

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**
**Phase Out and Replacement for
Manhattan Theatre Lab HS**
122 Amsterdam Avenue
NY, NY 10023
January 24, 2012
6:00 PM

1 [START RECORDING]

2 MS. SOBELMAN: Good evening ladies and
3 gentlemen. I think we'll go ahead and get
4 started. So my name's Jenny Sobelman. I will
5 be acting as the facilitator for this evening's
6 joint public hearing. This is a joint public
7 hearing of the Department of Education,
8 Community Education Council 3, and the School
9 Leadership Teams to discuss the proposed phase
10 out and replacement of Manhattan Theatre Lab
11 High School. I want to also make note that this
12 evening's proceedings will be recorded and
13 transcribed.

14 So before we begin the hearing I just want
15 to run through the agenda - - this evening and
16 also let folks know that we have public comment
17 and each person who would like to comment we've
18 got a - - here and - - over here. There's two
19 signup lists out at the entrance where you came
20 in at the back of the auditorium, and we'll have
21 that signup open until 6:45 tonight so if you
22 have a desire to make a public comment during
23 the public comment portion please do make your
24 way to the back and sign up and then I'll call
25 folks up in the order in which they sign up.

1 Each person will be given two minutes to make a
2 public comment and we'll be monitoring the time.
3 And I would say we have quite a lengthy list of
4 folks so I'm going to try and keep us to that
5 two minutes each and ask that folks be
6 respectful of each other and their neighbors so
7 that we can make sure everyone has an
8 opportunity to comment. And if additional
9 comments come up after the hearing tonight we
10 have an email and a phone line that will stay
11 open until the February 9th panel meeting, and I
12 will give you those a few times and it's also
13 included in the fact sheet. So it's D03, zero
14 3, proposals at schools dot N-Y-C dot gov and
15 the phone number is (212) 374-3466.

16 And we'll also have this evening a question
17 and answer portion so once we've run through the
18 proposals and the presentations from the panel,
19 we'll have public comment and then we'll have Q
20 and A. So in the same place where you could
21 sign up for public comment you can also submit a
22 question on a note card. And I would say in
23 advance that there may be some questions we
24 aren't able to respond to this evening but all
25 the comments will be included in the analysis of

1 public comment which is published on the
2 website and made available to panel members, and
3 will also be provided to the CEC prior to the
4 panel vote which takes place on February 9th.

5 Okay, so now I'm going to go ahead and
6 introduce the panel members that have assembled
7 this evening. Starting to the far right we have
8 Karen Mitchell, the SLT Chair, Owen Hartness
9 also from the SLT, Noah Kaufman from CCHS, the
10 Citywide Council of High Schools, Teresa
11 Arboleda from CCELL, the Citywide Council for
12 English Language Learners, Christine Annechino
13 the CEC President, Superintendent Tamika
14 Matheson. Also representing the CEC, Noah
15 Gautbaum, and we have Deputy Chancellor Kathleen
16 Grimm.

17 I don't believe we have any elected
18 officials with us yet at this point. If any
19 join us during the course of the evening we will
20 recognize them and give them an opportunity to
21 speak as well. So I'll now introduce Kathleen
22 Grimm who will do a presentation of the formal
23 proposal.

24 MS. KATHLEEN GRIMM: Thank you very much
25 Jenny. Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I

1 want to thank each and every one of you for
2 being here this evening and we look forward to
3 hearing your comments and your suggestions on
4 this proposal.

5 As you all know, this joint public hearing
6 was convened to discuss the proposed phase out
7 and replacement of Manhattan Theatre Lab High
8 School. The decision to phase out a school is
9 not an easy one to make and we don't take these
10 decisions lightly. We examine many factors and
11 data before we propose a course of action. We
12 also reach out to families and to community
13 members.

14 Before I present the actual Manhattan
15 Theatre Lab proposal I'd like to say a few words
16 about why we are here. All of us count on our
17 schools to provide a high quality education to
18 students and we must hold all schools to the
19 same high standards of excellence because every
20 child in this city deserves the best possible
21 education he or she can get.

22 When a school is not getting the job done we
23 have to take action to ensure that its current
24 students don't fall even further behind and that
25 new students will have better options.

1 Manhattan Theatre Lab is located, as you know,
2 right here at 122 Amsterdam Avenue in Community
3 School District 3 in Manhattan. It currently
4 serves students in grades 9 through 12. On
5 December 22nd, 2011, the department published
6 proposals to phase out and replace Manhattan
7 Theatre Lab based upon its performance - - .
8 Manhattan Theatre Lab performance data indicate
9 that this school has struggled, and confirmed
10 the DMA reassessment that the school lacks the
11 capacity to turn around quickly to better
12 support students. For example, Manhattan
13 Theatre Lab earned an overall F grade on the
14 2010-11 progress report. That is with F grades
15 on student progress, student performance, and
16 school environment. Graduation rates have
17 steadily declined since 2008-09. Manhattan
18 Theatre Lab's four-year graduation rate,
19 including its August graduates, was 46% in 2011;
20 well below the city average of 65%, and at the
21 bottom 6% of high schools citywide.

22 In 2010-11 over 65% of first year students
23 at Manhattan Theatre Lab earned at least 10
24 credits. This rate of accreditation - - puts
25 Manhattan Theatre Lab in the bottom 15% of high

1 schools in the city.

2 Because of these evaluations the department
3 conducted a comprehensive review of the school
4 to determine which supports and interventions
5 would best benefit the students and the
6 community. DOE also consulted superintendants
7 and other experienced educators who have worked
8 closely with the school, and held community
9 meetings with parents and school staff to
10 solicit feedback. Based upon this comprehensive
11 review and evidence that additional supports
12 were not working, the department believes that
13 only the most serious intervention, the gradual
14 phase out and eventual closing of the school,
15 would address its longstanding performance
16 struggles and allow for new school options to
17 develop that will better serve future students
18 and the broader community.

19 Manhattan Theatre Lab is located here in the
20 Martin Luther King Jr. Educational Campus and it
21 is co-located with five other high schools
22 serving grades 9 through 12; High School for the
23 Arts, Imagination, and Inquiry, High School for
24 the Law, Advocacy, and Criminal Justice--
25 Community Justice--I'm sorry, High School of

1 Arts and Technology, the Manhattan/Hunter
2 Science High School, and Urban Assembly High
3 School for Media Studies. Co-location really
4 means that two or more school organizations are
5 located in the same building and they share the
6 large common spaces such as the auditorium, the
7 gymnasium, and cafeteria.

8 In separate educational impact statements,
9 also posted on December 22nd, 2011, the
10 department has proposed to expand an existing
11 school, Special Music School, to serve high
12 school students and to co-locate here on the
13 Martin Luther King Campus beginning in 2013-14.
14 Special Music currently serves Kindergarten
15 through 8th grade students at its current
16 location, a different building, Building 932,
17 which is also in District 3. Special Music
18 would continue to serve Kindergarten through 8th
19 grade students at that location and it would
20 serve students in Grades 9 through 12 in MLK
21 when it reaches full scale in 2016-17.

22 This new high school would give priority to
23 students continuing from Special Music's 8th
24 grade and then admit 9th grade students through
25 the citywide high school admissions process,

1 through an - - selection method. Special Music
2 would provide a new high school option for
3 families and replace a portion of the seats lost
4 by this proposed phase out of Manhattan Theatre
5 Lab. Special Music's high school grades would
6 be co-located in MLK with Manhattan Theatre Lab
7 as it phases out and the other high school--and
8 with the other high schools here at MLK.

9 Before we move to the public comment section
10 of this meeting I'd like to briefly discuss the
11 impact of this proposal on current Manhattan
12 Theatre Lab students and families if it would be
13 approved.

14 First of all, most current students will
15 complete high school at Manhattan Theatre Lab.
16 As the school becomes smaller students will
17 receive more individualized attention through
18 graduation to ensure that they are receiving the
19 support they need to succeed. Current 9th grade
20 students will also have the opportunity to apply
21 to a different high school during Round Two of
22 the high school admissions process in March, if
23 they so choose. Current students who are not on
24 track to graduate should meet with their
25 guidance counselors to discuss options.

1 Depending on their age, academic profile,
2 and credit accumulation some students may be
3 better served at one of our transfer high
4 schools or one of our young adult borough
5 centers. These programs have very strong track
6 records for helping overage - - credited
7 students to get back on track toward graduation.

8 Under the proposal, Manhattan Theatre Lab
9 would close in June 2015. The DOE would - -
10 replacement for any students who haven't
11 accumulated sufficient credits and those who
12 have not passed the minimum - - of Regents exams
13 to graduate by June 2015.

14 Again, I want to thank each and every one of
15 you for being here and we look forward now to
16 your comments and your concerns and your
17 suggestions about this proposal. Thank you all
18 for being here.

19 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you Deputy Chancellor
20 Grimm. So I'm now going to recognize other
21 members of the panel who will be making
22 statements. Owen Hartness will be speaking on
23 behalf of the SLT. I don't know if I need to -
24 - microphone - - .

25 [Crosstalk]

1 MR. OWEN HARTNESS: Good evening. I'm
2 Owen Hartness. I'm a Special Education Teacher
3 here at Manhattan Theatre Lab and a School
4 Leadership Team Member. I became a teacher six
5 years ago or this is my sixth year of teaching
6 rather, and I started teaching school in East
7 Harlem and my second year of teaching that
8 school is proposed to phase out and began its
9 phase out at the end of that year. That school
10 was a very clearly failing school to me; staff
11 and leadership were just--did not seem
12 interested in making a turnaround and there just
13 was no spirit at that school

14 I see a different school here at Manhattan
15 Theatre Lab. That school was broken beyond
16 repair but this one is not. In my 3½ years here
17 at Manhattan Theatre Lab I've seen our school
18 grow. I've been very proud to help the school
19 phase in its Special Education Program. I've
20 been proud to see my students graduate. I've
21 been very proud to see my students performing on
22 stage behind me. I've seen our school commended
23 for its graduation rate and I've seen our school
24 condemned for its graduation rate. But I firmly
25 believe that we can turn this around and I

1 firmly believe in the vision... I firmly
2 believe in the vision that Evelyn Collins, our
3 principal, has for this school as an unscreened
4 school where students do not have to audition to
5 come here and take... And take high quality
6 performing arts classes and have lots of
7 opportunities to shine, and that's open to
8 anyone including students who have a variety of
9 disabilities.

10 I'd like to speak specifically about two
11 populations that are important to me today; two
12 populations that I see really benefitting from -
13 - Collins' vision for this school. First I'd
14 like to talk about my own students, students
15 with disabilities placed in a special class or a
16 self-contained 15 to 1 class. At this school my
17 students are given the opportunity to integrate
18 fully into a high quality performing arts
19 program. As a result I've seen students come to
20 our school directly from District 75, be
21 embraced in our culture here, and I have seen
22 them shining on the stage behind me. It makes
23 me very proud to work here.

24 I'd also like to speak our about school's
25 significant gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual

1 population. Although they may face tremendous
2 challenges in their homes and the community,
3 these students are able to attend this school
4 and be themselves without fear. This is one of
5 the most positive and safe spaces that I have
6 ever been in where all students can perform and
7 achieve and be themselves and I think it would
8 be very sad for the city to lose a space like
9 this.

10 We need help. We need help in raising the
11 achievement level of our very diverse population
12 of students. We admit that. But we do not need
13 to be phased out. I'm confident that with the
14 support of our new network, that we just started
15 at the beginning of this school year, with our
16 committed staff, and school leadership team, and
17 our amazing student body and the vision that
18 Principal Collins has for this school, that we
19 can have our students achieving again and I hope
20 that they're given an opportunity to do so.
21 Thank you.

22 MS. SOBELMAN: [Background noise] Noah
23 Kaufman from the Citywide Council of High
24 Schools.

25 MR. NOAH KAUFMAN: Good evening.

1 [Crosstalk] Good evening members of the
2 Community Education Council District 3, members
3 of Manhattan Theatre Lab High School School
4 Leadership Team, members of the Parent's
5 Association, members of the MTL faculty staff,
6 students of Manhattan Theatre Lab High School,
7 parents, members of the public, honorable
8 elected officials, honorable chancellor and
9 deputy chancellor of the New York City School
10 System, and representatives of the City
11 Department of Education, my name is Noah
12 Kaufman. I am the appointee of the parent
13 members of the Citywide Council on Special
14 Education and I sit as a member of the Citywide
15 Council on High Schools. Miss Jamie Smalley
16 [phonetic] and Mr. John Engelhard [phonetic] are
17 the co-presidents of the CCSE and Miss Paola de
18 Kock, President of the Citywide Council of High
19 Schools, I convey their greetings to you and
20 also their regrets that they are unable to
21 attend this evening.

22 I am a parent in the public school system.
23 I'm speaking today as a parent volunteer who has
24 observed the school system for 13 years. I'm
25 here to voice my opposition to the proposed

1 phase out of Manhattan Theatre Lab High School
2 [background noise]. This proposal is wrong on
3 many levels and it is a continuation of the New
4 York City Department of Education's program of
5 closing schools as opposed to supporting,
6 aiding, and growing schools in order to provide
7 opportunities [background noise].

8 Prior to my appointment as a parent
9 volunteer member of the citywide council last
10 November I had presented comments to the
11 Department of Education requesting the
12 department provide sound planning to accommodate
13 our students and to alleviate the overcrowding
14 which occurs here in District 3 and across the
15 city. Last year at this time I listened to
16 community members and local elected officials,
17 representative of parents from across this
18 district, comment on another school closing
19 proposal. At that time the superintendent and
20 the DOE Portfolio Planner were asked directly
21 just what level of community opposition would
22 the department need to reconsider proposals that
23 are the subject of joint hearings such as this
24 one. The DOE was asked how much no do you need
25 to hear in order to change the proposal or pull

1 it back. The representatives of the
2 department declined to answer at that time.

3 I wish to support the students who've worked
4 so hard to get to school, to complete their
5 assignments, and to channel their energy into
6 productive and creative endeavors. They deserve
7 a high school that is built up and not phased
8 out.

9 Dr. Diane Ravitch is a historian of
10 education. She's written a very interesting
11 book entitled *The Death and Life of the Great*
12 *American School System*. In her concluding
13 chapter Dr. Ravitch writes, "If there is one
14 thing all educators know, and that many studies
15 have confirmed for decades, is that there is no
16 single answer to educational improvement. There
17 is no silver bullet; there is no magic feather,
18 no panacea that will miraculously improve
19 student achievement. There are no grounds for
20 the claim made in the past decade that
21 accountability all by itself is a silver bullet
22 nor for the oft-asserted argument that choice by
23 itself is a panacea. Accountability and choice
24 may - - not raise test scores, but neither is a
25 surefire way to improve education." Dr. Ravitch

1 continues to ask what we should seek from our
2 children. She writes, "We want them to be able
3 to read, to write, and be numerate. These are
4 the basic skills on which all other learning
5 builds, but that is not enough. We want to
6 prepare them for a useful life. We want them to
7 be able to think for themselves when they're out
8 in the world on their own. We want them to have
9 good character and to make sound decisions about
10 their life, their work, and their health. We
11 want them to face life's joys and travails with
12 courage and humor. We hope that they will be
13 kind and compassionate in their dealings with
14 others. We want them to have a sense of justice
15 and fairness. We want them to understand our
16 nation and/or world and the challenges we face.
17 We want them to be active, responsible citizens.
18 We want them prepared to think issues through
19 carefully and to listen to differing views and
20 to reach decisions rationally. We want them to
21 learn science and mathematics so they can
22 understand the problems in modern life and
23 participate in finding solutions. We want them
24 to enjoy the rich, artistic, and cultural
25 heritage of our society and other societies."

1 It seems to me ladies and gentlemen that
2 this is what Manhattan Theatre Lab High School
3 is doing every day. I say build it up, not
4 phase it out. Thank you.

5 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you Mr. Kaufman. Our
6 next presentation will be from Teresa Arboleda
7 from the Citywide Council for English Language
8 Learners.

9 MS. TERESA ARBOLEDA: The Citywide Council
10 on English Language Learners is deeply concerned
11 about the proposed phase out of Manhattan
12 Theatre Lab High School. According to the
13 Educational Impact Statement, the Manhattan
14 Theatre Lab High School has an English Language
15 Learner population of 9% as of October 31st,
16 2011. Also according to the EIS the specialties
17 of the schools percentage of ELLs is only 1%.

18 Manhattan Theatre Lab High School has not
19 been given an adequate chance to succeed since
20 it opened in the fall of 2004. It should be
21 given more years to build its program and serve
22 its students who, for many reasons, are very
23 likely not given the opportunity at student
24 performing arts programs. Future English
25 Language Learner students who want to choose a

1 theatre performing arts program that does not
2 require an audition will have limited options if
3 the Theatre Lab High School phases out.
4 Appendix A of the EIS states that only two
5 unscreened performing arts programs are
6 available. What provisions has the New York
7 Department of Education made for opportunities
8 for future ELL students who are interested in a
9 performing arts program? Will these students be
10 warehoused and doom to fail? Whether or not
11 it's true, it can be perceived that the Special
12 Music School with few ELLs and special education
13 students is preferred. This is not in any way
14 meant to disparage the Special Music School, but
15 a plea for consideration of students who are in
16 need of services and may not be deemed as
17 desirable because they may lower a school's
18 performance rating.

19 Every student has the right to an equal
20 opportunity for an education. Not all students
21 can afford the coaching needed to make the cut
22 in a high school audition. [Background noise]
23 Manhattan Theatre Lab serves students who choose
24 this school because they love music, dance, and
25 drama or they think they might love music,

1 dance, or drama. Many teenagers need a good
2 reason to come to school. The joy found in
3 performing is one of the best motivations for
4 returning to school work. It would be a
5 wrongful loss of choice and opportunity for
6 students if Manhattan Theatre Lab closes.
7 Wouldn't it be productive if both schools could
8 stay, - - , and work together.

