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**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION – DIVISION OF
PORTFOLIO PLANNING**

J.H.S. 166 George Gershwin

4/4/12

1 [START 290_246]

2 MS. JENNY SOBELMEN: I think we are going to
3 go ahead and get started. We were holding and
4 starting a little bit later trying to allow for
5 additional folks to join us, and I do believe
6 that Council Member - - is not here but will be
7 joining us so we will give him an opportunity
8 to speak when he arrives. We are joined by
9 representatives from the Community Planning
10 Board 5 and also from Senator Samson's Office
11 and they will both give comments a little bit
12 later in the agenda. So I want to thank you for
13 joining us this evening. My name Jenny Sobelman
14 and I will be acting as facilitator for this
15 evening's joint public hearing. This is a joint
16 public hearing of the Department of Education,
17 Community Education Council 19 and the School
18 Leadership teams to discuss the proposed closure
19 and replacement of J.H.S. 166 George Gershwin.
20 I would also like to note that this evening's
21 proceedings will be recorded and transcribed.
22 So now I will quickly run through the agenda so
23 everyone has a sense of the running of the show
24 this evening. Anyhow who would wish to speak
25 during the public comment portion, which will

1 take place shortly should just take advantage
2 of this time to go out into the entry way where
3 you came in. There is a table where you sign
4 in. Each person who signs up will be given two
5 minutes to speak. We have a microphone here and
6 we will actually keep the time by the young lady
7 or gentlemen in the front. We will let you know
8 when you're down to thirty seconds and when your
9 two minutes has elapsed. I think we have a
10 short list but I will just try to remind folks
11 that we will keep moving through the agenda and
12 then we will keep that open for about fifteen
13 more minutes. So if you think you might want to
14 make a comment, please do make your way to the
15 back. Then when we have all of the public
16 comments, we will have a session during the
17 agenda for Q & A. So also at the table in the
18 back there are note cards and you can take a
19 note card, jot down your question for the panel
20 and submit that. So once we go through the
21 public comment we will then respond to the
22 questions that are submitted. If the questions
23 are repetitive, will we batch them all together
24 and just respond once. If we aren't able to
25 answer all the questions this evening they'll

1 all be included in the announcement of public
2 comment, which is a document that is created and
3 published both on the website and provided for
4 the members of the Panel for Educational Policy
5 prior to the vote. The vote will be at another
6 public hearing and that's going to take place on
7 April 26th, in the Brooklyn Prospect Heights
8 Campus. So we will have presentations from the
9 Panel of Public Comment Q & A. And again as I
10 said if additional elected officials join us we
11 will give them an opportunity to speak. If
12 additional members of the panel want to join us,
13 we will also give them an opportunity to speak.
14 Additionally if you have additional comments and
15 questions that come up over the course of the
16 evening or tomorrow or in coming days of the
17 week, there are two ways that you can submit
18 additional comments and questions. We have an
19 email and a phone number and both of those any
20 comment or questions will be included in the
21 Announcement of Public Comment that I referred
22 to and I'll provide those several times over the
23 course of the evening. So it is the D-19
24 Proposals, D-19 Proposals at Schools.NYC.gov or
25 by phone at 212-374-0208. So I am now going to

1 introduce the panel that has assembled for this
2 meeting tonight for public hearing. I am going
3 to start at the far end. We have Justin Davis,
4 representing the SLT or the UNT Charter School.
5 We are also joined by Erica Perez representing
6 CEC 19. We are joined in the audience by team
7 members of the JHS 166 SLT, Linda King and
8 Seantel Lucien. I apologize if I mispronounced.
9 We are also joined by Superintendant Rose Marie
10 Mills. So I am now going to invite - - to read
11 the proposal.

12 MS. LAURA RODRIQUEZ: Thank you Jenny. Good
13 evening ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for
14 being here this evening. This joint public
15 hearing was convened to discuss the proposed
16 closure and replacement of Junior High School
17 166 George Gershwin. Junior High School 166 is
18 located at 424 Lennon Street in Community School
19 District 19 in Brooklyn. It currently serves
20 students in grades 6 through 8. On March 5th,
21 2012, the New York City Department of Education
22 published an Educational Impact Statement
23 accompanied by a building utilization plan to
24 close Junior High School 166 and open a new
25 school 19K338. By closing Junior High School

1 166 and replacing it with a new school we are
2 seeking to rapidly create a school environment
3 that will prepare students for success. The new
4 school will build on the strongest elements of
5 Junior High School 166 and then will also
6 incorporate new elements. Students will have
7 access to a higher quality educational option
8 while they continue to attend school in this
9 very building. In conjunction with this
10 proposal, the Department of Education submitted
11 a school improvement grant application to the
12 state education department to implement the
13 turnaround model at the new school. If approved
14 this would make new school eligible for up to
15 eight hundred thousand dollars in supplemental
16 federal funding. I want to acknowledge the
17 students and families who feel your son or
18 daughter is being well served by Junior High
19 School 166. Tonight we will hear about this
20 success stories happening at Junior High School
21 166. There are success stories and we honor
22 those but we also need to consider the many
23 students who started with their child in the 6th
24 grade and have not experienced the same success.
25 They deserve better. Despite a number of

1 challenges the school has faced some data
2 indicates that elements of Junior High School
3 166 are worth preserving in the new school. For
4 example, the schools overall quality review
5 score was a developing D. The quality review
6 indicated some areas of strength such as the
7 school makes good organizational decisions
8 around the use of time and programming to
9 support plans for improvement in student
10 performance. With new supports and
11 restructuring the department of education
12 expects that the new school will be able to
13 effectively leverage these areas of strength
14 while improving students out comes. However,
15 Junior High School 166's performance data
16 overall and feedback from members of the New
17 York State Board of Regions indicate that the
18 pace of change in New York Cities persistently
19 lowest achieving schools is not quick enough to
20 meet student needs and suggests that Junior High
21 School 166 should be closed and replaced with a
22 new school. In 2010, 2011 a majority of Junior
23 High School 166 students remained below grade
24 level in English and Math. In 2010, 2011 only
25 11% of students were performing on grade level

