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**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION - DIVISION OF
PORTFOLIO PLANNING
Phase Out and Replacement for Aspire
Preparatory - 1/23/12**

1 [START RECORDING]

2 MR. GREGG BETHIEL: Good evening. We will
3 discuss the proposed phase out of Aspire
4 Preparatory Middle School, 11-322, beginning in
5 the 2012-2013 school year, and proposed opening
6 - - new middle school, that's 11-556, will be -
7 - Aspire Preparatory Middle School, 11-322,
8 Bronx Street Middle School 11-326, and - -
9 Academy - - 11-468 in Building X-135, beginning
10 2012-2013 school year. Tonight's proceedings
11 will be recorded and transcribed.

12 Before we begin the hearing, if there is
13 anyone who wishes to speak during the public
14 comment portion of the evening, sign up at the
15 table in the back. The sign up will end 15
16 minutes from now, at approximately 6:30. If you
17 have a question that you want to be addressed
18 during the question and answer portion of the
19 agenda, please write that question on the index
20 card provided with that, and submit them to a
21 volunteer by the table. Only people who have
22 signed up to speak will be able to participate
23 and allowed to comment, so if you would like to
24 make a comment, we ask that you take the
25 opportunity to sign up now.

1 All panel participants were asked to be
2 here no later than 5:30 p.m. and now that we
3 have started, if a panel participant arrives
4 late, he or she will be given time to speak at
5 the first opportune moment, once we have
6 discussed everybody's side, including those in
7 the public who have come out to comment this
8 evening. There may be elected officials who
9 arrive at different times throughout the
10 meeting. If they wish to speak, we will do our
11 best to accommodate them at the first opportune
12 moment. Those who were here at the start of the
13 public comment segment will be asked to speak
14 first. We are beginning the hearing now at 6:15
15 p.m. Please look at the agenda that is
16 available around the room and outside, the
17 format will include a presentation of the
18 proposal, and presentations by the hearing
19 participants up here at the desk, followed by
20 public comment. Speakers should have already
21 signed up at the table in the lobby. If you
22 have not done so, please again, take the
23 opportunity to do that, so we can make sure
24 everybody is heard. Public comments can be no
25 longer than two minutes each, the time will be

1 strictly followed and speakers will be informed
2 when their designated time has ended. There
3 will be a timekeeper who will let the speaker
4 know when there are 30 seconds remaining and
5 when their two minutes is up. There will be a
6 question and answer period. Members of the
7 audience, if you have a question, you have to
8 write your question on a postcard that is
9 supplied at the sign in table when you arrived
10 this evening. While public comments are taking
11 place, staff members will organize the questions
12 into categories and get them ready for the
13 question and answer period. Some questions will
14 be asked directly and others will be batched
15 under headings in order to avoid repetitiveness.

16 Even though all individual questions will
17 not be addressed in the forum tonight, the
18 answers will be on the website prior to the
19 panel on educational policy meeting on February
20 9th.

21 If at the end of the hearing you still have
22 questions, we encourage you to direct them to us
23 by calling the number at the bottom of the facts
24 sheet, that you could have gathered outside, or
25 send them via email to us at the address also

1 provided on the fact sheets.

2 I would now like to introduce the panel
3 which has been assembled for this evening's
4 joint public hearings. Starting at the far end
5 is Principal Steven Cobb, Principal of Aspire.
6 Mr. Cobb, thank you for coming tonight.

7 [cheering, applause]

8 I would also like to introduce our
9 Superintendent, Elizabeth White.

10 [cheering, applause]

11 And Deputy Chancellor, Kathleen Grimm.

12 It is possible that members of the Community
13 Education Council will join us when they arrive,
14 in fact I see them being waved to right now, we
15 will introduce them as soon as they come down.

16 Just joining us at the table is the
17 President, Petra Napoleon, of the Community
18 Education Council. Thank you for joining us
19 this evening.

20 [applause]

21 There are a few other folks who are not with
22 us at the desk tonight but who are here, Grace
23 Loraglio, who is the Second Vice President.

24 [applause]

25 And also Elizabeth - -.

1 [applause]

2 We also have, from Aspire, Irene Estrada
3 Rukaj.

4 [cheering, applause]

5 Irene is my favorite coordinator.

6 FEMALE VOICE: - -

7 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you. Nixa Rivera,
8 also from Aspire.

9 [cheering, applause]

10 From - - we have Renee Olen [phonetic].

11 [cheering, applause]

12 And Gilbert Rodriguez [phonetic].

13 [cheering, applause]

14 And - -.

15 [cheering, applause]

16 And from - - Chrystal Charles Johnson
17 [phonetic].

18 [cheering, applause]

19 And - -.

20 [applause]

21 Is there anybody that I missed? Okay. What
22 we will do once we start the public comment
23 portion is those who are signed up, we will call
24 you up in groups of five, the microphone will be
25 on this side, so we will get the mic up here, we

1 will make sure that everybody has a chance.
2 Each speaker has a number assigned to them and
3 we will be calling you up by numbers. We will
4 look first to elected officials, should any
5 arrive during the hearing.

6 With that, I would like to opportunity to
7 introduce Deputy Chancellor Kathleen Grimm, who
8 will read the proposal.

9 MS. KATHLEEN GRIMM: Thank you very much.
10 Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I would
11 like to thank all of you for being here this
12 evening. This joint public hearing has been
13 convened to discuss the proposed phase out and
14 replacement of Aspire Preparatory Middle School.
15 The decision to phase out a school is not an
16 easy one to make, and we don't take these
17 decisions lightly. We examine many factors, and
18 much data, before we propose a course of action.
19 As part of that process, we also reach out to
20 families and community members. Before I
21 support the Aspire proposal, I would like to say
22 a few words about why we are here.

23 All of us count on our schools to provide a
24 high quality education for students. And we
25 must hold all schools to the same standard of

1 excellence, because every child in this city
2 deserves the very best possible education. When
3 a school isn't getting the job done, we have to
4 take action to ensure that its current students
5 don't fall even further behind, and new students
6 will have better results.

7 Aspire Preparatory Middle School was located
8 for a year at 2441 Wallace Avenue, in Community
9 School District 11 in the Bronx. It currently
10 serves students in Grades 6 through 8. On
11 December 19, 2011, - - the proposals to phase
12 out and replace Aspire Preparatory Middle
13 School, - - struggles and - -. On January 13,
14 2012, the Department - - made the proposal to
15 phase out and replace Aspire. The amended EIS
16 corrected information about the capacity of 6th
17 Grade Students in District 11.

