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**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION - DIVISION OF
PORTFOLIO PLANNING
Truncation of P.S. 161 The Crown
1/19/12**

1 [START RECORDING]

2 MS. MELISSA HARRIS: Just as a reminder,
3 speaker sign up is outside of the auditorium.
4 And we're posting speaker sign up at 6:15. So
5 if you wish to speak this evening you should
6 sign up outside of the auditorium. As well, if
7 you have questions this evening, we will be
8 collecting the questions on index cards. You
9 can get index cards from outside the auditorium.

10 We may not get to all questions this
11 evening, but if we do not get to all questions
12 the answers will posted on the website. There's
13 a telephone number that on the back of the fact
14 sheet, as well as, the address that you can go
15 to.

16 [Background noise]

17 MS. HARRIS: Good evening, everyone. My
18 name is Melissa Harris, and I will be ITS's
19 [phonetic] facilitator for tonight's public
20 hearing. This is the joint public hearing of
21 the Department of Education, - - Council
22 District 17, and the School Leadership Team to
23 discuss the proposed truncation of PS 161, The
24 Crown School. Tonight's proceedings will be
25 recorded and transcribed. Before we begin the

1 hearing, we ask that anyone who wishes to speak
2 during the comment public portion of the
3 hearing, sign up at the table outside the
4 auditorium.

5 Sign up will end at 6:15. If you have a
6 question, and you want it to be addresses this
7 evening during the Q&A portion of the agenda,
8 please write that question on the index cards
9 provided outside the auditorium, and submit them
10 to a volunteer by the table. Only people who
11 have signed up to speak will be able to
12 participate during the public comment portion of
13 this evening's hearing.

14 All panel participants were asked to be here
15 no later than 5:30, and I believe everyone is
16 here. There may be elected officials who will
17 arrive at different times throughout the
18 evening. If they wish to speak, we will do our
19 best to accommodate them at the first opportune
20 moment. Those who are here during the comment
21 public segment will be asked to speak first.
22 The format of tonight's joint public hearing
23 will include: a presentation of the proposal,
24 presentations by hearing participants, followed
25 by public comment.

1 Speakers should already have signed up at
2 the sign in table out at the lobby. Public
3 comments can be no longer than two minutes each.
4 The time will be followed, and speakers will be
5 informed when their designated time has ended.
6 Again, there will be a question and answer
7 period during this evening's presentation.
8 Members of the audience—excuse me.

9 I would like to now introduce the panel,
10 which has been assembled here for this joint
11 public hearing. Starting from the right side of
12 the table we have Ms. Townsley, who is
13 Representative of CEC, District 17, Demetrius
14 Lawrence, member of the SLT, UPTA President, Mr.
15 Ronald Rivette, SLT Chair, Ms. Buffie Simmons,
16 Superintendent, District 17, and Deputy
17 Chancellor, Marc Sternberg. I will now turn the
18 presentation over to Deputy Chancellor
19 Sternberg.

20 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR MARC STERNBERG: Thank
21 you, Melissa. And good evening, ladies and
22 gentlemen. I thank you for being here this
23 evening. Again, my name is Marc Sternberg. I
24 serve as Deputy Chancellor for the Division of
25 Portfolio Planning in New York City Department

1 of Education. And I'm going to share a few
2 details of the proposal that we are going to
3 discuss - - this is an official joint public
4 hearing. We have convened to discuss the - -
5 truncation of P.S. 161, The Crown from K through
6 8, which it serves currently to kids - - ,
7 beginning the 2012-2013 school year.

8 This is obviously subject to panel approval.
9 And so there is a fact sheet, an Educational
10 Fact - - , that, I believe, Melissa, we have
11 copies of on the way in. We encourage you to
12 take a look at that, as that lays out the
13 decisions, and the arguments that we have to
14 present to the panel in February. I want to
15 share that this is not a decision that we
16 arrived at easily, or taken - - at all. We took
17 weeks and months looking at data gathering about
18 the school around student performance trends,
19 and information from members of the community
20 and organizations that know the school well, in
21 and around the school.

22 We examined these main factors as we arrive
23 at our proposed course of actions. We also
24 reached out to families and members of the
25 community to compliment the department data that

1 we have with soft data, and the experiences
2 that people have who work in and around the
3 school. I mentioned that we do not come to a
4 decision like this lightly, we take it very
5 seriously. I should also emphasize the context
6 for why we are here, and what emanates the
7 Chancellor's decision here this evening. And
8 what emanates our work in the Division of
9 Portfolio Planning.

10 We all count on our schools to provide a
11 high quality education to students. And we, at
12 the Department, feel compelled to hold schools
13 accountable to providing very high bar of
14 service to our students and families throughout
15 New York. And it goes without saying, that
16 every family in the - - Zip code, neighborhood,
17 or borough deserves the very best. It is our
18 view that when a school is not getting the job
19 done, it is our moral obligation to act.

20 And P.S. 161 presents an interesting study
21 for us and in some ways a difficult one. In
22 that, we see many strengths here. We see a
23 support structure that is engaged and
24 enthusiastic about the school. We see a new
25 principal here, who has great promise. We see

1 families engaged, and I've had the pleasure
2 over the course of several weeks and months to
3 get to know some of them. So we see many
4 strengths here. We also see some strengths in
5 the performance indicators of the school. We
6 see real strength in the elementary grades. The
7 purpose of this truncation proposal is because
8 of the disparity we see in the performance we see
9 in the elementary school of 161, and the middle
10 school. And that brings us to the proposal to
11 truncate the middle school grades, which as will
12 describe both here and in the proposal, and in
13 our conversation this evening through Q&A. In
14 our view an innovation that will strengthen this
15 school. And that allows the professionals, Mr.
16 Johnson and his team, here at this school to
17 focus on the strengths, the many strengths of
18 this school, and in our view, the success in the
19 elementary grades.

20 So let me jump back a little bit, and
21 provide some additional context about the
22 proposal, and I apologize if I bore you with a
23 few technical details here, but important to get
24 on record. P.S. 161 is located here at 330
25 Crown Street in Community School District 17.

1 My - - new Superintendent here in Brooklyn. It
2 currently serves students in Kindergarten
3 through 8th grade. On December 19, 2011, the New
4 York City Department of Education published a
5 proposal to truncate the middle school grades of
6 P.S. 161 because of the school's low performance
7 at these grades, and the school's inability to
8 turn the middle school grades around quickly to
9 better meet the student's needs. Under this
10 proposal the elementary school grades would
11 remain open.

12 P.S. 161 performance data indicates the
13 school has struggled at the middle school
14 grades, and confirms that the Department's
15 assessment that the school lacks the capacity
16 presently to turn around those school grades.
17 It is better served focusing on its strengths at
18 the elementary school grades. P.S. 161 earned
19 an overall D grade on its 2010-11 progress
20 report. Including, D for student progress, and
21 student performance. And a C grade for student
22 environment. In 2010-11 the majority of P.S.
23 161 students remained below grade level in
24 English and in math. Only 38 percent of
25 students were performing on grade level in

1 English, and only 41 percent were performing on
2 grade level in math. P.S. 161, - - through 8th
3 grade students had struggle particularly.

4 Last year, only 30 percent of the 6th grade
5 students, 14 percent of 7th grade students, and
6 21 percent of 8th grade students were performing
7 on grade level in English. Only 18 percent of
8 6th grade students, 28 percent of 7th grade
9 students, and 21 percent of 8th grade students
10 were performing on grade level in math.

11 Enrollment is also another factor we take into
12 consideration when arriving at a decision to
13 truncate a school. Enrollment in the 6th grade
14 class at P.S. 161 has been low compared to its
15 5th grade class. For example, in 2009-10 P.S.
16 161 served 127 5th grade students, but in 2010-11
17 it served on 34 6th grade students.