1 in English and only 22% of students were
2 performing on grade level in Math. Additionally,
3 Junior High School 166 is not adequately helping
4 students to make progress. In 2010-11, the
5 school was in the bottom 23% of city middle
6 schools in terms of learning growth and English
7 and in the bottom 27% of city middle schools in
8 terms of learning growth in Math. The schools
9 attendance rate was one of the lowest among
10 middle schools city wide. The 2010-11
11 attendance rate was 87% putting Junior High
12 School 166 in the bottom 6% of New York City
13 Middle Schools in terms of attendance. Before
14 we hear from other members of the panel and move
15 to the public comments I would like to briefly
16 discuss the impact of this proposal on current
17 Junior High School 166 students and families if
18 it is approved. Number 1, all current Junior
19 High School 166 students will have a guaranteed
20 seat in the new school. This includes all
21 current sixth and seventh grade students as well
22 as any eight grade students who do not graduate
23 by the beginning of the 2012-13 school years.
24 Secondly, all incoming sixth graders who have
25 applied to Junior High School 166 and are

1 matched to it in the Middle School admissions
2 process will automatically be enrolled in the
3 new school. Additionally, the Department of
4 Education does not anticipate that the proposed
5 closure and replacement of Junior High School
6 166 will impact the co-location of the school
7 currently co-located in the building, the USC
8 Charter School. Similarly the Department of
9 Education does not anticipate that this proposal
10 will impact the two community based
11 organizations currently housed in this building.
12 Finally, I want to clarify the process the new
13 school will go through to hire the best possible
14 staff if this proposal is approved. Number 1,
15 there is no quota of staff that must be removed
16 as a result of this process. This proposal does
17 not require the turnover of any set percentage
18 of staff. Two, pursuant to the City's Teacher
19 contract, if this proposal is approved - - staff
20 will apply to work at the new school, will be
21 reviewed by a five person school based personnel
22 committee. The committee is made up of the
23 Principal, two designee's of the Chancellor and
24 two designee's of the UFT, United Federation of
25 Teachers President. Thirdly, the proposed new

1 leader will develop qualifications for
2 positions in the new school and the personnel
3 committee will consider each candidate who
4 applies. All teachers from the current school
5 are eligible to apply to work at the new school.
6 And finally if sufficient numbers of staff from
7 the closing school apply, at least 50% of the
8 new schools technological positions must be
9 selected from among the appropriately licensed
10 most senior qualified applicants. Again, there
11 is no set percentage or limit of the numbers of
12 staff from the closing school who can be hired
13 to work at the new school and the decisions are
14 made by the personnel committee of the new
15 school. I want to thank you and look forward to
16 hearing your comments and your questions. Thank
17 you.

18 MS. JENNY SOBELMAN: Thank you Deputy
19 Chancellor. The next presentation will be from
20 Erica Perez representing Community-

21 FEMALE VOICE 1: I want to recognize
22 Assemblywomen Inez Barron has joined us. If
23 you'd like to give a comment you can?

24 ASSEMBLY WOMEAN INEZ BARRON: Go on with
25 your presentation.

1 MS. JENNY SOBELMAN: Okay. You want to go
2 down there or do you want to go over there?
3 Where ever you are most comfortable okay?

4 MS. ERICA PEREZ: People say what's in a
5 name? For the name Gershwin, most of the people
6 in the community see that as a safe haven. They
7 see that as a place where it's not just a school
8 but it's a place where their children can be
9 safe. When I hear about all these statistics
10 with the attendance rate, I wonder if they're
11 looking at the amount of the percentage of
12 children that were in Foster Care or the amount
13 of the percentage of children that are in
14 shelters? Another question that I have is they
15 say we would have a new leader but the community
16 would not have a say on the new leadership
17 because it is coming in and being a brand new
18 school, the community doesn't have the say in
19 the new leadership or even a say in the
20 teachers. So once again our voice is not being
21 heard. My concern, the biggest concern I have
22 for our community is the parents are being left
23 out. I see a lot of decisions that are going to
24 be made for our children excluding us. I for
25 one as a parent like to be involved in every

1 decision that has to do with my child. I know
2 that a lot of people here have the same
3 concerns. They have a wonderful - - here and a
4 lot of kids are on the correct grade average to
5 be able to participate in the band and all the
6 other programs they have in the school. So I
7 know a lot of the parents here are concerned
8 about the band. But like I said again the
9 community is asking to be part of the process.
10 Whether it's a new school or a second school
11 that is existing right now they want to have
12 their say. They want to be able to say we feel
13 these people are effective or this is a
14 leadership that we would want for our community.
15 I think that's the biggest thing that we are
16 lacking in this community is that we don't have
17 a say on what's being done with or for our
18 children. Thank you.

19 [Applause]

20 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. I also
21 just want to say last call for public sign up.
22 Excuse me; public comments so if you'd like to-
23 if this is inspiring you to take a couple of
24 moments, please do make your way to the back to
25 sign in. Again, each person who signs up will

1 be given two minutes for public comment and we
2 will keep that open for just a couple more
3 minutes. The next presentation will be from
4 Justin Davis representing UFT Charter SLT School
5 Leadership Team.

6 MR. JUSTIN DAVIS: First I would like to say
7 welcome and thank you for coming out. This is a
8 good time to have this conversation about this
9 coming transition. For those of you who don't
10 know me, the UFT Charter School has been in this
11 building for six years. We have worked
12 collectively with George Gershwin to service our
13 students which are basically your students.
14 Many of our students also come from this
15 neighborhood so we have built a strong working
16 relationship with the Gershwin, George Gershwin
17 staff and I hope that as we move forward that
18 that continues. And finally I would just like
19 to say that we are a welcoming face okay. We
20 are here to work collectively regardless of what
21 happens in this transition. If we can help in
22 any way shape or form, we are open to doing
23 that. Thank you.

