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**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION - OFFICE OF
PORTFOLIO PLANNING
Choir Academy of Harlem
January 8, 2010**

1 [START 154_500]

2 MR. JOHN WHITE: Good evening, our hearing is
3 going to begin. Before our hearing begins, if
4 there are members of the school leadership team
5 or the Citywide Council on High Schools who wish
6 to join our presentation this evening, I would
7 ask them to come forward. And before we begin
8 this evening, I know we have translation
9 services available. If our translation service
10 providers could come forward and present
11 themselves, please. Please just speak into that
12 microphone.

13 MALE VOICE: [foreign audio] Hello, hello.
14 Okay. Hello. [foreign audio]

15 MALE VOICE: Hi, how are you?

16 MR. WHITE: Good evening, and thank you once
17 again for being here. Thank you to our elected
18 officials. Thank you to parents and parent
19 representatives. Thank you to students, and
20 thank you to Ms. Paris and the community at
21 Choir Academy for hosting the hearing this
22 evening. This is a hearing to hear public
23 comment on the proposal to reconfigure Choir
24 Academy from being a 6 through 12 school to
25 being a middle school. I'm John White. I'm the

1 Deputy Chancellor for Strategy at the New York
2 City Department of Education. I am joined to my
3 left by Superintendent Gail Reeves [phonetic],
4 by our Citywide Council on High Schools
5 representative, Mr. Landsman [phonetic], our CC
6 District 5 Representative, Mr. Hunt, and our
7 School Leadership Team representatives, Ms.
8 Norwood and Mr. Bryant who will be if they
9 choose participating in this evening's hearing
10 as well. This hearing is being recorded.
11 Following the hearing a transcription of
12 proceedings will be sent to members of the
13 councils that are participating in this
14 evening's hearings alongside Superintendent
15 Reeves and me. And the transcripts will also be
16 made available to the public on the Department
17 of Education's web site. The purpose of this
18 evening's hearing is to receive public comment
19 on this proposal. Before I describe the
20 proposal, I want to make sure that you are clear
21 as to how this evening's meeting will proceed.
22 All those who wish to speak must sign up on the
23 comment sign-up list immediately outside of the
24 front door of this auditorium. Please sign up
25 by 6:15. At 6:15 the sign-up list will be cut

1 off. However, it is our intent to hear the
2 comment this evening of all of those speakers
3 that have signed up. Speakers will be given the
4 floor in the order in which they have numbers
5 that have been given to them. So, number one
6 will be the first speaker, then number two and
7 so on. I will call your number and ask you to
8 line up. Odd numbers, one, three, and five,
9 will line up on this side of the auditorium,
10 not yet. Even numbers, two, four and six, and
11 so on, will line up on this side of the
12 auditorium, and I will continue to call speakers
13 down. All comments are limited to two minutes.
14 When there are 30 seconds remaining in your
15 period to comment, you will see a sign come up
16 from the front that will say that you have 30
17 seconds left. When your time is up at two
18 minutes, we will ask you by having a sign that
19 says time is up. We ask that because we have
20 over 50 speakers this evening, because we have
21 parents, and students, and teachers in the room
22 who have work or lives otherwise to attend to
23 that we proceed with this evening and make sure
24 that we hear everybody. And so when your two
25 minutes is up, we ask that you please pass the

1 microphone to the next speaker. We also ask
2 that you use only one card. Sometimes people
3 think that each card is like a chip and it's
4 worth two minutes, and therefore if you get five
5 of them, you can have ten minutes. For fairness
6 to all members here, we ask that you take two
7 minutes only and that if you exceed that, we
8 will ask for the microphone from you. In
9 addition, we welcome any comments and feedback
10 that you may have on this proposal before the
11 panel on educational policy votes on this
12 proposal January 26th, 2010 via the Department
13 of Education's e-mail address, which you can
14 find on the DOE's web site under the section
15 entitled "Panel for Educational Policy". If you
16 wish to provide written comments, again you can
17 go to the DOE web site's Panel for Educational
18 Policy page. You will see an e-mail address
19 where you can send those comments.

20 As I said, this is a proposal to phase out
21 and replace Choir Academy's high school grades
22 but not its middle school grades. The proposal
23 ensures that those remain. Choir Academy would
24 not admit a ninth grade in the fall of 2010, and
25 its high school grades would phase out over time

1 as it is replaced. The proposal is in response
2 to particular challenges in the school. The
3 school's graduation rate is 57.5%. In addition,
4 the school received a D on its 2008/2009
5 [crosstalk]. There's a public comment period,
6 thank you.

7 MR. HARGRAVES: I have a question.

8 MR. WHITE: On its 2008/2009 progress report
9 including an F on the learning environment
10 subsection. [crosstalk] Thank you. Thank you.
11 I'm going to continue with the meeting, Mr. - -
12 .