9 In its resolution of May 3rd, 2011, the
10 Citywide Council of English Learners requested
11 that the Department of Education monitor the
12 process of closing, opening, and co-locations of
13 schools to assure that the needs of ELLs are
14 met. The Citywide Council of English Learners
15 expects that its concerns will be addressed
16 appropriately and that we will be kept informed
17 regarding services for ELLs at Manhattan Theatre
18 Lab High School. We must work together so we
19 can succeed in raising the achievement of all
20 our students.

21 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. So our
22 next presentation will be from Ms. Colleen Jones
23 representing SLT.

24 Sorry actually let me make just one quick
25 announcement as well. So it's 6:43, so the

1 signup is open for the next couple of minutes,
2 so if folks are feeling inspired to speak during
3 the public comment portion I just want to remind
4 you that that option is available to you in the
5 back of the auditorium. Thank you.

6 MS. COLLEEN JONES: Goodnight and thank you
7 again parents and everyone for coming out. My
8 name is Colleen Jones and I'm speaking on the
9 behalf of my 407 students; I like to call them
10 my children, and the parents of... I believe
11 that my children and all children within the
12 United States should be given a chance if they
13 cannot afford to go to a school that is highly
14 auditioned. My child was awarded a chance to
15 come to a school where she can explore what she
16 loves to do. She loves to dance and with
17 dancing it gave her the incentive to do well in
18 her classes. So if I say to her if you don't
19 pass this English you're not performing, she
20 makes sure she picks up that book and then do
21 that English so that she can perform in any
22 performance that is going to be held in school.
23 And I know I can speak for other parents also.

24 Statistically we see that we have gotten a
25 beastly F. I - - the college so I know when you

1 get a C you want - - . Things happen and you
2 get an F but not because you get an F, it does
3 not mean I should close it down. It means that
4 I should step in and work with you, figure out
5 what's going on with you and then [background
6 noise]. Because if everyone [background noise]
7 is given an F and was told okay, you can't come
8 back to school, then we would not be here today
9 and we would not have a chancellor - - be given
10 a chance and I'm begging for that chance. I'm
11 saying the word begging because when - - the
12 school that is bringing in students that need to
13 be screened, my kids are not screened so I have
14 kids from everywhere coming in and I have to
15 embrace them, and I have to love them, and I
16 have to give them a vision. You want to dance?
17 I have a vision for you, I'll help you grow that
18 - - . It takes a man to move more than stones
19 to move a mountain. I believe we can move this
20 big mountain and keep our school open if we are
21 given the chance to change that F.

22 MS. SOBELMAN: [Background noise] the next
23 presentation will be Laurie Frey representing
24 the CEC 3.

25 MS. LAURIE FREY: Hello. Laurie Frey and I

1 would--no problem. I think I fell a little
2 bit in love as I sat in the audience earlier and
3 watched the passion and joy with which you
4 performed and I thank you for that performance.
5 That made me feel more [background noise] that
6 we speak to what the issues are that I think
7 personally are important to this matter.

8 Deputy Chancellor Grimm you mentioned the
9 graduation rate which sounded terrible and I - -
10 at the class of 2009 graduation - - last night
11 and I saw that the graduation rate of the school
12 was 74% - - so we know the potential is here and
13 that the people worked hard to be there.

14 I also happened to notice when I was looking
15 through the Comprehensive Education Plan, which
16 the SLT puts together every year in every
17 school, and I was looking at the demographics in
18 that report and I noticed that in 2009 and 2010
19 that in a class that was entering--that had 150
20 entering students, that 72 of those students
21 were entering as overage students and I've been
22 trying to figure out what does that mean. Does
23 that mean something? What does that mean if
24 they're overage because who really cares if
25 you're 16 or 14 or how old you are when you come

1 to the high school. And then I thought well,
2 there's a record attached and somebody was
3 sitting in the office of enrollment has a lot of
4 information in front of them, and now they have
5 a match process where they're matching students
6 to schools, and I wondered if who was setting up
7 the program that would make half of the entering
8 class come in with students who are known to the
9 DOE as having--I guess you could say special
10 needs. I have kids with learning disabilities
11 so I don't think there's anything wrong with
12 having particular needs. And I wondered if the
13 appropriate interventions and supports were put
14 in place because now you have half of a class
15 who maybe is known to have not performed on
16 standard metrics like Regents tests, and since
17 that's so heavily a part of the progress report,
18 to me it carries an appearance of maybe so - -
19 that have come to fruit. There is an appearance
20 I think of undermining the school, especially
21 when I think about the fact that the overage
22 enrollments citywide is 4% which means that in a
23 school of 400 there should be about 16 students
24 who are overage and now we have 72 out of 150?
25 And again, I don't think there's anything wrong

1 with quote overage because people take five to
2 six years to do college you know, I think
3 there's so many things in our life that come in
4 front of us that are barriers. I have barriers
5 every day that I face and to me the question is
6 not did you perform on that test, oh you're
7 failing your - - . The question is what's the
8 barrier, how do you get around it? We heard a
9 teacher who obviously has figured out how you
10 can go around some of the barriers that are in
11 front our youth.

12 Let me see if I've got any other notes here.
13 And I also noticed on another report I was
14 looking at a grant for the state that gives
15 money to us, to the DOE, to shut schools down
16 and close them and their transformation model,
17 and then they give a lot of that money to
18 corporations to come back in and open up and fix
19 the school and I notice that this school is
20 actually on the list as a Title 1 school that's
21 in good standing, which means other students can
22 transfer into this school and not because
23 they're in a school that's not doing as well and
24 that was a grant that was put in for an
25 application this year so... I think there's a

1 lot going on and I guess I'd just--I would say
2 it's wrong to stand here and say to a school
3 that you're failing because I don't think--you
4 know, I think that is up to God I guess when we
5 get to heaven to make those judgments and the
6 real question is are we doing our job, each one
7 of us, and I include myself in that as a parent
8 who is advocating for my kids, our kids, you're
9 my kids now.

10 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you Ms. Frey. The next
11 speaker will be Noah Gautbaum from the CEC.

12 MR. NOAH GAUTBAUM: Thank you very much. I
13 want to say thank you to Deputy Chancellor Grimm
14 and Superintendent Matheson. I really want to
15 say thank you to the Manhattan Theatre Lab
16 community. I was here for your performance and
17 I just--I'm amazed. You guys are incredible.
18 I'm going to talk as to why not only the school
19 should not be shut down, which you supported,
20 but also why this whole proceeding is a sham.

21 Before I do, I want to read a letter back
22 that's signed by most of the representatives of
23 the CEC, the CCHS, that's the Citywide Council
24 for High Schools, the Free Education Council,
25 the Citywide Council for Special Education, your

1 PA president, it says as follows: Dear
2 Chancellor Wolcott, in the course of preparing
3 for the joint hearing on Manhattan Theatre Lab
4 High School certain matters have come to our
5 attention that call into question the legitimacy
6 of the progress report failing grade on which
7 the DOE's recommendation to phase out this
8 school has been based. Specifically we have
9 been informed validation of student scores and
10 grades have been undermined with the intent to
11 depress the school's overall grade on the
12 progress report and thereby close the school.
13 Thus there is a very real possibility that
14 Manhattan Theatre Lab would not have received
15 your quote failing grade without such
16 undermining.

17 We do not feel it is necessary or advisable
18 to raise these allegations at the joint hearing
19 because we wish to avoid any hint of
20 sensationalism. In addition, we are relying on
21 our understanding that the matter is being
22 investigated by the Office of Special
23 Investigation, by the Department of Education
24 which we trust will conduct a thorough and
25 impartial investigation into the legitimacy of

1 that failing grade and the whether or not the
2 scores of these students have been undermined.

3 We are advising the Department of Education
4 as a courtesy and to preserve the school's
5 rights, we are requesting that the closure
6 proposal be withdrawn from the PEP agenda until
7 such time as the allegations have been
8 thoroughly investigated, included, but not
9 limited to, the findings by the Office of
10 Special Investigation.

11 We are confident you will agree that if the
12 allegations are borne out by the evidence, and
13 we believe they are, that this is not a failing
14 school, the entire process of seeking to close
15 Manhattan Theatre Lab will ultimately be shown
16 to have been illegitimate. Yours sincerely,
17 Paola de Kock, President Citywide Council on
18 High Schools, Christine Annechino President
19 Community Education Council District 3, Teresa
20 Arboleda President Citywide Council on English
21 Language Learners, Noah Kaufman Citywide Council
22 on High Schools, Stanley Ng Citywide Council on
23 High School, Colleen Jones President PTA
24 Manhattan Theatre Lab, Noah Gautbaum Community
25 Education Council District 3, Laurie Frey

1 Community Education Council District 3, Olaiya
2 Deen Community Education Council District 3. We
3 will be sending this letter to the chancellor
4 and also bring it up for resolutions among these
5 - - organizations.

6 I read that letter and we are putting the
7 DOE on notice in terms of legal questions
8 because unfortunately this public hearing, as I
9 said, is a sham. And if the only way the
10 community can be heard is via lawsuits it's sad
11 but true. I would ask Chancellor Grimm what is
12 the purpose of this public hearing and I've
13 asked Chancellor Grimm if you could please,
14 could you answer our question. Chancellor I'd
15 like to know what is the purpose of this public
16 hearing and getting public comments.

17 [Background noise]

18 MR. GAUTBAUM: You're not taking questions.
19 Not right now. [Background noise] take
20 questions later. Is it--I mean we have an open
21 forum here. I think [background noise]
22 students, [background noise] students,
23 [background noise]. We'd like to know as
24 representative of the chancellor, you are a
25 chancellor, what is the purpose of this public

1 hearing.

2 FEMALE VOICE: Before we waste our time
3 giving our time we want to know.

4 [Crosstalk]

5 MR. GAUTBAUM: So [background noise]

6 [Crosstalk]

7 MR. GAUTBAUM: My colleagues have said ask
8 away.

9 MS. SOBELMAN: Just want to make a quick
10 announcement that all the questions that are
11 presented during the presentation from the panel
12 will also be responded to in the Q and A portion
13 after the public comment.

14 MR. GAUTBAUM: Okay, well we'd like to
15 understand that.

16 [Crosstalk]

17 MR. GAUTBAUM: So the SLT, the CEC and those
18 on the dais would like to have the question
19 answered at this point, so given that this is a
20 joint hearing of the DOE, the CEC [crosstalk]
21 could we ask you.

22 MS. GRIMM: Thank you all very much. The
23 purpose of this hearing is to present to you the
24 proposal that the department has with regard to
25 this school and to receive from you your

1 comments, your suggestions, and that's what
2 we're here for, and so at the end we will answer
3 questions but mostly we're here to hear from
4 you. Thank you.

5 MR. GAUTBAUM: I guess the next question,
6 the obvious question is: is there any level of
7 feedback from the community, from our community
8 that will change the course of this closing?
9 What do you need to hear Chancellor Grimm that
10 would change your mind and have you ever, once
11 it's been submitted, done so? So the question
12 is where you're hearing our comments, the next
13 question is what is the purpose of hearing those
14 comments? Is it simply a sham or is it to
15 integrate those and integrate them into the
16 decision-making process.

17 [Crosstalk]

18 MS. GRIMM: We have been conducting these
19 hearings for three years. We bring these
20 proposals, which I acknowledge are very
21 difficult proposals, but we bring them after a
22 lot of work, after a lot of analysis, after a
23 lot of outreach so they are not generally
24 changed but we have in fact, changed them based
25 on these public hearings. That's why it's very

1 important for us to--excuse me. It's my turn
2 for us to hear from all of you. Thank you.

3 MR. GAUTBAUM: Well, if I stand corrected
4 that any proposal that's been brought to the PEP
5 has always been approved, has never been voted
6 down, and that I ask the question again what
7 level of public comment, disagreement changes
8 the DOE's mind. I'd love to get an answer but
9 I'm not going to push that at this juncture
10 because we do know the answer. We know the
11 answer historically.

12 What's going on here at Manhattan Theatre
13 Lab is everything that's wrong with the
14 Department of Education and with our school
15 system. Instead of listening to our community,
16 to our parents, to our teachers, to our
17 students, we are dictated to by those who don't
18 even set foot in these schools. It is done
19 based on test scores that have jumped around
20 more than this school having changed principals
21 initially. This school should be lauded.

22 The DOE is failing miserably at high needs
23 kids, 13% of our kids, our minority kids are
24 college ready. This school is taking kids who
25 want to be here, taking a school that had a very

1 rough start and is now going in the correct
2 direction. You can talk about your test scores
3 but I would ask about performance. Did you see--
4 -sit down Rose and Chancellor Grimm--did you see
5 the performance of these kids? This is a
6 performing arts school.

7 Additionally this is a school that takes all
8 kids. It is not a screening school. It is a
9 school that provides opportunity and a broad
10 curriculum and it is taking great talent and
11 really pushing them out. And one year, mind
12 you, one year of phony test scores using that as
13 an excuse to close this school because you want
14 to put in another school, a screened school,
15 that's transparent.

16 Don't get me wrong. I am a supporter of the
17 Special Music School. I believe it is a great
18 program but it should not be put in at the
19 expense of Manhattan Theatre Lab [background
20 noise]. You talk about choice Chancellor Grimm
21 but I ask you what happens to these children,
22 what happens to these students when this school
23 gets closed down. Where do they go? What
24 happens to the kids who want this opportunity;
25 an unscreened performing arts school who don't

1 have the opportunity for the tutoring and
2 everything else who want this, what happens to
3 them coming down the line? The school won't
4 exist. They won't have that opportunity. And I
5 ask you, this school has been the choice of
6 hundreds of kids. You see them here. This
7 school has turned around. It has the solid
8 support of its parents; it's got the solid
9 support of its kids, and teachers. And yet
10 you're using a one year excuse to close it down.
11 So I ask you because you talk about choice, is
12 choice only for screened students, for the
13 highest performance students? What about choice
14 for these kids? What about choice for all of
15 our high needs kids? Again, of which I have
16 two. Is it only charter schools or is it only
17 high performing kids, test taking kids - - .
18 But its time and we're going to hear from all of
19 you, I'm looking forward to it, to say no to
20 this dictatorship that we have here for those
21 who don't even set foot in our schools, who send
22 their kids to private schools, are - - closing
23 down based on phony data, based on this type of
24 criteria, all in order to provide real estate to
25 others.

1 Chancellor Grimm, the DOE and
2 Superintendent Matheson, the DOE is failing our
3 minority kids, it's failing our high needs kids,
4 its failing our ELL kids. This school is not
5 failing and I hope you take a cue from this
6 school which has motivated these kids and
7 instead of closing it down, support it. Thank
8 you very much.

9 MS. SOBELMAN: And our final presentation
10 from the panel is Christine Annechino also
11 representing the CEC.

12 MS. CHRISTINE ANNECHINO: [Background noise]
13 that was interesting and - - . Hello, my name
14 is Christine Annechino and I am President of the
15 Community Education Council which is the elected
16 body representing the parents of District 3 from
17 59th Street to 122nd Street on the beautiful
18 upper west side.

19 I want to hear, it is my responsibility as
20 an elected official to hear from the public in
21 terms of your particular experiences and
22 situations in this building and in your school.
23 But, or however, I would like to make that two
24 comments. One is that I do not believe, and I
25 believe I've been assured from the Department of

1 Education, that this is not a choice of
2 Special Music School or Manhattan Theatre Lab.
3 I won't fall into that conversation and I won't
4 be part of that conversation. I support the
5 special middle school expansion because I
6 believe, as others believe in the Department of
7 Education and in this community that both of
8 those schools can survive happily, warmly,
9 vocally through dance and all other kinds of
10 expression, all in this building so please do
11 not, do not fall into that trap where schools
12 are fighting against schools. You both are
13 great schools and you both deserve the right to
14 expand in this building.

15 My second comment is this is what these
16 hearings remind me of. And this is a perfect
17 place to use this analogy. In the Wizard of Oz
18 when Dorothy and everybody goes up and the
19 wizard's in front and they're asking to please,
20 please, please to send us home and the wizard
21 say you've got to do this, and you've got to
22 that, but there's a man behind the curtain,
23 there's a woman behind the curtain, there's all
24 kinds of people behind the curtain who are
25 making all kinds of decisions and even though

1 we're talking to the wizard, we're not talking
2 to the real decision makers, so please keep that
3 in mind.

4 My third point is that Manhattan Theatre Lab
5 is a great school. Your performance was
6 wonderful. I wish I could have gotten more
7 people from the community to see you and see
8 what you're all about. The community education
9 council believes in you, is fighting for you and
10 when we talk about parent and student and
11 teacher engagements, these past engagements and
12 instead of being engaged we're enraged and we're
13 enraged with you. So we're with you and thank
14 you very much for having us here.

15 MS. GRIMM: I just want to, before we begin
16 the public comment period, I just want to take a
17 moment to - - see to mention to you and to ask
18 you to settle all differences - - all of us our
19 best wishes to - - a member - - very serious
20 heart attack and is out fortunately recovering,
21 but is not able to be with us here tonight. So
22 we would like to send our good wishes and our
23 prayers.

24 [Crosstalk]

25 MS. GRIMM: A teacher, he's a teacher at the

1 school. So all of us wish him well and
2 [background noise]

3 MS. SOBELMAN: So we've now concluded with
4 all the presentations with the panel members and
5 we're going to get started with the public
6 comment and I'm going to invite Christine
7 Annechino to read through the names of the
8 people who signed up. And I would just make a
9 note; a microphone on this side with a yellow
10 piece of paper and a microphone on this side
11 with a white piece of paper so we have two
12 lists. So if you have a number one on a white
13 piece of paper that means you're on this side.
14 If you have a number one on a yellow piece of
15 paper line up at that microphone.