24 [Applause]

25 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. So now

1 before we transition into public comment, we
2 will invite our elected officials to make
3 remarks. I believe the Assembly Woman is going
4 to this microphone or whatever you are most
5 comfortable with?

6 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRON. How about this one?

7 MS. SOBELMAN: Absolutely.

8 ASSEMBLYWOMAN BARRON: Good evening. It's a
9 pleasure to see all of you here this evening
10 because this is a bit of an issue. The Board of
11 Education continues to play games with our
12 children. This is a school that has been forced
13 to not be able to get a student population other
14 than what it is that they wanted to have here.
15 I have spoken with administration here and they
16 tell me about problems that they have in terms
17 of students who live a distance away from the
18 school but yet they are still not provided
19 transportation. So yes, if it's not convenient
20 for children to get here, they may not put that
21 special effort in to getting here. So yes, you
22 are going to have reduced attendance and that is
23 going to reflect poorly on the school going
24 forward. We are talking about a school that has
25 granted a school improvement grant to set a plan

1 in place to improve what was going on and due
2 to politics, that grant was - - and the school
3 is no longer allowed to continue in the planning
4 that they were initiating to try to turn this
5 school around. So we've got this charade and
6 this game going forward about not allowing the
7 school to go forward. So what they are going to
8 do is have a move in shift and they are saying
9 allow the same population of staff to be able to
10 come again but that's not the description of
11 what it is. The description says fifty% of the
12 staff will be allowed to return. So the
13 language that you are hearing is different than
14 what is written as what is going to be. And you
15 think that closing the school one day and
16 opening it the next day with a new name makes it
17 a new school with the same population of
18 students. That's a magic trick that I would
19 really like to see you pull off. What's the
20 problem is, is that this Administration in the
21 City has not been given the resources that it
22 needs. And the problem also comes from the
23 state, from the State Assembly. I have fought
24 and I have fought with my colleagues and with
25 the Governor to give New York City the rest of

1 the 5.5 Billion dollars that it's entitled to
2 by law. The law says that we are supposed to
3 get that money because the law said that that
4 for thirteen years New York City was under-
5 funding and now we have a whole generation of
6 children who are graduating without the
7 resources that they need to be successful. So
8 you are getting 13% graduations that are college
9 or career vetted. That's not acceptable. And
10 the plan going forward does nothing to address
11 increasing that graduation rate. It's a game
12 that they are playing. Our children need
13 resources. Our children need the equipment and
14 the time and personnel that will work with them
15 to get them to be successful. When you have a
16 plan that's an 18 month plan and then you shift
17 it and you get another management plan from the
18 board, you are going to have chaos and our
19 children are the ones who are suffering because
20 of that shell game that they are playing with
21 our children.

22 [Applause]

23 ASSEMBLYWOMEN BARRON: Now, what happens if
24 you allow a school to come together and to get a
25 school improvement grant and to try now to

1 reshape that school, why would you not allow
2 the school to continue? Why would you yank that
3 after three or four months and tell them that
4 no, you can't go forward and we are going to
5 have to turn you around and we are going to have
6 to make another plan? I say we need to go
7 backwards. I say we need to allow this school
8 to continue with the school improvement grant
9 and to go forward with the plan that they had.
10 They know the students, they have been the ones
11 that have dedicated themselves to the plan that
12 they made to make themselves successful and we
13 need to allow them to continue with the school
14 improvement grant that they had been working on
15 that will allow them to be successful for our
16 students going forward. I say to the parents,
17 my office is going to work with the staff and we
18 are working with the administration because we
19 know that our children when given the proper
20 resources and given the proper motivation and
21 the proper - - material and then for a well plan
22 curriculum will be successful and we need to
23 challenge our children to do all that they can
24 do. But we need to give them the resources and
25 the motivation and the support to be successful

1 in what it is that they have to do.

2 [Applause]

3 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you and we will invite
4 him to provide comments as well.

5 MR. CHARLES BARRON: Hi. I agree with
6 everything that she said. It makes sense to me.
7 You know I have done this a thousand times and
8 usually I have little exercises in futility and
9 just come and hear us and we vent and then they
10 go ahead and they do what they want to do. But
11 we are going to fight. We want our Principal to
12 stay. He has been doing an excellent job for
13 our children and we want our Principal to stay.

14 [Applause]

15 MR. BARRON: They are doing this because the
16 Mayor is in some battle with the UMT and they
17 are having their battles so since he can't get
18 rid of people the way he wants to get rid of
19 them so he will close our school. It is crazy.
20 To shut a school down in June and start a new
21 one up in July, same people so that he can now
22 fire half the staff he wants to and exercise
23 that people target control that he has over the
24 school system. Mayoral control is a fact that
25 has failed us and we are going to fight to end

1 the Mayoral control over our schools. This is
2 what they do. They start up new schools and co-
3 locations and Charter Schools, five and six
4 schools in one building, our children having
5 lunch at ten o'clock because they have to share
6 the auditorium, share the lunchroom, share all
7 these common spaces. This system under Mayor
8 Blumberg, all those that don't stand up to him
9 whoever you are you have failed our children.
10 They have failed our children miserably so most
11 of their ideas have nothing to do with
12 education, nothing to do with educating our
13 children because they are not educators. They
14 are not educators. They are not taking advice
15 from educators. We have a Doctor - - and a
16 Doctor Sheila - - who is brilliant brilliant. A
17 Doctor Douglas Smith - - and math. They don't
18 talk to any of those. They are African American
19 Educators who are excellent. They don't even
20 talk to them because they are not interested in
21 anything they have to say. We know what it
22 takes to educate children. We know it takes
23 smaller class size. We know that it takes a
24 culturally relevant curriculum so children can
25 identify with their culture and feel proud of