18 Aspire's performance data indicates that the
19 school - - and it confirmed the Department's
20 assessment that this school lacks the capacity
21 to turnaround to better support these students
22 needs. - -

23 Aspire earned an overall "F" grade on the
24 2010-2011 annual progress report. Including
25 efforts for student progress, and school - - and

1 a "D" grade for student performance. In 2010-
2 2011, the majority of Aspire Students remained
3 below grade level in both English and
4 Mathematics. Only 24 percent of the students
5 were performing at grade level in English and
6 only 38 percent of students were performing at
7 grade level in mathematics. The school is also
8 not accountable when helping the students to
9 make progress. Aspire is in the bottom nine
10 percent of all middle schools city-wide, in
11 terms of learning growth in English and the
12 bottom six percent of all middle schools city-
13 wide in terms of learning growth in mathematics.
14 If these omissions persist, Aspire students will
15 fall further behind their peers in other
16 schools. Because of these evaluations, the
17 Department conducted a comprehensive review of
18 the school to determine which supports and
19 interventions would best benefit these students
20 and the community. The Department also
21 consulted superintendents and other experienced
22 educators who have worked closely with the
23 school and helped community leaders, the
24 parents, and school staff, to solicit feedback.
25 Based on this comprehensive review, an evidence

1 - - The Department believes that only the most
2 serious intervention, the phase out and eventual
3 closure of the school, will address these
4 longstanding performance failures and will
5 produce good options to develop that will better
6 serve future students in the community.

7 Aspire Preparatory Middle School is located
8 in Building X135, - - campus, and it is co-
9 located in two - - Bronx Learning Academy, and -
10 - a co-location means that two or more school
11 organizations are located in the same building,
12 and they share large common spaces such as the
13 auditorium, gymnasium, and cafeteria. The
14 Department has proposed to welcome in and co-
15 locate a new middle school, 11X556 in this
16 building, which would serve students in 6th
17 through 8th grade and will reach full size in
18 2014-15. This new proposed school, 11X556,
19 would be co-located with Aspire, Bronx - -
20 Middle School, and - - Academy of - - as Aspire
21 Preparatory Middle School Phases out and the new
22 middle school phases in. If this proposal is
23 approved, middle school 556 will give new
24 students, through the campus choice admissions
25 method, it would give priority to students zoned

1 into the learning campus, and after seats are
2 filled, through the campus choice process, any
3 remaining available seats would be opened for
4 the district-wide middle school choice process
5 by a limited application method. If this
6 proposal is approved, current 5th graders in the
7 zone would receive information about the new
8 school, and have an opportunity to revise their
9 middle school application rankings. The
10 proposed collocation of middle school 556 is not
11 expected to impact admissions, enrollment, or
12 instructional programming at Bronx - -, - -
13 Academy, or Aspire Prep.

14 Now, before we move to the public comment
15 section of this evening, I would like to briefly
16 discuss the impact of this proposal on the
17 current Aspire students and families, if this
18 proposal is approved.

19 If approved, Aspire Prep Middle School would
20 be phased out gradually over the next three
21 years. It would no longer admit new 6th grade
22 students after the end of this school year. The
23 current 6th and 7th grade students would be
24 supported by supported by Aspire as they
25 progress toward completion of their middle

1 school and transition to high school. The
2 current 8th grade students at Aspire will meet
3 promotional requirements, and all will apply for
4 high school through the city-wide high school
5 admissions process, and those who have - - will
6 do so in round two of this process, and that is
7 regardless of whether or not this proposal is
8 approved.

9 So Aspire Preparatory Middle School would
10 close after June 2014. At the end of the 2014
11 school year, when the school is scheduled to
12 close, any Aspire students who do not meet
13 promotional standards will be placed at another
14 District 11 middle school or at a middle school
15 in the district in which the student resides.

16 I want to thank you all very much and we all
17 look forward tonight to hearing your comments
18 and your questions about this proposal. Thank
19 you.

20 [applause]

21 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you, Deputy
22 Chancellor. Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for
23 your patience as we have read the proposal into
24 public record. We are going to close the
25 speaker list in just a minute. If there is

1 anybody who arrived late and wanted to sign up
2 for the public speaks portion, please make sure
3 you do so now and we will begin to call folks
4 from that list in just a second. The list is in
5 the back of the room where you checked in.

6 With that, I will turn it over to Principal
7 Cobb, who is representing the school leadership
8 team, and I know he has a good presentation.

9 MR. STEVEN COBB: Thank you. Thank you all
10 for coming out.

11 [applause]

12 I am Steven Cobb, Principal of Aspire
13 Preparatory. I am here representing our school
14 leadership team, and you have heard the
15 proposal, and our school leadership team
16 respectfully disagrees with the proposal of
17 phase out. That is what our communication will
18 be.

19 This is Mr. - - he is our Co-PTA President.

20 [applause]

21 I'd like to thank the teachers and the
22 parents as well as I see some former students
23 here, thank you for coming out in the rain to
24 support us. We really appreciate it.

25 [applause]

1 Our presentation does not take a long time
2 but we do want to paint a full picture of what
3 Aspire Preparatory is. I was the founding
4 principal, I have been here since 2006, and so
5 here is Aspire as we have seen it through the
6 years.

7 Between 2006 and 2011, these are the facts
8 for Aspire Preparatory. We have had annual
9 gains in math and English language arts, we have
10 an excellent record of attendance, and we also
11 have been able to produce noteworthy gains in
12 special education as well as with our students
13 who are Black and Hispanic, low performing
14 students. These are the facts. When we look at
15 the facts and we look at the numbers, these are
16 the numbers. We started in 2006 and we were a
17 phase-in school, because X135 was phased out,
18 and we had immediate gain, and as you can see
19 through the years, each year there was gains
20 that were progress. When we got to 2010, as you
21 all know, there was a change in the way the New
22 York State tests were scored, and so there was a
23 correction that impacted Aspire Preparatory as
24 well as all other schools in the city and state,
25 and so when you see the negative growth was last

1 year, you will see a negative four percent
2 growth in the LA and a negative three percent
3 growth in math, and we will talk about the
4 particular circumstances after a while - -

5 But before we do that, I want to talk about
6 our former success. We have some of our former
7 students here, and this is what the fact sheets
8 do not say about Aspire Preparatory. We have
9 had three graduating classes, and in that time
10 we have taken the time and opportunity to really
11 push our students, students who many wouldn't
12 believe would be able to handle these courses,
13 and we have offered them, we have nurtured them
14 to be successful in their courses here before
15 they left. We had 116 students take the
16 integrated Algebra regent, and pass it. We had
17 33 students pass the - - regent. We have had 50
18 students pass the Geometry regent - -

19 [cheering, applause]

20 Because when you look at the Geometry
21 regent, you can't find the middle schools in the
22 Bronx, let alone the city, that would give
23 students the opportunity to take those regents.
24 So we did send them out to the community, and
25 they were successful. And then on top of that,

1 we had 11 of our students test into the
2 specialized high schools.

3 [applause]

4 And that - - you know like I know the Bronx
5 is sorely underrepresented - -

6 [applause]

7 Every year we have had students that go to
8 the specialized high schools, and that is
9 something to be proud of.

10 [applause]

11 Some of the data that the Department of
12 Education provides is data about where our
13 students are now, after they graduate. So
14 looking at that data for our graduating class,
15 this is what we see. For all of our students,
16 in all sub-groups, we know that our students go
17 to school. They have a higher attendance rate
18 than the borough and in - -

19 [cheering, applause]

20 And these students go on to actually passing
21 their regents, specifically in math and English.

22 [applause]

23 Now for those students that we have had the
24 pleasure of serving who received special
25 education services, their outcomes are even

1 better. Not only are they going to school but
2 they are also accumulating credits, which is
3 important if you want to graduate. You can be
4 in school for four years and not have credits,
5 that is not the case for our students, and they
6 are passing their regents. We have students
7 that have graduated with IEP and special
8 education services, but they are passing their
9 regents at a grade higher than their peers in
10 the borough as well as in the city.