18 This we think is an indication that P.S. 161
19 6th grade students are choosing to leave P.S. 161
20 after 5th grade through the Brooklyn Live Board
21 District 17 Middle School Choice Process and
22 enroll in other middle school options across the
23 district. So it is because of these evaluations
24 that the Department conducted a comprehensive
25 review of the school to determine which supports

1 and interventions would best benefit its
2 students and community. In doing so, the
3 Department consulted with network support staff
4 and cluster support staff, Superintendent, and
5 the Superintendent's office staff, who have
6 worked with the school over the course of the
7 years.

8 We consulted with community groups, parents,
9 and families who came to the school to help the
10 principal and the leadership team, and members
11 of the faculty. And the parents together—we
12 solicited their feedback as we arrived at a
13 decision. It entitled—through the conversations
14 we've had and through our analysis of the
15 students' performance - - , we have arrived at
16 the decision to propose this gradual truncation
17 of the middle school here at P.S. 161, and as an
18 effort to allow Mr. Johnson and his staff to
19 continue to focus on strengthening the level of
20 service in its elementary school grades. And
21 help them server current and future students
22 here in 161 and District 17 community well.

23 Again, a few other technical details, since
24 P.S. 161 is located in here in building - - 161—
25 let me just provide some context of what happens

1 after tonight. This is, of course, the joint
2 public hearing so Melissa will lead us through a
3 conversation where we will hear from the School
4 Leadership Team, the CEC—although, I’m not sure
5 if they will be speaking, however, they will
6 have an opportunity to speak. And we will take
7 public comment, and we will then have a
8 conversation based on the questions that you all
9 submit.

10 After this evening, the proposal will go to
11 the Panel for Education Policy, which will occur
12 upon February 9 at Brooklyn Tech High School on
13 Clark. I’m hoping you will come that evening.
14 The meeting starts at 6:00, so this will be on
15 the agenda for the panel to discuss. - - on
16 February 9th. If this proposal is approved P.S.
17 161 would remain open, but its middle school
18 grades would be truncated gradually over the
19 next several years. And the school would no
20 longer admit new 6th grade after the end of this
21 school year. So in fact the current 5th grade
22 students would have the opportunity to apply to
23 middle school through the District 17 and
24 Borough City Wide Choice Process.

25 Current 6th and 7th grade students who meet

1 promotional standards at the end of the
2 subsequent school years, and current 6th and 8th
3 grade students who do not meet promotional
4 standards at the end of the year will continue
5 to be supported here at P.S. 161 as they
6 progress towards completion of middle school
7 into high school. The current 8th graders who do
8 meet the promotional requirements at the end of
9 this school year will apply, and in fact already
10 have applied, to the high school through its
11 process to a high school of their choice.

12 At the conclusion of the 2013-14 school
13 year, when the school is scheduled to server
14 only kindergarten through 5th grade students, any
15 P.S. 161 6th through 8th grade students who do not
16 meet promotional standards will be placed in
17 another District 17 middle school - - , or
18 another middle school in the district in which
19 the student resides. So with that said, I will
20 put that into my summary, and thank you for the
21 opportunity to present the floor to
22 conversations of this hearing.

23 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. We will now have
24 the presentation - - the school's SLT, Mr.
25 Rivette, Mr. Lawrence.

1 MR. RONALD RIVETTE: Good evening parents.
2 Okay. I want to say first of all thank you for
3 coming Deputy and - - for coming out today. My
4 - - cold, so bare with me. I came out today
5 because I to state the position of the SLT - -
6 previous Superintendent of - - 161. We want the
7 school to stay in tact because we believe in the
8 school, the parent body, as well as, the
9 teachers. As well as, the new principal we
10 have, Mr. Johnson. Now, my position is still
11 strong. I believe that we should save K thru 8
12 because I don't believe closing our schools is
13 an answer to the problem. [Applause].

14 The problem stems—I'm not going to - - long,
15 if you look at the history of the school, we
16 were the top of the state, we were in
17 newspapers. The school was doing well. And
18 then it was changed. It was changed and we had
19 to accept students who were allowed in the
20 system. I have no problem educating children.
21 We all are here to educate children, but if we
22 are going to accept children, all children have
23 to fill needs. There are students who are very
24 studious in the gifted program who do their work
25 with home support. But we have children--it's

1 the truth, in this school system, that come to
2 school with a lot of issues. They need the
3 support to succeed. So when we start accepting
4 children that are already given to us, the
5 children--and we did our best to educate the
6 children with what we had, among budget cuts.
7 This year alone - - school. If you want to
8 educate and make the process work, I say give us
9 the resources that we need to succeed, not - - ,
10 not clothes, but if you give us real resources,
11 programs for these kids--and this is not an issue
12 pertaining to 161, this is an city-wide issue.
13 We are losing our kids in middle schools.

14 So it's not an isolated case. When we talk
15 about 161, we're talking about he city schools
16 throughout the system. And I ask, when you
17 close this school and you send the children to
18 new schools, how good are these new schools?
19 Are these new schools succeeding? Do they have
20 the resources to succeed? We are closing
21 schools - - names, and no resources with the
22 same outcome. You can change the school name
23 from Martin Luther King - - to Malcolm X, but if
24 you don't give us computers and the funding that
25 is necessary you will change it again.

1 When cutting afternnoon programs, children
2 have no where to go in the afternnoon. The
3 streets are unsafe, no activities. Let's talk
4 about that, we need to keep our schools open.
5 We believe, and sir, you said that you liked the
6 new principal. We have new things at 161 that
7 we are offering. We have Regent's classes given
8 in the afternnoon, we a new Assistant Principal,
9 Ms. Carter, who's doing a wonderful job
10 regarding instruction. We are implementing
11 instruction more. Mr. Johnson is very visible.
12 He is giving a lot of - - to all staff members.
13 Give the man a chance to turn it around.

14 You can't say you're going to hire a new
15 principal for K thru 8 schools, and then in the
16 middle of January say you're going to take the
17 top school off. It's saying that you do not
18 believe you can turn the whole school around, so
19 you're only giving him half the school to work
20 with. So I'm asking you as I stand here on this
21 panel because I want to prove my point to the
22 parents who came out for the children, the
23 teachers who stay late—once you close The Crown
24 school you have - - for what? My question is,
25 once we are under your - - what will come? So

1 my stand is to same as it was before. I will
2 not change it. I believe in use, and that we
3 can turn this around. I believe in the future,
4 and I want you to go back, and re-think this and
5 say, you know what; we are going to give them at
6 least a year or two to change.

7 If you can, please go back and have this
8 discussion--not in the middle of the year, to
9 truncate the K thru 8 schools. Thank you very
10 much.

11 [Background noise]

12 MS. HARRIS: Thank you.

13 MR. DEMETRIUS LAWRENCE: Good evening,
14 Deputy Chancellor Marc Sternberg. First of all,
15 thank you for coming out in this cold weather.
16 I am - - PTA President, and I represent the
17 parents of P.S. 161 School. And I proudly
18 support these parents on their decisions. Right
19 now, speaking of the parents, from the time that
20 we had been notified of the truncation at P.S.
21 161, the parents were not pleased. One
22 conversation that we had is that we need you to
23 stop playing politics with our children. I have
24 a son who graduated here, and went on to middle.
25 I have two girls who currently go to this school

1 now, and the reason why I chose this school is
2 because it was the top school in District 17.
3 It was considered the Crown school. And it
4 saddens me to see that the DOE wants to remove
5 the jewels from its crown. And we as parent
6 leaders and parent bodies must continue to
7 engage in every effort of our children's
8 education. We are asking the DOE to actually
9 have an active engagement with the parent body.
10 When we first found out about this truncation of
11 the school, we heard about it on the NY 1 News.
12 It was totally unfair to the parents, and
13 totally unfair to our children.