16 MS. ANNECHINO: Okay, let's start. Our
17 first speaker is Juan--and please I apologize
18 ahead of time, I pronounce things terribly and
19 it's all me. It's not you and if I pronounce
20 your name in the wrong way, please correct me
21 and I do apologize.

22 So first, Juan Pagan from CCHS.

23 MR. JUAN PAGAN: Hi, how do you do? My name
24 is Juan Pagan as she said. I am a member of the
25 Citywide Council on High Schools and I'm here to

1 represent also my colleague who had to step
2 out. But the first thing I want to say is that
3 I graduated from the High School of Music and
4 Art and you were on target when you said that
5 kids that can't wait to get to school because
6 they want to perform, they want to play. I
7 remember, and I'm talking back in the seventies
8 when I was in the High School of Music and Art,
9 and I couldn't wait to go to orchestra, sit in
10 composition class, play my guitar with my
11 friends, and it was just awesome, and if that is
12 a motivator, it truly is an incentive and add to
13 that while learning and being involved in the
14 arts I was also achieving in my academia.

15 Okay, two things. First I want to present
16 my colleague Stan Ng, who had to step out, but
17 it's a question and in regards to the early
18 engagement process in which notification of the
19 parents in regards to the early engagement
20 process, as one of the Manhattan representatives
21 from Citywide Council of High Schools I was not
22 notified, including me, I was not notified of an
23 early engagement for Manhattan Theatre Lab until
24 the meeting was over. Since the Citywide
25 Council of High Schools was not properly

1 notified I want to know if the parents of MTL,
2 the Manhattan Theatre Lab, were ever properly
3 notified. Now, this is a rule under the
4 Chancellor's regs 80660, parents have to be
5 notified ten days prior to the meeting and
6 postal mail is necessary. Was this done?

7 Okay. [Background noise] so you see we're
8 getting jammed up behind a deal we--now I came
9 with my little speech. It's just a short piece
10 but I'm going to say it right from the top. My
11 name is Juan Pagan I'm a member of the Citywide
12 Council on High Schools Manhattan
13 Representative. I'm also a parent of a child
14 who attends a public high school. My daughter
15 Hannah [phonetic] attends the Legacy High School
16 for Integrated Studies. That also has been
17 evaluated and wrongfully assessed by the
18 Department of Education as a failing school
19 unjustly stricken with a poor grade and now
20 being punished with the threat of phase out.
21 Worst of all the children are falsely accused,
22 characterized, and labeled as failures. What
23 has happened to Manhattan Theatre Lab High
24 School and to Legacy High School and the many
25 other schools afflicted by a misguided and a

1 misgoverned Department of Education are merely
2 the effects of a larger problem. The underlying
3 cause is the corrupted education reform strategy
4 imposed by Mayor Bloomberg who blatantly ignores
5 the teachers, the students, educators, and the
6 community to which this school belongs to take
7 part in the decisions that would lean towards
8 its success. They have excluded the very people
9 who it affects the most and this is what has to
10 change. We need to be included period. And we,
11 message to the parents, especially the parents
12 have the power to affect that change. Parents
13 need to unite citywide to affect that change.
14 Parents united are the powerful voice that has
15 not been truly heard yet. Let's find a way
16 tonight to affect the change we need so that our
17 children will no longer continue to pay the
18 price [background noise] PEP, Panel of
19 Educational Policy, is a--[background noise]
20 deal with a - - parent and I know that
21 [background noise] Thank you. Thank you.

22 MS. ANNECHINO: I'm going to--just to make
23 sure everybody has a chance to speak I'm going
24 to call two speakers at a time and just line up.
25 The first speaker will be Monty Baronet

1 [phonetic]. The next speaker get ready to be
2 next, Reginald Richardson [phonetic] at the
3 yellow mike. I'm [background noise].

4 MR. MONTY BARONET: Students at - - every
5 school - - like - - stepping stone in our - - .
6 Manhattan Theatre Lab School is - - leaders - -
7 in the community and - - the boroughs. Middle
8 school students look up to us and watching on
9 our shows on YouTube and Facebook. Manhattan
10 Theatre Lab is a credit to every community in
11 New York because - - to positive influences. We
12 lead other generations, a younger generation
13 that everyone is so worried about. Manhattan
14 Theatre Lab - - me in 8th grade where my - -
15 school when - - sat through an auditing process
16 that - - . - - me in other students this school
17 had no competence and - - bodies. I can't
18 understand why someone would want to contribute
19 to bringing a positive institution such as
20 Manhattan Theatre Lab down. Community members
21 love us and smile when our name is brought up.

22 Instead of judging us and tearing us down
23 you should be contributing to everything that is
24 great and - - . Thank you.

25 MS. ANNECHINO: Reginald.

1 MR. REGINALD RICHARDSON: Good evening.
2 My name is Reginald Richardson. I currently
3 serve as the Principal at Performing Arts and
4 Technology High School but prior to that I was
5 an Assistant Principal here at Manhattan Theatre
6 Lab High School, and it's just ironic that we
7 stand here in a building that was constructed to
8 honor the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King to
9 consider a proposal that so dishonors that
10 memory.

11 The opportunities that students are provided
12 here at Manhattan Theatre Lab makes - - quantify
13 my - - it doesn't appear - - because how do you
14 measure life transformation. And I know it
15 because I work shoulder to shoulder with people
16 here in the school and we've seen it happen, and
17 it is a place that deserves the opportunity to
18 continue to transform lives. I mean if you look
19 at it--well, students. Can I ask the students
20 to stand up? All the students stand up. All
21 their lives [background noise] school. What
22 stands before you is not the face of failure.
23 This is not failure that stands before you and
24 so we really, really I ask that you listen to
25 what they're going to say, the community is

1 going to say, and seriously consider keeping
2 the Manhattan Theatre Lab as a viable option for
3 this city. Thank you so much.

4 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. The next two
5 speakers are [background noise] Nestor and
6 Everett.

7 MR. NESTOR RODRIGUEZ: Hi everybody. My
8 name's Nestor Rodriguez and I am an entrepreneur
9 and the founder of Avant Garde Entertainment.
10 I've been very successful in my life. I've been
11 given a lot of gifts in my life not without a
12 fight but I've given a lot of fight to that.

13 The reason I'm here today is because I was
14 introduced to Principal Collins by an
15 organization that I belong to which is The
16 Pencil Program. The Pencil Program puts the
17 private sector with the - - schools so I lend my
18 resources, my knowledge of the art and
19 entertainment. I came here two years ago and I
20 was introduced to Evelyn Collins and her
21 students and I was literally blown away. I wish
22 I had that much time. But it reminds me of the
23 time when I fell in love with the arts when I
24 was in 3rd grade. I went to PS153 in Harlem and
25 from that I had--when I was learning about music

1 and dance and all of those different things
2 there was a tragedy in my life which was my
3 father and my mother got a divorce and so I took
4 it hard. And so my mother who had no education,
5 she had - - . She worked in a factory earning
6 30 cents for a shoulder pad that she did for
7 women's dresses, and one of the things that she
8 always taught us is to fight. Fight for what
9 you know and what you have a passion for, and so
10 she didn't give us a lot but she gave us that
11 love and so this story is not really about me.
12 It's about these kids that are all around us
13 here and [background noise] that see a fight in
14 them because Evelyn Collins has put that into
15 them. Evelyn Collins, I've seen she actually
16 has given so much to these kids.

17 Just very quickly, I know that the DOE has
18 given a chance to other schools. As a matter of
19 fact they have given a chance to Harlem
20 Renaissance run by Principal Nadav Zeimer and
21 I'm happy to say that they've actually turned it
22 around and all I want is for us to get an
23 opportunity too, Deputy Chancellor Grimm. We
24 want a chance too. But this is not all about
25 just kids. She's also had a track record. Let

1 me - - things. On March 9th 2010 the school
2 was featured in a daily news article. City High
3 School graduation - - , the Manhattan Theatre
4 Lab skyrocketed from 92% to 2009 for 42% from
5 the year before. Number two is principal
6 Collins is featured in the NBC Nightly News for
7 Education Reform. In 2010 also 80% of the
8 students passed the ELA Regents, okay, which is
9 [background noise] it obviously [background
10 noise] and lastly 15% of the students in the
11 class graduate with Regents diplomas.

12 So if you look at not only does Evelyn
13 Collins give the inspiration to these kids but
14 she also had a track record and I would ask you
15 just to give her one more chance because I know
16 that she has a plan in place for the kids here.

17 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you [background
18 noise]. Everett.

19 EVERETT: Oh okay. I'm an advocate for
20 education, a parent, and educator and I and I
21 have a corporate background and I've also worked
22 with Miss Collins before she came to this
23 school. Before Mayor Bloomberg became Mayor she
24 was instrumental in turning around Wadleigh,
25 it's a - - school. Reginald who stood before

1 you also was instrumental in turning around
2 Wadleigh and a principal that I won't say her
3 name, who's - - you labeled a super principal
4 turned around Wadleigh and she's a
5 superintendant in Brooklyn now. So if you give
6 her the support that she needs it'll happen.
7 But the problem is your system doesn't work.
8 Miss Collins - - you how to turn around the
9 school system [background noise] not just this
10 school but all the schools that are failing.
11 You know, the man has a history of over a decade
12 of meeting over performance throughout the
13 school system. Now if something doesn't work
14 when - - doing the same thing. I worked as an
15 industrial engineer and my first job out of
16 college I increased productivity in the
17 corporate setting by 400% and the reason that
18 they kept failing because they was doing what
19 Michael Bloomberg was doing; the same things
20 that don't work.

21 Now, I'd like to ask you are you looking for
22 space for the special--what's it the Special
23 Musical School to expand which means you have a
24 strategy of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Are you
25 practicing a management style that doesn't take

1 responsibility for its failure? That means
2 you're blaming others. Are you being
3 Machiavellian? I need a building, I've got - -
4 control so I'm going [background noise]. Real
5 leadership doesn't close doors. It opens doors
6 and in the words of Martin Luther King,
7 "darkness cannot cast our darkness only light
8 can do that. [Background noise] cannot cast out
9 - - only light can do that." Effective
10 leadership does not close schools to pretend
11 that they are helping them. Effective
12 leadership does not label great administrators
13 and schools and students as failures. Only the
14 DOE would do that.

15 And finally Malcolm X said just because a
16 man tosses a worm in the river doesn't
17 necessarily mean that he's a friend of the fish.

18 So we're asking the mayor that you leave a
19 legacy of success. Support the school, support
20 these students. You can do it and you need to
21 do it. Thank you.

22 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. [Background
23 noise] get the next speakers which is Joanne
24 Marion [phonetic] and Cindy Anderson [phonetic].

25 MS. JOANNE MARIANI: Good evening. My

1 name's Joanne Mariani [phonetic] and I teach
2 10th and 12th grade ELA here at Manhattan Theatre
3 Lab School. Before the - - the data and - -
4 failure and I'd like to share with you some
5 numbers that present a very different picture.
6 The English Language Art Regents - - since the
7 first graduating class in 2008. In 2008 44% of
8 our graduating class passed with a 65 or higher.
9 Only 10% got 85 or higher, which indicates
10 college readiness. Those numbers have risen
11 every year and the young men and women who will
12 be graduating in June this year have an 81%
13 [background noise] and above and 20% have a
14 grade of 85 and above. In addition among
15 students with disabilities in the 2008
16 graduating cohort - - % with a 65 and above
17 raised to [background noise] in this year's
18 graduating class and of them 14% got 85 and
19 above [background noise] Regents. These are not
20 numbers of a failing school.

21 One more thing I just wanted to mention,
22 this year for the first time we have raised the
23 bar, we are offering honors level courses and
24 [background noise] advance placement - - .
25 These are not yet [background noise] but those

1 of us who teach here have seen an increased
2 level of academic involvement, commitment and
3 energy of - - students come to my room at lunch
4 to work on my work, or - - history, and these
5 are students who have opportunities for
6 academics [background noise] for admission to a
7 graduation from more competitive universities
8 and they will never get that chance if - - the
9 opportunity to [background noise]. Thank you.

10 MS. ANDERSON-WARD: Hello my name is - -
11 Anderson-Ward. I am a professional - - film
12 actress. I've worked with Principal Evelyn
13 Collins and - - artists, specifically working
14 with - - students. I do believe and I saw the
15 performance today from these young people, that
16 they are amazingly talented. They remind me of
17 myself. I come from Boston, Massachusetts and
18 in 9th grade I met a teacher who changed the
19 course of my life. She was a drama teacher.
20 She saw something in me that no one in my
21 community saw and no one in my family saw and
22 she encouraged me to be the very best. People
23 said oh, you talk like a white girl okay. And
24 she said someday she's going to get paid a lot
25 of money for how she speaks. She changed the

1 course of my life.

2 I went on to study theatre in college; I
3 went on to study theatre at the - - School of
4 Drama and graduated. [Background noise] I'm
5 [background noise] to say that can never ever
6 tell you the potential of these students. It
7 will never tell you that. A lot of times the
8 students were going through so many things they
9 are floundering and then a light is shown by
10 someone who just shows them the way. I would
11 personally say that it's Principal Evelyn
12 Collins. I would say every dedicated teacher in
13 here that sees something within them. They are
14 encouraged, they are inspired. I humbly ask you
15 to reconsider this phase out because if you do
16 phase out this school it would be equivalent to
17 hobbling a dancer. It would be equivalent to
18 muzzling the actor; it can be the equivalent to
19 ripping out the vocal chords of a singer. You
20 will never ever know the potential of these
21 young people so please consider them when you
22 make your decision. Thank you.

23 MS. ANNECHINO: Next up is let's see...
24 Devina Elong [phonetic].

25 DEVINA: Hello, hi. I'm a senior here at

1 Manhattan Theatre Lab [background noise]. I
2 don't feel like a lot of my classmates would - -
3 to say this but I'm going to speak how I feel.
4 I don't feel like the problem is the school but
5 I feel like it's with our leaders and I feel
6 like there's performing arts before academics
7 and that has become a problem.

8 Another problem basically that people
9 [background noise] and I'm going to corroborate
10 my ideas with this scenario. I've been
11 hospitalized, I'm a dancer here and had - - .
12 I've been hospitalized for two weeks, coughing
13 blood in the hospital and I come back to school.
14 So I go and talk to my principal. I'm like
15 okay, you know, I'm back in school and you know
16 what she tells me: well, you know, on the 24th
17 you have a show to do not taking into
18 consideration my health. I'm - - be on stage.
19 But I always do the shows here. [Background
20 noise] I [background noise] mind you I haven't
21 been in school for a whole month [background
22 noise] dancing. And I go home. My friends
23 bring me my work so that I can you know, make up
24 all the work that I have to do for my teachers
25 and my [background noise] for me about me to

1 begin a Regent I had to take [background
2 noise]. But she was [background noise] and
3 [background noise] and writing [background
4 noise] to do this show [background noise] that I
5 had to take the Regent the whole time that I was
6 sick.

7 FEMALE VOICE: That sounds personal.

8 DEVINA: When [Crosstalk]

9 [Crosstalk]

10 FEMALE VOICE: Let her speak.

11 [Crosstalk]

12 DEVINA: --so I'm going to finish my speech.

13 [Crosstalk] So as [background noise] exactly.

14 As I was saying [background noise] ideas

15 [background noise] but if you don't [background

16 noise] not going far. You need [background

17 noise] before [background noise]. And I feel

18 like it's not just [background noise] they could

19 be our leader there's not an equilibrium of

20 academics and the performing arts. [Background

21 noise] for a show until 9:30 but [background

22 noise] has to go at [background noise] she has

23 to go and I feel like that's my right

24 [background noise]

25 Another thing the people that's on the

1 National Honor Society okay, the people at the
2 top of the [background noise] those are not the
3 people that need to be helped. But the people
4 that need help are the people that's not
5 receiving help and that's a problem. we need to
6 focus on the people that need the help and help
7 with scholarships for [background noise] that
8 need it and have the mentors for people that
9 need the help and maybe the school would be
10 better but I just feel like we need a new leader
11 because the leader that we have now you can't
12 talk to her, you can't confide in her, and she
13 just [background noise] she never gives her
14 students a chance to speak or have a voice
15 [background noise].

16 [Crosstalk]

17 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

18 FEMALE VOICE: Hi. My name - - . I'm a
19 singer and dancer and actor, entertainer and I'm
20 an honor student in English and Earth Science.
21 I've been to all my Regents this year so
22 [background noise] so [background noise] just
23 said. High school is to us to basically learn
24 our self, be our self, and take responsibility
25 so if you were sick, your friends were bringing

1 you homework so why didn't you tell your
2 friends to tell you when Regents were. Then on
3 top of that I feel like you didn't take
4 responsibility and you can't blame people and
5 you can't [background noise] 'cause I didn't cut
6 you off [background noise] cut you off.

7 Now, also [background noise]

8 [Crosstalk]

9 FEMALE VOICE: My principal, Evelyn Collins,
10 is the best principal I've ever had.

11 [Background noise] and we need our [background
12 noise] and we really, really do need her she
13 comes through. And the reason that she does
14 make this - - arts thing work because she knows
15 that if we don't do our work, we're not
16 performing so we do our work but - - is
17 ridiculous. It's so small and I [background
18 noise] and I honestly I look up to her and she's
19 [background noise].

20 [Crosstalk]

21 MS. SOBELMAN: Okay, so I'm going to
22 reintroduce myself. I'm Jenny Sobelman. I'm
23 with the Department of Education serving as your
24 facilitator this evening so we are
25 collaborating. So Christine's going to be

1 reading the names and inviting you to come to
2 the microphone and one note we have from the
3 sound crew is you don't need to be so close. So
4 the reason it's sounding a little bit fuzzy or
5 feedback is that you're too close to the
6 microphone so stand back a little bit.

