institute for Girls in this building,
22 for which there will be a separate hearing next
23 Monday, February 25th.

24 Before we move into the public comment
25 section of this meeting, I would like to briefly

1 discuss the impact of this proposed phase-out
2 on current Performance School students and their
3 families.

4 If this proposal is approved, Performance
5 School will not longer admit new pre-
6 kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade or
7 second grade students after the end of this
8 school year. Current students in kindergarten
9 and first grade will be served by the new
10 elementary school. Current students in the
11 second, third and fourth grades who meet
12 promotional standards will continue to progress
13 towards the completion of their elementary
14 school education at Performance School.

15 Current fifth-graders will have the
16 opportunity to graduate from Performance School
17 at the end of the year. These students should
18 have already applied to middle schools via the
19 District 7 middle school choice process.
20 Performance School will continue to phase out
21 gradually until it closes in June 2016.
22 Students may also apply to finish school
23 elsewhere if they wish to do so. As part of our
24 public school choice process, students at
25 Performance School will get an opportunity to

1 apply to transfer to another elementary
2 school. Applications for this transfer
3 opportunity will be available to students this
4 spring. That's for enrollment starting next
5 September. I want to thank you in advance--
6 thank all of you here who will share with us
7 tonight your feedback on these proposals. We
8 look forward to hearing all of your comments and
9 all of your questions.

10 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Deputy Chancellor.
11 I just want to acknowledge that we have been
12 joined by one of our members of the Community
13 Education Council, Ms. Tracy Woodall, and now we
14 will transition into our next presenter on
15 behalf of the Community Education council, Ms.
16 Woodall.

17 MS. TRACY WOODALL: Good evening, everyone.
18 I'm just going to be brief. I'm just talking on
19 behalf of the Community Education Council first
20 and foremost. My name is Tracy Woodall. I'm
21 the second vice president of the CEC for
22 District 7, and basically we're parents that are
23 elected by parents, and we advocate for the
24 parents of District 7. So just being here as a
25 parent and hearing that there is another phasing

1 out, I was here also at the hearing at MS203,
2 I'm very upset about it. I'm very upset that
3 we're losing our schools, and like I said before
4 I'm really sick and tired of it and something
5 has to be done because our children are
6 suffering and our children are failing in the
7 long run. I really wish that this never
8 happened, but a lot of issues I'm realizing is
9 that a lot of the fundings don't really get to
10 our schools and our District and it doesn't get
11 to our children. So, once again like I said I'm
12 very frustrated, you know, me representing the
13 counsel. We're doing everything we can to
14 notify the parents. I just want to speak on
15 behalf of parents. You all do have a voice, and
16 you all do have power, and when you come out to
17 these hearings and you speak out and you all say
18 what you all feel about you all children, you
19 all will get heard, and a lot of times these
20 phasings will be stopped if we come and we try
21 to--we stand firm and state that we don't want
22 our schools to close. Sometimes they do listen,
23 but a lot of times these things are done, and
24 right now there is nothing we can do about this
25 school being phased out. But I'm telling you as

1 a parent your voice is important. Advocate
2 for your child. Get involved. Get on the SLTs.
3 Get on the PTAs. Come and join the CEC.
4 Actually, they are having elections coming up.
5 We need more parents' voices to speak out on
6 behalf of our schools. There's too many of our
7 schools in the Bronx that are being phased out,
8 and it's ridiculous, all right, because our
9 children are suffering. Our middle schools are
10 being closed up. The charter schools are coming
11 in. I don't have nothing against charter
12 schools because I have a daughter in charter
13 school and I've got a son in a public school,
14 but the problem is with the lottery how--what
15 says that your child is going to get into those
16 middle schools. So what is going to happen to
17 our public schools, our public middle schools.
18 You can't bus a 13-year-old to the other side of
19 town to go to middle school, you understand, and
20 there's a danger in that. We are losing our
21 middle schools in our District, and we have to
22 stop it. Something has to be done. We have to
23 speak to our mayor. I pray that we can get a
24 new mayor in, but something has to be done. So
25 that's all I got to say. I'm not happy about

1 it, but as parents we have to stand up and we
2 have to fight this, we have to fight this. So
3 I'm asking, if you all hear my voice now as a
4 parent you have the power. Advocate for your
5 child. Don't sit here and let these schools
6 close without you having a say in what's going
7 on in your District. That is why I'm sitting
8 here right now. Okay, so if I can do it, you
9 can do it too. Speak up. Come to our CEC
10 office. We can tell you what needs to be done
11 to make you a better advocate for your child.
12 We give you--we'll give you the whole lines of
13 people and places who you need to call if you
14 have an IEP child. I have a child with an IEP.
15 I'll tell you what to do. Come to the CEC
16 office. Come to our meetings. Every month we
17 have meetings, and we can educate you all on how
18 to speak up so these schools will not close. We
19 can't do it. We have to stop this. It really
20 has to stop. Every year I've been on the CEC
21 for six years, and every year a school is
22 closing in our District. This is ridiculous.
23 This is ridiculous, and I'm sick and tired of
24 it. So, something has to be done, and our
25 voices need to be heard. So don't let nobody

1 tell you you can't walk in a school and
2 advocate for your child. As long as your child
3 is in that school, you have a right to walk in
4 and ask questions, you have a right. So just
5 understand that, and if you come to our
6 meetings, you can be better educated. I'm so
7 glad to see so many parents come out, but we
8 need more parents to come and be part of the PTA
9 and SLTs and come to the public meetings that we
10 have because a lot of times nothing--we always
11 see a full crowd when it comes down to phasing
12 out, but when things are going well, and there's
13 meetings to instruct you and tell you what to
14 do, we don't see nobody. One or two parents
15 come, but if you continue to come, you will hear
16 before hand that the school is being phased out
17 and you could have did something about it. You
18 understand? Because a lot of times we don't
19 wait until the last minute. If it's not our
20 child, we don't want to have nothing to do with
21 it, but we have to stop that. We have to get
22 involved and know what is going on. Even if
23 your child is in kindergarten, eventually your
24 child is going to go to middle school. So if
25 you're not coming to the meetings about the

1 middle school, where is your child going to go
2 when they hit that age to go to middle school if
3 there's no middle schools in our district. So
4 you have to get the information. So, please
5 come to our CEC office. It's on Cortlandt
6 Avenue. It's open to you all at any time. You
7 can come in from 9:00 to 5:00. We are there.
8 If you have any questions, we are here. All
9 right, so please, please come, and get the
10 education so we won't have to go through this
11 any more. This has to stop. This is a new
12 year. We have to stop the phasing out of our
13 schools. This has to stop. Thank you.

14 [applause]

15 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Ms. Woodall. So,
16 ladies and gentlemen, I just wanted to let you
17 know previously I had mentioned that speaker
18 sign-up would end at 6:15. We have actually
19 extended the time, so if there are members of
20 the audience that would like to speak that time
21 has been extended to 6:45. So, once again you
22 are interested in speaking out in front at the
23 table out front you can sign up to speak.

24 At this point in time, members of the SLT
25 are going to present. Okay, Ms. Rodriguez.

1 MS. HOPE RODRIGUEZ: Ladies and gentlemen,
2 there will be a PowerPoint. It's going to be a
3 while. Trust me, but it's something I feel
4 everybody should know. Our school is currently
5 a part of the Children's First Network, and
6 first and foremost come our children so we need
7 to think about them in this situation. It is
8 the only barrier-free school in the district.