14 What we are asking the DOE to do—we know
15 that there were over 700,000 dollars removed
16 from this school. It's hard on behalf of the
17 teachers to give our children the necessary
18 education, and a proper education without the
19 necessary resources. When you remove that
20 resource from the school, how are our children
21 supposed to get a quality education? Closing
22 down and truncating the school, and moving our
23 children from out of this convenient
24 neighborhood, to displace to them to them to
25 other neighborhoods sets the parents back. And

1 it's really hard for the parents because, now
2 they don't have to go a block to the school, but
3 they will have to go out of the district. It
4 may be 20 blocks to a school that is out of the
5 district, and out of their home zones. This is
6 hard for the parents. I advocate on behalf of
7 the parents to the DOE that we should halt the
8 truncation of the P.S. 161 middle school.

9 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. We will now call
10 presentation by Ms. Townsley of the CEC.

11 MS. CASSANDRA ALSTON TOWNSLEY: Thank you.
12 Good evening everyone. My name is Cassandra
13 Alston Townsley. I am Second Vice President for
14 the Community Education Council for District 17.
15 I am also the parent liaison for P.s. 161, The
16 Crown School. I ran for office, the CEC,
17 because I have a strong passion for the children
18 and their education.

19 I strongly believe that phasing out the
20 middle school is not an option, and that is
21 something that we are not going to accept. And
22 we are not going take sitting down. I on behalf
23 of the Community Education Council of District
24 17—our position is that we are definitely
25 opposing truncation of the middle school at 161.

1 Middle school is where we lose our
2 children, a lot of times. We do not need them
3 displaced. We have a growing population of
4 immigrants from Haiti, which we all know about
5 the devastation there. There are areas that
6 affect grades, but we are supposed to be
7 teaching students first. It's about them; it's
8 not about the DOE. It's not about the teachers,
9 it's not about the - - . It's about the parent,
10 it's about my children, it's about their
11 education, and it's about the future. There's a
12 moto that I have been saying that I've always
13 stuck by, and it is always better to build a
14 child than to repair an adult. Right now we
15 will be - - of these children's lives, of their
16 academic careers, of their success, and if we
17 lose them now, who are the real failures?

18 It's not the students, and it's not the
19 schools. It's you that sit behind the suits and
20 the ties and behind your desks pushing pens
21 across papers wrongfully misjudging our children
22 who need our help. And I apologize, but I'm
23 very adamant about what was happening right now.
24 P.S. 161, I know it to be a very good school
25 because my son was born in District 17. And

1 when he was in my arms, I researched schools
2 within the community. And if we stayed,
3 initially in District 17, this was going to be
4 one of his schools. But we had come back, so I
5 was new to District 17. So it's devastating to
6 find out what I always knew to be a strong
7 school within this community with strong support
8 for our students, that you're getting ready to
9 fail them. We cannot lose our students.

10 Right now I will reiterate on the fact that
11 we do have a new principal here, we have a new
12 AP. We have a new network leader, we have a new
13 PTA, we have a new CEC Council, and a new
14 liaison. We need a chance to help bring the
15 school back to where it was because I have had
16 the honor and the pleasure of sitting in on, not
17 one, but every PTA meeting. I've sat on several
18 SLT meetings; I've done a walk-thru in school.
19 I sat in the classroom and witness and observed
20 a teacher, Ms. Carter [phonetic], who cared
21 about the 6th grade math class and did a superb
22 job. I am not new to the Community Education
23 Council, I served to years in District 13. So I
24 done a walk-thru of many schools.

25 For this to be an elementary and a middle

1 school, I'm highly impressed at the behavior.
2 And to find out that our numbers aren't even
3 down. We're doing everything we have with very
4 little time. Give us time to turn this school
5 back to what it used to be, what it can be,
6 where it ought to be, what are children deserve.
7 Mr. Johnson deserves a chance, our new
8 superintendent deserves a chance, and I deserve
9 a chance. We need a chance. Do not break my
10 children down right now. I also was honored to
11 be the host of District 17 spelling bee, and it
12 was my extreme pleasure to hand over a trophy to
13 the 4th grade winner of P.S. 161, The Crown
14 School. I was able to give that award to that
15 lovely child.

16 If this school was in such of a problem, why
17 do we have such successes? We have our Regent's
18 classes now. We have our Saturday Academy, and
19 I was here on day one for their first Saturday
20 Academy. I got out of my bed on a Saturday
21 morning and came here to stand with my concerned
22 parents, my concerned children, with Ms. Carter,
23 and everybody who wish to see this school
24 succeed. They care—I care. Okay, we have an
25 outside agency who has just admitted to getting

1 back to the community and helping our children
2 succeed, and help to turn this school around. I
3 ask that you strongly go back to the drawing
4 board, and re-draw that picture that you painted
5 because the picture you have painted is not the
6 reality of what it should be. This - - is a
7 calm, nurturing, caring setting for a school.
8 Middle schools can be really crazy, and you know
9 that—you remember when you were in middle
10 school, not a lot has changed. Our children are
11 just learning who they are, and finding
12 themselves, but we have the proper channels
13 right here.

14 I am so impressed every time I come to a PTA
15 meeting, they have - - , they care—stop it.
16 Give my people their chance, give my children
17 their chance. Just understand right now we're
18 not going to go away that easy. We are here to
19 stay, and we know if you fairly go back and
20 review your notes—did you see the faces out
21 here? Where are my children, my students are
22 here, my parents are here, my PTA is here, I
23 have my CEC here. We want you to really
24 reconsider this truncation because I cannot see
25 my middle school, my 5th graders trying to find a

1 place to go. Right now, they know where their
2 home is, but tomorrow you're trying to tell them
3 that they are going to have to now play—have you
4 gamble with their life and their education. We
5 need that to change. I thank you.

6 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. We have now
7 concluded the formal presentations for this
8 evening. We will start public comment. You are
9 reminded that public comment must be limited to
10 two minutes. Time will be capped and we will
11 signal you when have 30 seconds remaining, and
12 also when your time is up. I invite Jervone
13 Singleterry, Sadiqua Wahhaj to give statements
14 on behalf of Assembly Member Karim Camara—excuse
15 me, Councilwoman Latisha James. Ms.
16 Singleterry?

17 [Background noise]

18 MS. HARRIS: I'm sorry, we're not going to
19 take comments directly from the floor, but Ms.
20 Singleterry I invite you to come up now. Thank
21 you.

22 MS. SINGLETERRY: Good evening everyone, I
23 bring you greetings from New York State Assembly
24 Member Karim Camara. What I find interesting is
25 that I keep hearing the word, parent choice

1 being thrown around by the DOE, and what we're
2 doing is we're truncating the school by taking
3 out the middle school. We've closed - - to make
4 that a new school, and all we have now is P.S.
5 161 for our children. Where is the - - ? What
6 are they supposed to do in this situation?
7 Additionally, we have Principal Johnson, who has
8 just come into the school, and we need to give
9 him a chance, as it has been said a million
10 times before. - - you didn't hear them talking
11 about truncating and - - . And what happened
12 probably didn't - - until the end game. We have
13 got to give people a chance. I've never seen
14 this much coalition around a school closing.
15 Please, I implore the DOE to reconsider this
16 decision, give them an opportunity, and let them
17 become the Crown in Crown Heights again. I know
18 they can do this. Thank you very much.

19 MS. HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Singleterry.

20 MS. SADIQA WAHHAJ: Good evening, my name is
21 Sadiqa. I am here on behalf of Councilwoman
22 Latisha James. She is out of town, so she
23 couldn't make it. But - - stated in the press
24 release. She states, I join many of my
25 colleagues and the New York City Council, and

1 many Crown Heights parents in opposing the New
2 York City Department Education truncation of
3 P.S. 161, The Crown, from K8 to K5. A move,
4 which would gradually phase out the middle
5 school option. The school principal, Mr.
6 Michael Johnson, was appointed in Fall 2011, and
7 is committed to upholding your comprehensive
8 mission to ensure the involvement of students,
9 parents, teachers, and the working community in
10 developing a wholesome academic environment for
11 the families and the students.