7 And the other note is we've got folks who
8 are sitting next to the microphones who are
9 holding up signs saying 30 seconds and 2
10 minutes. So I'm going to just try and keep
11 reminding folks to continue to be respectful to
12 each other and try and stay closer to the two
13 minute limit because we've got a lot of folks
14 signed up to speak. So I'm going to ask for
15 Christine to continue. Thank you.

16 MS. ANNECHINO: Not only do we have
17 wonderful students and teachers and principals
18 in this audience but we also have another
19 wonderful performer and that's Ruby Dee.

20 MS. RUBY DEE: [Background noise] and this
21 is my school. This is my school. I was
22 [background noise] because I a history mentor
23 and they sent me to this school and I fell in
24 love with it because it has something to give
25 because you cannot allow, we cannot allow this

1 to slip between the cracks and get lost
2 [background noise] that's what happens that we
3 cannot allow. We owe it, we owe it to everyone,
4 and we owe it to these students to see to it
5 that they're fully well-rounded students. They
6 have enough steam in the performance and a
7 relationship with them and I will not let you
8 fail.

9 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. [Background
10 noise] Mendez [background noise] and Sadia
11 [phonetic]. Anna Mendez and Sadia [background
12 noise].

13 MS. ANNA MENDEZ: Hi. I'm a freshman here
14 at Manhattan Theatre Lab. I have just come in
15 and I feel as welcomed as if I was a senior so
16 you know, for four years, I feel like I'm - -
17 already. And looking at how the school is going
18 through when it came to the phase out everybody
19 got sad. We're all family here and we push each
20 other to be better in life. That's [background
21 noise] and what we want, we want the school to
22 be open not just for us but for the future, for
23 the kids that are coming in, the kids who have
24 an opportunity in the arts, who want to see the
25 world the way we do, and if we take away

1 Manhattan Theatre Lab after 2015, what's going
2 to happen to those kids. What's going to happen
3 to the future of art and everybody who will
4 exceed in life? Miss Collins, she will support
5 you. The students will support you.
6 Everybody's behind you and they only want the
7 best for you and that's what Manhattan Theatre
8 Lab is so we can't take them out.

9 SADIA: Hello, my name is Sadia Acabashum
10 [phonetic] and I'm a senior at Manhattan Theatre
11 Lab High School. Imagine an education system
12 that truly worked to have a - - quality
13 education for every student. Imagine a
14 disadvantaged student who never had to go to a
15 disadvantaged school. Imagine that you, the
16 board, were radical enough to repeal the
17 proposal to phase out Manhattan Theatre Lab High
18 School. Imagine that you offer the proposal to
19 help and not proposals to unintentionally hurt
20 the school community. Imagine the year, time
21 period where minorities still has arts acts to -
22 - live like predominantly white students who
23 must take our place. Imagine that history has a
24 role at - - rather than discouraged. Imagine,
25 imagination, image. Manhattan Theatre Lab High

1 School is filled with students who have an
2 imagination, who fit the image of who can now
3 begin to imagine a world where there is no MTM.
4 Yes, that - - are important for statistics which
5 end up being exclamations and not givens or
6 exacts. But without exceptional resources the
7 data it affects aren't used in corroborative
8 way, but a destructive way. Those databanks are
9 seized in a moment of I'm going to get you to an
10 - - a small - - school and bring in more major
11 corporate funded schools. The opportunities and
12 resources for each group of students are vastly
13 different. The argument of what percentages
14 from the last year that affects that MTL is a
15 prime candidate to be closed. I say closed
16 because that is the goal of the proposal. Phase
17 out is a pacifier or Band-Aid. Where was the
18 department when the school received a B two
19 years ago? When did the board come into the
20 building and work with the staff and - -
21 received a C the year after and who sat on the
22 board that offered critical help when the school
23 received that grade from last year. Let's
24 imagine the school board members were meeting -
25 - no - - what would be best for our school.

1 Thank you.

2 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

3 MALE VOICE: Great. My name is Charles Lamb
4 [phonetic]. Imagine this group coming to the
5 conclusion after careful analysis of one year
6 and thorough imaging of the probability of
7 future years that phasing out the school to
8 close would be best. Further they establish
9 that they want to move in a private, a
10 public/private high school--those are my words--
11 because of convenience of location. But
12 shouldn't this community, the Lincoln Center and
13 the upper west side community want to reach back
14 to the disadvantaged youth of America and give
15 them the chance to see and experience Julliard,
16 Lincoln Center and the Metropolitan Opera.
17 Shouldn't those students have the right to be
18 next door to what the board deems as the premier
19 public high school for performing arts and down
20 the street from the special school of music so
21 they can be inspired by all those institutions
22 and the people that inhabit them? Shouldn't
23 they have the opportunity to imagine themselves
24 greater than because that's what they are
25 surrounded by? The board answers no. The board

1 feels the school should see themselves at
2 failures at home and at school. They should see
3 themselves as people who need to be phased out.
4 This proposal in lieu of all these events is
5 preposterous. It is a classic case of bullying,
6 abuse, and oppression. How will the students
7 who are in the building continue on when they
8 see less and less of themselves over the three
9 year period for the phase out proposal? Who
10 will repair their spirits; drive their drive to
11 want more out of life and their zeal and
12 affinity for what they are passionate. Forever
13 in life passion will be associated with that
14 which is taken away so someone or something who
15 has more can continue to get more. But can we
16 imagine a world where there's--where that is
17 false. Your decision will let me know if it is
18 possible. If it is in fact on February 29th,
19 2012 a board can make a difference in the
20 education process at large and be the leaders to
21 execute a change that we can cooperate to
22 coexist and offer better options for all.
23 Please start with offering Manhattan Theatre Lab
24 High School the ability to get current and
25 future students the freedom and right to imagine

1 so they're able to realize a world, an
2 education system that works together instead of
3 against one another, realize a world that is in
4 fact, working towards the dreams our ancestors
5 fought, dreams for equal education and justice,
6 realize a world that will not change the man for
7 whom this building is named. I am the acting
8 teacher and I implore you to keep Manhattan
9 Theatre School, High School open, alive, and
10 [background noise]. I just want to say I
11 appreciate Deputy Grimm that you want to hear
12 our voices in two minutes. Thank you.

13 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. [Background
14 noise] Makalia, please correct me. And
15 Christine Martin.

16 MS. MAKALIA ROSE: Good afternoon. I'm
17 Makalia Rose [phonetic]. Manhattan Theatre Lab
18 is a talented school. Not only are the students
19 here gifted in the arts but they're also very
20 intelligent. It's obvious this is a great
21 school.

22 When the students were told about this
23 proposal at an assembly first I didn't care. It
24 didn't matter. I was like okay, but I'm still
25 going to graduate. Then I saw kids crying and

1 trying to think of ways to keep the school
2 open. These students were genuinely touched by
3 this school. One student said I love this
4 school and it would be sad if the school closed
5 because it basically made us.

6 Manhattan Theatre Lab teaches us and helps
7 us improve in the things that interest us.
8 Stage design, music, acting, dance, it helps us
9 get ten steps closer to our dreams if we try.
10 Besides the arts academically 65% of the school
11 is passing their classes. Don't make that 35%
12 speak for those of us doing well in our classes.

13 One of the reasons for the school being
14 proposed to phase out is because the graduation
15 rate for last year's seniors weren't the best
16 they could have been.

17 Miss Collins is making sure that is fixed
18 and us, as students, are encouraging our friends
19 to go to class and focus on whatever's being
20 taught. Why should irresponsible seniors burn
21 down their futures and take our school with
22 them? Phasing Manhattan Theatre Lab won't only
23 affect the people who work here but change the
24 lives of the students taught here.

25 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

1 MS. CHRISTINE MARTIN: Good evening ladies
2 and gentlemen. My name is Christine Martin and
3 I'm a - - grade student at [background noise] of
4 Manhattan Theatre Lab - - . When I first came
5 to Manhattan Theatre Lab High School I was an
6 incoming freshman interested in - - my dance and
7 singing talents. But when I arrived I
8 discovered a new interest of stage design. So
9 instead of singing and dancing - - here I was
10 putting up lights and moving set backgrounds and
11 learning the art of stage design. If I would
12 have never been accepted into this school which
13 was my second choice on my high school
14 application, I would never have discovered this
15 new talent and interest of stage design. The
16 stage design teacher, Mr. Penn, taught me a lot
17 of hands-on in the theatre and history about it.
18 I'm now in my second year of high school and I
19 was inducted in the National Honor Society in
20 2011. And I'm also a member of the student
21 council.

22 As a high school student at MTL my goals are
23 to graduate as valedictorian with an overall
24 average of 100 GPA. After graduating and
25 beginning college I'd to - - to the time to

1 Manhattan Theatre Lab High School to mentor
2 and help other students become successful in
3 their academic studies. My goal is to graduate
4 with a full four-year scholarship at one of the
5 top universities in the United States.

6 The proposal to phase out my high school is
7 unacceptable. Manhattan Theatre Lab High School
8 is a school of success, hope, and ambition that
9 drives on the imagination of the students that
10 live to be a part of the theatre, whether on
11 stage singing or dancing or portraying other
12 talents such as stage design or playing an
13 instrument. MTL holds students who want to be
14 on Broadway and plays and designing the best
15 sets ever seen to man and MTL has the future
16 talent to become the best of the best
17 theatrically and academically. Therefore it is
18 important that you reconsider your proposal to
19 phase out my school not only for the current
20 students but all future students who are waiting
21 in the wings for the same opportunities. Thank
22 you.

23 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. The next
24 speakers are Keana [phonetic] Griffith and
25 Alexandra Lopez.

1 MS. KEANA GRIFFITH: First off I'd like to
2 say that I'm a junior at Manhattan Theatre Lab
3 and I will graduate in 2013.

4 Manhattan Theatre Lab you guys keep using
5 school. Manhattan Theatre Lab is more than a
6 school. I feel like it's a household. Imagine
7 if someone came to you and told you that your
8 house was up for foreclosure, it's like you're
9 taking away the place where I could be myself,
10 my sanctuary. All these students here are more
11 than just my friends. They're my brothers and
12 my sisters and every day I come to school not
13 only to see myself succeed but to see them
14 succeed too.

15 Before I came to Manhattan Theatre Lab I
16 didn't care about my education or where I was
17 going or anything like that but the faculty, the
18 principal, my brothers, and sister, they made me
19 care about going to college, about the
20 performing arts. I'll always have performing
21 arts in my life but education wasn't a big deal.

22 I feel like if you close this school then
23 future kids would come that had the same
24 feelings like I do they won't have the same
25 opportunity to better their selves. I look

1 forward to coming to school every day not
2 because I dance, not because I sing, because I
3 know that I have a bunch of people around me
4 that's going to support. I just feel like this
5 is wrong decision to close this school. If
6 anything you should help us. Thank you.

7 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

8 MS. ALEXANDRA LOPEZ: Hi. My name is
9 Alexandra Lopez. I'm the Associate Director of
10 Education at Lincoln Center Theatre which is
11 just across the street from here. I'm bringing
12 a letter from my Department of Education, - -
13 who unfortunately could not be here at the
14 moment, but I do want to represent one of the
15 cultural institutions just across the street
16 that is in partnership with this school. We
17 strongly support Manhattan Theatre Lab and we
18 want to register our concern with the Department
19 of Education's decision to phase out the school
20 starting in 2012.

21 As a long time cultural and community
22 partner in Manhattan Theatre Lab, Lincoln Center
23 Theatre has invested countless hours of teaching
24 artists and administrative time and thousands of
25 dollars in this school in the form in in-class

1 theatre residencies and tickets to see our
2 shows. These are services that are provided to
3 the school at no cost to the students or to the
4 school.

5 In the course of our four year partnership
6 with Manhattan Theatre Lab we have worked
7 closely with the Principal Evelyn Collins, as
8 well as key members of her faculty, Mr. Kane
9 [phonetic] included and found them to be
10 thoughtful and hardworking educators who are
11 serious about helping their students to achieve.
12 We've also gotten to know Manhattan Theatre
13 Lab's students and found them to be bright,
14 creative young people for whom the arts provide
15 a crucial framework and motivation for learning.

16 Obviously the school has struggled to help
17 students score well and - - increase the
18 graduation rate. This is a struggle that is
19 shared by hundreds of high schools citywide.
20 Could Manhattan Theatre Lab benefit from
21 additional funding and support to help its
22 students succeed? Absolutely. However, given
23 the academic challenges of the population it
24 serves the faculty and principal of this school
25 are doing a remarkable job.

1 If you open and close the school within
2 less than ten years seems irresponsible and
3 reflective of poor DOE level planning and
4 support. Phasing out an unscreened school like
5 Manhattan Theatre Lab that serves students who
6 require intensive academic support ceding the
7 real estate to Special Music School of America
8 that serves exceedingly high achieving students
9 was both cynical and disheartening.

10 I very much hope that DOE would reconsider
11 the decision to phase out Manhattan Theatre Lab.

12 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Just to keep
13 [background noise] despite this engagement and -
14 - doesn't stop here don't forget on February 9th
15 that's when they have when everybody's calling
16 the PEP meeting, we've got a lot of the names of
17 - - but that's at Brooklyn Tech and it's at
18 6:00. And that's where we hope we get to speak
19 again but--right, but prior to that we - - the
20 proposal but if not that's when you get to have
21 another voice in front of the people who make
22 the final vote. So I just want to make sure
23 everybody has that date which is February 9th.

24 Next on the speakers list is David Shawn
25 Baptist and Sabrina Gonzales.

1 MS. SABRINA GONZALES: Good evening ladies
2 and gentlemen. My name is Sabrina Gonzales and
3 this is my first year at Manhattan Theatre Lab.
4 I was very excited to start when I heard I got
5 accepted to this performing arts school as great
6 as this one I was ecstatic. I love to perform
7 and the school has brought me so much happiness
8 and many friends including teachers.

9 The principal, Miss Collins, equally
10 interacts with the students and is a very loving
11 person. She believes everyone can succeed at
12 academics and performing arts. I wouldn't - -
13 as to just be able to stay in school. I can
14 assure you we can miraculously improve. This
15 school is our little sanctuary where we can be
16 different. Also as a reference to Mr. Hartness
17 when he said that the school accepts gay and
18 lesbian and bisexual, of course, we all love
19 them. They can explore what they love to do
20 which is acting and singing and dancing or stage
21 design.

22 And who know--sorry. I have a vision and so
23 does Miss Collins and it's to--and it is to be
24 given a chance, a chance to change. And you
25 said that this school is not a bully zone but

1 the DOE are bullying.

2 I stand before you begging not to close this
3 school. Thank you.

4 MS. ARBOLEDA: I just want to say something.
5 I am so impressed and I think everybody here is
6 impressed with the eloquence of these kids.
7 These kids, the way they're talking, the way
8 they're presenting themselves does not support
9 the data--so-called data.

10 MS. ANNECHINO: Nathaniel Morales and I
11 think its Cory Davis. No Nathaniel? And let's
12 do Selena Celestin and Gayle Rose Benjamin
13 [phonetic]. So Selena and Gayle - - .

14 Oh, hold on.

15 MR. CORY DAVIS: Oh. Well the first people
16 here...

17 [Crosstalk]

18 MS. ANNECHINO: Are you Nathaniel?

19 MR. DAVIS: I'm Cory.

20 MS. ANNECHINO: Okay. Nathaniel was first
21 please. Thank you.

22 [Crosstalk]

23 ROXANNA: Hi, my name's Roxanna and I'm a
24 senior and I'm - - at Manhattan Theatre Lab. I
25 oppose Manhattan Theatre Lab High School being

1 phased out. This school gives many
2 opportunities other high schools can't receive.
3 MTL is a school that cares for each student
4 individually. Other schools won't give you the
5 time of day to help you with what you need help
6 with or to become successful due to the size of
7 the student body.

8 At Manhattan Theatre Lab - - a school that
9 is phasing out many hearts from the staff, the
10 parents, and of course, the students will be
11 broken. There isn't another high school that
12 can compete with Manhattan Theatre Lab. This
13 school has become a part of many children's
14 lives and one I would never forget. If you give
15 this school a chance then you would see a
16 difference.

17 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Cory, and then
18 Selena. Thank you.

19 MR. CORY DAVIS: Hello I'm Cory Davis and I
20 actually went to Wadleigh Secondary School under
21 Miss Evelyn Collins supervision and I went and
22 had my BFA from Howard University and
23 [background noise].

24 I stand before you today to let you know
25 that if she can work with me - - , and she can

1 work with these students - - , I can't - -
2 because the data doesn't show that. But however
3 - - have the same - - but they do have - - on
4 our feet. So if you - - this big school in here
5 with big money and big real estate it's not fair
6 to the schools that all have kids in poverty and
7 compare those because they don't add up. It's
8 not fair to our kids here at Manhattan Theatre
9 Lab.

10 My other concern that I have is why would
11 you call this hearing for today when this is - -
12 Regents week from January 24th through the 27th,
13 these students should be out there right now
14 practicing for their regents [background noise]
15 and [background noise] right here, right now to
16 bring up this public hearing when we - - says
17 something else. They have a lot going on. You
18 tell them they're failing so they're - - and yet
19 you put more stress on them by saying you've got
20 to take the test too. Some of these kids test
21 today, some tomorrow and I just want to thank
22 you for what you've done. Thank you.

23 MS. ANNECHINO: Selena.

24 MS. SELENA CELESTIN: Good evening. My name
25 is Selena Celestin [phonetic] and this is my

1 second year of high school. I was transferred
2 from North Carolina but attending school down
3 south I was not enthusiastic as I am now. I
4 would have never thought a school would be as
5 welcome as MTL. You're - - able to express
6 yourselves, do whatever art you desire with a
7 school that limits no one.