1 them-selves. We know it is going to take some
2 smart board and science labs and computer labs
3 and all that to teach them about the green
4 economy and the future. That is where the
5 future is about green jobs and what does it mean
6 to know this stuff about economics and
7 leadership? They are not teaching none of that.
8 You know what they are teaching? Test Prep.
9 Every other period test prep. Do you know why
10 Test Prep? So scores can go up whether they
11 cheat or place so that he Mayor looks good and
12 he can then say I educated the children look?
13 The tests scores are up. No. He said the
14 graduation rate was up from fifty some odd
15 percent to sixty five percent but that pole is
16 not worth the paper it is written on because
17 when the dust clears and I see this everywhere I
18 go, this Mayor in his ten years had one hundred
19 and fifty billion dollars. When I came to City
20 Hall, the budget was eleven billion dollars. It
21 is now 24.1 billion dollars for education. 24.1
22 billion. When the dust clears at the end of all
23 the talk only 13% of those 65% graduates, 13%
24 are prepared for college or career, thirteen
25 percent and if they graduate from a Charter High

1 School it's ten percent. Less than the public
2 High School and that is according to their
3 statistics, not mine. I got that from them. So
4 how they say anything about education? How
5 could you not listen to the parents?
6 Assemblywoman Inez Barron has been educating for
7 over thirty-six years. She knows as a Principal
8 and as a curriculum specialist and the system
9 and the superintendent, she knows what it takes
10 to educate. Do you think they'd talk to us? So
11 whatever they are doing here, we got to demand
12 that we have the power and authority to dictate
13 control of what's going to go on at our schools.
14 This is not going to be just a ventilated
15 session so they can say they had a public
16 meeting. That is what they do. We had a public
17 meeting. Okay, let's kick them out, we are
18 finished. Kick them out. Let's go. Let's pull
19 them out. They have a public meeting, they told
20 us, we heard it and then they just go do what
21 they want to do anyway. We are going to monitor
22 this one very very closely and do have some
23 victories. We fought hard and we got Maxama
24 taken off the list from shutting down. How are
25 you going to shut down a school of that - -?

1 [Applause]

2 MR. BARRON: - - of the marking system. We
3 need a marking tweet needs to be shut down. How
4 you going to shut down a school that got an A?
5 And then we also won a victory of PS114. We
6 fought and we kept that open because the people
7 said no. The people said no and seems like I
8 could buy stuff, maybe I could buy some schools
9 and say we are not shutting down schools. I
10 could buy every school that we think needs to
11 stay open because there is nothing - - sound
12 about shutting a school down because it's
13 failing. Well what did you do to support it?
14 What did you do to keep it going and how much
15 assistance did you give it? How about schools
16 that don't have libraries that are up to date.
17 They don't have science labs, smart boards,
18 computer labs. They don't have after school
19 programs and they don't have no money. They cut
20 the money for the arts and sports. They just
21 cut all the money out and if none of that
22 happened, you know our kids would be running the
23 school and have a rich athletic program and
24 things that would inspire and mold them to come
25 to school. Finally, you know what the real

1 crime and some cancer rolls from this one.
2 They said they are having budget problems. That
3 is what the Department of Education told us and
4 City Hall. They are having budget problems so
5 they had to fire over 600 school aid workers.
6 They fired over 600 school aid workers to do
7 what, to save thirty-two million dollars,
8 thirty-two million dollars. Hold that figure
9 for a minute. 32 million dollars and they fired
10 the school attendance, the Para-professionals.
11 Some of these people know your children better
12 than the teachers.

13 [Applause]

14 MR. BARRON: I know crossing guards that
15 will check your kids before they even get in the
16 school to make sure that they are here because
17 the crossing guard has a relationship sometimes
18 than people inside the school. They fired 600
19 of them to save 32 million dollars. I told - -
20 when he came and presented the budget, I said I
21 thought you said you were broke? I thought you
22 said you had a crisis? How can a budget you
23 know when they came through the - - they raised
24 it by 700 million dollars. They had a 3.8
25 billion dollar contracting budget, now it's 4.7

1 billion dollars in contracts and then the
2 Chancellor said, "Well Charles, you know we need
3 contracts." Yeah, for - - but what is
4 professional services 65 billion dollars? Who
5 are these professionals and what kind of
6 services are they providing? They have another
7 category, General Professional Services they
8 informed me. They had - - professional services
9 for education activities, nine hundred and four
10 million dollars. I want to know who these
11 people are? How do you have 700 million dollars
12 more for contractors and you don't have 32
13 million dollars to keep our school workers down
14 to permanent? They are outsourcing. They have
15 these people getting rich off of your education
16 dollars. They are getting rich and our kids our
17 children are not being educated. So tonight we
18 want you to sign up with us. Give us your name
19 if you're serious about being an education
20 activist; come see us afterwards because we are
21 going to stay on their case. I am telling you
22 this is going to be a battle for a long time.
23 The Mayor is out of control and he must end
24 Mayoral control - -. Thank you very much.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Next we have elected
2 Representative Brandan Bloomfield representing
3 Senator Samson's office. I think he just
4 stepped out. Okay, so we are going to come back
5 to him. Next to speak from the elected list we
6 have Queeny Wooton from Community Board Five,
7 Community Planning Board Five.

8 MS. QUEENY WOOTON: Good evening ladies and
9 gentlemen. My name is Queeny Wooton. I am the
10 Chair of - - of Planning Board Five - - 127th -
11 - Avenue. I am a resident with - - and I work
12 for 43 years with the Board of Education. I am
13 here to oppose any closure of any schools and
14 the employees and I want to go on record here as
15 - - supposedly closely. Thank you very much.