13 MR. HARGRAVES: Why would you continue? I
14 have a question.

15 MR. WHITE: Because we're running an orderly
16 meeting.

17 [crosstalk]

18 MR. HARGRAVES: It's just a question.
19 That's why we're here.

20 MR. WHITE: We're running an orderly
21 meeting, Mr. Hargraves [phonetic], and we're not
22 going to speak out of turn. [crosstalk]

23 MIXED VOICES: Let him speak. Let him
24 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
25 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him

1 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
2 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
3 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
4 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
5 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
6 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
7 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
8 speak. Let him speak. Let him speak. Let him
9 speak. Let him speak.

10 [crosstalk]

11 MIXED VOICES: Our school. Our school. Our
12 school. Our school. Our school. Our school. Our
13 school.

14 MR. WHITE: Thank you. Thank you. I want
15 to emphasize at this evening's meeting, at this
16 evening's meeting, at this evening's meeting we
17 are not, we're going to speak in a regular order
18 and in order to do that, or if we do that, we
19 will make sure everyone's comments are heard.
20 We will make sure we will continue with the
21 meeting, and we will honor this school and this
22 school community. If we don't do that, we will
23 not be able to proceed with the meeting. We
24 will not be able to hear everybody's questions
25 and everybody's comments. So we have a choice.

1 Now, I'm happy to receive the question here so
2 that I can understand what it is. Then I'm
3 happy to answer it. Unfortunately because the
4 public comment part has not happened yet, I'm
5 not going to receive it in this format. So if
6 you'd like to pass it through either of the
7 gentlemen here, I'm happy to receive it and
8 answer it for the public. Unfortunately,
9 because the public comment portion has not
10 happened, we're not going to start the public
11 comment. I will finish this. I will finish
12 this part of the session. I'll finish what I'm
13 saying. Then we will subsequently take public
14 comment. Again, if you'd like to pass a
15 question here, I'm happy to answer it publicly.
16 Accordingly, the demand for the school from
17 parents and students is low. Choir Academy was
18 designed as a six through twelve school created-
19 -to create a seven-year education experience.
20 Currently, the majority of students in the
21 middle school choose not to attend the high
22 school leading to over 200 students, only 200
23 students across all four grade levels of the
24 high school. In fact, only 25% of ninth graders
25 attended the middle school. Phasing out the

1 high school grades will allow the school to
2 focus on the middle school. [crosstalk] All
3 right. Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and
4 gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen, we are--ladies
5 and gentlemen, we are going to adjourn this
6 meeting, and we are not going to continue it
7 until this crowd, this audience is going to
8 participate in a functional way. Everybody's
9 voice will be heard, and that includes you, sir,
10 everybody's voice will be heard. For now we're
11 going to take five minutes. We will settle
12 this, and then we will continue with the
13 meeting. Thank you.

14 [break]

15 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. Okay,
16 we're going to bring the meeting back to order
17 please. We're going to bring the meeting back
18 to order. I want to thank all who participated
19 in clarifying that situation. The question that
20 was asked by one of the members of the audience
21 was that I said during my directions that if one
22 individual collects say three, five, seven
23 different numbers that we would only allow that
24 individual two minutes of comment, and there was
25 a challenge put to that and he asked for the

1 rationale why I would do that when that
2 defeats the purpose of passing the number from
3 one individual to the next. If an individual
4 wants to pass the number that he or she received
5 to somebody else so as to give it to that
6 person, that's perfectly fine. [applause] If
7 however, if however one individual collects
8 three, five, multiple cards, for the sake of
9 fairness to keep all comments equal, that
10 individual and every individual is allowed two
11 minutes of comment and there will be no
12 exceptions to that at this evening's meeting.

13 MALE VOICE: Per card, right?

14 MR. WHITE: I want to continue, there is--
15 not per card, per individual. I want to
16 continue with this evening's presentation. I
17 answered the question, thank you. I want to be
18 clear about a couple of consequences of the
19 proposal in front of the audience this evening.
20 One, every student who is enrolled in Choir
21 Academy will have the ability to graduate from
22 Choir Academy as the school phases out. Two, I
23 want to be clear that the school will continue
24 to offer a middle school option, that the
25 middle school is not being proposed for change.

1 In fact, the proposal is so that the school
2 can focus on its middle school grades, which
3 are currently higher performing. Because there
4 was some noise at the time that I was speaking I
5 want to emphasize that the rationale for the
6 proposal is that not enough students, roughly
7 57%, currently are graduating from the school
8 and that secondly the school has very few
9 parents and students who are signing up to
10 attend it at the high school grades. Only one
11 in every five students in the high school
12 attended the middle school, and there are only
13 200 students in the high school, which is a
14 tremendously small high school here or anywhere
15 else. I want to thank you for coming this
16 evening. We look forward to hearing your
17 comments. We're going to start by--I'm going to
18 start by asking the school leadership team if
19 they would like to make a presentation or have
20 comments. I will then ask the Community
21 Education Council or the Citywide Council on
22 High School representatives if they have
23 comments and a presentation. And we will then
24 start with the public comment portion by calling
25 people down by their numbers.