11 [cheering, applause]

12 And in - - Black and Latino students
13 attendance, our students, when they come to
14 Aspire, they are in the habit of coming to
15 school and enjoying their time at school and
16 that carries on with them. They are
17 accumulating credits and they too are passing
18 regents at a higher rate than the average for
19 their peers in the borough and in the city.
20 Now, when you talk about schools and their
21 impact, this is our record. Our students leave
22 here ready for high school, ready to learn, and
23 ready to do what it takes to go to college and
24 beyond, which is our daily mission.

25 [cheering, applause]

1 So you heard what Chancellor Grimm talked
2 about, she talked about the progress and she
3 talked about the issues that we had last year,
4 and we do not run away from what happened last
5 year. I was here last year, every day last
6 year, and it was a very rough and ugly period
7 for Aspire Preparatory, and we do not--we agree
8 that last year was a difficult year, but we
9 think when you do a comprehensive review of what
10 happened here last year, you cannot overlook the
11 atypical circumstances that we had last year,
12 which affected our positive role in regards to -
13 -

14 So this is a snapshot. Last year, Aspire
15 Preparatory, our projected registry was 572
16 students, which, as an aside, part of the
17 rationale for proposal that our school be phased
18 out is because of low demand for seats. We were
19 in a position where we were turning students
20 away and sending these students to overflow at
21 144. We never saw that low demand. We saw
22 constant increase of students. We started with
23 200 students last year, I mean, in 2006, and we
24 worked our way up to over 500 students. I think
25 that speaks to a demand. So we had our

1 students, but what we had was an issue with
2 teachers.

3 Now, before I begin this, I must say that we
4 have a dynamic teaching staff.

5 [cheering, applause]

6 They go above and beyond, and I can say that
7 because that is what we did last year.
8 Unfortunately, as you can see, we had a number
9 of teachers that were out for legitimate medical
10 concerns. I just want you to imagine middle
11 school, one day in middle school with a
12 substitute teacher, and then you multiply that
13 by eight and the number of things that you see
14 on the right, and that is why we had a very
15 difficult time last year. It was very difficult
16 for us to maintain an academic program that had
17 continuity because we had a lack of teachers,
18 and so you see teachers that were out for over
19 100 school days, and of course that is going to
20 have not only an impact on our academic outcome,
21 but it definitely had its impact on - - But
22 despite that, the teachers are still here, and
23 we made a lot of difficult decisions during the
24 last year that would prepare us to be successful
25 for this year.

1 So let's talk about today. Today is - - .
2 We started school September 9, 2011, and here is
3 where we are. Our attendance is above 93
4 percent.

5 [cheering, applause]

6 We are happy to say that over 80 percent of
7 our students have never missed a day of school.

8 [applause]

9 I saw the records from last week which is
10 well above the city average of students with
11 perfect attendance. One of the things that you
12 have to consider when you think about the
13 capacity to turn things around for the next year
14 is to recognize that we have far less students
15 this year. Last year we were over 500 students,
16 this year we have 398 students, and that is not
17 because students didn't want to come, that was
18 because students moved out of this district, and
19 so we are not the only school that had a smaller
20 incoming 6th grade class. That puts us in the
21 position to really address the shortcomings that
22 we had last year.

23 Furthermore, we added more instructional
24 time to our day, because we know we have to make
25 up lost time from last year. So we added 20

1 percent more instructional time in math and
2 ELA.

3 [applause]

4 Despite what happened last year, and despite
5 my inability as a principal to guarantee parents
6 and students that you would have a fully
7 certified teacher in your classroom every day,
8 this year we still have a fully committed and
9 involved parent-teacher associated who support
10 us wholeheartedly.

11 [applause]

12 We - - as he works to reform education in
13 New York City, we are aligning our curriculum to
14 the - - standard, our teachers are doing a lot
15 of good work in that area, and we are also
16 increasing professional collaboration and
17 development of our staff. - - and it is all
18 resulting in the last part that is in red. Our
19 preliminary outcome. We have added 5.5 months
20 growth in math achievement since September.

21 [applause]

22 We recognize that we have not been at school
23 5.5 months, and so at the middle of the year, at
24 this time, we are assessing our students using -
25 -, it is an assessment tool that is provided to

1 us by the Department of Education, and we are
2 already seeing the impact of our growth. This
3 week we are testing students in English Language
4 Arts and I feel more than confident to say that
5 there will be comparable growth in English
6 Language Arts as well.

7 [applause]

8 So, of course we are here for a proposed
9 phase out, but we are very optimistic about
10 being here, grades 6 through 8, for next year.

11 [cheering, applause]

12 Thank you all. As principal, - - what our
13 trajectory is. We are still doing the work. We
14 are still passionate and committed to our
15 students and the students of this community, and
16 this is what we are preparing ourselves to do in
17 the future. We are going to continue to have
18 improved learning outcomes. As you saw our
19 history, that is our tradition, and we had some
20 bumps in the road, we do not deny that, but we
21 are in a place now where we are a stronger body
22 and a more unified body, a more focused body,
23 and I would say that we do have the capacity to
24 turn around Aspire Preparatory to benefit all of
25 the students that we serve. Continued

1 improvements in tone and climate and I do want
2 to speak to that, because last year, as I said,
3 was a very challenging year, not just
4 academically, but also for tone and climate,
5 which I know could be attributed to the lack of
6 teachers that we had. The reason I am so
7 certain of that is because you have to visit us
8 this year. You have to walk onto the Third
9 Floor and see Aspire Preparatory 2011-2012, it
10 is a marked difference. It is a marked
11 difference. And so I invite all of you to come
12 see us, because I can tell you, but I can show
13 you better than I can tell you.

14 [cheering, applause]

15 We - - wholeheartedly and fully with the
16 Concord Learning Standards, we are keenly aware
17 that that is where we need to go and we are
18 putting the ground work, laying the ground work
19 now for our students to be prepared for the new
20 assessments that reflect the Concord Learning
21 Standards in 2015, and we are going to continue
22 to upgrade technology and continue to integrate
23 arts and create art opportunities for our
24 students.

25 So as far as we are concerned, the best is

1 still yet to come.

2 [cheering, applause]

3 So with that said, we understand what the
4 information on the data sheets that you have
5 says, but we also ask that you would hear what
6 we are saying, the people who are here every
7 day, the students that are here, the teachers
8 that are here, the administrators that are here,
9 the parents and guardians that are here, we
10 really do have parents in our building every
11 day.

12 [cheering, applause]

13 And if they did not believe that Aspire
14 Preparatory had the capacity to turn around, in
15 all honesty, I would not be sitting here this
16 evening. So I wholeheartedly believe that the
17 best course of action for the Department of
18 Education, is to rescind the proposal to phase
19 out Aspire Preparatory.