16 MS. SOBELMAN: Mr. Bloomfield, perfect time.
17 So the next speaker will be Brandan Bloomfield
18 representative for the State Senator Samson's
19 Office.

20 MR. BRANDAN BLOOMFIELD: Please excuse me, I
21 have - - back to my sister. Good evening
22 everyone. So we have this panel of - - folks
23 and I have been with the Senators Office for
24 five years now and we have had a lot of fights
25 with schools, the DOE and the Charter schools

1 and things like Councilman Barron, I heard him
2 saying. Whole heartedly the Senator feels that
3 we are always at a disadvantage. There is a
4 hearing and then we go to a vote and we already
5 know what is going to happen right? We have
6 been through this so many times and there is no
7 check and balance on the system right? Do our
8 parents feel empowered by this? They've cut the
9 budget so many times between schools and then
10 they tell them they are failing at the same
11 time. It is like catch 22. How do I do more
12 with less with more students and to take into
13 account the students that we have coming into
14 the school will certain special needs, certain
15 programs so if you don't have the supplies you
16 can't do your job right? If you don't have a
17 pen how are you going to write, right? If you
18 don't have up to date materials and book, smart
19 boards and those things, other sides of the
20 District, neighboring Districts have all of
21 that. They have smart boards and there aren't
22 any co-locations with them. It is pretty
23 concentrated in our area in conflict like us
24 right? So it's unfortunate that when we go to
25 the Chancellors office and when we speak to the

1 parents and then we have these hearings it
2 matters not, does it but we have to stand
3 steadfast because of all of this, it doesn't
4 matter if the - - because they are not going to
5 - - you. So there is no statistic that shows
6 Charter School is better than the public school
7 and the administration that is there. They have
8 a problem with administration; with
9 unfortunately we give power to the Mayor because
10 we are afraid of corruption and all of that in
11 the school board. But now we have a
12 dictatorship with our schools. Where will we
13 go? We have to stand together as a people. The
14 numbers will come up. They'll make these
15 private public charters and public money into
16 private hands. This is what they are going to
17 do. This is what it is all about and they are
18 taking and shifting responsibility away. We
19 really have to stand up in this community. This
20 room should be full of us, should be full of
21 parents. But you can't blame the parents that
22 are disappointed that this - - on them and yet
23 they don't have and they don't see - - and they
24 are going to do what they want to do so why have
25 this hearing right? Well we need to take

1 advantage as we can and everyone should have
2 brought a baby even if you have a - - in the
3 school you should be here today to hear our
4 voices and to see what is going on. Senator
5 Samson stands in the community and it is
6 unfortunate you've worked with - - this fight
7 was really about them not getting on the same
8 page as - - and one of the casualties is
9 unfortunately this school. That's unfortunate
10 because the children are going to suffer. I am
11 not saying that the school - - of course we have
12 to support the school. We are not supporting
13 the only school; it's the parents so it must
14 work because if not who is going to lead us when
15 I get older. That is why we are here son so
16 unfortunately we stand with them and the Senator
17 stands with the parents. We fought along with
18 other elected officials and we are going to
19 continue to fight to make sure that our schools
20 are properly funded. Thank you very much.

21 MS. SOBELMAN: So that concludes our formal
22 presentations and we are now going to transition
23 into public comment. So as I said the
24 microphone is here and I believe this gentleman
25 up front is going to keep time for us so he will

1 let you know when you have gotten to thirty
2 seconds and when the two minutes has elapsed. I
3 am going to call out the names and I want to
4 apologize in advance if I get any of the names
5 wrong but hopefully you'll recognize your names
6 if I get close. So I am going to call up the
7 first batch of speakers. Speaker Number 1, Kate
8 Leonard. Speaker Number 2, Chris Banks, Speaker
9 Number 4, Tony Yancey, Number 5, Anita
10 Stevenson, Number 6, David Best, and Number 7,
11 Delsa Best. So we will start with speaker
12 number 1, Kate Leonard.

13 MS. KATE LEONARD: I am speaking on behalf
14 of Erie - - and CSA. The New York State
15 Department of Education intends to close 26
16 schools and are already in the process of - - is
17 a political maneuver that is not proven it is a
18 sound educational practice. What began as a
19 ploy designed to avoid negotiations with CSA and
20 UFT over new Principal and Teacher evaluation
21 systems? Motivation behind that ploy was the
22 following, a turnaround model, a model that does
23 not require Principal and Teacher evaluations
24 and allows the city to close and conditionally
25 keep open schools and - -. What can we do about

1 this? Fifteen percent of the teachers will do
2 well while fifty percent of the teachers will be
3 out put into excess wily nily. There is nothing
4 educationally sound about this intervention
5 plan. It is being introduced for specific
6 reasons not to help children. It will not
7 contribute to the development of sound principal
8 and true evaluation systems. While these newly
9 reinforced are the most important ones, there
10 are physical costs too removing 1800 teachers
11 across - - an eight bar system where they work
12 as substitutes at full salary will cost the city
13 approximately one hundred and eighty million
14 dollars annually. Thank you.

15 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker
16 Number 2, Chris Banks.