8 When it was announced that my school was
9 proposed to phase out I was appalled. A - -
10 time mission within their students is a team,
11 unacceptable. MTL consists of hardworking
12 students as myself, as one of these students, -
13 - to be closed offer future generations
14 experience the greatness of the arts. Academics
15 are also a part of this school. Teachers - -
16 the hard work from their students, teachers
17 assisting us when help is needed, and guiding us
18 to achievement. Yes, those are some students
19 who fail to meet accomplishments but don't all
20 schools have a few? What makes us different
21 because we're screened?

22 Manhattan International High School is - -
23 yet has a graduation rate of 59.4%. High School
24 of Graphic Communications had a 43.5% but no
25 phase out. That's crazy. MTL gives us the

1 opportunity to not be limited just because of
2 what we may not know. They will teach us the
3 material. To propose MTL as a phase out school
4 is exceptionally arrogant on DOE's behalf. This
5 is like another home to us. Every school has
6 it's - - . No school is perfect. Is it because
7 the majority of our - - of color. Leadership in
8 public service high school had chances. They
9 had an F. Where's our chance? Martin Luther
10 King Jr. once said, "I look to the day when
11 people will not be judged by the color of their
12 skin, but the content of their character."

13 My resolution to this dispute is for DOE to
14 take the time out of their schedule to visit my
15 school and distinguish what we really are; a
16 school with hardworking students and with high
17 expectations. Thank you.

18 MS. ANNECHINO: One quick note, we are on
19 speaker number 11 just so everybody knows where
20 we're at. Gayle, please.

21 MS. GAYLE ROSE BENJAMIN: Hi my name is
22 Gayle Rose Benjamin. I'm a parent, I'm a
23 teaching artist, I'm a performance artist, and I
24 am so proud of all the students here.
25 Congratulations on that wonderful [background

1 noise] earlier. Thank you.

2 In middle school in vocal music class I saw
3 the film and heard the film and heard the music
4 of Westside Story. Right away I wanted to be
5 Maria who was in love with Tony. My teacher saw
6 something in me awaken. This awakening
7 triggered my inner creativity and ignited
8 opportunities that led me to be in the drama
9 club in high school and to be in two theatre
10 companies in college, one which was founded by
11 Miss Evelyn Collins. It was [background noise]
12 ensemble program. She has always aligned
13 herself with excellency and with greatness.

14 What did I learn from these opportunities of
15 self expression through performing arts? I
16 learned to be the writer and the performance
17 artist that I am today. I learned discipline,
18 timeliness, organization, speaking up and
19 expressing myself. It would be a shame if in
20 2012 right smack in the middle of New York City
21 in the state of New York a school named
22 Manhattan Theatre Lab with such promise and
23 possibility that is thriving were not able to
24 continue to thrive. It would be a shame if
25 vocal music, drumming, dance, tap, acting,

1 building sets and working to get along with
2 others with the same goals and interest would
3 suddenly vanish, disappear. What would happen
4 to your dreams if there is no one like Principal
5 Collins and others here on her staff to help
6 encourage them, recognize them, and endorse
7 them, and nourish them. Langston Hughes
8 [phonetic] said it best: "What happens to a
9 dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in
10 the sun? [Background noise] like rotten meat or
11 crust and sugar over like a syrupy sweet. Maybe
12 it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it
13 explode?"

14 It would be a shame if this school,
15 Manhattan Theatre Lab, which allows students
16 from all over New York City to come and create
17 and prosper became a dream deferred and
18 vanished. It would be a shame. We cannot
19 afford to fall asleep in the middle of their
20 dreams. Thank you.

21 MS. ANNECHINO: [Background noise] Brittany
22 and Juanita Guess.

23 BRITTANY: You think MTL is a failure
24 school? Well I beg to differ. MTL is a school
25 that is very passionate about the arts but

1 everyone knows that Miss Collins says
2 academics first. I'm not willing to let you
3 close this school down without a fight. MTL is
4 a home away from home. We are a family. MTL is
5 an excellent schools and the teachers care about
6 us and our success. They want to watch us grow
7 into the intelligent young women and men we can
8 be. They - - get satisfaction out of us growing
9 into the mature young adults. I'm - -
10 successful school who will fight through this.
11 Nobody and I do mean nobody is going to take
12 away MTL.

13 I bet you think this is no big deal because
14 I'm going to be in the school for the next two
15 years and I would graduate. But what about my
16 brothers and my sisters who want to come to MTL
17 or my friends? Even the - - the world that
18 wanted to come to MTL. They don't get the
19 opportunities to experience the great things me
20 and my friends got to experience. It is - -
21 affect many people in this world. You're taking
22 away people's dreams opportunities, and even
23 their futures. MTL doesn't deserve to be phased
24 out. MTL isn't perfect but what school is?
25 Every school has a flaw or - - flaws, but flaws

1 can be fixed. I admit MTL is a work in
2 progress but if you give MTL a chance, you'll
3 see how wonderful it really is. So I ask you
4 are you - - for this board.

5 MS. JUANITA GUESS: [Background noise]
6 council, school supervisors, and administrators.
7 The DOE has scheduled 25 more schools to phase
8 out and close and said that the new schools open
9 under Mayor Bloomberg are better than those that
10 they replace. Yet, in the latest round of
11 proposed closing 11 schools out of that 25, one
12 of which was MTL, were opened during this
13 mayor's administration. Ironically some of the
14 mayor's new schools are usually among those that
15 are closed and become part of a vicious cycle of
16 schools failing.

17 CSA wants you to know that the New York City
18 Public School System is not a place for
19 experimentation where we open and close schools
20 for students who have already been traumatized
21 by previous school closings. Then there is a
22 tragedy of all the young people who have not
23 been saved, even briefly, by the city's new
24 school's safety net have been turned away from
25 new schools for reasons of poor academic

1 achievement, or for other reasons and sent to
2 be warehoused at other low performing schools
3 that would probably be closed too.

4 This is a losing strategy for turning around
5 so-called low performing schools which are
6 invariably attended by children of color from
7 economically disadvantaged communities. The end
8 game of the strategy is to eliminate schools
9 that the administration had at least a decade to
10 fix and to improve its data, that's DOE's data,
11 by creating new schools that won't have their
12 own data for at least four years.

13 The fact is that closure is admission of
14 failure by city hall. The Bloomberg
15 Administration needs to take more
16 responsibility, not less, for schools that are
17 not doing well rather than turning them over to
18 private entities like EPOs or closing them and
19 washing their hands of a deep-rooted problem
20 that it has been unsuccessful in fixing.

21 MS. ANNECHINO: [Background noise] and
22 Samara Delary [phonetic].

23 MS. GRAHAM: Good evening. My name is - -
24 Graham [phonetic]. As I look at my - - and my
25 fellow classmates - - I see color, beautiful

1 colors; brown, dark skin, cream and many other
2 colors. It's all beautiful. Then I look around
3 to see some - - whose home isn't as good as
4 others. Manhattan Theatre Lab gives
5 opportunities and choices other schools waive.
6 But honestly when you're coming from a poor
7 family and/or home music, singing, dancing,
8 acting, it's all we've got. I am a student who
9 already has been given these opportunities.
10 Manhattan Theatre Lab is my home away from home.
11 Though I've only been home for only a few months
12 I personally care, trust, and love. I
13 understand my score is not an F but I'm doing my
14 part in getting good grades and - - with many
15 others. I know they're doing theirs too.

16 Closing this school would not settle
17 anything. The students of MTL are very
18 cognitive and have a bright future ahead of
19 them. I feel closing the school will - - other
20 opportunities; opportunities parents can't
21 afford. So I'm making it clear that I oppose
22 the phasing out of the school. Thank you.

23 MS. ANNECHINO: We have Millie - - White and
24 then Cunan Charles [phonetic].

25 MALE VOICE: [Background noise]

1 MS. ANNECHINO: I'm sorry. I apologize.
2 Keenan Charles.

3 MS. LILIAS WHITE: Good evening everybody.
4 I'm glad you all are here. My name is Lillias
5 White. I am from Brooklyn, New York. I went to
6 Wingate High School which, at the time that I
7 went to high school, was the premier arts high
8 school in Brooklyn. The very idea that this
9 school is--that the proposal to close the school
10 at this time is absurd to me.

11 I went to high school here. I want to
12 PS167, three year high school and Wingate High
13 School. I'm a product of the New York City
14 educational system. I am the recipient of a
15 Tony Award, a Drama Desk Award, and I have a
16 Critics Circle Award, an Emmy Award, a Drama
17 Logue Award. And I'm [background noise] that I
18 made it because there was a school interested
19 and open to my creativity, to my ideas. There
20 were teachers who were supportive and who pushed
21 me, who saw the gift and who allowed me to
22 develop. If the school is not here the children
23 cannot come. They cannot develop their gifts.
24 And I'm not talking to just about performance.

25 People who study the arts are people who

1 become audience members as well. They are
2 people who go to the museums and they support
3 the idea of art in the world. Art in the world
4 is essential to having a decent, civil society.
5 It's what we [background noise]. The
6 development of good character comes from good
7 leaders. In my opinion Evelyn Collins is still
8 here and said I'm going to do this for these
9 children, I'm going to work my tail off and make
10 the sacrifices necessary to have these children
11 get a decent and aboveboard education. If the
12 Department of Education does not stand behind
13 this kind of quality work then we are in
14 trouble. My time is up and I'm saying to all of
15 you tell your parents, your grandparents, and
16 everybody you know to stand up and don't let
17 this school fail. [Background noise]

18 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Keenan and
19 Mickey Grant [phonetic].

20 MR. KEENAN CHARLES: Good evening. My name
21 is Keenan - - Charles, and I'm a 9th grader and
22 I'm part of student council.

23 Most of MTL students are highly capable of
24 keeping 85% average while also being active in
25 their major in the school. The teachers go out

1 of their way to help and motivate their
2 students from extended due dates for assignment
3 to staying after school assisting students with
4 their homework and other studies. Over the past
5 four months I've been in Manhattan Theatre Lab
6 I've grown to love this school with all my
7 heart. How dare you even think about phasing
8 out such a marvelous school? It is the fact
9 that it received an F or is it that you decided
10 that you - - Manhattan Theatre Lab to push out
11 of the way for space for another school to enter
12 the building.

13 We've gone above what you expected for us.
14 They say every rose has its thorn and you're not
15 giving this rose a chance to show its true
16 beauty. Therefore I oppose the phasing out of
17 the school.

18 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Can we make sure
19 that microphone is working so that... Okay,
20 great. Thank you. The next one is Mickey
21 Grant. And then after Mickey is Jamie Floyd.

22 MR. MICKEY GRANT: Hi. As you know my name
23 is Mickey Grant. I'm a playwright, composer,
24 lyricist, and actor. I - - you... [Crosstalk]
25 little short me.

1 I knew Principal Collins before she came
2 to MTL. I - - and I'm a witness to how she
3 turned things around there. Since she's come
4 here I've had the privilege of seeing many of
5 the performers this year. I was also honored to
6 be their commencement speaker in 2009.

7 These young people I have spent most of my
8 adult life in the theatre and so I've seen
9 hundreds of performances and hundreds of
10 performers. I've seen one them on a
11 professional level mostly, and I have seen many
12 of the university - - and I was never - - when I
13 say I have seen performances here on that same
14 level.

15 I want to ask. There's something very
16 special about this place that we're in. There's
17 a nourishing environment here, a nurturing
18 environment here. How--when was the last time--
19 I should say when was the first time you were at
20 a school where you had force the students to go
21 home. I'm assuming they want to stay until the
22 doors close and they'll sit in the principal's
23 office until she puts her coat on.

24 There's something special happening here.
25 It's not just knowing the parts, and I agree

1 with Lillias, art is a universal language.
2 And it is the humanizing thing for us as human
3 beings. And it's not just learning the music
4 and the dancing and the words but it fits you
5 for your entire life. Just to learn various
6 characters is almost a minor in psychology
7 because you learn about so many different
8 characters and you embody them and you embrace
9 them.

10 My time is up. But I just want to say that
11 you can learn to act Greek tragedy or
12 Shakespearean tragedy but these young people
13 should not have to experience tragedy as a
14 reality, and I think that closing or phasing out
15 this marvelous institution, MTL, and what is
16 happening here and I have seen and witnessed
17 happen, would be a tragedy.

18 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Jamie Floyd and
19 Lillias White.

20 FEMALE VOICE: Lillias already went.

21 MS. ANNECHINO: Oh. Jamie Floyd.

22 MS. JAMIE FLOYD: Hello. I want to thank
23 you very much for the time you've given us, and
24 I'm going to hope that you really listen and
25 that it's not a sham, and that perhaps we can

1 turn this around.

2 I did not know Evelyn Collins before. I
3 have nothing to do with Wadleigh and I'm not a
4 performer or an entertainer, although I am a
5 journalist on television, so I guess maybe on
6 some level I am a performer and an entertainer.
7 But I came to this school through the Pencil
8 Program as well. I was the original Pencil
9 partner in 2009 and '09 and I'm here to tell you
10 that it's a very special place.

11 I started out as a principal for a day and
12 when I stepped into the building I couldn't
13 leave and so I became a partner which meant that
14 I was here every month, sometimes twice a month,
15 for a couple of years and I've been back many
16 times since because I can't pull myself away.

17 The data does not reflect the place and I
18 know people want to talk about Bloomberg and the
19 system and I can get into all that too. I
20 generally don't even speak at public hearings
21 because I'm a journalist and I'm not supposed to
22 do it, but I have to speak here tonight.

23 This place is unique. I've seen hundreds of
24 public schools. I went to public school in New
25 York. My mother was a public school teacher;

1 she supervised teachers in the second half of
2 a 40 year career which meant as a child I
3 visited public schools in Brooklyn, Manhattan,
4 the Bronx, sometimes Staten Island, and Queens
5 with my mother. Then I worked in the Clinton
6 administration, and what was my job? Well, one
7 of my jobs was to take our war to public schools
8 in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York City.
9 I've seen magnet schools, charter schools,
10 private schools, public schools. I've seen
11 schools that are thriving and schools that are
12 failing. I don't think I've ever seen a school
13 as special as the one we are sitting in today.
14 And I have no personal connection to this
15 school. I am not friends with any of the
16 teachers here. I am not friends with Evelyn
17 Collins. I don't have children in this school.
18 I am saying it because of my personal experience
19 in the building. You come into this building
20 and there is a spirit in this place that you
21 will not feel in any other public school in New
22 York City.

23 This school is about building self esteem
24 from the inside out. This is a school where a
25 young heavysset black woman will feel beautiful

1 on that stage in a way she will never feel
2 again in America when she steps into a world
3 where the white anorexic, [background noise] and
4 beauty standards will face her every day of her
5 life. This is a school, I don't care that my
6 time is up. I'll sit down [background noise].
7 This is a school where homosexual young black
8 men feel safe all day every day of their life
9 for the four years that they are here. They may
10 not feel that way again.

11 This is--I'll be done in one minute. This
12 is a place of love. This is a school where the
13 principal knows the name of every student in
14 this building. I don't know that they school
15 you replace it with will be the same. Please, I
16 beg you to consider, reconsider the phase out of
17 this very, very special school. Thank you
18 [background noise].

19 MS. ANNECHINO: Colleen Jones and Omar
20 Edwards.

21 MS. JONES: I'm Colleen Jones I'm the PA
22 President. I'm here again to ask to save my
23 school only because I know the kids and as a
24 representative I'm also a social worker so when
25 I look at the kids that are in this school I

1 know what they're going through on a day-to-
2 day basis.

3 When you're traveling on the train from
4 Brooklyn at 6 AM in the morning and then getting
5 here and then doing what you have to do, but
6 you're driving from the Bronx, so you're driving
7 from far upper - - Queens. This is not a zoned
8 school. It's a school where kids decide they
9 want to come here and they make it here on time.
10 We can look at the data and we can say yes, the
11 - - have math, English, history, they're doing
12 well with everything in the theatre and music.

13 I'm asking the DOE, review the data. Give
14 us the opportunity. Work with our - - leader.
15 Let's find a new model to follow so that we can
16 turn this parade around. If you give us a
17 chance, if you want us to share the school, yes,
18 we can. Maybe we can learn a new model from the
19 people that are coming in. But as a social
20 worker I know that the difference between
21 putting kids in a school--I visited a school in
22 Harlem recently that is - - a charter school and
23 they said that they have to step aside in the
24 hallway for the other students to go by. This
25 is the environment that you're going to create

1 when you decide to share a school.

2 I don't mind sharing a school. I might
3 learn something from their educational process.
4 I might be able to - - shows to them or we can
5 have great shows here. We could share next door
6 - - . I'm about sharing but I'm asking you to
7 give my kids the opportunity to have that; to
8 learn something and look at the psychological
9 things that you're going to increase for them.

10 Put a social worker there to provide - - all
11 these people - - the thing that they love is
12 acting and if you would help us to get on track
13 with the math and the English and everything
14 else, all we are asking for is that chance. So
15 give us a chance. Review the data and give us
16 that - - who can come in and turn things around
17 for us.

18 MS. ANNECHINO: Omar [background noise].

19 MR. OMAR EDWARDS: Hello - - a lot. Okay.
20 So I hate being redundant. I don't want to say
21 everything. I do want to say that I'm extremely
22 proud of all the students who've expressed
23 themselves in very highly mature ways - - you're
24 doing something.

25 Look, I think the problem is the people.

1 People. This is about people, right? I've
2 been in show business 25 years. I'm still in
3 show business. I'm a professional tap dancer.
4 Interesting thing about dancing and dance school
5 is there's a dance school in every block in
6 every neighborhood in America, there usually a
7 dance school. So I've seen children brought to
8 me. I've owned my own dancing school for the
9 last six years. So the parents - - they are
10 supportive and they're like packing the bag.
11 They come in with the water, they come in with
12 the change of clothes, the tap shoes, they're
13 ready to focus, they're going to pay the fee.
14 That's just called support and that ends with
15 the person being well-rounded regardless if they
16 end up to be professional tap dancers or not.