9 FEMALE VOICE: [off mic]

10 MS. RODRIGUEZ: Washington, whenever you're
11 ready. This is a presentation to PS385
12 community New York City Department of Education.
13 Our goal this evening is to help you become
14 familiar with our school by listening to members
15 of our community. We believe in bringing people
16 together and believe in teaching our children
17 the value of cooperation and respect. Respect
18 takes many forms. One form is being willing to
19 work through challenges rather than giving up
20 and disbanding. Knowledge of how to work with
21 others is our deep and sincere expectation for
22 our children as they grow into educated, capable
23 adults. Okay, hold on. Excuse me. You have to
24 forgive me for this one. Our lives are both
25 rich and demanding. We are complicated people

1 in this community as are all people, rich,
2 poor and in between.

3 Our lives are rich in family ties and not
4 easy. We think that if you know us better it
5 may help to make this a more meaningful evening.
6 Sometimes we are not able to attend a meeting
7 with the superintendent. We do not hire people
8 to take care of our children. We and our family
9 members take care of our own, so we should not
10 be judged as uninterested in our children if we
11 do not attend every meeting. To illustrate, I
12 am going to ask the people to stand if you are
13 living with three or four generations in your
14 household. Please stand if you know more than
15 one language and sometimes translate for others.
16 Please stand if you are responsible for caring
17 for a family member or friend with asthma or
18 another serious medical condition. Please stand
19 if you care for your children and also have a
20 job. Please stand if someone in your family or
21 a neighbor has been hurt by violence. Please
22 stand if this is one of the first times you have
23 participated in a public hearing.

24 [applause]

25 For this reason, we want to object to the

1 DOE's literature supporting their decision to
2 phase out the school. The statements in the EIS
3 about lack of large numbers attending meetings
4 are not constructive and don't even mention that
5 the meeting was held on the night of a historic
6 storm. The EIS summary of community feedback
7 actually harms the connections that we are
8 trying so hard to nurture in our school. Three
9 times the document mentions that the
10 superintendent was given positive feedback about
11 the school but failed to state any of this
12 positive feedback and then followed with
13 concerns and states each one in several cases
14 including distorted versions of statements made.
15 Then they say, however, and go on to state
16 concerns. This should not state however. We
17 have concerns because we care because we have
18 thought about the school.

19 Our story in brief, PS156 closed in 2008 and
20 reopened as PS385 slated to be close again in
21 2013. Our teacher attrition rate under Ms.
22 Astraya [phonetic] was extremely high. This
23 could have been a piece of data that would have
24 moved the DOE to remove her and find a strong
25 and positive principal. This did not happen.

1 The data used to decide on closure is all from
2 her tenure. We also want to point out some data
3 that the DOE may not have considered. Our
4 school does not have a low record as at least
5 one other school in the District that is not
6 being closed. We do want to make a note that
7 they do not have a charter school that wants to
8 expand in their building.

9 The DOE cites a laundry list of strategic
10 improvement efforts and supports offered to our
11 school. Most of those were given to a failing
12 administrator who did not in turn provide
13 support to the teachers and students. Teachers
14 have written accounts of these inconsistent and
15 unhelpful efforts. In a number of cases support
16 was offered and then discontinued by the
17 principal. The DOE should have been alerted to
18 this. In other cases, support was superficial
19 and coercive rather than allowing the
20 construction collaboration to work teachers were
21 attempting to do. As an example, Ms. Astraya
22 directed teachers to plan together and then
23 after they spent their vacation writing a
24 curriculum unit, she threw away their work and
25 directed them to all go plan individually and

1 not use the work they had developed together.
2 She kept the teachers at a distance and did not
3 spend time in classrooms. Many students did not
4 even recognize her since they saw her so
5 infrequently, and she did not know many of them.

6 In contrast, Mr. Hernandez' approach is a
7 breath of fresh air as he knows the students and
8 spends time with them in their classrooms every
9 day. Just last Friday, he was a DJ at an event
10 called the scholars' dance. This positive
11 connection to the students and teachers is a
12 welcome change.

13 MS. JAC O'CASEY: As was mentioned earlier,
14 all this evidence is based on a meeting that
15 took place the night of a nor'easter just two
16 months into the new principal's administration
17 when he and the community had just started to
18 get to know each other. The DOE didn't even
19 assign us our new principal until this
20 September. They did not appoint him earlier so
21 that he would have the summer months to plan and
22 get to know the staff and community, and the
23 evidence of students' academic struggles is
24 based on past reports from the period when
25 former Ms. Astraya was at the helm.

1 We believe that the source of many
2 problems was the DOE's neglect. It neglected to
3 remove Ms. Astraya even when teacher attrition
4 climbed. It neglected to find a new principal
5 to start in the summer and neglected to
6 recognize that there are constructive ways to
7 support our community.

8 The best thing the DOE can do to truly act
9 in the best interest of our children would be to
10 step back from this drastic plan of phase out
11 and allow us to grow and improve with our
12 excellent new principal.

13 What is excellent about our school that we
14 have valued all along? We are a barrier-free
15 school with a special education population that
16 is integrated into our school. We offer several
17 models in order to fit a variety of needs.
18 There are ICT classes where children with IEPs
19 and those without are classmates, and two
20 teachers team teach. We also have 12:1 and
21 12:1:1 classes that are more sheltered than
22 general education classes, but the students
23 still play in the yard together, share the
24 cafeteria, and their teachers collaborate in all
25 grade-level meetings and curriculum planning.

1 The table shows that PS385 has a high
2 proportion of students learning English and with
3 special needs integrated into the general
4 education population. Even the more restrictive
5 environments, 12:1:1, the students have regular
6 daily contact with their non-disabled peers. We
7 are proud of this integrated environment, and it
8 will not be offered by our growing neighboring
9 charter schools, by the proposed District 75
10 school or by the smaller new school that is
11 proposed. The objection has to be raised.

12 The DOE's proposal would deprive our special
13 education students of their right to the least
14 restrictive environment. We also have a rich
15 cultural community sharing many cultures and
16 languages. We welcome newly-arrived immigrants
17 and help them to join our community. The local
18 charter schools have a less inclusive population
19 of students who are learning English. Their
20 ethnic background statistics reflect this fact.

21 We provide both ESL and transitional
22 bilingual teaching models. These students are
23 welcomed into our school, respected, and
24 supported as they learn both social and academic
25 English while maintaining their first languages.

1 Pre-K, we have a stable, wonderful, pre-K
2 program with two classes, one bilingual, the
3 other monolingual. The only trouble is we need
4 more pre-K classes. We have a long waiting list
5 each year. Historically there have been more
6 than one-half the applicants turned away for
7 lack of space. This year there were 50 students
8 on the waiting list.

9 What has been improved since September that
10 has not yet been evaluated by the DOE?
11 Attendance is up by 4% to 5%, counseling and
12 academic support, common core standard aligned
13 ELA and math curriculum. PTA is restored and
14 active. Excellent spirit. Mr. Hernandez
15 actively supervises teachers and makes frequent
16 visits to the classrooms. The principal knows
17 every child in the school. We have Saturday
18 classes for parents. Teachers have constructed
19 collaborative planning periods and regular
20 grade-level meetings for collaborative planning.