17 MR. CHRIS BANKS: Good night everyone. I am
18 here to support those parents that got out and
19 got involved and took a stand today. One thing
20 I can say to the Department is that they are
21 consistent with disrespecting our community and
22 we are not going to stand for this at all. One
23 thing is I take it personally too because I have
24 worked with the Principal, I have worked with
25 Regina Collins, I've worked with all the staff

1 and we have had - - and my thing is and what I
2 am afraid is going to happen is there is going
3 to be a new school that comes in that will not
4 be as community minded as - - will tell you.
5 And the community holds the door to the
6 community. I am afraid that because we have
7 invested in our seniors, we have this generation
8 - - they get a public service of - -. What's
9 going to happen? What is going to happen then?
10 It's like we go through this every day where it
11 is a kin to getting smacked in the face by this
12 administration. When are you going to start
13 understanding that people should have the final
14 say? Mayoral control should be - -. The only
15 thing that we have gotten out of Mayoral control
16 is dictatorship. We have the type that does
17 nothing but just tells us what we think or what
18 he thinks we should know. It's disrespectful.
19 We are sick and tired of it. You know it is sad
20 because they pour their hearts in there every
21 day to be here and be here for these students.
22 - - so to use this thing like closing a school
23 as a form of a budget solution which I think is
24 - - in terms of the District, never - - they set
25 this administration up to fail. They never gave

1 the proper resources in the beginning and you
2 expect to have them work a miracle. Shame on
3 the Board of Education and to the Department of
4 Education. It's not indicative on the--this
5 doesn't represent the administration of the
6 school. This is disrespect so we are going to
7 stand up for the school. We are going to
8 continue to stand up for the school. The same
9 support that - - got. People like David Best -
10 - and a whole lot of support that we should
11 demand for our students. We are going to
12 continue to fight against the Department of
13 Education when it comes to our school 166. This
14 is my - - and I am going to continue to fight.

15 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. Taking the floor
16 is Tony Yancey.

17 MR. TONY YANCY: Good evening everybody. I
18 would like to speak on behalf of the PTA
19 President/Secretary of the PTA. I am also
20 speaking for - -. We oppose the closing of this
21 school first of all and foremost. We oppose - -
22 and-

23 [Applause]

24 MR. YANCY: The Department of Education does
25 not - -. I have been here at this school and I

1 have personally observed Miss Ortega do ten
2 things at one time in five minutes.

3 [Applause]

4 MR. YANCY: The odds that she is against are
5 bigger and we should give her an opportunity to
6 compose our own report so that we can submit to
7 the DOE of the short comings that they have put
8 upon us to deal with what we are dealing with
9 today. The teachers are dedicated, the students
10 are dedicated and the parents are dedicated.
11 It's a travesty that they are causing and I am
12 going to fight with Councilman Barron and
13 Senator Samson. Whatever you need from me?
14 Whatever you need, I will be there. I would
15 hope that you all offer the same because if we
16 don't, like they said they are going to do what
17 they are going to do anyway but they are going
18 to know that they have a fight on their hands.
19 Thank you very much.

20 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, Speaker Number 5,
21 Anita Stevenson, speaker Number 5.

22 MS. ANITA STEVENSON: Good evening
23 everybody. My name is Miss Stevenson. I am a
24 parent here and I have two children in this
25 school and what you are doing is wrong. They

1 have had inadequate money and they have given
2 a lack of time for the school to improve so we
3 as parents have to fight. We are not going to
4 give up and we are going to continue to fight
5 and we are going to fight like we ain't fought
6 before. We are going to fight you tooth and
7 nail.

8 MS. SOBELMAN: Speaker Number 6, David Best.
9 David Best.

10 MR. DAVID BEST: Good evening everyone. I
11 have - - and that statement and I have few
12 questions. One, is student enrollment actually
13 - - the school? So how can you expect the
14 students and the parents to - - the students
15 that come here belong in the other side in
16 Queens? How are the kids that come here picked
17 to come here? If the charter schools don't - -
18 they come here and all the special education
19 kids come here. Each year the stats go up as
20 far as the kids that are not making grades.
21 Two, also I would like to say - - impact the
22 students in the community there is only one - -.
23 Now, why is that? The - - basically says that
24 the - - will have no - - affect or seating
25 affect. Look around you. Most of the time all

1 these kids come from either the projects here
2 or the projects on the other side. Also, taken
3 into account with the bus passes and train
4 passes. You all limit them each year. Now,
5 with the teachers performance, okay I understand
6 they - - but who can you blame? Now one
7 question and one that I would like you to
8 answer. If you are going to close the school
9 and reopen it I think and I should probably say
10 I know. You should have a parent on that Board
11 asking who is educating these children because
12 if you don't, this will be the same thing. You
13 are going to change schools name and the same
14 kids. What are you doing to them? Same problem
15 but it won't continue because I can look around
16 here and I can see a bunch of people sitting
17 around here from the DOE and trying to - -.
18 Well guess what, what are you doing, sitting on
19 your ass.

20 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you sir.

21 MR. BEST: And you have nothing to teach our
22 kids.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. SOBELMAN: Delsa Best.

25 MS. DELAS BEST: Hi, good evening everyone.

1 My name is Delsa Best and I am - - to be here.
2 I would like to say that when you look at me, I
3 am a - - a lot of people that talk about me but
4 I credit it from the school that I had. It
5 wasn't - - but it had a lot of the program - -.
6 Today I am proud to say that I have a Masters
7 from NYU. I have had credits in education at
8 NYU and what I am saying is that we cannot close
9 this school. Some of the kids like me that
10 didn't have the opportunity and people were
11 saying you couldn't have an opportunity,
12 everybody has a right to an equal education and
13 I think - - that I am hearing that has not been
14 said. You cannot close a school that has not
15 had adequate supplies and has not had adequate
16 support. I am saying let's keep this school
17 open and let's do what is right and - -
18 Assemblywoman and Councilman and the team and
19 everyone here has my full support. I will - -
20 those who want to speak as parents, I will be in
21 the back because I am also speaking to - - our
22 community radio station. Let's fight. We
23 cannot - - as everyone has the right to a decent
24 education. Thank you so much.

25 MS. SOBELMAN: Before we go on to our second

1 set of speakers, we are going to take a break
2 and we are going to have a performance by - -.

3 [Loud yelling performance]

4 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much to the
5 marching band. That was great. We have a quick
6 comment from Joyce Simmons from our Principals
7 office.