17 But now you're talking about a situation
18 where in September I show up with all my
19 experience and I get ready to go on tour again
20 and blah, blah, blah, and I'm in this children's
21 space like I'm going to teach you how to tap
22 dance, and they go really? And then some of
23 them are halfway into it and some of them are
24 halfway not into it and before we're at the end
25 of the semester I've got them all. I've got

1 them. And I'm not talking about robotics
2 here. I'm not talking about hey, do what I do
3 or you're going to get kicked out. I mean art
4 form, letting them know that what I'm teaching
5 them was born in America. It's over a hundred
6 years old. I'm letting them know that it's
7 bigger than me, that there are practitioners of
8 this art form that come in all shapes and all
9 forms. And then I--my daughter was on Broadway
10 for three years and I see Broadway shows all the
11 time and I know where it's at, and I know that
12 my students, I consider them auditions right now
13 and the caliber of dance which they're able to
14 do and understand and know about is beyond the
15 people who are actually on Broadway right now.

16 So all I can say is this is about people.
17 What do you do? All my students in my school--
18 unfortunately I have a school in Harlem at 149th
19 Street. Now I own a school in Harlem, 149th
20 Street. All my students are white and Japanese.
21 The only time I get a chance to see what--I grew
22 up in - - Rockaway Queens--the only time I get a
23 chance to see me is when I come here in the
24 morning.

25 FEMALE VOICE: Thank you. Wrap up.

1 MR. EDWARDS: I don't really know what
2 we're talking about here. I think what we're
3 talking about is people and how you can make and
4 hurt a particular group of people.

5 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. [Background
6 noise] and I apologize for this ahead of time,
7 Hadija [phonetic] and Eris Thompson.

8 MALE VOICE: [Background noise]

9 MS. ANNECHINO: Dietrich [phonetic]. Thank
10 you for your help.

11 MS. SELLERS: Hello, my name is - - Sellers
12 and I am a junior at Manhattan Theatre Lab High
13 School. I'm - - and a member of the National
14 Honor Society. I don't think you know my school
15 like I do. My school has an environment where
16 you have the freedom to express yourself and
17 still - - academically. Even if a show - -
18 class emphasize - - class. My three years so
19 far in this school was an experience that wasn't
20 planned for. Everyone was welcoming and I don't
21 mind being myself. Taking every day one step at
22 a time I would walk these halls starting to
23 become something better. The rest of my school
24 - - myself will take this proposal as a
25 challenge that we will overcome. We will excel

1 in both academics and the arts.

2 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

3 MS. THOMPSON: Hello, my name is - -
4 Thompson. I am the dance teacher here at
5 Manhattan Theatre Lab. I want to say that I've
6 worked at Wadleigh Secondary School with Miss
7 Collins and I joined her to come to Manhattan
8 Theatre Lab back in 2006. When we came to
9 Manhattan Theatre Lab the school was two years
10 in existence and I just want to say that it was
11 very, very sad to see that condition that the
12 school was in in terms of its productivity and
13 the progress of the students.

14 What concerned me is that the school was two
15 years old and the condition that it was in was
16 not functioning as a school at all. And they
17 were two years in. So that was a sign to me
18 that for a school to last for two years in that
19 poor a condition they had no help. They could
20 not have received help from the DOE the first
21 year and definitely did not the second year.
22 Miss Collins had her hands full.

23 First of all she had to get the school
24 functioning much less anything else. And where
25 the school is today is unimaginable and to take

1 this school and throw it away to say that
2 someone else is more worthy of being in this
3 building I think is a very sad thing. What does
4 it say for the DOE upon the children? We say no
5 child left behind, so no child left behind means
6 that if students are failing step in and help
7 them so they aren't left behind. It sounds to
8 me like the DOE is leaving these kids behind for
9 kids that they see as better than that.

10 So the history of the school has had many
11 challenges and I know the school as it exists
12 today yes, we have our problems academically and
13 otherwise and there is some division in the
14 school. But the school is worth saving and I
15 ask that you reconsider keeping the doors open
16 so that these students can have the opportunity
17 and feel value like the students that you feel
18 are more worthy to be in the building
19 [background noise].

20 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Mariah Gray and
21 Michelle Gibbons [phonetic].

22 MS. GRAY: Okay. Good evening. My name is
23 - - Gray [phonetic] and I am a junior at
24 Manhattan Theatre Lab. I'm also a proud member
25 of the National Honor Society. The three years

1 that I have been at MTL has been a tremendous
2 journey so far but sadly the journey that lies
3 ahead of me remains uncertain. Learning that
4 DOE has plans to phase out my school is
5 heartbreaking for me because I feel that after
6 all my hard work and after all the great things
7 the teachers and Principal Collins have done for
8 me, I almost feel stripped of what I walked
9 through these doors with, my aspirations.

10 One of the many things I've learned about my
11 school is that the teachers here not only do a
12 great job in teaching the students but they help
13 transform us. I for one was always very shy and
14 didn't talk much. Because of astounding
15 teachers like Mr. Browning, our Drama Teacher, I
16 enjoy public speaking. Teachers like them not
17 only inspire me academically but personally.
18 Participating in his class has helped me find my
19 voice.

20 Principal Collins has also been a diligent
21 leader in creating a variety of classes that
22 keep every students interest. Whether it be AP
23 History, Public Speaking, and even various road
24 trips to various college tours, Principal
25 Collins makes it happen for her students. These

1 things make me proud of being a student here.
2 This is my school where friendships have been
3 made, hard work continues to take place and
4 dreams begin to blossom.

5 All I ask of the DOE is to come up with a
6 better solution. Giving up on us is not the
7 answer. The dread of our school being phased
8 out is a hard pill to swallow and I will do
9 everything I can to support my school, my
10 teachers, and Principal Collins.

11 The one thing my parents have always taught
12 me is to stand up for what I believe in and I
13 believe in Manhattan Theatre Lab. Department of
14 Education, you should too. Thank you.

15 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Michelle.

16 MS. MICHELLE GRIFFITH: My name's Michelle
17 Griffith. I'm a parent. I'm nervous, I feel
18 like I'm auditioning.

19 I'm a part of SLT, I'm - - and I work
20 closely with Miss Collins, Principal Collins.
21 My daughter - - get out of 8th grade and coming
22 to high school you're nervous, you feel like
23 you're going to head start and I remember crying
24 when I left her for the line, worried about how
25 her day was going to go. When she came home she

1 was very excited because the principal - - one
2 day and the 12th graders embraced her as the baby
3 remembering how it was when they first came in.
4 So I don't want her to be the last 9th grade
5 class. I want to be the last graduating class
6 of MLK. She - - challenge to--excuse ML--MTL
7 which is in the MLK building. This was a shy
8 kid that I - - until the 8th grade. She's
9 already - - interview for LaGuardia, Challenges
10 Unlimited, PPS, - - on our list. They chose us.
11 That's - - with her when everybody else turned
12 her down and - - when they brought her in. She
13 gets excellent grades. She came - - with
14 Regents under her belt. So what I'm - - add on
15 the assets that's coming in to the assets that's
16 already here. Stop talking about the
17 liabilities and like - - was saying, don't fight
18 for schools values that's valid because this
19 basement belongs to Manhattan Theatre Lab. They
20 shouldn't have to share it with anyone and I
21 will fight very hard for my baby to stay here
22 and she will go - - the whole time whether they
23 embrace - - or not which I'm going to fight like
24 hell for them too and not stay with her, they're
25 not going to bring in no new school - - oh just

1 I'm going to have--they'll be having
2 computers and all this fancy stuff and they're
3 going to push this school to the side - - work
4 with it and I'm begging you god, to look at the
5 kids that's coming in to add them on to the
6 assets that's already here and let's keep this
7 school open. Thank you.

8 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. [Background
9 noise] and Carlos Lewis.

10 MS. DAPHNE GITANO: Hello. My name is
11 Daphne Gitano. I'm a junior in Manhattan
12 Theatre Lab and I just wanted to say the three
13 years ago just before coming here I could not
14 stand here before you and speak to you. I went
15 to a private school actually. I was in a
16 catholic school and one would think that going
17 there would have boosted my confidence. They
18 usually have smaller classes; I speak to my
19 teachers every day. I sat in front of the class
20 and got good grades but I still didn't feel
21 catered in any way I would say, because I went
22 to the classes and my teachers knew my name but
23 they didn't understand that I was struggling in
24 the classroom. They didn't know that I was
25 going home and trying to do the homework and

1 still didn't know how to do it. They didn't
2 realize that I was too afraid to speak up in a
3 classroom because I was afraid if I answered and
4 I answered wrong that I'd be penalized and made
5 fun of because my answers were incorrect.

6 I came to MTL because I auditioned for
7 LaGuardia and I got turned away. I came to MTL
8 because when I decided that I wanted to pursue
9 the arts and realized not having the background
10 to be entered into LaGuardia. I mean you go to
11 the audition and one of the first things they
12 tell you is I have four years to whip you into
13 shape. If you can't do it at this audition you
14 will never be able to do it. I was basically
15 told that just because my parents could not
16 afford to go to--for me to go to a dance school,
17 I was not going to make it in the world, that I
18 had no chance of becoming a dancer, and that
19 wasn't what I decided.

20 So I got here and I'm now being trained and
21 I realize I see myself growing and my academics
22 are getting better. My teachers have gotten me
23 to seek out. I answer in class. I'm happy to
24 be in class, and when I'm falling behind my
25 teachers reach out to me before I get to reach

1 out to them. They make sure I'm doing well
2 in this school, and for you to think that you
3 can close down the school where other students
4 are going through the same thing I am will not
5 have the chance to see or learn or do what I'm
6 doing is hurtful to me and all the future
7 students that should or could be coming here.
8 And that's it. Thank you.

9 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. [Background
10 noise]

11 MR. CARLOS LEWIS: Good evening. My name's
12 Carlos Lewis, Co-president of the Manhattan High
13 School President's Council, PA President of the
14 High School for Law, Advocacy, and Community
15 Justice, right upstairs.

16 It's funny how we hear on Regents week,
17 right, try to convince the DOE not to phase out
18 the high school when these kids should be
19 studying for their Regents. It's funny the
20 rumor by administration to say that - - we can't
21 phase him out or the DOE like they are trying to
22 do to our kids in our schools.

23 And I want to thank these kids here for a
24 beautiful performance. As we heard from - -
25 folks here Manhattan Theatre Lab is a very

1 special school not only for its performance
2 for the special kids that are here. It's weird
3 that two more hearings coming up in District 3,
4 which are also too performance schools which is
5 Wadleigh and Manhattan Theatre Lab. The two
6 prime schools only in District 3 that are
7 performing art schools. Now what is the
8 situation here? Is the DOE trying to take over
9 all of the performance schools in District 3?

10 That's another thing that I wanted to say to
11 let you know the Manhattan High School
12 President's Council supports - - as you can see
13 everyone up here supports you, the community
14 supports you, keep up the good work and I want to
15 see all of y'all at the POP February 9th to let
16 them know that we're not going to close this
17 school or any school. Thank you.

18 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you Carlos. Bianca
19 Bennett, Carolyn Johnson.

20 MS. BIANCA BENNETT: Hello my name is Bianca
21 Bennett and I'm a freshman at MTL. High school
22 is a turning point in an adolescent's life from
23 becoming a confused teenager like myself into a
24 growing, mature, and responsible adult. The
25 people you meet influence and change your views

1 on everything. The things you learn while
2 you are - - for the rest of your life. The
3 things you accomplish make you the person you
4 dreamed of being your whole life.

5 Recently my school has been informed that we
6 are in the position for a possible phase out
7 because of low performance rates in academics.
8 Manhattan Theatre Lab consists of an average of
9 49.4 African American, 47.9 Hispanic, 1% Asian,
10 and lastly 1.7% white. By looking at this data
11 people may say our school is destined for
12 failure. But it's the students learning, the
13 teachers teaching and the staff working and the
14 hope our principal gives us every day when you
15 walk through those doors, we know otherwise.
16 Like our school motto says, failure is not an
17 option. If Manhattan Theatre Lab was to phase
18 out we would go right along with the stereotypes
19 of different ethnicities. I, for one, am not a
20 stereotype and neither is MTL. Data does not
21 define us. We are smart. We are talented. We
22 are successful. We are amazing. We are
23 everything this phase out is trying to tell us
24 we are not. Manhattan Theatre Lab is my home.
25 No one is going to take me out of my home. No

1 one is going to separate my family. No one
2 is going to make me inferior to others and
3 whoever says different is no longer welcome to
4 my home.

5 I am highly insulted by my school being in
6 this predicament and so are my fellow students.
7 That's why we're here today to fight and
8 obviously if the DOE is too ignorant to see
9 [background noise] what we are doing tonight and
10 does phase us out, you were never in the right
11 position to oversee children and their
12 education. Thank you.

13 MS. CAROLYN JOHNSON: Good evening. My name
14 is Carolyn Johnson. I am the formal parent
15 coordinator of MTL. Now I can stand here and
16 say many things about my school. I was
17 initially cut from the budget because of budget
18 cuts. I'm not surprised. Many years of budget
19 cuts will cause schools to fail. I am here
20 because I love my students. I came here
21 yesterday because one of my students is in
22 trouble academically and I believe it's because
23 that he feels that his school is no longer
24 valuable and I'm here to fight for him and all
25 my children of MTL.

1 I would like to know why is it that after
2 ten years of mayoral control of the Department
3 of Education that schools are still being closed
4 at an alarming rate and yet the mayor of this
5 city has the dignity to stand up and say he is
6 improving the schools. Show me where when every
7 year come June we have more school closings than
8 ever. I want to know what's going on.

9 Tell me why is it the solution to putting
10 charter schools where our children are going to
11 be put under a light to say you're not good
12 enough to come here but that's the solution to
13 replace public schools. Why? Because it's
14 profitable for somebody's pocket. I'm letting
15 you know, over my dead body. I [background
16 noise] in the New York City Public School System
17 since 1992 when my son, my oldest child, began
18 school and all I've seen is budget cuts, budget
19 cuts, budget cuts, and more budget cuts. I'm
20 not - - . They're my children - - . Stop - -
21 the children and telling them - - because I have
22 a college graduate son who went to a public
23 school and he graduated a five year engineering
24 college in four doing 18 credits, 17 credits,
25 all it took to become an engineer and it was - -

1 that just this year he finally got a job as
2 an engineer after almost eight years being out
3 of college. My son was disillusioned. He threw
4 away his degree because he felt like it wasn't
5 worth anything.

6 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you ma'am. If you
7 could wrap up.

8 MS. JOHNSON: I'm not stopping right now.
9 [Background noise] children that they're not
10 worth anything. My mother was an uneducated
11 woman. She had no education. She went to the
12 4th grade, but you know what? She taught me so
13 much. She was my role model because she taught
14 me that - - wasn't - - . I dare you to close -
15 - schools in [background noise].

16 MS. ANNECHINO: Okay, can we have
17 [background noise] Dara and Katrine.

18 Your name is?

19 [Crosstalk]

20 MS. ANNECHINO: Instead of - - Diara? No?

21 [Crosstalk]

22 MS. ANNECHINO: Okay.

23 MALE VOICE: So basically all I've been
24 hearing all day is I, I, I and everybody's
25 little personal problems but this is a problem

1 that we all need to come together - - . It
2 seems like ya'll be coming here when something
3 bad is going on. What happens to the times when
4 we had 80% or higher passing their English
5 Regents or their math Regents? What happened to
6 the good times? Why does everybody come
7 together during triumphs and like bad things
8 like what's the problem now. And I feel like
9 this school is like a family. Like if you break
10 us up you're breaking like a family up. And it
11 brings us back to--personally I look at it as it
12 brings us back to a boycott. Martin Luther
13 King's looking right at me right now.
14 Personally this is his school. He built it and
15 I see one, two, three, four, five, six people
16 that's not my color telling me that I got to
17 [background noise] this building and go
18 somewhere else [background noise].

19 MS. ANNECHINO: [Background noise] direction
20 since I'm - - dais. We are not one, two, three,
21 four, five, six, and some people haven't decided
22 yet, but we're not against closing the school.
23 Please don't [background noise] oh my gosh it's
24 late. I'm late [background noise].

25 MS. MARYANNE HOUSTON: Hello I'm Maryanne

1 Houston the former Education Director at
2 Theatre Development Fund, TDF, and I had the
3 pleasure of working with Manhattan Theatre Lab
4 for a number of years as well as with Evelyn
5 Collins when she was at Wadleigh.

6 Deputy Chancellor Grimm I don't know what
7 other hearings have been like but I can only
8 imagine that this is remarkable and a very, very
9 different hearing than you've been experiencing
10 before. This is a testimony to a community that
11 is alive and is a beautiful place for learning
12 which is what we're all about.

13 I'm confident that there must be a solution
14 for finding the proper real estate and place for
15 the Special Music High School. I'm all support
16 for them turning it into Kindergarten through
17 8th, 9 to 12. I think it's a great idea. I'm
18 sure they can find a place. It's not the time
19 to ask Manhattan Theatre Lab to leave. It's a
20 school on the rise and it's a school that's
21 doing beautifully with its student population
22 that serves kids who have not been screened.

23 As the Education Director for TDF we serve
24 6,000 students in the city. We worked with 56
25 schools and I had to scrutinize my schools to

1 see what schools we would rotate out, and at
2 no point ever did I feel that Manhattan Theatre
3 Lab should be rotated out. It worked
4 beautifully with our resources and the
5 opportunities we gave them.