21 What would be lost with a phase out? Many
22 students have already expressed their anxiety
23 and despair about losing their school. Many
24 feel like failures because of the low scores.
25 Some say they wish they could stay with their

1 friends. Students, families and teachers
2 relationships will be splintered. The co-
3 located charter school may leave this building
4 anyway as they are already seeking other space,
5 and they do not need the barrier-free school
6 because they do not tend to include students
7 with special needs. Their numbers of special ed
8 and ELL students are not made available to the
9 public by the Department of Education, but as
10 far as we can tell, they do not seek out or
11 support this population. They seem to be asking
12 for this space simply as a stop gap for a short
13 period, but the DOE is attempting to accommodate
14 them even at the cost of stability for our
15 students.

16 We hold no ill will toward the charter
17 school's families and children. We are simply
18 tasking that their students not be treated by
19 the DOE as--oh, I'm sorry, asking that our
20 students not be treated by the DOE as any less
21 worthy of educational stability and quality. We
22 have wonderful sports and music programs with
23 excellent staff. As the school phases out, we
24 know from seeing other schools go through this
25 process that the shrinking size will not allow

1 the school to afford to keep these programs
2 going in the way they exist now. What a
3 needless and tragic loss that would be for our
4 children. Children with IEPs have to adjust to
5 huge changes. Testimony from many parents in
6 this situation describe the extreme stress
7 involved in interrupted relationships and
8 routines. Students with IEPs will not have any
9 guarantee of continuity with their guidance
10 counselors, which is extremely hard on many
11 students with IEPs. In past school closings in
12 other parts of the New York City system, despite
13 promises that no educational disruption will
14 take place, it often has, and sometimes with
15 disastrous results for the child. Students with
16 IEPs who shift from an integrated to a District
17 75 setting will be forced into a more
18 restrictive environment than they need, which is
19 a violation of the IDEA, the Individuals with
20 Disabilities Education Act. Some families will
21 be forced to have children in multiple schools
22 so they will be unable to assist in both
23 schools. Establishing working relationships
24 with teachers is much harder when the parents
25 are not able to be at the school. PS156 and 385

1 has many superb, seasoned teachers. The phase
2 out will send them off to the hiring market, and
3 we will lose their expertise, their caring, and
4 their ties to our community. The DOE ought to
5 appreciate and support such ties.

6 In the PS156 closure and in other school
7 closures, many excellent, experienced teachers
8 left but have been unable to get a permanent
9 appointment. This is a result of the
10 intentional and unnecessary system chosen by the
11 DOE instead of paying all the teachers and
12 charging each school the average of all the
13 salaries for the number of teachers on their
14 staff, they require each school to pay each
15 teacher's salary. So instead of paying the
16 average, schools are put in the terrible
17 position of choosing inexperienced teachers in
18 order to save money thereby cheating our
19 students out of some of the most experienced,
20 wise and deeply gifted and committed teachers.

21 What can happen if we allow it to remain
22 stable as PS385 and work with our new principal?
23 The school is coming back to life. We ask that
24 the school be given the chance to remain open,
25 have a quality review before any decision is

1 made, and have the time to improve now that
2 the DOE has corrected its own error of keeping
3 the school under an ineffective principal for
4 three long years.

5 Objections to the process, the chance to
6 give an SLT response at this meeting was not
7 mentioned to us at the DOE. This opportunity as
8 well as the agenda was only provided by a union
9 representative. The statements published about
10 the school have been distorted, divisive,
11 disrespectful and even incorrect.

12 In conclusion, we would ask you to listen
13 and give justice by the ones who stand to lose
14 by this closure, our community, our families and
15 our precious children. They are brave. They
16 are smart. They are ambitious. As their elders
17 and parents, we call on you. Speak up for our
18 kids. We ask you to reject the chaos-promoting
19 closure in favor of calm, slow building of
20 community. We brought our children here tonight
21 to watch you and to learn from you if you decide
22 to support their school. It is in your hands to
23 set a good example for them.

24 [applause]

25 MIXED VOICES: Save our school. [repeated by

1 audience.]

2 MR. ERNEST SUAREZ: Right now I would like
3 to present a video that Ms. Washington had put
4 together. Unfortunately there are a lot of
5 faces here that do not know the school. So this
6 is the school at work.

7 [video]

8 [applause]

9 MR. MOJICA: Ladies and gentlemen, as we're
10 getting the lights on, I just wanted to make
11 just a couple of quick announcements. One is
12 signer speak up has closed, and as I know that
13 the SLT has not finished their presentation, but
14 I'm just taking this opportunity. I also want
15 to acknowledge the presence of elected officials
16 and elected official office representatives who
17 are in attendance. I want to acknowledge
18 Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo who is in
19 attendance.

20 [applause]

21 MR. MOJICA: Mr. Angel Santana from Senator
22 Serrano's office.

23 [applause]

24 MR. MOJICA: And Ms. Erica Veras [phonetic]
25 from Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Junior's

1 office.

2 [applause]

3 MR. MOJICA: We'll now continue with the
4 presentation from the School Leadership team.

5 MR. SUAREZ: Good evening once again. I
6 actually had a speech all planned out, but I
7 left it at home while I was helping my kids with
8 their homework with my glasses.

9 All right, so I've said this once before or
10 maybe twice, or maybe many times, as many as I
11 can get, this school to me and my kids is not
12 just a school. It's a part of their life and my
13 life. I have two kids, two boys, that I try my
14 best to do the best I can with them. But I bet
15 my bottom dollar that if it wasn't for this
16 school and several faculty members that helped
17 out my kids that have IEPs, they wouldn't be, A,
18 at the level that they are at right now, and the
19 way they function with other peers is a lot more
20 stronger than it was before. They helped me--
21 they showed me how to put more structure into my
22 kids so not that they only help my kids
23 academically, but they took time out to help me
24 in other ways and teach me how to be more of a
25 parent than I already knew. So, before you guys

1 decide or whoever makes the decision on
2 closing the school, I'm not the only one with a
3 story, and if the school does close, it will be
4 very unfortunately because I will have to start
5 all over and look for a new kids school for my
6 kids. One of my kids has emotional problems,
7 and it's very hard for him to adjust. And the
8 relationship that he has now with the principal,
9 the assistant principal, with staff members,
10 teachers, if you saw him in September and you
11 see him now, it's not only because of me. It's
12 because of the school that helped my kids.

13 [applause]

14 MR. SUAREZ: I can go on and on, but I'm
15 going to pass the mic. Thank you.

16 MS. O'CASEY: I've said it before. I'll say
17 it again. This is a Children's First Network
18 school. They need to consider our children
19 first. I volunteer in this school on a daily
20 basis. I have a daughter, three nieces and a
21 nephew all in this school. My goal is to keep
22 all the kids together. If the school phases
23 out, my nieces, my nephews we'll all be in three
24 different schools in one building. That's just
25 uncontrollable and understandable for me. I

1 will not take it. They need to consider our
2 children first. I volunteer in a first-grade
3 classroom. I have first-graders who tell me if
4 PS385 closes, they want to drop out. They are
5 diminishing these children's education at the
6 beginning. I have a second grader who tells me
7 they believe that it's their fault that they're
8 a failure because 385 wants to phase out. If
9 you tell a child that they are a failure, if
10 they feel they are a failure, that is what they
11 are going to grow up to be in life. We do not
12 want to do that to our children. Our children
13 come first.