8 MS. JOYCE SIMMONS: Oh boy, aren't our
9 children awesome? Weren't they awesome? Our
10 children are more than just numbers and more
11 than ones, twos and threes and A, B, and C's.
12 Just the talent and the leadership and the young
13 man that was leading them and the team work and
14 the cooperation and this is what we are fighting
15 for so in that vein yes absolutely, right?

16 [Applause]

17 MS. SIMMONS: This is what we are fighting
18 for. These are our children that we are
19 fighting for. You know so again my name is
20 Joyce Simmons and I am a Judicial Delegate in
21 the neighborhood and also I am Councilman
22 Barron's Chief of Staff and I just wanted to say
23 that when we finish please do come see me
24 because now is the time, you know we ventilated
25 and they know that is the time that they do what

1 they want to do and now is our time to fight.
2 So please come over to me, let me give you
3 information and we will work with cooperation
4 with the Parent Association and we are going to
5 hold a - - meeting next week, just the parents,
6 just the community and we are going to plot out
7 strategy. The DOE has been doing their strategy
8 and we are going to plot our strategy so please
9 do see that's right so please see me afterwards.
10 Now the kid got me all excited here. Don't you
11 know like drums beating and you know just brings
12 us back to our culture, our African Culture and
13 our African Ancestors so that was the call to
14 war right? That was the call so I'll be right
15 over here to get everyone's information so we
16 can go forward. Thank you.

17 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. Thank you. Okay
18 so now we are going to return to the second set
19 folks that have signed up for public comment so
20 the microphone is here again back in the aisle
21 and I am going to call out the next set of
22 names. Speaker Number 8 is James Paterson.
23 Number 9 will be Greg Grant and ten will be
24 Tasha Yancey. Eleven will be Bryce Wyatt and
25 twelve will be Janet Williams Gordan. Mr. James

1 Peterson, speaker number 8. James Peterson.
2 Okay, we will come back to him. Speaker Number
3 9, Greg Grant.

4 MR. GREG GRANT: Good evening everyone. I
5 am a parent of two that attend this school. I
6 also have one that graduated. He came here
7 until he was thirteen. We are going back seven
8 years. Talk about numbers. Look at the numbers
9 of seven years ago and look at it seven years
10 previous to that. This lady does a magnificent
11 job in the school with basically nothing. She
12 was set up to fail by - -. You have seen the -
13 - statement? That is to keep these kids
14 educated with books so they can read and be part
15 of the - - program. You know what I mean? Be
16 part of the - - so the eight grade kids who are
17 taking regents classes on Saturdays like my son
18 took. He was able to start out and be ahead
19 when he got to the ninth grade. He took his
20 regents in the 8th grade and put him ahead and
21 that is what this school did and her staff and
22 the hard work that they put forth every day.
23 The lady is - - in the community and this is why
24 we need to keep this school together so that you
25 have the - - and everything that you see. So

1 when you start talking about your numbers look
2 back seven years and then look back seven years
3 before that and you'll see a big difference. So
4 if you remove this lady you are going to be
5 killing this school. You take away it's heart
6 because believe me boys growing up in here and
7 they respect the woman but these kids have the
8 utmost respect for Miss Ortega so you will be
9 doing these kids a terrible injustice by
10 removing her from the school.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. SOBELMAN: Has Mr. Peterson joined us?
13 Okay it is Mr. Peterson, speaker number 8,
14 speaker number 10 Tasha Yancey? Are you Tricia
15 Yancey?

16 MR. YANCEY: No I am Tony Yancey but I did
17 want to say they talk numbers, they talk this,
18 they talk that and we are going to do our own
19 report. You understand so we can submit it when
20 we go to fight the good fight because we are
21 going to put it in the report what - - so
22 everybody can know where we stand and where we
23 got to go. That is all I got to say. We are
24 going to do our own report because we have been
25 getting the short stick for too long and they

1 are going to know about it. Thank you.

2 [Applause]

3 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. Speaker Number 11,
4 Bruce Wyatt. Speaker Number 11, Bruce Wyatt.

5 MR. BRUCE WYATT: Good evening. My name is
6 Bruce Wyatt and I am teacher at - - Junior High
7 School. I have been here for fourteen years
8 now. Fourteen years and ten months. You
9 continue to allow the school to be an
10 underfunded school and then you say the school
11 is failing. A lot of parents know this; we have
12 fifteen and sixteen year old sixth graders with
13 eleven and twelve year old children. But you
14 continually allow other schools to - - in our
15 building. You rezone the district, now you have
16 - - houses, room and board houses and rented
17 houses in one school building and then you want
18 to give the students in the - - houses half
19 their - -. Then you wonder why the attendance
20 is low?

21 [Applause]

22 MR. WYATT: I love this community, I love
23 the students that go here but you continually
24 stack the deck and make this an underground
25 school to be here - -. Thank you.

1 [Applause]

2 MS. SOBELMAN: Speaker Number 12, Janet
3 Williams Gordon.

4 MS. GORDON: Good evening everybody. My
5 name is Janet Williams Gordon and I am a parent
6 with partners here. I have a son who is twelve
7 starting here in September of last year. I - -
8 and I also have a son who is - - and when he
9 first started here I didn't know what to do. I
10 didn't know how to get him to cooperate and I
11 came to the school like everyday I was here. I
12 was like a student here trying to get my son to
13 settle down in school. I spoke to Miss Ortega
14 and one meeting with her and we got all teachers
15 together in cooperation where we also - - where
16 he belongs. He belongs in a - - so is he going
17 to be fitting in a class where the kids are? He
18 comes home one day and he said Mom, I don't like
19 the school. I feel uncomfortable. I said why?
20 He goes, all the kids are so-so much kids it
21 makes me scared because he is coming to a school
22 where he was also in his - - so much. - -
23 computer to see where this child belongs. Miss
24 Ortega said - - because we have 12 to 1 here but
25 she started working with me and - - and he is

1 getting the treatment that he needs for ADHD
2 but he is not - - and if you close this school
3 with the kids that are here and if it doesn't
4 get the right - -, I think Middle School is - -
5 and give the school everything that they need so
6 the kids can go home happy. Also give them a
7 chance to handle themselves. If they don't do
8 well then there is a reason to say - -. We give
9 them - - and A, B, S and if you give them what -
10 - then of course. The school should give us - -
11 and you should also know that this school is
12 where school belongs in the community. If you
13 close this school, where are the kids going to
14 go? The teachers are from here. They don't
15 know the - - of the teachers that were here
16 already. - - so please DOE please think again
17 and evaluate the whole situation before you
18 close the school. Thank you.