12 I stand with parents who are taking up the
13 DOE proposal in truncating P.S. 161. It impedes
14 their goal and thwarts their success. Since his
15 appointment, Mr. Johnson has adopted a more
16 productive environment, achieving 95 percent
17 student attendance. And implementing a
18 competitive curriculum to better serve his
19 students with city and state - - . P.S. 161 is
20 comprised of dedicated administrators, teachers,
21 and parents who seek to transform this school
22 into a highly sought after middle school option.

23 The DOE states that their decision to
24 truncate this school is to better serve the
25 students in this community. However, it's truly

1 time that the DOE work along side parents and
2 elected officials representing the community in
3 a joint effort to increase resources, support -
4 - areas of need. I ask that the DOE halt this
5 truncation, and support P.S. 161, and Principal
6 Johnson in their work to continue to advance the
7 school in its current K thru 8 model. It is
8 vital that the Department of Education motivate
9 high achieving schools, while continuing to
10 provide necessary resources to lower performing
11 schools to ensure the opportunity to grow,
12 improve, and sustain progressive working
13 environment for our children. Thank you.

14 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. I now invite those
15 who have sign off on the speaker signup sheet to
16 - - at the microphone. First, Mr. Charles
17 Dluzniewski, followed by Anne Marie Williams,
18 and then Trisha Meckenberg.

19 MR. CHARLES DLUZNIEWSKI: Good evening. My
20 name is Charles Dluzniewski. I am an Assistant
21 Director with the CSE, that's the Council with
22 Supervisors and Administrators. We - - the
23 principals and assistant principals of the New
24 York City public schools. I'm speaking on
25 behalf of our president Aaron Slogan. The

1 Department of Education has scheduled 25 more
2 schools for phase out, truncation, and/or
3 closure. And said that the new schools opening
4 up under Mayor Bloomberg were better than those
5 they replaced. Yet, the latest rounds of
6 closings, 11 schools were opened during this
7 Mayor's administration. Ironically, some of the
8 Mayor's new schools are being closed and have
9 become part of this cycle of failure.

10 The New York City Public School System is
11 not a place for experimentation, where we open
12 and close schools for students who have already
13 been traumatized by previous school closings.
14 That is a tragedy for all the young people who
15 have not been saved, and turned away from new
16 schools for reasons of poor academic achievement
17 or other reasons. They are sent to be
18 warehoused to other low performing schools that
19 will close eventually, as well.

20 This is a - - strategy for turning around
21 low performing schools. These schools are
22 invariably attended by children of color or
23 economically disadvantaged communities. The end
24 theme of the strategy is to eliminate schools
25 that the administration has had at least a

1 decade to fix, and has not. The fact is, is
2 that closure is an admission of failure in City
3 Hall. The Bloomberg administration needs to
4 take more responsibility, not less for schools
5 that are not doing well. Rather than turning
6 them over to private entities, or closing, or
7 truncating, or washing their hands of the deep
8 routed problems that this city's administration
9 has been unsuccessful in fixing or finding
10 revenue for. We support our principals and we
11 support our school. Thank you.

12 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. Ms. Williams.

13 MS. ANNE MARIE WILLIAMS: Good evening
14 everyone. My name is Anne Marie Williams,
15 President of President's Council, District 17.
16 Today, I had the pleasure of meeting Chancellor
17 Klein at the CPAC meeting. He spoke about - -
18 and how to engage these hearings. My comments,
19 and my questions are together, but I gave you my
20 questions also. We would like to know when were
21 the parents were notified that the school was in
22 danger? What type of support was given to the
23 school? What was the - - time before the
24 decision was made? I'm here today to ask the
25 DOE—I know you look at the data, and all of this

1 stuff to make your decision. Principal
2 Johnson has just become a principal at this - -
3 school. We want you to go back and re-think
4 your action, and give Principal Johnson - - and
5 show that our school can do - - . Please, put
6 the support into the school, and make sure our
7 school works. Let's work together. Let's go
8 back to the table and re-design a program and
9 come back and meet with the CEC, the President's
10 Council, the DLT, and the SLT of the school.
11 And re-design the program. I know our kids have
12 strength, and focus on the weakness and rebuild
13 - - and put money in our schools to help our
14 children. I'm a parent, and every parent here
15 wants the very best for their children. And we
16 want every school to be the very best. But
17 we're asking you to not truncate, and please put
18 additional funds in our schools. So that we can
19 be prepared to help our children. Thank you.

20 MS. HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Williams. Ms.
21 Tricia Meckenberg.

22 MS. TRICIA MECKENBERG: I'm addressing the
23 Parent Board, but specifically, Buffie Simmons,
24 Marc Sternberg, Melody Heins [phonetic]. When
25 you take this message back to your boss Mayor

1 Bloomberg, and tell him that P.S. 161 is not
2 going to lie down. We have been meeting since
3 October, the parents here—I'm going to tell you,
4 you are going to have a fight because I'm
5 speaking to you as the old board that they are
6 talking about. Up until May and June, we have
7 not met anyone from the DOE who came here to
8 give us support for this school that was
9 supposedly failing.

10 I am speaking out of emotion. I'm very
11 emotional right now. Four years ago are Crown
12 School kids were being awarded and were getting
13 admitted to - - , Brooklyn Tech, and Bronx
14 Science, that doesn't happen to a failing
15 school. You guys have your agenda, and you came
16 here and gave us no support. You have your
17 agenda to truncate the school. Now, Ms.
18 Townsley said some beautiful words about our
19 feelings and passions here, but I'm going to
20 take it further. It's not about just the school
21 here, it's about the community. You take away
22 800 students, we're down to 1000, 2000 parents,
23 the teachers that work here and anyone that
24 supports the community, all the business up and
25 down Crown Heights. What are you saying? Like

1 the gentleman before, you are targeting our
2 community, and taking - - we cannot stand for
3 it. Thank you.

4 MS. HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Meckenberg.
5 We'll have Fred Baptiste, followed by Sarah
6 Wright, and then Peggy Chambers.

7 MS. FRED BAPTISTE: It's very hard to follow
8 up what some of the parents and the teachers
9 have said, but I do have a few items that I want
10 to put on the record, as well. It's actually -
11 - this strategy of closing and truncating
12 schools. Particularly, when you find that the
13 students are struggling, and having issues. The
14 question that comes to mind is that if they are
15 struggling here, and you move them to another
16 school, what prevents them from struggling
17 there? If you look at the numbers of District
18 17, the problems that P.S. 161 is having, are
19 not unique to 161. So do not implement - - the
20 real issues, the real obstacles to education, it
21 doesn't matter where you send our children, the
22 same thing is going to happen.

23 We are asking what is the DOE doing to
24 identify what are those best practices that work
25 for our children, and why is it necessary to

1 move our children from our community to get a
2 good education? Why can't those things be
3 brought here? The fact sheet goes on to say
4 that the reason why you're proposing the
5 truncation is because you don't believe that
6 Principal Johnson can quickly turn this around.
7 This didn't happen quickly, so I don't see what
8 the rush in turning it around - - .

9 It's going to take time, and a sustained
10 effort to correct. It's going to take real
11 investing on the part of the DOE, and the
12 parents. The parents are investing. Can we say
13 the same thing about the DOE? It really speaks
14 to the whole idea of—we're not asking for a hand
15 out for P.S. 161, all we are doing is demanding
16 as parents and tax payers, quality education in
17 our community. We are talking about having a
18 new principal, new PTA, new network
19 administrator, new superintendent—we are talking
20 about putting in place right here in our
21 community, those things that are—adding a - -
22 for those students that are doing well, and who
23 want to stay here and not leave P.S. 161 or
24 District 17.

25 We are also talking about adding the

1 remediation for those kids who are struggling.
2 How do you actually help somebody if you're
3 going to take away 700,000 dollars of their
4 budget, over three years alone? Another problem
5 - - it's not going to be a solution that is
6 going to happen overnight. What we need to do
7 is stay committed to the process. As it says on
8 the DOE's website, it is children first always.
9 And we need to do what's best for our children.
10 And we need to stick together as a community to
11 make sure that happens. Thank you.