20 [applause]

21 We understand that there is a vote on
22 February 9th, but we take the position that
23 there is really nothing to vote about, and we
24 would appreciate it if the proposal was taken
25 off of the agenda completely, and we were

1 allowed the opportunity to continue the work
2 that we have enjoyed with our students and this
3 community since 2006.

4 Thank you.

5 [cheering, applause]

6 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you, Principal
7 Cobb.

8 MR. STEVEN COBB: My pleasure.

9 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: While this concludes the
10 formal presentations, before we move on to the
11 public comment period, I know we are joined this
12 evening by Alfredo Pagan who is the Bronx
13 Borough President's appointee to - - Educational
14 Policy, as well as Monica - - from the Bronx
15 Borough President's Office.

16 [applause]

17 FEMALE VOICE: Good evening. Thank you all
18 for coming, and I hope that the Department of
19 Education turns around and takes a look at this
20 group and see that you have turned out.

21 [cheering, applause]

22 I do want to say that we have not had the
23 opportunity to sit down and to review the full
24 proposal. We will be doing that, and that is
25 why I am also hoping, and that I would ask

1 tonight, that you too will hear the voices
2 here and take it back to the table and really
3 have a conversation about whether the school
4 remains opened or closed. Thank you.

5 [applause]

6 MR. ALFREDO PAGAN: How are you doing,
7 everyone? I am very honored to be here, and
8 very grateful to be able to represent by Bronx
9 School. As it was pointed out, a successful
10 school, completely, and like this school there
11 are many schools in the Bronx that are
12 successful. The DOE schools involved in this -
13 - lack of resources - - with any schools. To be
14 honest, I show disagreement for this proposal,
15 and it is my hope and petition that the
16 Department of Education reconsider the
17 information provided by the administration, by
18 the school community, and that is my
19 presentation on this proposal for Aspire.

20 [cheering, applause]

21 I respectfully and honestly say, that after
22 meeting with the parents and getting information
23 concerning Aspire, - - research on it. This
24 school has - - transition, as the principal
25 pointed out, and it is now undergoing a

1 resurrection, and I strongly feel that the
2 support and the proper resources should be given
3 - - for the future.

4 [cheering, applause]

5 I - - that on February 9th, I will be - - on
6 your vote against Aspire - -.

7 [cheering, applause]

8 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you. We have now
9 concluded the formal presentations and in just a
10 second we have 23 speakers that have signed up
11 to speak this evening, and at this point I have
12 only received a handful of questions. If there
13 is anybody that has a question, we are
14 circulating some index cards around. Please
15 make sure you fill out the card with the
16 question so that your voice can be heard.
17 Speakers are reminded of a few things. First,
18 if you do have your comments written down, feel
19 free after you speak to hand them to me to make
20 sure they make it into the public record in
21 full. Also, speakers are reminded that they
22 have--they will be limited to two minutes. The
23 time will be kept and a signal will be given
24 when you have 30 seconds remaining and when your
25 time is up. Given that we have 23 speakers, I

1 do ask everybody to please respect the time
2 limit, so that everybody has a chance to be
3 heard, you have been very patient with us this
4 evening in hearing the formal proposal and the
5 response and we really want to make sure that
6 everybody that has come out tonight has an
7 opportunity to speak, for those that want to.
8 Each speaker has a number assigned and I will
9 call you up in groups of five, I will ask you to
10 line up over here by the microphone, and we will
11 make sure everybody has their time.

12 With that, I would ask Stephen Bennett,
13 number one, Ilene Udillo, number two, D'Andre
14 Harris, number three, James Weatherington
15 [phonetic], number four, and La-Row Gaskin,
16 number five.

17 [cheering, applause]

18 You will come up here and if you could just
19 start by saying your name and your comment.

20 Thank you.

21 MR. STEPHEN BENNETT: Hello. Good evening.

22 Can you hear me?

23 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Yes. You are on.

24 MR. STEPHEN BENNETT: Good evening. I am
25 Stephen Bennett, the Bronx Field Director for

1 the Council of School Supervising
2 Administrators, CSA, which is the Union that
3 represents principals and the citizen principals
4 city-wide. The DOE has scheduled more schools
5 to phase out in closure and said the new schools
6 opened by Mayor Bloomberg are better than those
7 they replaced. Yet, in the latest round of
8 closings, 11 schools were opened during this
9 mayor's administration. Ironically, some of the
10 new schools are usually among those that are
11 closed, and become part of the vicious cycle.
12 The New York City Public School System is not in
13 place for experimentation, where we open and
14 close schools for students who have already
15 begun to be traumatized by previous school
16 closings. Then there is the tragedy of all the
17 young people who have not yet been saved even
18 briefly by the city's new school safety net, but
19 have been turned away from new schools for
20 reasons of poor academic achievement or for
21 other reasons, and sent to be warehoused in
22 other low performing schools that probably will
23 be closed as well. This is a losing strategy,
24 returning them to low performing schools, which
25 are comparatively attended by children of color,

1 from economically disadvantaged communities.

2 [cheering, applause]

3 The only point of this strategy is to
4 eliminate schools that the administration has
5 had - - and improve its data, by opening new
6 schools that won't have that data for as long as
7 four years. The fact is that closure is an
8 admission of failure by City Hall.

9 [cheering, applause]

10 The - - administration needs to take more
11 responsibility, not less, for schools that are
12 not doing well, rather than turning them over to
13 private entities like EPOs, or closing them, and
14 washing their hands of a deeper problem that it
15 has been unsuccessful in remedying. Thank you.

16 [cheering, applause]

17 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Ms. Ilene Udillo.

18 MS. ILENE UDILLO: Yes. Hello, my name is
19 Dr. Ilene Udillo, state psychologist - -

20 [cheering, applause]

21 I want to talk a little bit about what the
22 psychological effects are of phase out, because
23 I am against the proposed phase out. For
24 children in middle school, their school is a
25 form of their identity, and they create memories

1 here, and what is the memory of a school that
2 is phased out and failed? This school hasn't
3 failed, as Mr. Cobb has said, and middle school
4 children don't understand the concept of
5 failure. What does that mean to a middle school
6 student? Does it mean that they failed? Who
7 failed? They are going to grow up and say, "I
8 went to this school, I think it might have been
9 called Aspire, but I don't remember, because it
10 was only open for a few years, because it
11 closed." Transitions are hard, and I worked
12 here during the last phase out, and I can tell
13 you that that phase out affected every single
14 member of the school community. Teachers were
15 stressed out because they didn't know whether
16 they were going to work the following year.
17 Teachers are - - when they are anxious, that
18 anxiety gets communicated to children. Even
19 though those teachers are dedicated and try very
20 hard to be professional, they are coming in and
21 doing their job every day, they were worried,
22 children were worried. Transitions are
23 difficult for everybody. They are difficult for
24 children, they are difficult for adults, and
25 they cause anxiety and they are stressful.