14 [applause]

15 MR. SUAREZ: Hello? I'm sorry, I also
16 wanted to add that I don't live around the
17 corner. I don't live across the street.
18 There's a school next to my house. I choose to
19 take the bus with my kids in the morning to come
20 here. I chose to fight a year and a half ago,
21 two years ago, to make sure my kids get in this
22 school because this is one they also have a very
23 well IEP team.

24 [applause]

25 MR. MOJICA: I'd like to thank the members

1 of the School Leadership Team and the members
2 of the Community Education Council for their
3 presentations. Now, ladies and gentlemen, we
4 have concluded the formal presentations. I ask-
5 -we're going to begin to start our public
6 comment period. I will begin to ask speakers to
7 come up, but before that I wanted to just give
8 some instructions as a reminder. If everyone
9 could keep their comments to two minutes, there
10 is a DOE staff member who I'm pointing to
11 currently right now that will be keeping time in
12 front of the auditorium and will raise a sign to
13 alert you when you have 30 seconds remaining and
14 again when time is up. So before we begin
15 calling, and the first speakers I will begin
16 calling will be speakers one through five, but
17 before I do that, I wanted to one, give our
18 elected officers an opportunity to speak. Mr.
19 Santana, I understand that Council Member Arroyo
20 will be speaking later in our agenda, and I'd
21 like to give Mr. Santana an opportunity to
22 speak. After Mr. Santana speaks, speakers with
23 numbers one through five, and I will call the
24 names out as well if you could please line up by
25 the microphone. Thank you very much, ladies and

1 gentlemen. Mr. Santana?

2 MR. ANGEL SANTANA: Good evening. As stated
3 before, I am the community liaison for State
4 Senator Jose Serrano, and we actually recently
5 sent a letter to the DOE, and I have that letter
6 with me right now and I wanted to make sure that
7 I speak in his presence and read out this letter
8 so that the parents and the DOE understand where
9 the Senator and the community is standing, where
10 they stand. "I am writing to you as a State
11 Senator of the 29th Senate District representing
12 the south and west Bronx to express my concern
13 with the Department of Education's decision to
14 phase out the Performance School, PS385. On
15 January 22nd, the Department of Education
16 released an educational impact statement
17 outlining the proposed phase out of PS385. The
18 parents are understandably concerned with the
19 DOE's decision to vote on the phase out before
20 other measures have been explored. In recent
21 years PS385 has faced an enormous amount of
22 turnover at the principal and administrative
23 level. The new interim principal, Frank
24 Hernandez, has only held the position since
25 September 2012. The lack of stability within

1 the school and the sudden vote for phase out
2 leaves little time for Principal Hernandez' new
3 policy to increase student performance. Under
4 Principal Hernandez' tenure, attendance has
5 increased, a functioning PTA has been
6 established, teachers are receiving positive
7 professional development, and students are now
8 receiving extra services immediately unlike with
9 previous administrations. Also, students who
10 are struggling now have the opportunity to take
11 Saturday classes, which were implemented for the
12 first time this current school year. It should
13 also be noted that the faculty and parents alike
14 have positively endorsed Principal Hernandez and
15 his vision for the school. Another concern is a
16 call on the fate of PS385 before a quality
17 review study has been properly conducted. The
18 panel of educational policy will vote on whether
19 or not to phase out the school two months before
20 it even conducts a quality review. This is due
21 to the fact that the schools with an interim
22 acting principal are reviewed only after the
23 interim acting principal has been in place for
24 six months. Since the interim acting principal
25 has yet to reach that threshold, the review

1 cannot take place. The school's fate to stay
2 open or closed should be considered only after
3 Mr. Hernandez has had adequate time to bring his
4 vision of the school to fruition. I strongly
5 urge you to reconsider your decision to phase
6 out PS385. I respectfully ask that the DOE
7 provide Principal Hernandez the opportunity to
8 implement his initiatives with sufficient time
9 to fairly judge whether PS385 has the
10 capabilities to increase student performance.
11 Thank you very much for your consideration."

12 [applause]

13 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Mr. Santana. So,
14 ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to be calling up
15 speakers in groups of five, so would speakers
16 with numbers one through five please assemble in
17 front of the microphone. Thank you very much.
18 Our first speaker is Aura, and my apologies if I
19 mispronounce any names this evening. Please
20 correct me. I'm sorry, ma'am?

21 MS. AURA GANGEMI: Gangemi [phonetic].

22 MR. MOJICA: Gangemi, Ms. Gangemi?

23 MS. GANGEMI: Good evening, ladies and
24 gentlemen, boys and girls. My name is Aura
25 Gangemi, and I'm the assistant director for the

1 schools in the Bronx. I would like to share
2 my thoughts with you. Once again, the DOE has
3 scheduled more than two dozen schools for
4 closure. The latest 26 schools destined for the
5 scrap heap don't fit into any particular
6 pattern. Several have new principals who were
7 told they would have time to turn the school
8 around. Several have effective ratings from the
9 state. Several have proficient quality reviews.
10 One actually has a principal that exceeds
11 expectations and a quality review rating of
12 well-developed, and the DOE seems to take aim at
13 the schools as it is playing a game of Russian
14 roulette. The DOE's worst practice often
15 devastates our children and families. It
16 usually takes aim at students who already suffer
17 setbacks and humiliation from previous school
18 closings. Many of them have been turned away
19 from new city schools for reason of poor
20 academic performance or for not having family
21 with clout. Then the youngsters are warehoused
22 in other low-performance schools that are most
23 likely to be closed too. This is a failing
24 strategy for turning schools around. This
25 school, 385, is a case in point where we have a

1 new principal who was told that he would have
2 time to turn this school around and despite his
3 best professional effort he is now phasing out
4 the school over a three-year time, will not be
5 doing any admission and also reducing
6 enrollment. It is very, very important that we
7 notice that PS385 had had--the children in this
8 school have had four different principals in the
9 face of of five years' time. Is this a strategy
10 for success or turning a school around, or is it
11 rather a failing strategy for our students? We
12 need to consider that.

13 [applause]

14 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Ms. Gangemi.

15 MS. GANGEMI: Thank you.

16 MR. MOJICA: Thank you very much. We'll
17 have now Kathleen McGuinness. Ms. McGuinness?

18 MS. KATHLEEN MCGUINNESS: Thank you. Good
19 evening, everybody. I have been a pre-K teacher
20 in this building for 16 years. I am used to
21 speaking to people much shorter than I am. My
22 first--thank you. My first question is what is
23 going to be happening to the pre-K program in
24 this building. When I looked at the impact
25 statement that was put out on January 22nd, it

1 stated that 359 will serve students in
2 kindergarten through fifth grades and will offer
3 pre-kindergarten program when it reaches full
4 scale in 2016 with the sub-text being if the
5 funds are in existence at that point.

6 In an era where even the President of the
7 United States is devoting a substantial portion
8 of his State of the Union address to the fact
9 that pre-kindergarten is so important to the
10 growth of children and has such long-lasting
11 results, the even idea that they would remove it
12 from a needy school is incredible to me.

13 My other question is having been as part of
14 this school from when it was 156 and seeing what
15 happens when a school closes, what are the plans
16 to make a new school any better than it is now
17 when I have seen what happened when the school
18 closed to begin with and where the school was
19 improving at the time we were closed. It took a
20 nose dive when it was re-opened as the
21 Performance School.