12 MS. HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Baptiste. Sarah
13 Wright, and then Peggy Chambers. Sarah Wright?

14 MS. PEGGY CHAMBERS: Hi, my name is Peggy
15 Chambers, and I have grandchildren that go to
16 the school. My children went this school. My
17 question to you is—I find that the teachers are
18 being evaluated on an on-going basis, and that
19 takes away from the time that they have to
20 teach. I've been working here with the teachers
21 volunteering, and they are dragging in their own
22 supplies because they don't have the money. The
23 teachers are - - they are not - - their job
24 because their salaries are going towards
25 supplies. Another thing is that, if we have

1 money—we can find money to build new jails,
2 why can't that money be used for our schools?

3 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. Peggy Chambers—so
4 Sarah Wright is not here? Claudette Agard.

5 MS. CLAUDETTE AGARD: I will be brief
6 because you already had some CEC members speak.
7 I'm the Borough President of the CEC. The CEC
8 is very concerned about what is going on in
9 District 17. In general, we've had four schools
10 on this list. And so we have a major concerned,
11 and we will be writing a more detailed response,
12 so I'm not going to take the time to do all of
13 that now. You already heard all about the new -
14 - .

15 My concern is, what are the plans for this
16 building when you truncate this school? This
17 has not been stated. It will be an under
18 utilized building, or very close to it. What
19 are the plans, that has not been spoken about.
20 The other thing is, we are not defending
21 failure, but the failure that you site has not
22 taken place under this leadership. Therefore,
23 for you to site that to us, and not give us the
24 opportunity to address it and turn it around is
25 a major concern.

1 The other thing--is just that we're
2 concerned about the message that you're sending
3 to our children, and our community, which is, if
4 it's not working then give up. Our history
5 doesn't speak to us as giving up as a people, so
6 - - . We're not afraid to address what we need
7 to address, but we are only asking that you give
8 us the respect that you would receive, and be
9 able to speak to us. The Chancellor spoke this
10 morning about parent engagement, and it is clear
11 that it has not taken place the way he is saying
12 that it should take place. So we want that to
13 happen in moving forward with this school.

14 MS. HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Agard. Tiffany--
15 I believe this is Orr or Dor. I'm so sorry; I
16 couldn't catch the last name. Tiffany? I'm
17 sorry.

18 MS. DOR: I just wanted to come up here and
19 say that you have some very patient parents in
20 this school that really want to work with the
21 DOE in making this school better. And
22 personally, I've been through this process so
23 many time that if I had my way we wouldn't be
24 shutting this school down - - . That's just me.
25 I seen too many schools that I've see working in

1 working class minority communities that are
2 performing well. And without any support, you
3 turn around and you close these schools. You
4 have schools that I've seen come close to
5 closure, but ended up being co-located because
6 they didn't have proper leadership. I've seen
7 you take a good school like MS 2—a school that
8 once was a failing school, but had great
9 leadership, and you brought in - - , and co-
10 located it.

11 Now you have this school, which is a beacon
12 in the community because people care about this
13 school. And you want to truncate the middle
14 school. See what you don't realize is that I
15 understand that you are supporting Bloomberg's
16 agenda, but he only has one year left - - while
17 our communities are destroyed and broken. - -
18 what are your educational aspirations after you
19 destroy my community. I am disappointed in your
20 process, and I'm pissed, and parents are getting
21 that way.

22 Let me tell you, - - now you want to give
23 money to education, but we know that you can't
24 do this adequately with a broken down DOE. And
25 if you thing we're going to stop, we're coming

1 after you next. We're playing nice now, so I
2 think you better - - . After this, I think the
3 gloves come off, and if we have to march around
4 your office, your house, to show you that we
5 these working communities care about their
6 schools, that's what we're going to do. Thank
7 you.

8 MS. HARRIS: Ms. Wright? Is she here now?

9 MS. WRIGHT: Hi, how are you doing? I was
10 at the last meeting that you had at 587. I told
11 you all then that I was a member of that school
12 that graduating in '97. I went to this school,
13 since I was little. I graduated from this
14 school. Before you all came up with this new
15 program with the Board of Education, it messed
16 up the school. First, you all took Mr. Kerns
17 out of this school, and he was the best
18 principal this school ever had. We had programs
19 for the children in the school, but you all took
20 them out, and brought a principal in here—I
21 can't tell you all a bunch about that lady, but
22 I can't in here. She tore the school down, and
23 you all allowed her, and you all helped her tear
24 the school down. Now, all of the afterschool
25 programs - - they tried to bring to the school.

1 The principal, just because I was a concerned
2 parent, I guess she didn't like that and she
3 didn't want me to return back to the program.
4 You took programs out of this school that the
5 school needed. Pier relations, you know,
6 instead of calling the police on them, you all
7 will have mediation. You used to have pier
8 counselors, because some students can't learn
9 from the teachers. However, you all pulled that
10 program, too. I'm really concerned because you
11 all are going to mess these children up, and I
12 can't understand why - - children. It's not
13 working. I volunteered in this school, and I
14 walked up and down the hallways. And you all
15 prevent the teachers from doing a lot to the
16 students. They put them in the hallway, and you
17 tell the security guards, don't touch them, they
18 could fight each other, but you need assistance.
19 Let them beat each other up. When I was going
20 here, the teachers were like our parents. I
21 remember the teachers used to beat us.

22 Two teachers use to beat us in this school -
23 - . But you all ban the parents, you all ban
24 the school, and you ban the security - - taking
25 the kids. And then you come up with rules, and

1 you put all of these extra curriculum. It's
2 hard for these students, are you looking at
3 that? If you said their grades are failing, why
4 don't you have an afterschool program that's
5 offered for math, reading, and social studies,
6 if that is the problem? You want to keep
7 phasing out, and you're not solving the problem.
8 You say that the school is failing, right? So
9 you are phasing out, and relocating, but how are
10 you changing?

11 Instead of closing programs, give them
12 something to do. - - at the last meeting I
13 didn't want to hear what you had to say. You
14 pushed us out, and we asked questions and I
15 didn't get any of my questions answered. What
16 are you doing, instead of phasing out? I can
17 show you all how the school was running before.
18 I can tell you all about the programs that the
19 school was running before. But you keep coming
20 in and saying phase out - - .

21 MS. HARRIS: Ms. Wright, thank you.

22 MR. RICK KING: My name is Rick King. I'm
23 the UFT District Rep. for District 17. Two
24 words that come to mind are rigor and
25 differentiation. Tonight you will get a lesson

1 in rigor. The parents - - don't want this
2 school truncated. It is sad to know that we
3 barely have a new principal, and we all love
4 this new principal. Still you are phasing out
5 the middle school without giving the new
6 principal a chance. The principal deserves to
7 get a chance to see what he can do with this
8 school. You just eliminate the middle school
9 knowing fully well the - - and instruction is
10 key.

11 The question is, when the word spreads that
12 the middle school - - differentiation needed for
13 this school. There's no - - let's try to get
14 into this school and try to resolve some of
15 these issues. It is only fair that we respect
16 the community, the students, and the parents.
17 We cannot truncate students because they come
18 back. If you truncate P.S. 161, they will come
19 back in another phase. - - and it does not work
20 out.

21 What is your plan to help the community?
22 What is your plan to help the students? What is
23 your plan to help the parents? What is your
24 plan to - - that come into this school to make
25 this school the proud star that it was? That is

1 to restore - - to District 17 once was again.
2 Thank you.

3 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. Mr. Wheeler?

4 MR. MARVIN WHEELER: Good evening everyone.
5 My name is Marvin Wheeler. I'm a 16 year
6 veteran volunteering in this community. And if
7 you want to look at fault in this school, I'm
8 blaming it on you. If you would not have been
9 breaking down the school and tearing down
10 schools and turning them into charter schools,
11 naming them after Con Edison—in name only, we
12 wouldn't have these problems. All the Board of
13 Ed is--name only--Board of Education. It's
14 really Charter Board of Education. That's what
15 is going on here, and I blame you for not
16 holding the district of any school to the rigors
17 that they are supposed to give these children.
18 The person who ran this school is not sitting
19 back with a fat paycheck, retired. That's real
20 talk. Now, they are retired, and you let them
21 get out of here without holding them
22 accountable.