1 I think that it is important that you
2 consider that Aspire has many excellent
3 strengths and many devoted staff members, and
4 given the impact that phase out is going to have
5 on children in the whole community, I recommend
6 that we strengthen the programs we have that are
7 working, provide additional supports, and
8 address the things that are not working. Thank
9 you.

10 [cheering, applause]

11 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you, Ms. Udillo.
12 We will now hear from D'Andre Harris.

13 [cheering, applause]

14 - - who would like to? D'Andre, we will
15 hold your spot. Okay? Next is James Flemington
16 [phonetic].

17 [cheering, applause]

18 MR. JAMES FLEMINGTON: - - I have one
19 question for the Board of Education. - - last
20 year to this year, they moved to phase out - -.
21 Where does that help to stop this phase out from
22 happening? Where was the support to stop this
23 from happening? That is my question. For all
24 those who - - phase out, they are so quick to
25 phase us out. Give us the help and support we

1 need to keep this school open for our kids,
2 and our community.

3 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: I will call the next
4 group to the microphone. I would ask number
5 six, Nixa Rivera, number seven, Ginger Buckley,
6 number eight, Grace Loraglio, number nine, Rosa
7 Martinez, and number ten, - - please come up to
8 the microphone.

9 MR. LA-ROW GASKIN: How are you doing, guys?
10 I am Mr. Gaskin. My daughter attends this
11 school.

12 [cheers, applause]

13 Really quickly, I just want to say a few
14 things. She came in as a 6th grader, she
15 transitioned as 7th grade honors, due to the
16 dedication of her teachers she had in place, and
17 with the help she had at home, and during - -
18 with the transition - - her grades began to
19 drop. So I came in and spoke to Mr. Cobb and
20 her other teachers and said, "What can we do to
21 fill in the gap," because other teachers were
22 being pulled - - to help. At the end of the
23 day, New York State is a state that has one of
24 the largest federal - - with 700 million dollars
25 over the next four years, why are the children

1 of Aspire losing? At the end of the day, we
2 just keep doing the same thing. We are the
3 adults. We have to make the choices and
4 decisions for the children and for their
5 education, but we are the ones acting like
6 children. It is just unspeakable, the thought
7 of the school closing or being proposed to phase
8 out, due to under utilizing of the state. You
9 do your research, you see all these things pop
10 up with the state or the city. It is just as
11 shame that we the adults cannot get it together
12 for the students. - - every day, this school is
13 far from dangerous, we are here, we - - and at
14 the end of the day, please rescind the proposal
15 to phase out Aspire Preparatory.

16 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you, Mr. Gaskin.
17 Next is Ms. Rivera.

18 MS. NIXA RIVERA: Hello, my name is Nixa
19 Rivera, I am one of the - -. I am here almost
20 every day. I just want to say that our children
21 are not dangerous, our children are not bad
22 kids. The Department of Education is making
23 this decision way too fast, as we only had it
24 bad for one year, and they need to give us a
25 chance to make amends, so please, Department of

1 Education, leave our school open, our children
2 are not dangerous, they are very intelligent,
3 talented and beautiful students at our school -
4 -

5 [cheering, applause]

6 Our children are not bad kids, they are - -

7 [cheering, applause]

8 Thank you.

9 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you very much.

10 Ms. Buckley? Hold your spot? - - We will hold
11 your spot. Next is Grace Loraglio.

12 MS. GRACE LORAGLIO: - - vice president of
13 CEC11. I graduated from 1Prep5 back 19-
14 something, and even back then it was considered
15 that the neighborhood was dangerous. This has
16 been going on for 40 or 50 some-odd years that
17 this is a dangerous school and a dangerous
18 neighborhood and I am still here, and there is a
19 lot of people still here and nothing is going to
20 happen in that respect. Now, you spoke about
21 data. I used to work for IBM, I used to be a
22 troubleshooter as far as inputting data, and I
23 know that data is only as good as the person who
24 is going to input it - - There is no
25 accountability, there is no transparency as to

1 who puts the data into the system that you all
2 make decisions from? We don't know who does
3 that. We don't know their education level, we
4 don't know if they are qualified, we don't know
5 if they are reading it, someone might be
6 dyslexic and - - I used to catch many, many
7 errors, when working specifically with numbers.
8 I caught many, many mistakes that would have
9 destructed networks had I not caught them. So,
10 the data, although you used data, I find it
11 suspect because we don't know who is doing what
12 with the data, and especially in this
13 technological age, it is very easy to manipulate
14 data.

15 [applause]

16 I also want to speak about the impact, that
17 there would be no impact if Aspire is phased out
18 and a new school brought in, but there is an
19 impact, as you heard from the psychologist, the
20 children already feel like failures. They hear
21 the school is failing, they feel like failing,
22 and then they give up and they don't want to
23 try, even though there is a great support system
24 here, this is my first year as a CEC, and I have
25 to say that this is a great support system

1 between the PTA and the principal and the
2 teachers, I have seen them all working together
3 to keep this school going. As you say, if there
4 wouldn't be an impact on the school, then why
5 bring in another school? Why not give those
6 resources to Aspire?

7 [cheering, applause]

8 I want to say, oh, I'm sorry, just one
9 second. As Nixa said, I lost my train of
10 thought. I lost my train of thought. As Nixa
11 said, we only learned that the school had an "F"
12 in November, and we were optimistic about
13 turning it around, and it is my understanding
14 that New York State Education has a schools
15 needing improvement list, and it is also my
16 understanding that schools that need improvement
17 get at least three years or three years to
18 improve. From November, it was going to--we
19 were looking to improve, and then come December
20 there is the phase out proposal. There wasn't
21 any kind of time given to the school to do a
22 turnaround and we also have schools that need
23 improving in District 11 here, there are many
24 schools that need improving, and they are
25 improving year one or year two, even our own

1 PS121 District Office is improving year one,
2 there are a lot of schools that are improving
3 and again, there is no transparency as to how
4 you made the decision to phase out one school
5 when there are many other schools that need
6 improvement. There is no balance.

7 [applause]

8 I ask that you remove the proposal and give
9 Aspire at least a year. Thank you.

10 [applause]

11 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Next is Rosa Martinez.

12 [applause]

13 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: And - - please come
14 down, you will be next.

15 MS. ROSA MARTINEZ: As a student in this
16 school, I don't know why you guys put it as a
17 dangerous school, because as a student here, I
18 have no problem here. I learn, as well as all
19 the other students, and I try my best like
20 everyone here. I think this is a real good
21 school, because I used to come from MS180 and I
22 heard that school was very good, so I wanted to
23 go there, but it forced me too much, so then I
24 wanted to come to this school, and I believe it
25 had a big impact on me, because it is really,

1 the teachers teach really good, and I think
2 this is a really good school.

3 [cheers, applause]

4 But I really don't know why you guys put it
5 as a - - dangerous school, because I have been
6 here every single day, almost since the
7 beginning of the school year, and I have not
8 seen anything that has been dangerous about this
9 school. This school is very safe and all the
10 students behave. Many students, some students
11 may not behave, but the teachers will get them
12 on the right track and we all do our best.