6 So I'm pleading to you to take the
7 opportunity to come to this school, to
8 experience the riches that these kids have in
9 their talent and in their eagerness to learn.
10 That's what we're all here for. Thank you.

11 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Stanley. Are
12 you--what's your name?

13 [Crosstalk]

14 FEMALE VOICE: I guess you could tell I
15 didn't go to Manhattan Theatre Lab School. My
16 interest and I prefer to talk to the students.
17 Nobody stood up here - - day, right? - - .

18 I'm thinking of a journey, that journey that
19 I went on and to let you know that you are
20 already ahead of the game.

21 I went to--it wasn't here--but I went to
22 high school of 500 students. I graduate 4th from
23 the bottom, no counselor talked to me about
24 going to college. We had classes where we had
25 72 students in one class and only 20 seats. I

1 went on I got a 3.7 in undergrad and got - -
2 finals at Columbia University. So you - - ahead
3 of the game.

4 I was afraid to go to high school so I
5 missed a lot of classes. I was afraid to walk
6 to school so you're already ahead of me. You
7 get nurtured here and you're getting it from
8 the--I don't know your past; I don't know your
9 future. I can only go by your presents and the
10 presence I saw on stage shows me you're already
11 ahead of the game. As a working playwright that
12 I go casting and a stage manager and I help
13 other people cast I can say you're already ahead
14 of the game. And you should be proud that
15 you're a part of the school that you're a part
16 of.

17 And I also want to commend you on how well
18 you listen especially to other people who have
19 opposing views even when they are talking
20 against my friend, Evelyn Collins, that you
21 listen and give them an opportunity to speak
22 because that's the way we learn. If you only
23 listen to your parents who say oh, yeah you're
24 great; you would not feel them booing you at the
25 Apollo. You have to listen to all views and

1 that's the only way you're going to change.
2 If - - great all the time you don't know what
3 you need to change and you have to open stuff up
4 to listening - - . And I just want to end with
5 a poem and [background noise].

6 I took my - - to work and hung it on the
7 blackboard of my - - . You're already ahead of
8 the game so don't complain, fight for - - .

9 MS. ANNECHINO: Claudia Lyons and Billy
10 Allen.

11 [Crosstalk]

12 MS. CLAUDIA LYONS: I'm a proud parent of a
13 12th grader who is on the honor roll, who as the
14 National - - Award Society Award - - and also
15 has just been accepted at University of Virginia
16 State. I am so proud of what she has achieved
17 in this school.

18 Evelyn Collins thank you and - - the kids
19 because - - not only a child excelling on her
20 own, she's a child who helps--this is, as they
21 say, a family school and kids come together and
22 help each other and it's all about the dream.
23 Martin Luther King said I have a dream. My
24 daughter came to this school with a dream. As a
25 single mom I cannot afford for her to go to a

1 four-year or two-year - - . This school gave
2 her the opportunity to excel the way she has
3 excelled.

4 My son goes to - - Academy in Queens and
5 it's an excellent school. I do not know the
6 principal's name. He's graduated in 8th grade
7 but I still don't know the principal - - but I
8 know Evelyn Collins' cell number. I can call
9 her anytime. I know when my child is at school
10 if she's late, you see I follow through as a
11 mother, and - - I was also on the - - and I
12 would follow with parents of kids struggling and
13 we are a family that pulled together and kept
14 the school where it is right now. And we do
15 have kids that succeeded. We don't have a
16 failing school. We have some that are failing
17 but if you give us a chance we can help those
18 who are failing. I'm not longer going to be a
19 mother part of MTL but I would back MTL with my
20 corporate friends. Thank you.

21 MS. JOYCE SYLVESTER: All prisons are not
22 made of concrete and steel Deputy Grimm. And
23 this is an environment of people that care about
24 their education. I see you taking notes. I
25 pray to God that you are taking the kind of

1 notes that say that the arts are saving these
2 children.

3 I am a product of the arts. My name is
4 Joyce Sylvester. I'm a playwright, I am a
5 director and an actress, and it was through the
6 arts that saved me in the school, the Street
7 Academy out in Brooklyn and many, many years
8 ago. I've been in the business for 40 years and
9 it was through the arts that saved me. That I
10 understood that I am a creative person. Not a
11 corporate person that would confuse me and have
12 me end up being on drugs or something like that,
13 but a creative person and I learned that through
14 being in a school that cared, a school that
15 believed in the gift that was bestowed upon me.
16 And this is a place that cares. I've only been
17 in the school one time to speak to the students.
18 This is my second time. I was happy to come
19 here because it is an environment that cares and
20 I hope that you have that in your notes.

21 The arts teach, as it was said, the arts
22 will teach a child discipline. You don't want
23 these children running out in the streets and
24 causing crime and all these other kinds of
25 things because they don't have a place to be and

1 a place to go. So I pray that you go back to
2 Bloomberg. Because the Department of Education
3 is now standing for the Department of Extinction
4 and it's just a ridiculous thing that all these
5 budget cuts. I'm a teacher/artist. I have
6 given back to the schools. I have even taught
7 in the schools. I was--I'm a part of the budget
8 cuts but I'm here because I care. So I hope and
9 I pray that you go back and you report to
10 whomever is it and Bloomberg that now the
11 Department of Education has a nickname; the
12 Department of Extinction. We are ashamed. We
13 are ashamed. Thank you.

14 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. [Background
15 noise] and Curtis Williams.

16 MS. SABRINA BOYCE: My name is Sabrina
17 Boyce. I am in 11th grade here at MTL. I
18 participate in dance and - - and I'm a proud
19 member of the National Honor Society.

20 I have attended Manhattan Theatre Lab High
21 School for the past two years and I was
22 devastated when my principal informed the
23 teachers and students that our school was on a
24 list to be proposed for a phase out. Manhattan
25 Theatre Lab High School is supposed to help

1 students academically and artistically.

2 This school has helped me achieve my highest
3 grades possible, a - - student who received
4 seventies to eighties to someone who gets
5 eighty-fives and nineties. At MTL I learned
6 about technique and choreographing my dance
7 class which wouldn't have been possible because
8 my family can't afford dance lessons.

9 I have been introduced to wonderful
10 opportunities because I attend MTL. In my
11 acting class I have met professionals in the
12 industry that talk about how they've become
13 successful. These individuals discuss the
14 importance of a good work ethic and hard work
15 and how it pertains to acting and life.

16 MTL has a partnership with Fordham
17 University. If you participate in your science
18 and technology entry program, this program helps
19 students improve academically and offers classes
20 on college preparation and career development.
21 I am grateful for opportunities that my school
22 has given me. I know that I will become an
23 outstanding member in society because of my work
24 in this school.

25 Manhattan Theatre Lab High School is like my

1 second home. To some students it is the only
2 place where they feel comfortable. We are a
3 family at Manhattan Theatre Lab High School and
4 this school shouldn't be phased out because
5 there is so much more we can accomplish. Thank
6 you.

7 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

8 MR. CURTIS WILLIAMS: Hi my name is Curtis
9 Williams. I'm a former graduate of Wadleigh
10 High School, Class of 2001 where Evelyn Collins
11 was one of my teachers as well as my drama
12 instructor.

13 In 1999, grade ten for me, inspiration blew
14 in like the wind for me. It came in the form of
15 Michigan. A woman named Evelyn Collins
16 preaching the arts, something I had no knowledge
17 about but in my near future didn't know how it
18 would unify my soul's parts. A torn soul I was,
19 misguided youth because I never really had
20 anyone showing me that inside is where I would
21 find my truth. I tampered with the dark side
22 because choices seemed few or maybe too much
23 time on my hands and not much to do.

24 Evelyn Collins brought her tugboat of the
25 arts to a damaged and sinking ship of just

1 another school in the hood by latching all
2 her chains of inspiration, motivation, and
3 dedication me and my classmates bought in and
4 success began to win. I starred in every
5 production and in off-Broadway productions in my
6 high school years graduating with an 81%
7 average. With failure is not an option being my
8 fuel for my rocket and the discipline from the
9 arts the love from Evelyn Collins with of
10 course, the map from my ancestors and my sheer
11 determination I took off. I finished college
12 with a degree in theatre and have been working
13 in MTL as a paraprofessional for five years as
14 well as a professional actor for ten.

15 I am the POME of Evelyn Collins powerful
16 fist for uplifting our children through the
17 educational arts. The POME, P-O-M-E, the
18 product of my environment. I see me in every
19 student I have ever met that walked through the
20 MTL doors. I've witnessed the impact Evelyn and
21 MTL has had in these kids so to propose a phase
22 out of an entire school who call these walls
23 their second home and use the arts as the torch
24 through the dark caves of education is absurd.

25 MTL deserves a chance to be great so I ask

1 the question why should the phase out be the
2 subject of our kids fate.

3 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

4 Alicia and Carmen.

5 Alicia?

6 ALESIA: Alesia.

7 MS. ANNECHINO: Alesia. I apologize.

8 ALESIA: I am a senior here and I don't
9 think this school should be phased out. I think
10 we just need more structure. We need somebody
11 with a different plan. Everybody that came here
12 - - the arts, I excel in the arts but you're
13 ready to go on stage to perform but nobody
14 wanted to go to Spanish. How long it took us to
15 get - - books. How much support do we get when
16 it Regents prep and I got to leave at 4:00. She
17 got her - - at 4:00 but we got to perform for a
18 show that's taking it till the lights go off.
19 We had to do - - same time she scheduled - - .
20 It's like we are talented who came in like this
21 but half the people who's leaving - - to a four-
22 year school. They could go to a show and
23 perform, they can tell you about the dress and
24 that but that's not going to take you nowhere
25 'cause when it's time for you to sign a contract

1 and you can't read that and you can't tell
2 somebody - - saying but you could tell them how
3 to put your foot up - - is not the same thing.

4 They came in here talented, they're going to
5 leave talented. Now how - - leave with a proper
6 education. Miss Collins is--she's for the arts.
7 Don't get me wrong she can teach you till she
8 can't say no more. But half the teachers in
9 here who - - you don't get her support 'cause
10 they not dancing [background noise] how long it
11 took for her to get in contact with her where we
12 got to do stuff. We don't get textbooks and - -
13 till a month ago and one was a class you have to
14 have to graduate. You don't get the support
15 unless you go on stage and that's the problem of
16 many seniors so when you get a freshman saying I
17 don't want this school to close, they're not
18 seniors. They're not applying for the
19 applications so all [background noise] is how to
20 do the [background noise] not worry about can I
21 get a recommendation letter 'cause I asked her
22 for one and I still haven't got one, but when I
23 was doing assistant principal assist the
24 direction for the show I got what I needed to
25 get.

1 The problem isn't the artists, it's the
2 academics, and that's why ya'll want to phase
3 out the school 'cause at the end of the day
4 these kids have somewhere to go to. They need
5 somebody whose head is in the middle, who's
6 ready to dare academics and arts, not just one
7 thing and not the other. Miss - - can't do--
8 I've seen her and when you don't have the
9 support from everybody you're not going nowhere.
10 I had my Spanish teacher he walked me down the
11 hallway seen me 5,000 times and not going to
12 tell you you're failing until it's too late.

13 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

14 Thank you. Is Carmen here? Carmen - - and
15 after Carmen is Tracy Hood.

16 Carmen, please.

17 CARMEN: Thank you. My name is Carmen - - .
18 I'm the parent of a freshman and it's amazing
19 because the department of the DOE is proposing a
20 phase out instead of help [background noise]
21 money that will support you. So what kind of
22 proposal is that? When I was looking for high
23 schools for my son we visited six schools
24 including MTL and amazingly enough he liked all
25 the schools but when he came here it grabbed

1 him. He said this is where I want to go. I
2 said are you sure? He says - - . He's in the
3 arts already so he really wants a future like
4 all these young adults here.

5 Proposal phase out? There's something
6 wrong. I thought proposals are supposed to be
7 good things. Evelyn Collins. I've been with
8 this school, I've entered this school in
9 different occasions for different reasons, and
10 I've seen nothing negative. My son has had two
11 marking periods here, two report cards. Each
12 report card went up. That's a failing school?
13 I don't think so. So proposal? Why not make it
14 a positive not a phase out.

15 Everything I've seen, heard tonight is all
16 positive. If that's something that's not moving
17 you, don't you get it? You want more evidence?
18 Go on YouTube, go on the internet. Google
19 search it. There's history behind Evelyn
20 Collins. There's dedication. A principal who
21 knows every child's name? That should say
22 something. If there's problems in the school,
23 there's problems in every school. But guess
24 what? You resolve the situation by giving it
25 resources, giving tools, make it grow, nourish

1 it. You just don't say I'm proposing to
2 phase you out. That doesn't grow. Two and two,
3 that doesn't add to four. I really hope that
4 you consider to keep the school open for now,
5 present, future, next generation. Thank you.
6 Thank you so much.

7 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

8 Tracy, and Nova Delgado [phonetic].

9 FEMALE VOICE: Welcome parents, students,
10 staff, and community. My name's Tracy Hood and
11 I'm a Special Education Teacher here at
12 Manhattan Theatre Lab High School.

13 I wanted to take this time to express that
14 we are all MTL strong. We are strong in
15 academics, strong in talent of the arts, short
16 in morale and short in preparing our students
17 for life after high school.

18 It has been a great pleasure to work with
19 such a dedicated and professional educational
20 staff. I would like to win a special thank you
21 to our administration. They have been true
22 leaders and mentors to many. It is evident in
23 their day-to-day activities that they each place
24 our students first and are committed to their
25 academic achievement.

1 Our Special Education Program works to
2 accentuate the best talents that all of our
3 students possess. We encourage and cultivate
4 our students to express and utilize their unique
5 and special gifts to accelerate them in their
6 core academic studies. We work with each
7 student Monday through Friday to teach them how
8 to better achieve their academic, career and
9 life skill goals. We also provide after school
10 programs and weekend enrichment along with
11 school performances for our community.

12 This school's well-rounded educational
13 program not only allows for core academic
14 achievement and college preparatory studies but
15 it also cultivates the arts and allows our
16 students a positive outlet to express themselves
17 holistically. Our diverse student body
18 encourages individuality and enables students to
19 be comfortable in a learning-enriched
20 environment. What this school offers the
21 students is valuable within our educational
22 system and speaks to the root of a well-balanced
23 public education today.

24 We work each day to develop the whole child
25 and push them to work to their fullest academic

1 potential. What Manhattan theatre Lab High
2 School offers is an education that affords each
3 student the opportunity to be globally aware,
4 challenged, and prepared to compete once they
5 graduate from our school. We prepare our
6 students to be MTL strong. Thank you so much
7 for your time ladies and gentlemen. Have a safe
8 and wonderful evening.

9 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Is Nova here?

10 MS. LEA WOLGREN: So I'm going to speak for
11 her.

12 MS. ANNECHINO: Oh.

13 MS. WOLGREN: My name is Lea Wolgren
14 [phonetic]. I'm a senior in Manhattan Theatre
15 Lab. I came in here wanting to act. Throughout
16 my four years I don't want to act no more. It's
17 not for me. It's not because my--I believe that
18 when you see people's lose passion and not just
19 the people whose teaching you lose passion, it
20 makes you not want to do it no more. She, Miss
21 Collins, she's a great businessperson. She's
22 great in the arts yes, but when--I - - in
23 anything I do I do it and I - - for myself. And
24 if I'm not getting taught how to articulate and
25 how to carry myself and like academically wise

1 outside the school, then what's the point of
2 having the talent. What's the point of lifting
3 my leg up and - - if I can't communicate and
4 when I get a contract I won't know the
5 percentage because I don't know math. You ask
6 somebody what's a math problem they go like uh,
7 but when you ask them what's the oldest - - they
8 played heads up, Oh, I know. It's just
9 everybody comes up and they say how good the
10 performance was. Yes, but they don't know that
11 Miss Collins had pulled them kids out of class
12 that they need to take another semester for
13 'cause they failed [background noise] and they
14 do all these shows and they miss class and - -
15 you're thinking I'm missing class to do what I
16 want to do. You're not getting too worried
17 about it. As an adult you should be if you're
18 failing you need to stay in this class. Miss
19 Collins had plenty of time for different plays.
20 If you're failing two of your classes you can't
21 be in it. So when that time comes and she knows
22 that you failed two more classes she - - let it
23 slide. Okay just perform.

24 And - - we're out there - - doing bake sales
25 and we might not enjoy our senior traditions

1 like going to prom and go to senior trip
2 because we don't have the funds but we - - life
3 for Friday, Saturday morning, Saturday night,
4 Sunday morning, Sunday night and where do our
5 friends go to? To new - - , to - - we don't
6 even got enough.

7 So even when the surveys, the surveys the
8 most complaints come from the teachers. The
9 teachers are not complaining for no reason
10 because they--the teachers are complaining
11 because they care and - - she talks about them
12 saying yeah the teachers are complaining, and
13 the teachers talk about her saying she's not
14 organized.

15 This whole school is not organized. So if
16 maybe if you need to phase it out then that's
17 what needs to happen, but - - and we - - go to
18 an after school program - - .

19 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Thank you.
20 Maryanne Houston. Or Houston. Cynthia Coplus
21 [phonetic], sorry.

22 [Crosstalk]

23 And Paul, the last name begins with an M.
24 Macintosh. Oh, Paul Macintosh. And Gladys
25 James.

1 Hi. I'm not Mary or any of those. I
2 didn't get a chance to sign the list, it was
3 closed, but my name is Shikana Matou [phonetic].
4 I am a former student of Evelyn Collins. I've
5 known her for 15 years and when I met her I
6 didn't meet her as a performing arts teacher. I
7 met her as my English teacher and a video
8 production teacher. She taught me at Wadleigh
9 which is also another school that will be going
10 to a public hearing.