23 The Department—how long did you let that
24 person sit in this building before you decided
25 to close the school down? You don't wait until

1 the new principal comes into the school, and
2 now you going to shut it down. I don't think
3 so. This school - - six to ten years. First of
4 all, you have a brand new PTA, a brand new
5 principal, a brand new school - - ,and you kick
6 up out.

7 That's a star of a - - , and you can't hold
8 them responsible for what happened in the past.
9 It's not their fault. Remember, you are the
10 leadership. I'm asking you to look forward—ask
11 them what they plan on doing. There are seven
12 schools that are supposed to be closed down, and
13 when the school was failing, people were still
14 getting paid. Why is that? So I'm saying to
15 you now pick up your game from the beginning.
16 You let this school sit here, and you let it
17 fall.

18 How long does it take to ask the principal
19 for a pink slip? You have the strongest union
20 in the world. We all know that, and all of the
21 good teachers in this school know who the bad
22 teachers are. We know that already. So I'm
23 asking for a - - change. I'm asking that
24 anybody prior to the new leadership should be
25 gone. The principal needs to take charge and

1 run the school the way it needs to be run.
2 It's not fair to the parents out here—you're
3 playing them, too. What do - - .

4 The kids aren't coming here for free, school
5 uses their money. So let these parents'
6 children get the best education without shipping
7 them out over again. It's not fair—you don't
8 have a child in here.

9 MS. HARRIS: Mr. Wheeler, thank you. We
10 have one final comment from Mr. Lawrence. Mr.
11 Lawrence?

12 MR. LAWRENCE: Yes, thank you. I'm actually
13 a new parent - - , but I actually wanted to
14 speak directly to you, Mr. Marc Sternberg. I'm
15 going to introduce my self as Demetrius
16 Lawrence's father. And I would like to
17 introduce you to my family, my wife, and my
18 kids, who go to the school. Alicia, please, my
19 kids come up here now. As a father, a concerned
20 father, a community leader, as a resident of
21 this community for ten years—my wife and I were
22 married, we were high school sweethearts. My
23 son graduated from 161 to go on to - - wood High
24 School. My daughter is now in 6th grade, who is
25 going on to another school in the high school.

1 I have another daughter, Tiara, who is in the
2 4th grade, and when she goes to the 5th grade,
3 she will never have the opportunity to say I
4 graduated from the school as my other siblings.
5 It is unfair. I ask the DOE rethink and halt
6 the truncation of this school. I took the role
7 as a PTA president because I cared for the
8 school and I enjoined the children of the
9 school.

10 As a parent, I love the children in the
11 school just as I love my own. I ask the DOE,
12 again, halt the truncation of P.S. 161. We have
13 new leadership, Mr. Johnson, are new principal
14 who I believe in his vision. We have a new
15 network liaison, Ms. Manning [phonetic]. We
16 have a wonderful superintendent, Buffie Simmons.
17 Everything is new, and I want to share this one
18 thing with you, same and change is not the same.

19 P.S. 161 is not the same as it was before.
20 It's a changed place, and you have to allow the
21 change to manifest in the school. We are an
22 active parent body. Over 200 parents who
23 participate in every PTA, we have a very
24 powerful PTA body. We have a PTA Vice
25 President, Fred, please stand up. We have our

1 PTA Secretary, Alicia. We have our PTA
2 Treasurer. We have a wonderful parent body, and
3 most of all we have enormous support from the
4 teachers of P.S. 161.

5 I have - - or Mr. Johnson, for the - - he
6 held in this school district. It was wonderful
7 and brought tears to my eyes. He had 100
8 fathers bringing their children to this school.
9 That means a lot. [Applause]. That shows the
10 direction that the parents want to take for the
11 school. Mr. Marc Sternberg, God bless you and
12 your family, but please, if you can do anything-
13 and our prayers go with you, for the parents,
14 and the PED [phonetic] to halt the truncation of
15 this school to give Mr. Johnson and the new
16 leadership of this school a fighting chance.
17 Thank you.

18 MS. HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Lawrence.

19 [Background noise]

20 REV. ROBERT TOWNSLEY: My name is Rev.
21 Robert Townsley. I'm a clergy in the community.
22 I'm on the Brooklyn Branch, Executive Board of
23 the NAACP, first member at large. I'm - - the
24 Community Council, and I have a child in
25 District 17 going to a middle school. There are

1 several concerns that we have, one of the
2 concerns is that you evaluated the school and
3 decided to shut it down. But there are many
4 things that happened, and did not happen in the
5 meantime.

6 One of the things, the principal that is
7 here came from a school where he was doing
8 fantastic. They want him back, he was doing
9 fantastic. He has a success rate. You took him
10 from there, and you didn't consult the parents
11 at all. You took him from there and brought him
12 here. Now, that school from my understanding is
13 not doing well since he has been removed, so it
14 might need to be shut. Now, this school is
15 being shut down, and you're not giving him a
16 chance to function. Now, I think there are some
17 legalities [phonetic] with what's going on.
18 You're having this session because of legalities
19 because of due process you have to have this
20 session. When I was in 587, you made sure you
21 heard us, and you didn't answer our questions,
22 but you went through all of the questions, and
23 you shut it down because you didn't do due
24 process. We need to be heard.

25 I was in the Tuitt [phonetic] building with

1 you this morning, several of you with the DOE.
2 The Chancellor spoke with us - - said, you're
3 not listening to us. You take our tax money,
4 and you take our children to run a business, but
5 this isn't a private cooperation. This is a
6 public business. That you're running with our
7 money, and our children. You justify our taxes
8 by the money that we spend in here. So how are
9 you making decisions with our schools without
10 consulting us, and that's what was talked about
11 at the Tuitt building today.

12 Part of the problem is the teachers and the
13 schools that are being evaluated are supposed to
14 have a support system to help them be
15 successful. From my understanding, that support
16 system is the Children's First Networks. The
17 Children's First Networks doesn't answer to us.
18 They talk directly to a principal and they talk
19 directly to the DOE. So we don't know what
20 they're doing, and what they're not doing. We
21 don't know where to fix it, but you're talking
22 to them, and if you're not fixing it, then if
23 this school is failing, then it's your fault.

24 If you saw need for support, then it should
25 have been corrected. Now, this principal has

1 been brought from a school that he had a good
2 track record. He had a successful school. He
3 should at least be allowed to function. At
4 least give him a probationary period, up until
5 June, to bring those grades up. He should be
6 allowed that before his school is phased out.
7 We have problem with that, you're not listening
8 to any reason. The solution is not closing down
9 the school, it's looking at the problem and
10 correcting it. So we need to find out what the-
11 Children's First Network, did or didn't do.
12 Find out where the problem is, and give the
13 support to the teachers and the principals in
14 the school where it is needed to make a
15 successful school function here for our
16 children.

17 All us see us doing is shutting down
18 schools. Where will our kids go? Are getting
19 ready to transfer them out? What is the trauma
20 that is going to hit those children? How are
21 they going to able to adjust in a new school,
22 and all of this other sort of stuff? This also
23 affects their grades. I know that you are
24 talking about time, but we have nothing but time
25 for our children. These are our children, and

1 this is our school.