22 I would like to know what plans does the DOE
23 have to be better than Mr. Hernandez is putting
24 us on a path right now. Thank you.

25 [applause]

1 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Ms. McGuinness.

2 Now we'll have Patricia Filomena.

3 MS. PATRICIA FILOMENA: Patricia Filomena,
4 District 7 UFT rep, but I'm not here to
5 represent only the staff members because I also
6 represent the parents and the children of the
7 school. And the children are the victims of
8 this nonsense. Bloomberg--Bloomberg opened the
9 school five years ago saying that 156 wasn't
10 doing the job, but he failed to put money into
11 the school. We have a large ELL population, and
12 we have a large special need population.
13 Without the resources, you can't do what we have
14 to do. Now, it's interesting because in five
15 years we've had three principals. The first
16 principal was gone at the end of December, let's
17 say, so we changed the vision. Then we have
18 another principal who comes in, and the
19 teachers, and the students, and the parents have
20 to get adjusted to a new principal. That
21 principal leaves, and we have a new principal,
22 and again we have to get adjusted, and the
23 school is not being given the chance. How many
24 times are we going to open and close schools in
25 District 7? Hasn't the DOE learned that you

1 have to put money into the schools in order
2 for the children to achieve? Because as I tell
3 you before, they are the victims.

4 [applause]

5 You need to know that if a school phases out
6 it's not the staff that suffers because they
7 have jobs. It's the children who suffer. Isn't
8 it time to stop? Enough is enough.

9 [applause]

10 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Ms. Filomena. Mr.
11 Rojas?

12 MR. LUIS ROJAS WITH INTERPRETER: Good
13 evening, everybody. [Foreign audio]. I live in
14 this community for 24 years. I am an activist
15 in this community. We fought for the
16 construction of this school, and now I'm being -
17 - to come fight so that they won't close it.
18 This is incredible. I stood on these streets to
19 fight to open up the school. Now I'm coming to
20 fight because they want to close it. A school
21 with all the problems that it has had it's been
22 the fault of the Department of Education. If
23 this has failed, how are you going to continue
24 something that has failed?

25 My children have developed and were raised

1 in this community in the Bronx here. My
2 daughter studied special education to fight the
3 same problems that these children are having.
4 These are many good children that come in here
5 without knowing English. They are evaluated in
6 English after six months of being in school.
7 Children that come in that don't know anything
8 and in six months are evaluated in mathematics.
9 It's impossible. It's incredible.

10 In the proposal it's been said what is
11 needed to better the schools, but it doesn't say
12 how much has been invested by the - - teachers,
13 what they've invested to deal with the
14 situation.

15 [applause]

16 When I say that my children were raised in
17 the public school system, in these schools my
18 son is prominent in this career, has graduated
19 from NYU with a Master's. He is working in a
20 big corporation. He's the fruit of these public
21 schools, and my daughters also graduated. She
22 has her Master's, and she works in this very
23 school.

24 [applause]

25 That to me makes me very proud. Thank you

1 very much.

2 MR. MOJICA: Thank you very much. Thank
3 you, sir. So, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to
4 at this point in time also call up, begin to
5 call up speakers six through ten. So speakers
6 six through ten can also assemble behind the
7 microphone, and right now we will be hearing
8 from MS. Marrero. Ms. Marrero?

9 MS. LILLIAN MARRERO: I wanted to address
10 the impact statement on page three. That
11 meeting that took place on November 7th with Ms.
12 Tores. It says here that the school serves a
13 difficult population including a high percentage
14 of illiterate students, students requiring
15 intensive social/emotional support, students who
16 lack resources.

17 First of all, that's not what I stated. I
18 stated we live, we have children here, multi-
19 cultural families, Africans, okay, Arabic,
20 people from Yemen. We have--this is a little
21 United Nations, and we need to be more sensitive
22 to the cultures and the needs of these families.
23 I also stated that this L-shaped school zone has
24 nine schools. I also stated, and it's not
25 reported here, that school now starts at 8:00 in

1 the morning, and at 7:30 in the morning on
2 156th Street and Morris Avenue there are no
3 school crossing guards, and since then Ms. Tores
4 two children have been struck by cars, two
5 children, because of that safety issue.

6 Okay, we have a new principal who is doing a
7 wonderful job. You people allowed Ms. Astraya
8 to fail because once she got the second C she
9 should have been booted out, not given the
10 opportunity to put in her papers for her
11 retirement. No, I'm not paying attention to
12 that because I'm illiterate.

13 [applause]

14 Yes, I'm illiterate too. I'm not paying
15 attention to that because if our kids are
16 illiterate so am I. I have four children. My
17 siblings, first grade, second, third, and a
18 fifth-grader, three IEPs, two take the bus, two
19 I drive. I'm one block away from PS277, but I
20 choose this school because I like this school
21 and I'm safe. I'm illiterate. I am safe here.
22 I trust everyone in this school going down to
23 the custodian. Do you understand? My kids like
24 it here.

25 My third-grader is a special needs

1 challenge, and she reads. She does third-
2 grade math. We got Mr. Hernandez, and I want
3 him to turn it around. You gave Astraya three
4 years. Let's give him three years starting
5 September. Not only that, we have--we have
6 excellent teachers here, which I trust every
7 teacher here. Okay? And again this is a
8 barrier free school. My two girls need the
9 elevator. One has mild CP. The other one has
10 other orthopedic issues. I'm not jumping from
11 three schools, three principals. You gave 277 a
12 chance. You gave 154 a chance. Give 385 a
13 chance.

14 [applause]

15 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Ms. Marrero. Thank
16 you.

17 MIXED VOICES: Give us a chance. [Repeated
18 by audience.]

19 MR. MOJICA: Ladies and gentlemen, I called
20 up speakers before. I just want to be sure, six
21 through ten, but also what I will do as well if
22 those speakers are not here, I will also call up
23 speakers 11 through 15. So, once again, I just
24 wanted to recall members 6 through 10, speakers
25 six through ten, and if those speakers are not

1 here, then if speakers 11 through 15 could
2 assemble behind the microphone thank you very
3 much. Sharron - - .

4 MS. SHARRON JACKSON: Good afternoon, ladies
5 and gentlemen. My name is Sharron - - Jackson.
6 I'm the mother of a special needs child. He's
7 Down Syndrome, hyperactive attention deficit
8 disorder, and he needs a barrier-free school.
9 This is the only barrier-free school in this
10 area, and my child needs this school. Okay, and
11 I'm going to go to my notes.

12 Phasing our school out should be the last
13 resort. The system is playing a dangerous game
14 with my son, our children's education, and their
15 future. All our children is hearing from the
16 DOE that they're under-performing, they are not
17 good enough. Let me let you all know something
18 this afternoon. You all are playing Russian
19 roulette with my child's education, and I will
20 not stand back and see that happen. You all are
21 not going to push my child under the bus this
22 evening because I'm going to back it up on you
23 all.

24 [applause]

25 Last September our school had a new

1 principal in Mr. Hernandez. He has integrated
2 in the running of the school. He has ensured
3 that there is optimal parent involvement and all
4 the parents are on board. Workshop has been
5 implemented. Our parents' partner workshop,
6 Wake Up New York, new - - program, additional
7 curriculum activities has been implemented.
8 Saturday academy has implemented. We have a
9 change in staff. We had a change in staff. The
10 sheep have been severed from the goat. Now, let
11 the shepherd shepherd the sheep.