13 [cheers, applause]

14 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you. Next is
15 Lucia Moran. Lucia? Lucia Moran, number 10?
16 Okay, we will move on to the next five. Number
17 11 is Irene Estrada Rukaj, number 12 is Justin--
18 it looks like Martinez, Robert Gonzalez, number
19 13, Jquawn Unthank, number 14, and Judith De La
20 Paz, number 15. - -

21 [applause]

22 MS. IRENE ESTRADA RUKAJ: - -

23 [cheers, applause]

24 - - but I am privileged to be the - -
25 coordinator for Aspire, and I am also on - -

1 council, and - - one point, - - is that you
2 need to break this proposal. It is the wrong
3 decision for our community. I will stand up for
4 you and I will tell you that if it was a bad
5 choice to keep it open, I would be the first to
6 compliment the Board. I would be the first one
7 protesting against the school, because of what I
8 do. But because I have grown up, this is my
9 community, right, my community, too. We have
10 seen some changes since 1982, and this is the
11 best change in our community that this community
12 has had. We have a - - we are a big family at
13 Aspire. We fight, we argue, we eat together, we
14 party together, and we teach our children to
15 become the best they can be, and the best of
16 their ability, to whoever they want to become,
17 because there is very much love at this school.
18 It is highly respected. And these children come
19 into our doors, highly motivated, optimistic,
20 full of so much energy, that they burn us out
21 every single day. But these teachers that are
22 here today, my fellow - - coordinator, and Mr.
23 Cobb can tell you, that we spend so many hours
24 here, many times past 8:00, 8:30 at night,
25 because these children are still - - I am

1 praying that you tear down this amendment,
2 this proposal is absolutely wrong for our
3 community, and I will go before the Board of
4 Education, I - - and we need to fight this
5 proposal because it is the wrong one. That is
6 the bottom line.

7 The second thing is we need to find some
8 school activities and after school programs. -
9 - first year they got a D, nobody looked at
10 them. Next year a C, nobody looked at them.
11 They got an F, - - much later. We asked the
12 program for training. Our own program for - -
13 where - - monitor their own self, because there
14 is no money in the system.

15 [cheers, applause]

16 The final thing in my prayer is that you
17 don't judge a school by its color. Come in to
18 our home, as far as our half, mi casa es su
19 casa. You need to come to each classroom and
20 take a look at each - - I want you to know, - -
21 Blacks and Latinos are a minority. As far as
22 Aspire Middle School, our Blacks and Latinos - -
23 are not only learning, but they are excelling.
24 - -

25 [cheers, applause]

1 - - you will be making a very large
2 mistake, because we have a large population, of
3 special education children, that I represent,
4 that need classes. We have children - - to come
5 to our schools because they don't have the
6 programs they need in special education. - -
7 she said, "I have a student with special needs,
8 and I am satisfied with Aspire and if they do
9 take the school and phase it out, what will
10 happen to all of those parents who have those
11 children with special needs?" Please keep
12 Aspire open for all in our community. Thank
13 you.

14 [cheers, applause]

15 I love you, Aspire.

16 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Next is Justin Martinez.

17 MR. JUSTIN MARTINEZ: I want to say, I don't
18 want the school to close because the people at
19 school - - the kids who have special needs, if
20 they close the school down, they won't be able
21 to--this school has special programs for special
22 kids to go. That's all.

23 [cheers, applause]

24 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: He said - - he decided
25 he was going to respond.

1 [cheers, applause]

2 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Next is Mr. Robert
3 Gonzalez.

4 [cheers, applause]

5 MR. ROBERT GONZALEZ: I think that the
6 school shouldn't close down because of the fact
7 that ever since I came here, my grades have
8 improved and every time a teacher talks to a
9 student, it isn't constantly, it is one on one,
10 - - I would say that this phase out shouldn't
11 happen, and we should not close the school down
12 because number one, the school isn't dangerous.
13 Ever since I have been here I haven't seen
14 anything like you all have said, I haven't seen
15 anything dangerous, my grades have improved, and
16 since 4th grade I failed science and I have an
17 improvement a bit in science, but it is jumping
18 from grade to grade, which have improved. I
19 would say also that all of the teachers here are
20 good and they have a certain way of teaching
21 their students how to improve. That is all I
22 have to say.

23 [cheers, applause]

24 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Next is Jquawn Unthank.

25 [cheers, applause]

1 MR. JQUAWN UNTHANK: First of all, all I
2 have to say is that from 6th grade, I really
3 improved because of the teachers, and when I
4 went to 7th, a lot of teachers were absent. I
5 hadn't seen them since like the 5th marking
6 period, and a new teacher came in. But ever
7 since all the teachers have been coming in, I
8 have actually been improving in all my work and
9 I am not--nothing bad - - I love you guys,
10 Aspire.

11 [cheers, applause]

12 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Judith De La Paz. Yes,
13 can we get a translator?

14 MS. JUDITH DE LA PAZ: [in Spanish]
15 [translator is inaudible]

16 [cheers, applause]

17 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Our next five speakers,
18 if I could ask them to line up are number 16,
19 Nims Gonzalez, number 17, Shatasha Martin,
20 number 18, Samantha Tapia, number 19, Michelle
21 Tapia, and number 20, Shadiya McClain.

22 [cheers, applause]

23 Ms. Gonzalez?

24 MS. NIMS GONZALEZ: Thank you, everyone. I
25 just want to emphasize one fact, that what

1 everybody else has said already. This school
2 - - Mr. Cobb proved it, he showed evidence, go
3 do your research, people graduate from this
4 school. DOE suggests - - they have not - - but
5 we need the services. Stop focusing on an "F"
6 that was last year, let's see what these kids -
7 - but this proposal is supposed to be voted on
8 in February. So how do we even - - I don't
9 understand that. I have been here for - - we
10 need to help our community, and that will not
11 help our community, by bringing in another
12 school. This was our school. This is Aspire.
13 We have children, be here, give them the help
14 that they need. I am begging, I am pleading
15 with you, if you want me to get on my knees, I
16 will do it, - -

17 [cheers, applause]

18 They will bring up the grades, because my
19 son is, and I am pretty sure a lot of children
20 here are going to do it soon.

21 [cheers, applause]

22 FEMALE VOICE: Um, I have been living here
23 like three years, I have no problem, and why
24 this school, I have never seen no one dangerous
25 at this school. This is my first time, this

1 year, in 5th grade, I never had this problem
2 this year, this school, I never had this school,
3 I love this school, I love Aspire and this
4 school is not dangerous because I have never had
5 a problem in three years. I love my Aspire.

6 [cheers, applause]

7 MS. SHATASHA MARTIN: Hello, my name is
8 Shatasha Martin, and I was a graduate of the
9 class of 2009. It breaks my heart that a school
10 of past success and future success won't be
11 around anymore. The three years I attended at
12 Aspire wasn't only a great experience but also
13 an opportunity. When I came here, the school
14 was brand new, and I was offered an opportunity,
15 most of my friends that attended a middle school
16 other than Aspire wasn't offered. That was to
17 take high school courses which led me to start
18 my Freshman year at - - high school with two
19 credits and - -.