2 MS. HARRIS: - - , and this was an agenda
3 that we that we agreed on between the
4 Department, as well as, and we have a lot of
5 questions to answer this evening and we want to
6 try to get to as many-

7 REV. TOWNSLEY: I understand that, and I
8 also understand what I'm saying because I just
9 don't function in District 17. I go to
10 functions all over Brooklyn. I go to functions
11 all over the city. That's why I was in the
12 Tuitt building this morning, and the same thing
13 that you're doing now is what the parents
14 complained about at the Tuitt building this
15 morning. It's happening all the way around the
16 board. The fact that it's not a private
17 cooperation, this is a public entity and there's
18 a real problem with the whole--there's three
19 schools in this district that are being shut
20 down. The Mayor has shut down over 100 schools.
21 That's and issue, that's a problem, and this is
22 the Mayor that said he could make things better,
23 and we don't see it better.

24 We have overcrowding in our schools, and
25 somebody has to be able to listen. I'm going to

1 say this, and I'm through. This audience is
2 acting fantastic, in other communities they
3 would have just pulled in a lot of people and
4 created a riot, literally. We are acting
5 respectful, even under the threat of our schools
6 being closed. Please, start to show some
7 respect towards us. Work with us, and help us
8 find some solutions. Thank you, very much.

9 MS. HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Townsley. We
10 have now - - presentations. We have now
11 concluded the public comment and will begin Q&A.
12 There were--okay, Ms. Townsley, okay proceed.

13 MS. TOWNSLEY: Goodnight everyone. I want
14 to say this to DOE specifically. Since 1970,
15 when Jimmy Carter signed the DOE in, you failed
16 us as parents, and you failed our children. The
17 door has not been closed on you, however, when
18 you close the door on all of these schools--how
19 dare you have the audacity to do that. First of
20 all, I want to know if you're going to close
21 these schools and you're sending the children
22 from here waiting somewhere else--number one, do
23 you expect them to get there on time, number
24 two, what are you going to do with this building
25 here? Why should it be empty? There are over 3

1 million people here in New York City, and half
2 of them are homeless. Are you going to give
3 somebody a home? I think not. I'm going to
4 say, as I have said many time before, us as
5 parents we have to stand up, and we have to
6 teach our own children because we cannot look
7 for them to do it for us. They have closed
8 community centers. If you look around in
9 Brooklyn, how many closed community centers are
10 there? There was a skating rink on Empire
11 Boulevard, but that is now closed. It went back
12 to being a factory, a warehouse. What are you
13 going to do with the closed schools? That means
14 to me that you are declaring war on us as a
15 Black and Latino community. If you are
16 declaring war on us, we are not going to be
17 offense, but we are going to be on the defense.
18 And what does the defense mean? When you see
19 someone coming into your home and kicking down
20 your door, you don't let them kick down your
21 door and take over. You fight back and keep
22 them out, we want DOE out of - - a relationship
23 to work. There's too many hands in it, and - -
24 DOE your hands are in the pot too many times.

25 You're under paying teachers, laying people

1 off left and right, you're stopping para
2 professionals in the schools, like the parent
3 aide and the teacher's aide, you want to lay
4 them off. The supplies, what about the books,
5 what about the smart boards, - - , all of these
6 things. I hoping that you stand up and fight
7 the - - , and you tell them they are not going
8 to shut us down, but we are going to shut you
9 down DOE.

10 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. We will now begin
11 the Q&A period—I'm sorry—Senator Addams is here.

12 [Background noise]

13 MS. HARRIS: Senator Addams.

14 SENATOR ERIC ADDAMS: You know, I've been in
15 this school several times. Particularly, to the
16 PTA meetings, and it's extremely active. This
17 group of parents is truly concerned. And I'm
18 happy to see the anger because if you're not
19 angry about the case of your children then
20 something is wrong with you. - - control came
21 through the Senate in the Assembly, and I'm
22 proud to say I voted against it. - - our school
23 system. I've been to several of these hearings
24 and I know you don't speak because these aren't
25 the people we need to be voicing our anger to.

1 They are sent here to be in the Lion's den and
2 take the attacks all across the school. All
3 across the city by policies that they don't
4 implement. These are not the ones that we
5 should be angry at, we should be angry at the
6 Mayor that has created a system that has decided
7 - - . So you really need to understand what is
8 happening in this city. There is a conscience
9 effort of, one, dismantling good schools. This
10 was a good school. And you don't starve a
11 child, and say, why are you so undernourished.
12 They starved this school, and there's a plan
13 across the city to starve schools, dismantle
14 them, and then turn them into charter schools.

15 Now, - - parents didn't have a choice. I
16 don't care where they decided to go. I don't
17 care if it's charter, public, parents should
18 decide, but we've created an environment where
19 the parents are the enemy. That's the
20 environment that is done. The largest part of
21 the budget is health care and education.
22 Billions of dollars in education. They have
23 taken ours schools and turned them into a chain
24 link stores of 7-Elevens, and that's how they
25 are treating them. Our children are - - they

1 are our children.

2 So, if we want to stop this madness, our
3 energy can't be merely to voice our anger at
4 this panel that's here to listen to it. We have
5 to take this fight to the streets, and we have
6 to get real about it. If we're not real about
7 saving these schools, and these good schools to
8 get the nourishment and support that they
9 deserve and not create a two tiered educational
10 system. Where two floors with computers, and a
11 library, and another two floors you - - . You
12 just decided that you're going to push our
13 children out, and to fill prison cells, and not
14 - - , it can't happen.

15 So you have to reach out to parents all
16 across the city, and say, I want our school
17 system back. And force those that go to Albany,
18 can City Council, and the State Senate, and
19 Assembly. If they're not going to do things
20 that are real, than you need to get them out of
21 office. Of course, the distant schools close -
22 - , anybody can't say that. Of course, it was
23 wrong to close the school, of course, it was
24 wrong to starve P.S. 161. You all know this,
25 there's no reason for me to say it. I'm not

1 going to go to school to say it. I want to
2 meet you all on the street. Let's take back our
3 school system in the City of New York.

4 [Applause]

5 MS. HARRIS: Thank you, Senator. We will
6 now begin the Q&A period. Remember, there will
7 be some individual questions, and others have
8 been bucketed into categories where we will have
9 representative questions asked. Any question
10 not answered here tonight will be answered on
11 the website. If you have additional questions
12 at the conclusion of tonight's proceedings, we
13 ask that you direct them to us via the telephone
14 number or email address that can be found on the
15 bottom of the fact sheets that are available
16 outside of the auditorium. Deputy Chancellor?

17 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR STERNBERG: Thank you,
18 Melissa. So as Melissa pointed out during the
19 answer period, I'm going to make my very best
20 efforts to address the questions that were asked
21 this evening. Many of them are submitted on
22 note cards, others I have been writing down as I
23 heard them. So, again, I will do my very best
24 to answer the questions as they were submitted.
25 I will also do my very best to answer the

1 questions that I heard this evening. And
2 again, the questions that are not addressed will
3 be addressed in the analysis and public comment
4 that will come out - - .

5 I first, want to thank everyone here, the
6 Senator, the Representatives from CSA, and UFT.
7 The Parent Association, CEC. I am moved by the
8 passion that the folks in this room have for the
9 school and for the success of this school. I
10 have heard from the SLT directly, Mr. Gords
11 [phonetic] , who I've enjoyed getting to know
12 over the last few weeks. The desire of this
13 community to stay in tack, or the school to stay
14 K thru 8, and I've seen first hand, what Mr.
15 Gords promised I would see, which was deep
16 passion that families in the crowd have for the
17 community that is built here in this school.

18 So, I'm humbled to be able to be here. And
19 a number of people have said they respect that
20 was represented in many of the comments this
21 evening, and I appreciate that, as well. Again,
22 I will do my best to answer your questions—and I
23 suspect we will disagree on some things tonight,
24 but we will do everything to answer these
25 questions. Before I answer these questions, I

1 acknowledge your principal, Mr. Johnson. And
2 I say this as a former principal of a high
3 school in the Bronx, that I know how hard being
4 a principal is, and you have in short order,
5 rallied this community around you and your
6 vision for the work ahead here. And you are to
7 be applauded on behalf of the Chancellor.