12 [applause]

13 Our principal ensures that optimal time and
14 tasks by teachers are carried out to ensure that
15 the time table has been taught. Our principal
16 has an open-door policy. He has good
17 administration qualities. He knows every
18 student by name. He walks the halls of this
19 school. He is in every class. He has a plan.
20 Our principal ensures--can I have some water
21 please?

22 [laughter]

23 Our principal ensured that optimal time and
24 task by teachers are carried out. He ensured
25 that the time table has been taught. I said

1 that already okay. The principal had an open-
2 door policy and has administration qualities.
3 He has known every student by name. How do you
4 expect our principal to fix a broken system in
5 three months? You want positive consequences?
6 You have to give us time. How do you expect him
7 to fix something in three months that it took
8 three years for Ms. Astraya to mash up?

9 [applause]

10 You cannot--DOE is bullying our children.
11 This is a high-handed way of doing it because
12 you all have the ammunition to do it, and I'm
13 asking you all, I'm telling you all give us a
14 chance because we have intertwined with our
15 principal. We have bonded with our principal,
16 and we are going to make this work if you all
17 give us the chance. You all promised to give us--
18 you all haven't given us a quality review in so
19 long. Come in and give us a quality review and
20 let you all see where we are today. Give our
21 children a chance because I am sick and tired of
22 my child--see that little boy there? He is who
23 I live for? Shaquan [phonetic] say hi. That's
24 my Down Syndrome child. You hear me? He is one
25 of the smartest child in PS385 because he has a

1 teacher and a principal as Mr. Hernandez.
2 When Ms. Astraya was here, I asked to see her.
3 My child has been in this school for three
4 years. I have never seen that principal. The
5 first time I saw that principal was the day when
6 she was ready to leave the school. She never
7 opened her door to see me.

8 Let me tell you all something. Give my
9 child a chance. Give our children a chance.
10 I'm standing here for every mother's boy and
11 every father's girl. Give our children a
12 chance.

13 [applause]

14 MR. MOJICA: Thank you.

15 MS. AISHA SANKAREN: Hi, my name is Aisha.
16 You should--the DOE don't know what they're
17 doing cause this school, the teachers and the
18 principals did their best to make the children
19 learn. They made the children have an
20 education, but now that you all are closing
21 this, you are phasing out the school, ya'll are
22 crazy people that don't know what all you are
23 doing. Just let--just give this school a
24 chance. If you all don't give this school a
25 chance, I could go sue you all right now.

1 [applause]

2 People are fighting for our school. People
3 love this school because the principals and the
4 teachers are trying their best to keep this
5 school open. But the DOE is phasing out this
6 school.

7 [applause]

8 MS. MARIAH PERDOMA: Hi, my name is Mariah,
9 and I'm a freshman at NYC Museum School. I
10 attended this school four years ago and
11 graduated the school four years ago in the fifth
12 grade in 2009. I attended the school since pre-
13 K all the way till fifth grade, and then I
14 graduated the school as the salutatorian of the
15 school, and went to graduate MS223, one of the
16 greatest schools in the Bronx. PS385 has
17 prepared me for the opportunities I have gotten,
18 and this is the second phasing I have witnessed
19 as I witnessed the phasing of PS156 as well back
20 in 2008 when I was in fourth grade. Everyone
21 felt as failures due to the fact that the
22 school's report card was low, and the students
23 now feel the same way. I wouldn't want PS385 to
24 go as well as I bet all the children here do not
25 as well. We all have memories, have grown

1 special relationships with each other, with
2 the teachers with the staff, and due to the
3 closing it will affect us all so give all the
4 students, the teachers, the staff, and the
5 principal a chance to redeem themselves.

6 [applause]

7 MR. MOJICA: I just want to make sure we
8 have speakers 13 and 14 next so I want to be
9 sure those speakers are up at the microphone and
10 then also at this time as the next speaker comes
11 up if we can have speakers 16 and 17 also
12 assemble by the microphone. Thank you, ladies
13 and gentlemen.

14 MS. JANE MAISEL: Thank you. My name is
15 Jane Maisel. I'm a former staff member, long-
16 time teacher in both private and public schools,
17 so I'm very connected to the DOE. My biggest
18 connection is through this school when I was a
19 staff person here. I was the literacy coach and
20 also because my son who has special needs was
21 not able to be helped by special schools and
22 private schools, and the time I first came to
23 get real help for him was through the New York
24 City Department of Education. They stepped
25 forward and said we will take your son, we'll

1 try, and they tried and they succeeded. I say
2 to people, they saved his life. That is the
3 potential that the Department of Education has,
4 not just with special needs children but with
5 all of our children. We should keep that--thank
6 you, we should keep that in mind, the tremendous
7 potential for good that the DOE has. When I
8 heard that this school was being closed for a
9 second time, I hit the ceiling. I couldn't
10 believe it that this damage that had been done
11 once before was about to happen again. I said
12 to my husband, I've got to go. I'm going over
13 to the Bronx right now. Change all of our
14 plans. I came over, and I found parents and
15 teachers who thought that it was over in some
16 cases and said we're fighting anyway but we
17 don't think there's any hope. As we spent time
18 together they realized that it was worth the
19 fight to stand up and speak for their children.
20 And they found ways to do it. They found
21 remarkable, creative ways. You see the
22 creativity tonight and the power and the passion
23 of these teachers and these parents. I have
24 been honored to be getting to know some new
25 people and re-acquainting myself with the

1 wonderful staff that has been here all along,
2 through--as you've heard through thick and thin.
3 They've stayed. They've stayed for these
4 children. Do not throw that away. When I got
5 here, they said we've finally got a great
6 principal, and they started showering me with
7 all kinds of information about how things are
8 getting so much better and I was so thrilled to
9 hear it. So I am honored and thankful for being
10 included in this fight for the life of the
11 school and the life of these children and the
12 community. Thank you.

13 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Ms. Maisel. Next
14 speaker.

15 STUDENT 1: Okay, thank you. I want to say
16 that it's not fair that our school is shutting
17 down because like right now Mr. Hernandez when
18 we would go like, when I would be in my class he
19 would come and help me, but last year, last year
20 nobody--not even the principal came and helped
21 me. But now thank God I have Mr. Hernandez
22 helping me.