19 [Applause]

20 MS. SOBELMAN: I believe we are going to
21 have two speakers coming up at the end. Two
22 members of the Marching Band are going to speak.
23 Two members of the band and I don't have their
24 names but if you want too, I was told there were
25 a couple of students who wanted to speak? Do

1 they want to make their way down to the
2 microphone and then if you would just give us
3 your name before you start—before you begin so
4 we will have your name for the public record?
5 Thank you so much.

6 MR. PASHEA WILLIAMS: My name is Pashea
7 Williams. I went to Gersh when I was in 6th
8 grade and - - and I am now in the 12th grade
9 where I will graduate school this summer.

10 [Applause]

11 MR. WILLIAMS: If it weren't for Gersh I
12 wouldn't be talking right now. - - I started
13 talking a lot and I talk too much now.

14 [Applause]

15 MR. WILLIAMS: And it made me actually want
16 to do things once you got something you could
17 actually do you want to learn from it. I began
18 to - - and band and - - talked to the school
19 about the Principal and they all want her to
20 stay. When I was in Gersh I had a lot of fun.
21 I wish I could do it again and this school
22 should stay open because the teachers here look
23 out for everybody. Thank you.

24 [Applause]

25 MS. SOBELMAN: Mr. Tores.

1 [Applause]

2 MR. WILLIAM TORES: Okay.

3 MS. SOBELMAN: Go ahead.

4 MR. TORES: My name is William Tores. I
5 think I would be disappointed if the school
6 closed down because of the fact that I think I
7 have really appreciated the two years that I
8 have been here and now this year I started with
9 the - - and I would be sad if it broke up. In
10 this school I had just everything.

11 FEMALE VOICE: Good job.

12 [Applause]

13 MS. SOBELMAN: So now I have reached the end
14 of the speaker sign up list. I want to thank
15 everyone for their important comments and we are
16 going to transition into the Q & A. So as I
17 said at the beginning folks were invited to
18 write questions on comment cards. If we haven't
19 had an opportunity to prepared to some of the
20 questions that were submitted and if there are
21 other questions that you submitted that you
22 don't get your answers to tonight that will be
23 put in the Analysis of Public Comment which will
24 be published on the website and provided to the
25 panel members prior to their vote which will

1 take place at a public hearing on April 26th
2 at Prospect Heights High School. If after this
3 evening you have additional comments and
4 questions you would like to submit, I would ask
5 that you please send them to D-19 Proposals,
6 that's D Number 1 Number 9
7 Proposals@Schools.NYC.gov and also by phone at
8 212-374-0208. I am now going to invite my
9 colleague to join us up front and she will
10 respond to a few of the questions that were
11 submitted. Thank you.

12 MS. ROSE MARIE STEWART: Thank you. The
13 first question that was written that was
14 submitted was who decides which child can get to
15 attend this new school? The answer is all of
16 the students who are currently enrolled here in
17 grades 6, 7 would continue next year to be
18 enrolled in the new school. Any students who
19 are in 8th grade who were not promoted to high
20 school will be able to remain in the new school
21 enrolled in the new school. And any student who
22 would be matched to come to this school for 6th
23 grade for the Middle School application process
24 would continue to be enrolled in this school, in
25 the new school. The next question was what

1 happens to the kids whose grades are not at a
2 certain level and don't they deserve a chance to
3 strive? The answer is yes. All of our students
4 deserve a chance to achieve their greatest
5 potential. The new school will be designed to
6 meet the needs of all the student in the school
7 whether they need enrichment or remediation or
8 special services, those will all be included in
9 the design for the new school. Does the Deputy
10 Chancellor have power to recommend we keep the
11 school open? The Deputy Chancellor will be
12 reporting on the public comments that have been
13 gathered here tonight. That is the purpose of
14 the joint public hearings. So all that
15 information will be compiled and submitted to
16 the Panel for Educational Policy. It is the PEP
17 that has the decision making authority about
18 closing the school or not except in the proposal
19 and that will happen at the hearing on April
20 26th. Are you shutting down the school to
21 replace it with a charter school? The answer is
22 no. We are not shutting the school and
23 replacing it with the charter school. We have
24 proposed to close this school and to reopen the
25 new school to take its place that will meet,

1 that will serve the same students who are here
2 or who will be enrolled next year. We are not
3 replacing this school with a charter school.

4 Thanks very much.

5 MS. SOBELMAN: So I want to thank everyone
6 for joining us this evening and making public
7 comments and submitting questions and also of
8 course the marching band for that wonderful
9 performance. Again I just want to provide the
10 phone number and email for additional comments
11 and questions would like to be posed. It's D-19
12 Proposals@Schools.NYC.gov or by phone at 212-
13 374-0208 and all of the information gathered
14 here tonight and by phone and email will be
15 included in the Analysis of Public Comment which
16 will be posted online and made available to the
17 panel members prior to their vote that will take
18 place at a public hearing on April 26th at
19 Prospect Heights High School. I want to thank
20 you so much for coming and this Joint Public
21 Hearing is officially adjourned.

22 [END 290-246]

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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: *Donna Wilson*

Date: April 8, 2012

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