11 But I stand here to say that she didn't just
12 make sure that I was excellent in the arts, but
13 she did make sure that I was excellent in my
14 academics, because there was no way you could do
15 a performance if you were failing. There is no
16 way that you can do one and not be able to do
17 the other. How can you do a performance if
18 you're failing English and you can't read? So
19 how can you sit here and say that she doesn't
20 care about your academics if she's telling you
21 that I can't allow you to do these things if
22 you're not holding your responsibility as a
23 student; to make sure that you are studying,
24 that you're in class. She would not allow any
25 of her students to be there and after school and

1 study the lines and stay for rehearsals if we
2 could not be in class.

3 If you did not have your attendance together
4 you were not there. I took the ELA twice.
5 First time I didn't pass. Second time she took
6 over the summer--took me over the summer and
7 studied with me so when I took it again in
8 August that I passed and I passed above 65.

9 There aren't many people who are willing to
10 do that that is just focus on performing arts.
11 If it was all about performing arts she would
12 have said forget that, okay. You didn't pass
13 the ELA but you passed your English class, you
14 can still go on to do performing arts and I did.
15 I started in all three plays while I was in the
16 school with her, but it wasn't just about
17 performing arts. It was about me knowing as a
18 young lady that there were things that you have
19 to do. It's - - diligence that taught me
20 respect, and it taught me - - excellence in
21 everything that I do. So I don't believe
22 closing the school or trying to phase out the
23 school is the answer. If someone is trying to
24 be there and nurture our kids, our community and
25 show them what they need to do other than just

1 the performing arts. Thank you.

2 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. [Background
3 noise]

4 MALE VOICE: I stand before you with a heavy
5 heart and my heart is heavy because
6 unfortunately some of the comments that I've
7 heard from my young brothers, my young sisters
8 are misguided and that pains me greatly.

9 When I came here this evening it was my
10 intent to respond to some of the data, some of
11 the things that the DOE has said was problematic
12 for schools like this school. But as I
13 listened, I listened to Brother Noah Gautbaum
14 when he began to speak and I thought of simply
15 that George Orwell said when he said that in
16 times of universal deceit to tell the truth is a
17 revolutionary act.

18 So I stand before you with a heavy heart and
19 I stand before you willing to speak the truth.
20 Otherwise I wouldn't stand here.

21 I remember it being said that if you have a
22 child it's like having your heart walk outside
23 of your body. So these are our hearts. These
24 are our children and I don't want to get
25 emotional about this. I want to be as

1 dispassionate as I can possibly be but these
2 are our children. These are our hearts. And if
3 I can just share with you a bible verse and its
4 Proverbs 4:23 and that verse says "above all
5 else protect your heart, it's where your life
6 comes from." And if these children are our
7 hearts we must protect them.

8 I've just been told that my time is up but I
9 have to say a couple of other things. We've
10 been channeling a lot of emotions, frustrations,
11 and I stand here channeling the frustrations and
12 the pleadings of those brothers and sisters,
13 some of them misguided, those parents who
14 already know that this perhaps will be a sham
15 and that's unfortunate because Albert Einstein
16 once said "setting an example is not the only
17 means of influencing people. It is the only
18 means." And I stand before you to say that I
19 would not look you in the eye if Miss Collins
20 has set the example. And lastly, in 1954 Brown
21 vs. Board of Education, that ruling declared
22 that we should have equal access to opportunity.
23 If you close this school the least of us, those
24 brothers, and sisters who will have to go
25 through the storm, they will not have equal

1 access to opportunity.

2 And lastly since we've referenced Dr. King
3 he said "true peace is not - - the access of
4 tension: it is the presence of justice." So
5 we're talking about justice here.

6 When I look at my sister I look at you--both
7 of you, and I look at and I try and I empathize
8 and see what you feel. And I try and read your
9 faces and I sincerely hope that you have the
10 spiritual integrity to embrace the truth because
11 these are times of universal deceit and we can
12 embrace and tell the truth. That will be a true
13 active revolution.

14 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you sir. We have
15 [background noise] Sebastian?

16 [Crosstalk]

17 MS. ANNECHINO: Gladys I'm sorry.

18 MS. GLADYS JAMES: That's okay. I'm Gladys
19 James. I'm a teacher, 22 years at the High
20 School of - - Industries. I came from the south
21 of the country. I dealt with the civil rights
22 movement and this evening is very heartbreaking
23 to me. When I hear children speaking up about
24 education, this is what we did back in the
25 sixties. When they were closing all of the

1 black schools and sending us to the white
2 schools, and I really did not think that I would
3 have to go through this again on this earth.

4 There are two schools in District 3. My son
5 went to a school in District 3. These are art
6 schools. I'm a fashion designer, I'm a costume
7 designer, I'm a tailor. All in the arts. I've
8 worked with these wonderful students helping
9 them to get costumed for their performances. I
10 work for them. The last show I worked on was
11 Phantom of the Opera so I've worked with all
12 kinds of people in the theatre business.

13 I see futures here. It's not about Miss
14 Collins. It's not about these teachers.
15 They'll get jobs somewhere else. It's about
16 losing our children. I have gone to union
17 meetings and I've heard about these schools
18 closing. Maxwell was on the list. Today the
19 New York Schools said they have - - . I've had
20 students who barely made 65 all through high
21 school and now teachers they're helping someone.
22 I worked with the Office of Juvenile Justice and
23 the National Board of - - , [background noise]
24 street in Harlem - - females. I have a
25 physician's assistant, social worker. I have

1 two girls who opened up a home in Brooklyn.

2 Let's save these children.

3 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you.

4 MS. JAMES: They're not as at risk as we
5 think they are. If we look at ourselves right
6 now we are at risk, not the children. Let's
7 save them. Someone save them. Thank you.

8 MS. ANNECHINO: Thank you. Our [background
9 noise] is [background noise] Sylvester.

10 [Crosstalk]

11 MS. ANNECHINO: Okay, Cynthia.

12 MS. CYNTHIA TOMKINS: Hi. My name is
13 Cynthia [crosstalk]. My name is Cynthia
14 Tomkins. Twenty-six years I've been in the
15 public system with my kids. I had one graduate
16 - - performing arts and one graduated from
17 LaGuardia, and one graduated from - - .
18 [Background noise] graduated from here you know,
19 and they get degrees. But the whole thing is -
20 - and from the inside they're - - terrific
21 schools, because I've been there. But I've been
22 a PTA president this school had money. The
23 parents had money. That's the reason why.
24 Thirty thousand dollars - - attitude. They have
25 everything in these schools because they had the

1 money together. They got a silver lining. I
2 got all the tutoring - - , they tell me where to
3 go, who's the best to give the kids the best
4 SATs. The school is. I done did all that but
5 my last child said she wanted to go somewhere
6 else. She wanted to not just dance, she wanted
7 get her degree. In all those schools you can't
8 do all three. You pick one that's the one you
9 choose to do. If you don't like dance, in the
10 third year you have to stick with it no matter
11 what. But when my daughter came here she wants
12 to be here. She comes here and wants to learn.
13 Okay, the school is struggling but we can--just
14 give us some more help. That's all I'm asking
15 for is some help. I'm willing to fight. I'm
16 willing to stay on with the PTA for 10 or 15
17 years then I'll end up working for the board of
18 education because I was always there anyway.

19 What I'm trying to say is she came here, I
20 see her smile, I see her want to come to school.
21 I even see her want to read and my daughter - -
22 do that because... And this did not
23 discriminate on her size and - - being a dancer
24 is very hard for - - side are you on. And my
25 kids struggled with that and they are the best

1 dancers. They always do their best. They
2 can - - but there's always size, can't - - .
3 You know, this school would take the - -
4 whatever she wanted to do and everybody's going
5 to love her no matter what she do and that's why
6 I'm going to try to fight and keep this school
7 open and get help for Miss Collins, get help for
8 whoever. Kids have - - . This won't always be
9 a story of somebody had a bad experience but
10 let's make more - - experiences. My boy told me
11 in 9th grade I'm going to - - for three years.
12 You know for her to be somebody to speak in the
13 12th grade telling somebody else I hope the 9th
14 grade gets in. Just please give us a chance.
15 [Background noise] Miss Collins.

16 FEMALE VOICE: Okay [background noise] list
17 and we're going to start the Q and A portion of
18 the event.

19 MS. DENISE GRAY: My colleague, you called
20 for Joyce Sylvester, I know, I'm sorry. And she
21 had to leave and asked me so speak for her.

22 My name is Denise Gray and I am a producer
23 and I'm a performer. And I first came upon
24 Manhattan Theatre Lab when I was producing a
25 show, an event called Broadway to the Boroughs.

1 It was a hundred thousand dollar fundraiser
2 for a nonprofit organization and I asked them
3 who their musical director, their teacher, Greg
4 Payne, if they would come and back up this show.
5 This show had folks like Stephanie Mills, it had
6 people from FAYLA [phonetic], it had people from
7 in the heights. I had high level professional
8 people. The kids came in, they were
9 professional, they were articulate, they were
10 excited, they were high-spirited, but they did
11 what they were supposed to do. They did it with
12 love and they did it with professionalism. That
13 began my journey with them. They did it so well
14 they were invited back again the following year.
15 They did it so well that I started volunteering
16 here and doing work around here.

17 I come into this school and quietly watch.
18 As an actor you always watch and taught to be
19 perceptive and to listen and look more than you
20 speak. So I come in here and I'm sitting in the
21 lobby upstairs and I see these kids line up
22 whenever I come in here and they're going
23 through that detector thing up there. And they
24 take off their shoes and they take off their
25 hats, and they take off their gloves, and they

1 don't even flinch. First of all they've
2 become accustomed to how the world is but second
3 of all, I believe that it's because of the
4 encouragement and the confidence and the self
5 esteem which is being built here that they can
6 come in here and what they get every day when
7 they know they get through that detector that
8 they are willing to do that. The world is cold
9 outside. We know it's cold. The recession is
10 hard and life is hard.

11 There a whole lot of options just phasing
12 out this school. Did anybody ever think about
13 maybe giving them a building somewhere where
14 they would be wanted, relocating into Harlem?
15 Anybody think about that?

16 I beg you, I beg you, I beg you. Our
17 children are not supposed to be suffering
18 because of our malfunctions. Please, there are
19 other options and I beg you to exercise them.
20 Thank you so much.

21 MS. SOBELMAN: [Background noise] and we're
22 going to start on the Q and A. So we have a few
23 questions that have been submitted. I'm going
24 to read each question twice so everyone hears it
25 and then we've got a couple of different folks

1 who are going to respond.

2 So the first question is: Why is phasing out
3 a school a solution? Can you really phase out
4 our children? This proposal does not help
5 students here.

6 So again: Why is phasing out a school a
7 solution? Can you really phase out our
8 children? This proposal does not help students
9 here. And I'll invite the Deputy Chancellor to
10 respond.

11 MS. GRIMM: Well phasing out a school is a
12 solution. It is not a solution we seek but it's
13 not a solution we propose easily.

14 Phasing out a school is not a phase out of
15 children. The proposal to phase out a school is
16 in response to our concern that these children
17 need better opportunities. And as I said when I
18 was talking about the proposal, the children in
19 this school, if this proposal is accepted, will
20 continue in this school and they will continue
21 with all of the support that we can give them.
22 But we want to offer a different option to young
23 people coming up entering into the 9th grade.
24 Thank you.

25 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. The next question

1 is: What other unscreened options are
2 available to students who want a performing arts
3 school but don't have the skills to audition?

4 So again: What other unscreened options are
5 available to students who want a performing arts
6 school but don't have the skills to audition?

7 And I'll invite the Manhattan Planner Elizabeth
8 Rose to respond.

9 MS. ELIZABETH ROSE: So there are two other
10 schools with performing arts programs in
11 Manhattan that are unscreened, the do not
12 require an audition. One of them is the lower
13 Manhattan arts academy, the other is the urban
14 assembly school for the performing arts, and
15 both of those schools are also unscreened.

16 In addition some of the audition schools
17 take a very wide range of students in terms of
18 their preparation so some of those schools also
19 take students who may not be accepted by some of
20 the other audition schools so we can - -
21 options.

22 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. And the next
23 question is: What kind of support has the DOE
24 given to Manhattan Theatre Lab?

25 So again: What kind of support--excuse me--

1 has the DOE given to Manhattan Theatre Lab?

2 And I'll again invite Elizabeth Rose to respond.

3 MS. ROSE: So the supports that have been
4 provided to the school are identified in the
5 educational impact statement. There's a section
6 that begins on Page 4 that talks about supports
7 to the school. A couple of speakers this
8 evening actually to refer to some of them, the
9 schools work with their networks and networks
10 provide supports in a number of ways. They
11 provide leadership training working with the
12 principal and the administration. They provide
13 professional development to the teachers and
14 staff. They help the school focus and identify
15 on their goals for the coming year. They
16 provide operational supports to the school.
17 They provide budgetary and management supports
18 to help the school make choices with the budgets
19 that they have. So some more of this
20 information is in the educational - - .

21 MR. GAUTBAUM: Can I interject here? You
22 say the network has provided the support. Could
23 we get the network leader or anyone for
24 providing those supports? Can they come up and
25 tell us specifically what supports they provided

1 to the school?

2 FEMALE VOICE: Thank you.

3 MR. GAUTBAUM: Could you tell us when you've
4 done this. Who you are and also if you could,
5 could you tell us if you've received any
6 additional funding to provide these supports or
7 did they have to come out of your standard
8 budget for however many schools you have.

9 MR. BILL DUGAN: So, my name is Bill Dugan.
10 I'm the Deputy Network Leader for CFM405 and
11 this is our first year of working with Manhattan
12 Theatre Lab.

13 [Crosstalk]

14 MR. DUGAN: We did have a predecessor,
15 another network that worked with them in the
16 past. At the beginning of the year Principal
17 Collins did choose to join our network. I have
18 been here several times. I've met with
19 Principal Collins. I have met with some of the
20 assistant principals as other members of my
21 team; we are trying to help them develop some
22 plans of action. I know I've worked with one of
23 the assistant principals directly on the science
24 proposal. There's some concern about the
25 science program here so we've done a number of

1 things.

2 MR. GAUTBAUM: I don't mean to interrupt but
3 the school is being closed on the basis, correct
4 me if I'm wrong Ms. Rose. This school is being
5 closed on the basis of a failing grade that it
6 achieved last year and so--and in spite of
7 supports that the DOE said it provided. So a
8 new network coming in and providing supports
9 this year does not answer the question and so
10 I'm--I want to know, we want to know who was
11 responsible for providing those supports and
12 what supports were they. Because clearly this
13 gentleman is doing something--you know the horse
14 is already out of the barn. You're closing this
15 school theoretically because of scores last year
16 and supports that you say you provided. And I'd
17 also add to that question: in the EIS it says
18 that we have provided supports over a number of
19 years and they've been unsuccessful. And my
20 question is: if Manhattan Theatre Lab received a
21 B just two years ago, why would you have been
22 even applying these supports. It doesn't make
23 any sense. I don't really understand that.

24 So could you explain how that took place if
25 you were providing the supports? Why so you say

1 you were doing so and how were they
2 unsuccessful. Where's the network?

3 MS. ROSE: So, I think we should clarify.
4 We are not proposing that we phase out the
5 school just because of one year's performance.
6 We do not only look at last year's performance,
7 we have looked at performance over a several
8 year period and so networks provide supports
9 continuously every year whether you get a B,
10 whether you get a lower grade, we are always
11 working with schools to try to help them improve
12 the performance of the school. So, no, I can't
13 give you a specific list of what the network
14 supports have been in each of those individual
15 years. That's not something I have with me this
16 evening.

17 This is not about performance last year was
18 not good and therefore that's why we're closing
19 the school. It's we have been looking at the
20 performance, the graduation rates, and the
21 changes in the student achievement over a
22 several year period.

23 [Crosstalk]

24 MR. GAUTBAUM: And also could it be closed
25 if they did not--if they did not receive an F

1 grade?

2 MS. SOBELMAN: Okay, so we've completed the
3 answers and questions that were submitted and I-
4 -at this point if there are additional questions
5 I would like to refer folks to the phone and
6 email which we provided earlier.

7 MR. KAUFMAN: I beg to interject. It's a
8 joint hearing and I have a question. Do we know
9 what the number of the previous CFN was, which
10 was and what rank that CFN--does that CFN even
11 exist at this time or is it what rank it is on
12 your own metrics of CFN performance. Can we
13 receive copies of the CFN annual reports that
14 describe what that previous CFN did in regard to
15 this school?

16 The problem we have as parents is trying to
17 understand and have any confidence in DOE
18 reports or DOE metrics or DOE statements to the
19 fact that some schools are doing better than
20 others and why and when, right? There is a very
21 limited amount of confidence in the DOE - -
22 these smokescreens of jargon that we receive and
23 do not receive.

24 MS. ROSE: We will follow up with the CEC to
25 provide the information about the former network

1 and we will also see that we provide you some
2 additional data showing the relative performance
3 of this school against other schools over the
4 second year period.

5 FEMALE VOICE: I'm sorry but the gentleman
6 said there wasn't a former network.

7 [Crosstalk]

8 FEMALE VOICE: There was a former network?

9 [Crosstalk]

10 MS. SOBELMAN: So [background noise] stated
11 we will follow up on the information on the
12 former network. We don't have that information
13 with us here tonight and I do apologize for
14 that.

15 So we have now reached the end of the
16 question and answer session so I ask that if
17 additional questions come up or comments between
18 now and the panel vote which takes place on
19 February 9th at Brooklyn Technical High School.
20 Please reach out to us at DOE proposals; that's
21 D, the number zero, the number 3, proposals at
22 schools dot N-Y-C dot gov or at the phone number
23 which is (212) 374-3466, so the hearing is
24 adjourned and thank you so much for joining us
25 this evening.

- 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

[END RECORDING]

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: 

Date: January 27, 2012