20 [cheers, applause]

21 Because of Aspire, I am a success. I am
22 able to maintain a GPA and an attendance above
23 an 85 percent, and I am taking two college
24 courses classes, Statistics and Physics.

25 [cheers, applause]

1 I would like for other students to get a
2 chance to be successful and Aspire is a great
3 start. We will live up to our name and Aspire,
4 not expire.

5 [cheers, applause]

6 We love you, Mr. Cobb. Thank you, and have
7 a wonderful night.

8 [cheers, applause]

9 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Next is Michelle Martin
10 [phonetic].

11 MS. MICHELLE MARTIN: I think this school is
12 the best, because [crying] this is my first
13 year, and - - I think Mr. Cobb is the best,
14 because he always [crying] if there is a
15 problem, he always lets us solve it. That is
16 why I like Aspire. Thank you.

17 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you. We have four
18 remaining speakers I will call up. Shadiya
19 McClain, Muhammed Sylla, it looks like Yanni
20 Gunthrope and Elissa Vinnik.

21 [cheers, applause]

22 MS. SHADIYA MCCLAIN: As a part of the first
23 graduating class of Aspire, I am personally the
24 positive outcome of attending this school. Of
25 all my years of being at a school, I have never

1 had any other teachers that were so devoted
2 and passionate and caring as the teachers I have
3 come across at Aspire. It wasn't just like
4 attending school, being at Aspire was like being
5 - - these teachers, they were genuinely your
6 family and they wanted you to succeed. I think
7 that some of the best years of being at any
8 school came from Aspire, - - my growth as a
9 person, as an individual, happened in this
10 building, and it breaks my heart to even think
11 that this school will not exist anymore. I
12 believe that instead of trying to replace the
13 school, that the Board of Education should
14 instead support this school and - - because the
15 school has done nothing except for help us as
16 students. The school has helped the community
17 and cared for our students and they want us to
18 succeed and they want to help our future, which
19 starts here in schools for us as students. So I
20 believe that the Board of Education needs to
21 rethink their statements and help the school to
22 stay open because they - -

23 [cheers, applause]

24 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Next is Muhammed Sylla.

25 MR. MUHAMMED SYLLA: My name is Muhammed

1 Sylla and I am an 8th grade student at Aspire
2 and all I have to say is - - from having a good
3 education at our school. That is all I have to
4 say.

5 [cheers, applause]

6 MR. YANNI GUNTROPE: I am Yanni Gunthrope.
7 I am an 8th grade senior, and I don't know why
8 they want to close the school. Every day I stay
9 after school and spend time with - - learning
10 more stuff than we knew last year, and when the
11 teachers were sick, I still went after school,
12 to learn more from him. But I love this school,
13 I love all the teachers, and - - I don't want
14 this school to close. I can't take it. I will
15 cry if this school closes.

16 [applause]

17 MS. ELISSA VINNIK: Good afternoon. I have
18 never been to this school, but if there is
19 anything I can tell, you love this place, don't
20 you?

21 [cheers, applause]

22 My name is Elissa, and I am from - -
23 Department of Education, and this - - on this
24 panel, on February 9th in Brooklyn, but they are
25 not. They have never, ever, kept a school open,

1 and it is disgusting the way the children come
2 and cry about how much they love your schools,
3 but they don't listen. So what we want to do,
4 this is an invitation to you, to the February
5 9th key meeting, that room has a capacity of
6 1800 seats, and we invite you to work with us to
7 fill it. We want to open up the meeting so that
8 you can the community and schools like yours
9 that are being threatened with closure can come
10 together and maybe actually have a conversation
11 and open up the meeting where we listen to what
12 our community and students and parents want. I
13 want your email addresses, we need to have you
14 sign in, at 2 p.m. - - the information, but we
15 would love to meet you and work with you and - -
16 we've got to keep this going. So thank you.

17 [cheers, applause]

18 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: I would just like to
19 correct one thing that was said. I have
20 facilitated a number of these hearings in the
21 past, and as a result of these public hearings,
22 where folks come out and - - the Department has
23 amended recommendations and - - has withdrawn
24 those recommendations, so saying the Department
25 never listens to the feedback we have gotten, it

1 is simply not true, and I will say that
2 everybody this evening has conducted themselves
3 with nothing but the utmost respect and - - and
4 almost half the speakers tonight were students,
5 some as young as elementary school, some that
6 have left the school already, and I think that
7 is a testament to the students, it is a
8 testament to their parents, their teachers, and
9 the school, despite the challenges you are
10 having, for them to be able to get up here and
11 have the confidence to speak their minds I think
12 was really encouraging. I just wanted to send a
13 special thank you to them.

14 [applause]

15 Before we wrap up the public comments and
16 move on to the questions, and there were a
17 handful that were submitted, I just want to make
18 sure that either Mr. Harris, Ms. Buckley, or
19 Marcia Moran [phonetic] were still not here and
20 didn't want to make a comment. If you are not
21 going to, you can certainly submit them to us in
22 writing afterwards, and it will be included in
23 the public record. Any last statements? Okay,
24 thank you.

25 Now we begin the question and answer period.

1 Remember, there will be some individual
2 questions and others have been bucketed into
3 categories. We did receive a few dozen
4 questions, they fall into about seven general
5 questions that we are going to try to answer
6 this evening. Any question that is not answered
7 here tonight will be answered on the
8 Department's website. If you have additional
9 questions, at the conclusion, at the end of
10 tonight's proceedings, we ask that you direct
11 them to us via the phone number or email address
12 at the bottom of the fact sheet that was
13 available outside. I had the questions, here
14 they are.

15 The first question, that I will direct to
16 Deputy Chancellor Grimm, is there a set and
17 transparent protocol in place for selecting
18 which schools are phased out, and what is it?

19 MS. KATHLEEN GRIMM: Thank you, Gregg.
20 There is - - and transparent process that we go
21 through in evaluating what interventions to take
22 with regards to the schools that are struggling.
23 We have copies of the procedures available at
24 the meeting, - - it is also on the website.

25 First, what we do is we compile a list of

1 preliminary schools that meet one or more of
2 certain criteria, having to do with a grade "D"
3 or "F" or a third consecutive "C," or
4 underdeveloped on the most recent quality
5 review, identified - - State of Education
6 performance. We then apply additional criteria
7 to determine which of those schools are the most
8 in need of intervention or support. Schools
9 that are then removed from consideration, or the
10 most intensive support or intervention, will
11 receive differential supports from their
12 networks. The most of these schools are further
13 investigated, for more serious interventions
14 that may include a phase out, a - -. We
15 consider several key data points. - - strengths
16 over time, - - of the school. School culture,
17 school - -, the District needs and priorities,
18 and school safety. And - - we also engage in
19 strategy where we have conversations with school
20 staff, parents, students, - - and networks, to
21 try to get a realistic sense of what is really
22 happening at that school. The majority of the
23 schools that we do investigate, - - and so the
24 principal changes the setup, invests in
25 programs, or - - sometimes we reconfigure things

1 to help the school change. At the end of this
2 multi-step process, our - - data shows the
3 students do not have the capacity to
4 significantly - -. That is not an easy decision
5 that we make. No single one factor ever
6 determines whether a school will be phased out
7 or not. Deciding to phase out a school is the
8 toughest decision we make. But we do believe it
9 is the right decision to make, for the students,
10 and that school, and that city. So, if you are
11 more interested in this, I urge you to come up
12 and get all of this information that will show
13 you what we look at as we evaluate every school.
14 Thank you.