23 [applause]

24 MR. MOJICA: Thank you very much.

25 MR. GREGORY DELT: Good evening. My name is

1 Gregory Delt. I'm a former president of the
2 PTA and chairman of the SLT. I have two
3 children here at the moment. One is a third-
4 grader, one is pre-K. Hello? And I've been
5 involved in the process of the SLT the entire
6 time my children have been here. I've seen us
7 go from a failing school, from an F to a C, but
8 then I also saw how the DOE changed the core
9 curriculum standards, and they increased the
10 difficulty of the test that they gave the kids
11 to decide whether or not they go on to the next
12 grade. From that very point, the school went
13 from a school that is transitioning upwards to a
14 school that automatically failed because the
15 kids could not meet the new standards that the
16 DOE brought in. Now, if you guys are going to
17 use those particular scores to determine the
18 future of the school, then perhaps you should
19 pro rate the scores to see how they would apply
20 if you used the same standards in that method
21 because that is not fair to the kids. You are
22 giving them less than a year to learn completely
23 new material in a completely different manner,
24 and they were not prepared for that. Now, you
25 can't necessarily blame the teachers. You can't

1 necessarily blame the principals. They just
2 were not prepared wit the new rules that you
3 guys came up with in order to grade the adequacy
4 of the school. Now if you want something like
5 that to bear any kind of weight, then you have
6 to make a more just way to apply it because
7 otherwise no school is going to make it, and I
8 just want to say one last thing. You can have
9 whoever you like as a teacher here. You can
10 have whoever you like as a principal here. If
11 when kids get home at night parents are not
12 working with their kids to enforce what they
13 have learned we are going to be in the same
14 situation again because no matter what the
15 scores are, if they are not prepared, they are
16 not going to be prepared. So the parents have
17 to work with their kids when they get them home
18 and make sure that they know what they have been
19 taught during the day so that we don't have to
20 go through this situation again. Thank you.

21 [applause]

22 DR. DIANE HERNANDEZ: Hi, I'm Dr. Diane
23 Hernandez. I'm an assistant professor at
24 Columbia University. I'm also a local resident,
25 and so today I come as a concerned resident and

1 as someone who myself made it through a nearby
2 public school, in fact so did Mr. Hernandez.
3 He's my brother, and I want to make--

4 [applause]

5 But I want to make clear tonight that my
6 appeal is not for Mr. Hernandez, but it's for
7 our children. And it's the children of our
8 community that we both are very much invested
9 in, and I want to also assure you that Mr.
10 Hernandez will have many options moving forward.
11 In fact, he's already been offered multiple
12 positions, so this is not about saving his job.
13 What really stands to be lost are the growing
14 opportunities for our children. I came in the
15 other day, it was actually Valentine's Day, and
16 I happened to be in the neighborhood. I'm
17 buying a property nearby and had 30 minutes
18 before my meeting, and I came in and I was
19 greeted by the security guard and she told me
20 that Mr. Hernandez was downstairs in the
21 gymnasium walking the children up from
22 breakfast, and I walked with him and very much
23 in the same analogy that you used around the
24 shepherd moving the sheep forward, in fact that
25 is actually how I felt. He, and I say this

1 because this was just my first vision and my
2 first opportunity to see him in action. He knew
3 their names. He knew the students' names, but
4 more importantly he knew anecdotes about every
5 one of his students and was able to share with
6 me something about each and every one of them.
7 So by virtue of him I also get to be introduced
8 to so many of our young spirits who have so much
9 to offer to our world.

10 In a community where father involvement is
11 discouraged by social policy, Mr. Hernandez has
12 taken on the role as an role model. It an
13 unintended but critical consequence of his role
14 as a principal here, and in his former position
15 in the school that we both went to as children,
16 PS35, Mr. Hernandez demonstrated results both in
17 school performance and test scores but also in
18 elevating teachers' practice and giving children
19 and families additional resources and renewed
20 hope. Mr. Hernandez, soon to be Dr. Hernandez,
21 has invested in his own education. He holds two
22 Master's Degrees, and is in process to get a
23 doctorate in education, so he not only talks the
24 talk, but he walks it in his own personal life.

25 [applause]

1 We're actually very lucky to have him.
2 Somebody like him will very, very quickly be
3 scooped up somewhere else. Our family outings
4 are often filled with critical ideas and plans
5 for meaningful educational reform, and this goes
6 beyond rhetoric. It is demonstrated in action
7 and a deep commitment on the part of Mr.
8 Hernandez. Our children and families face
9 enough chaos, and research shows that
10 institutions can help mitigate the effects of
11 poverty. What is more fundamental than
12 educational institutions? Schools are the
13 alternative to an abyss, the abyss that most of
14 our children will ultimately face in the
15 criminal justice system and otherwise if we
16 don't give them fair chances, so how dare we not
17 afford our children the chance to be ushered in
18 the vision of Mr. Hernandez.

19 MR. MOJICA: Thank you very much. Ladies
20 and gentlemen, before we hear from Council
21 Member Arroyo, I just wanted to make sure that
22 the last person signed up to speak was Ms.
23 Sierra Sanchez [phonetic]. I just want to make
24 sure that Ms. Sanchez is not--is she here? Did
25 she speak previously? I just want to be able to

1 give one last opportunity. I'm sorry, - - ?

2 FEMALE VOICE: [off mic]

3 MR. MOJICA: Absolutely. Thank you, Council
4 Member.

5 STUDENT 2: I was living in Brooklyn and
6 then I moved to Bronx, so my school in Brooklyn
7 I had to move schools to PS385. So, the first
8 time I saw Ms. Astraya, she barely came into my
9 classes, but then the next year Mr. Hernandez
10 the first day of school he came into our class,
11 then on and on and on and yeah, the first time I
12 came I was scared, but I met new friends, and
13 kids that are special in needs, they're still
14 smart, and they could get better and go to
15 college, but they--the school is closing so that
16 won't help the children get into college and it
17 will cut down the time that they need to learn,
18 but I can't believe they're closing it down when
19 they have a new principal that's better than Ms.
20 Astraya, and he is always on top of his case and
21 like I don't know why, but they need to--they
22 need to keep the school open because then the
23 kids could get a better chance to learn and go
24 to college.

25 [applause]

1 MR. MOJICA: Thank you very much. Council
2 Member Arroyo.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you, Jesse.
4 Good evening, everyone. My name is Maria Del
5 Carmen Arroyo. I am the City Council member
6 that represents former PS156, now 385, and I
7 don't know what you're going to name it, but
8 thank you, Deputy Chancellor for being here, Ms.
9 Tores for being here. You have many of these
10 sessions in the community throughout the
11 district. I don't come to all of them because
12 no one wants a failing school in their
13 community, and I trust that what you aspire to
14 do is the right thing, but three to four weeks
15 ago I met with a group of parents from 385.
16 That is why I'm here today because I heard their
17 plea for giving the school a chance, and I had
18 to come here and echo their remarks and their
19 sentiment. I just met Mr. Hernandez, but I love
20 him already, not because I know him, but because
21 the parents spoke in support of his leadership
22 so strongly and so passionately, and many who
23 were in my office that day were not proficient
24 in English. I encouraged them as nervous as
25 they might have been to come here to speak in

1 their language and to force you to have a
2 translator for them. I guess the nerves got the
3 better of them, and I'm sorry. I'm sure that
4 they are in the audience, and they are not going
5 to dare to speak because they are nervous about
6 it.

7 We also need to understand that there are
8 parents that are part of this education system
9 that are not-that are afraid to come forward and
10 speak because their immigration status is
11 something that haunts them and makes them
12 believe that someone will do them harm or turn
13 them in to Immigration Services. We know that
14 the Department of Education doesn't do that, but
15 they don't trust us enough to believe that, so
16 the fact that not more parents are signed up to
17 speak tonight is a testament to the fact that
18 they are afraid of the system.