8 I believe my friend Claudette said that she
9 is not defending failure. Claudette, those were
10 your words. Let me be clear, this school is not
11 closing because we see many assets here, we see
12 many strengths here, and we see a principal that
13 has come here, and has applied those strengths
14 to return this school, P.S. 161, The Crown, to
15 be one of the premiere schools here in District
16 17. And this is one of the things that we may
17 disagree on in our view. But the strengths of
18 this principal and the strengths of this school
19 we view the truncation of the middle school as
20 an opportunity for this principal and this
21 faculty to focus on the existing strengths of
22 the school, and to reinvest in what is working
23 here.

24 That is what our view is, and we see great
25 strengths in the elementary school. That

1 explains how we arrive at the decision we did.
2 This is not a phase out. We see a school that
3 has great promise in the elementary school
4 grades, but let's be clear. We see a school
5 that has for a number of years struggled,
6 especially at the middle school grades. And I
7 shared the numbers with you earlier, but I can
8 share them again. Right now, what we see at the
9 middle school grades, first of all is a - -
10 decline in enrollment. When you see a school
11 that has declined, since 2006, in the middle
12 school in the student population by a third, we
13 see—I was respectful of the many comments that
14 we received this evening, and I would like a
15 return of that respect.

16 So P.S. 161 K thru 8th grade students have
17 struggled. Last year, only 30 percent of 6th
18 grade students, 14 percent of 7th grade students,
19 and 21 percent of 8th grade students were
20 performing on grade level in English. In math,
21 18 percent of 6th grade students, 28 percent of
22 7th grade students, and 21 percent of 8th grade
23 students were performing on grade level in math.

24 Last year, the enrollment in grade 3 was 120
25 students, in grade 4 it was 130 students, in

1 grade 5 it was 135 students, in grade 6 it was
2 34 students. And so what we have seen as the
3 performance has declined in the middle school we
4 have seen families who choose to send their
5 child to P.S. 161, as their own school, at
6 District 17. We've seen them choosing to send
7 their children elsewhere, to other schools
8 across Brooklyn, across the City of New York, to
9 District 17 through the choice process, charter
10 and non charter.

11 But again, I want to emphasize that this is
12 not a phase out. That we see strengths in the
13 elementary school, we see a principal who is
14 capable of building on these strengths, and we
15 think by phasing out the middle school, the
16 principal and the faculty are better able to
17 focus on building those strengths.

18 So now we're going to turn to some of the
19 specific questions, some of which I've started
20 to answer. One question asks, what was the
21 turnaround time before the decision was made,
22 and when were parents notified that the school
23 was in danger of truncation? For the second
24 year in a row, the Department has, this year
25 engaged in what we call an early engagement

1 process with schools that through a number of
2 student performance trends, rise to a level of
3 concern for this kind of intervention. And P.S.
4 161, was announced in September as a school that
5 we were concerned about. And that happened very
6 soon after the progress reports were released
7 for last school year.

8 I believe, a list of 47 schools were
9 announced in late September, and soon there
10 after, the Superintendent reached out to the PTA
11 Principal to begin the conversation. At that
12 moment we had the—hard data, the test scores,
13 and the growth rates, and the State test scores
14 from last year. And that put P.S. 161 in the
15 conversation about serious intervention. It was
16 at that point, now three and a half months ago,
17 that we begin conversations here in the school
18 and around the school.

19 We met with the Principal, we met with the
20 SLT, we called for meetings with parents, and
21 the School Leadership Team. And we explained
22 the process, and shared the student performance
23 data that we had, and shared our concerns about
24 it, and begin a conversation. And the result of
25 that conversation is that P.S. 161 is staying

1 open. The result of that conversation is that
2 we made the difficult decision to propose to the
3 panel for the truncation of the middle school
4 for the reasons I described.

5 I do want to emphasize that we view this as
6 an intervention that will support the future
7 success of this school. And I can appreciate
8 that there are other points of view in the room
9 about that decision. But I'm here to explain
10 how, why and when we arrived at that decision.
11 One of the questions that was asked, but not
12 submitted on a note card was, what will happen
13 with the space that is made available by the
14 truncation of P.S. 161—actually I think there
15 was—so what is the replacement plan for this
16 school—And let me be clear about the following,
17 first of all there are no plans. And any plan
18 would require an impact statement.

19 By law, we are not allowed to place another
20 school organization on this campus without
21 another Educational Impact Statement that would
22 make clear to the community, in a timely
23 fashion, what that new organization would be,
24 and then submit it to the panel for a vote. So
25 we have, as many of you noted, we have made deep

1 and sustained investments in a new school
2 process, new charter schools, and district
3 traditional non charter schools. And we have
4 done that with great success, we think. It has
5 been noted this evening that a number of our new
6 schools are up for interventions, like
7 truncations, and that is true. We acknowledge
8 that not every new school in the city, charter
9 or non charter in the vast majority have been
10 non charter. We acknowledge that not everyone
11 has been as high performing as we want them to
12 be, but the vast majority have been. However, I
13 say that to make a point that in the system that
14 is committed to a new school strategy, there is
15 no plan at this moment to place a new charter
16 school or non charter school on this campus.
17 And again to do so would require an Educational
18 Impact Statement and—I appreciate it if you show
19 me the same respect that I showed you—and that
20 is forth coming.

21 The next question asked, what type of
22 support was given to the school, and I'm going
23 to defer here to the Educational Impact
24 Statement, which lists a set of specific
25 interventions and supports that were offered to

1 the school in the form of structural supports
2 in the new common core standard. Coaching to -
3 - teachers-again I would appreciate the respect
4 in answering the questions that were submitted.

5 The Impact Statement outlines a set of
6 instructional operational, and student support.
7 Professional development opportunities provided
8 to the school by the network. The Network is
9 represented here this evening, and I think has
10 done a terrific job in providing the principal
11 support in transitioning into his role. The
12 support that are outlined in the Impact
13 Statement are not generic, they are very
14 specific. They are taken from the Network Team-
15 okay, so I understand-this are not generic,
16 these are very specific opportunities of support
17 provided to the school by the Network.

18 The next question asked about students with
19 special needs.

20 [Background noise]

21 MS. HARRIS: There are more questions that
22 were submitted by - - this evening that we would
23 like to get to-yes, there are questions that
24 were submitted, and if we could just get through
25 them maybe you will find that your question will

1 be answered.

2 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR STERNBERG: So the next
3 question is, what will happen to our children
4 with special needs, what will become of them?
5 So let me make a few points here. The first
6 thing I want to do is to assure everyone that
7 students with - - , and students in English
8 Language Learners will continue to be provided
9 their main service. Services provided by the
10 IEB, that is current students and future
11 students. The middle school students that are
12 here during the phase out, that will be true.
13 It is certainly true of other students across
14 the school.

15 I'll note that the school services 11
16 percent of students with IP's, which is slightly
17 lower than the Districts average, and
18 significantly lower than the City average.
19 Again, I want to emphasize again that students
20 will be provided services throughout their time
21 at the school. There's a question about the
22 Panel for Educational Policy, and whether any -
23 - member has voted against one of the proposals
24 from the Chancellor to the Panel. That is
25 certainly true, the answer is yes. I will also

1 point out that it is a dynamic process and
2 there are many instances of proposals being
3 submitted. And over the course of conversations
4 like the one this evening, the Chancellor and
5 his team are taking a second look and revising
6 the proposals, and there are examples of that
7 for this year - - . Melissa, I think those are
8 all of the questions.

9 MS. HARRIS: Thank you. We've heard many
10 comments here this evening and we appreciate all
11 of your feedback. The information that we've
12 heard here will be shared with a panel on
13 Education Policy, which will have its hearing on
14 Thursday, February 9th at Brooklyn Tech High
15 School vote on this proposal.

16 I ask that you please use the telephone
17 number or our email address at the bottom of the
18 fact sheet if you have any other questions or
19 comments. I thank you all for coming this joint
20 public hearing is officially adjourned.

21 [END RECORDING]

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24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

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

5
6 Signature

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8 January 23, 2012
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