15 [applause]

16 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you. The next
17 question I will direct to Amanda Cahn from our
18 portfolio management office. This I think was
19 reflected a number of times here tonight, why
20 won't the DOE give Aspire time to turn around?

21 MS. AMANDA CAHN: Good evening, everybody.
22 My name is Amanda Cahn, I am from the Office of
23 Portfolio Management. So this question about
24 time for school turnaround, it is clear from
25 tonight that in all of the things we learned

1 from you, everyone in this room is passionate
2 about this school and is dedicated to this
3 school, the students, the staff, the community,
4 and those people who spoke really do believe
5 that this school can turnaround. As we have
6 also said tonight, this is an annual process for
7 us. We have seen schools that have tried to
8 turn around, when they are coming from very
9 struggling places. Overall, by and large,
10 almost every time, these passionate, dedicated
11 communities, have not succeeded in turning their
12 schools around. So we learned from this
13 experience, and we have to focus on the students
14 and know that we can't take a chance when what
15 they deserve is the very best education. Based
16 on our experiences and what we have seen, when
17 these other schools, or a lot of schools that
18 have been struggling have tried to improve, we
19 haven't seen them improving fast enough and have
20 to make this decision despite how challenging
21 and difficult it is for everybody.

22 [jeers]

23 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: There were a number of
24 questions that asked whether or not Aspire has
25 received any - -. The answer to that question

1 will be posted on the website when we are sure
2 we have accurate information in order to answer
3 that clearly, and it will be answered on the
4 website. Speaking of the website, the next
5 question is, "Is the internet the only way to
6 learn about the proposal and provide feedback?"

7 MS. AMANDA CAHN: We got a couple of these
8 as well. It is not. We recognize that a lot of
9 people, while a lot of people are very familiar
10 with and have a lot of ways to use email, a lot
11 of our families and community members don't. So
12 we backpack home letters about the proposal, and
13 letters about things like this hearing and the
14 meeting that was mentioned earlier. We also
15 have copies of - - that details all of the
16 specifics of the proposal. Those have been in
17 the offices of all three schools in this
18 building since the proposal was posted. We also
19 have the opportunity while you guys have been
20 giving us feedback every day online, you can
21 also do it through the phone, for those folks
22 who don't use email. We have come out tonight
23 specifically to hear from you, in your
24 community, in your school, and then we also have
25 the opportunity at the hearing.

1 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you. The next
2 question is for the Department of Education, one
3 of the comments that was made, asked that we
4 please explain what we mean by underutilized
5 space.

6 MS. AMANDA CAHN: When we look at the - -
7 buildings, what is most important is that we are
8 using the space to best meet the students needs,
9 and so in this school there were several things,
10 several years ago, to cite three schools and
11 that was the way to use it. To clarify, this
12 building is not underutilized and according to
13 this proposal, to phase out and to replace
14 Aspire, it would not be underutilized. The
15 building would serve an appropriate number of
16 students to meet its needs, which means that
17 after the proposal to replace the school, we
18 would monitor - - but we do anticipate that the
19 building would not be underutilized.

20 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: Thank you, Amanda. I
21 will address the next question to Rudy
22 Rudnarian, who is the network lead. Rudy, the
23 question is about what is the offer to help
24 improve the school? I guess that means
25 determining support.

1 MR. RUDY RUDNARAIN: Good evening,
2 everyone. I am glad you could be here tonight.
3 I am Rudy Rudnarian, I am the network lead for
4 the school, and it is a privilege to be working
5 with this school for the last five years. The
6 school community as well as us - - support
7 organization for the last five years. As a
8 network, as some of you know, or some of you
9 don't know, the DOE has given the network to
10 support schools across the entire city and we
11 are primarily a middle school network, we
12 support schools in two areas, instructional and
13 operational support.

14 Some of the - - you had some support in the
15 summer, - - teaching effectiveness, and the
16 county board, as you know, this school
17 participated in that this summer. As well as
18 ongoing workshops and coaches - - We continued
19 to provide operational support here, regarding
20 the budget to the school community. As you
21 know, this is not a safe, quiet community, - -
22 and so we had to work with the students and - -
23 it is not improving and so - -. Basically those
24 areas are instructional and also operational. -
25 - it is about the schools and the - - practice,

1 and visit those schools and - - solve every
2 issue from an instructional - - Also we have - -
3 in the school. Thank you.

4 [applause]

5 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: We - - We have one last
6 question remaining, and actually I think this
7 question someone submitted, some of the issues
8 was articulated to us before and I will direct
9 this to Amanda. What is going to be done to the
10 students remaining at Aspire, particularly for
11 Special Education students and Individualized
12 Education?

13 MS. AMANDA CAHN: If the proposal is
14 approved, moving forward the school will
15 continue to work with the network, and with the
16 network they would develop a targeted action
17 plan. This plan would be aimed at helping a
18 school that specifically is phasing out year by
19 year, reducing enrollment year by year, and it
20 would have concrete action steps, benchmarks to
21 evaluate progress, year-end goals, all of these
22 things designed to help the school have
23 immediate improvement in student achievement.
24 This school and this target action plan would
25 further leadership development and intervention,

1 further professional development to target
2 specifically struggling students and
3 specifically for students in Special Education
4 Services, if that is in SET classes, if that is
5 in - - classes, if that is special education
6 support services, the network will use this
7 targeted action plan and also help identify
8 things like ramps or specific programs that
9 might be specific to helping a school give back
10 under the circumstance and vastly what that
11 support would be focused on is just narrower
12 attention to a smaller student body as they
13 phase out. The ratio between the leadership and
14 the students gets smaller, and we tend to see
15 improved relationships, individualized
16 attention, and the plan will help support this
17 as well.

18 MR. GREGG BETHEIL: With that, we have heard
19 many significant comments this evening, from
20 students, from parents, from teachers, from our
21 administrators, and from our elected officials.
22 We appreciate your feedback and the
23 contributions to this hearing. The information
24 will be shared with the panel on educational
25 policy, which will have a hearing, as we said

1 before, on February 9th of this year, to vote
2 on this proposal. If you have additional
3 comments or questions, please use the phone
4 number or the website at the bottom of the fact
5 sheet. Again, they are available outside, if
6 you would like to submit additional questions or
7 concerns or considerations.

8 With that, I would like to thank everybody
9 for coming this evening, and - -. Thank you.

10 [END RECORDING]

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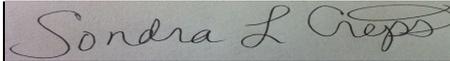
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C E R T I F I C A T E

1
2 The prior proceedings were transcribed from
3 audio files and have been transcribed to the
4 best of my ability.

5
6 Signature:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sondra L. Creps".

7 Date: January 25, 2012
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