19 So I am here to voice their plea to you to
20 give Mr. Hernandez a chance. Give this school
21 an opportunity to keep the momentum going, keep
22 the momentum moving forward in a positive, more
23 importantly community relationship because the
24 parents have the comparison of the former
25 principal and the current principal. They are

1 days apart, day and night, and feel very
2 strongly, and passionate and committed to being
3 part of not just as an individual parent, but as
4 part of the overall school community to make
5 sure that the progress that the school has made
6 in the few months that this principal has been
7 here continue and that we provide him, you and
8 I, provide him resources that are necessary to
9 make sure we have a quality learning environment
10 for our students, and that's my commitment to
11 you.

12 So I'm not here moaning and groaning and
13 whining about DOE and everything that you do and
14 how much I disagree with you all the time
15 because God knows we don't agree all the time,
16 but I'm here tonight because the parents spoke
17 so loudly and so strongly in support of allowing
18 this new school administration an opportunity.
19 I really don't understand how you can have a
20 phase-out public hearing today and a co-location
21 hearing on Monday for the same building. We
22 believe, I want to believe that this is a
23 democratic process and that you are going to
24 take what you hear tonight, weigh it, and factor
25 it into the decision whether or not you will

1 keep the school on the phase-out list or not.
2 You can't convince me that you have not already
3 made a decision when you announce a co-location
4 hearing for Monday the 25th.

5 [applause]

6 I hope. I hope. I hope that you take what
7 you hear tonight not from me because you and I
8 get to see each other all the time, from these
9 parents who have a deep commitment and a true
10 belief that if you give their new principal an
11 opportunity that they are going to make you
12 proud that you made a decision to keep the
13 school open. We cannot continue the practice of
14 dumping what didn't work and creating something
15 new. We've got to find a new strategy for how
16 we deal with failing schools. This phasing out,
17 closing and co-locating process that you guys
18 have done for the last I don't know how many
19 years is not working, and I want you to tell me
20 how many of the schools under the Mayor's school
21 control have been opened and failed because that
22 is something that's never been put out in the
23 public, but I know that 385 is one of them. 156
24 closed, you created 385, you give people hope
25 and belief and wham, four years later, they are

1 out the door. It doesn't work. It does not
2 work. We have seen this movie before, and we
3 know how it's going to end. I was at another
4 public hearing last week at the Jonathan Levine
5 [phonetic] school, cried because students, these
6 people who live in this school want to believe
7 that their voices matter. Give us a different
8 ending to this movie. Please don't make it a
9 you already made a decision and this is a dog
10 and pony show. I don't want to believe that you
11 would disrespect us like that.

12 [applause]

13 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Council Member.
14 Thank you, Council Member. We will now begin
15 the question and answer period. Remember, there
16 will be some individual questions and others
17 that have been bucketed into categories, ladies
18 and gentlemen. Any question that is not
19 answered here tonight will be answered--the
20 answer will be posted on the web site. If you
21 have additional questions at the conclusion, at
22 the end of tonight's proceedings, we ask that
23 you direct them to us via the phone number or e-
24 mail address on the fax sheet. Also, ladies and
25 gentlemen, I know that there were speakers who

1 had testimony and they read the testimony into
2 the record. We can also accept the written
3 testimony of the speakers of this evening also
4 handed in to us as well. We are recording our
5 sessions, but also if there are members of the
6 audience who have written testimony who would
7 like to accept that, we would also accept that
8 as well. Deputy Chancellor?

9 MS. KATHLEEN GRIMM: Thank you, Jesse, and I
10 want to thank everybody here again for what are
11 really I think your heart-felt comments. It's
12 clear there's a lot of passion here in this
13 room, in this community for this school, not
14 just from the educators, but the students, the
15 families, and the community groups and
16 individuals who spoke, all of whom support the
17 school. So we have heard all of this, and
18 certainly the success stories were wonderful
19 that we heard. We will go back. We will weigh
20 it. As I said earlier we have to weigh it in
21 light of what we believe is best in terms of how
22 much time does it take to really achieve what
23 everybody in this room clearly wants and how do
24 we think about all the children, not just the
25 success stories we've heard. But I assure you

1 that everything you have said will be
2 considered.

3 I'd like now just to try to respond to a few
4 specific questions that are still outstanding.
5 We had many questions as to why the Department
6 is proposing to phase out this school and why
7 now, which I think we really a theme that so
8 many expressed. And as I said earlier, we
9 expect--we rely on all of our schools to provide
10 the highest quality education to all of our
11 children. So, if a school, if we look at the
12 data and the school doesn't seem to be doing
13 what we expect, we are compelled to take some
14 action. Now, we certainly commend the efforts
15 of your principal, and the teachers here, and
16 all the staff, but our experience shows us you
17 know, not just in this district but in this
18 borough and across the city we have never seen
19 extra time result in a kind of dramatic
20 improvement that we're looking for.

21 So, no, no, let's be respectful. We will as
22 I say weigh all of the comments and the
23 materials that you've given us, and we will
24 weigh it in the context of our current and
25 future students. Now, we also had many

1 questions about the timing of the decision and
2 what information and feedback will be taken into
3 account after this hearing is closed. We've
4 gotten several letters from the community and a
5 couple more tonight that we'll take back, not
6 just from your community members but also your
7 elected officials. We've listened very closely
8 to what has been said tonight and you've all
9 given us a lot to think about. We'll take all
10 of that back, and we will discuss it with the
11 chancellor and the other--the deputy
12 chancellors. We'll do all of this in the next
13 few weeks, and if we continue to believe that we
14 have to propose this action, it will of course
15 be taken to the panel on March 11th.

16 One other very specific question I want to
17 clear the air about, and that was a question
18 about plans for the pre-K, the pre-kindergarten.
19 Our proposal is that the new school would open
20 in September with pre-K, kindergarten, first,
21 and second grade. There are two sections of
22 pre-K in Performance School and if the proposals
23 are approved, there would be two sections of
24 pre-K in the new school in September. I think
25 there was a little misunderstanding about that,

1 and I wanted to make sure everyone had that
2 information.

3 Again, I want to really thank you for
4 sharing your passion, and your observations, and
5 your beliefs with us. Jesse I think is going to
6 give you information. If you have any other
7 comments, there is still time to share it with
8 us, and you're going to tell people how to do
9 that, Jesse, aren't you? Thank you.

10 MR. MOJICA: Thank you, Deputy Chancellor.
11 Ladies and gentlemen, I also want to echo the
12 Deputy Chancellor's thanks to everyone today and
13 for all of your feedback and comments. A few
14 bits of information that I want to make sure
15 that the attendees of tonight's meeting have is
16 that the information that we have tonight will
17 be shared with the Panel for Educational Policy,
18 which will have its hearing vote on proposals on
19 March 11th at the Brooklyn Technical High School
20 at 29-4 Green Plaza in Brooklyn, New York.
21 Public comment, additional public comment,
22 public comment can be submitted via e-mail or
23 phone as I indicated before up until March 10th
24 at 12:00 a.m. You may submit feedback via phone
25 by calling the number 212-374-5159. I will

1 repeat that. That's 212-374-5159, or in
2 writing by e-mailing
3 D07Proposals@schools.NYC.gov. I will repeat
4 that as well. That's
5 D07Proposals@schools.NYC.gov. This information
6 is also included at the bottom of the fax
7 sheets, and I thank everyone for coming. This
8 joint public hearing is officially adjourned.
9 Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

10 [applause]

11 [END RECORDING]

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

The prior proceedings were transcribed from audio files and have been transcribed to the best of my ability.

Signature Trisha Ruckert

Date February 25, 2013