1 So, School Leadership Team would you have
2 comments and a presentation that you would like
3 to make?

4 FEMALE VOICE: Yes, I do, and I'm inviting
5 Mr. DeJohn [phonetic] to speak.

6 [applause]

7 MR. DEJOHN: Good evening. Thank you for
8 inviting me to be here. Thank you for putting
9 my public comment here on the table. I'll be
10 brief, and I'll be short, but in my rebuttal to
11 your statistics of the graduation rate, I've
12 done some research and I've gotten the advanced
13 copy of the school's report card issued by the
14 New York State School Department of Education
15 that indicates a graduation rate for this high
16 school of 73% for the year 2009/2010 and for the
17 economically less advantaged students in our
18 building, the graduation rate is 82%. I'm sure
19 that there are [applause] this report will be
20 made public formally. I'm sorry. I walk with
21 two artificial limbs as many of you know, and
22 I'm standing on a slope. Sorry. to add to my
23 rebuttal, maybe I should explain who I am. I'm
24 - - DeJohn, president of the Netherlands
25 American Community Trust. I have been a

1 supporter of the Choir Academy and the Boys
2 Choir of Harlem since 1990. [applause] Many of
3 you remember on two occasions I took the entire
4 performing choir to the Netherlands for a week
5 to have a cultural exchange and also to perform.
6 We have also supported the Choir Academy with
7 guest performances at Carnegie Hall and at other
8 cities, and recently we created a link with the
9 New York Pops Orchestra, Carnegie Hall and
10 Macy's, and we're happy to look at all your
11 pictures here. We just recently performed in
12 Carnegie Hall again and put the performing choir
13 back on the map. But to go back to my
14 presentation, the Apollo Theater, the Dancer
15 Theater of Harlem, and the Studio Museum, and
16 the Choir Academy of Harlem are all part of the
17 cultural bedrock of Harlem for many decades.
18 The Choir Academy of Harlem is unique and the
19 only choir academy in the City of New York.
20 Yes, just like many other institutions in
21 Harlem, they went, you went through some
22 difficult times, but the Harlem community and
23 the city always found ways to save, repair,
24 improve and preserve their cherished
25 institutions and in these efforts the upper

1 Manhattan empowerment zone and the New York
2 City Department of Education played key roles.
3 Today we are here to save the Choir Academy of
4 Harlem. Look at the pictures. Look at the
5 students. This is your success. You,
6 Department of Education of New York, saved the
7 Choir Academy of Harlem three years ago. Thank
8 you. Look at the graduation statistics issued
9 by the State Department of Education, 73%.
10 Congratulations, Dr. Barris [phonetic].
11 Congratulations to all of you teachers that made
12 that possible in only two years. You also
13 received credit encouraging the business
14 community and other arts institutions in New
15 York to get together again creating performance
16 opportunities. Carnegie Hall just six months
17 ago, United Nations, and the Fourth of July
18 fireworks extravaganza. Look at the new
19 uniforms donated just a few months ago by
20 Macy's. The performing choir is back.
21 [applause] If you kill the high school, you
22 kill the performing choir. [crosstalk] And you
23 deprive the students of the middle school from
24 receiving a continued and seamless education at
25 the high school. [applause] With all the

1 successes of recent after these difficult
2 times, why would anyone even consider closing
3 down the high school? To make space for a new
4 high school with no name, no students, and no
5 track record? It would be most disturbing that
6 your decision would lead to even more
7 instability in Harlem. Youth unemployment in
8 this country is at a record high, 27%. Among
9 the African American community, it's 50%. That
10 means 50% of our kids are not in school either.
11 Dislocating the students by closing down the
12 high school will put hundreds of students at
13 risk again. The students at the Choir Academy
14 are committed, and so are their parents, you and
15 your families. You know what risk means. The
16 parents in Harlem want and deserve stability in
17 these difficult economic times. They want the
18 middle school and the high school to continue
19 seamlessly. They have confidence in Dr. Paris
20 and her team in continuing improving the
21 academic performance just as they did, as you
22 did, with the middle school. Give the girl a
23 little time. Improving and continuing that
24 improving is true reform. Closing down the high
25 school is not. If the country can give General

1 Motors another chance so can the Department of
2 Education continue [applause]

3 MIXED VOICES: Save our school. Save our
4 school. Save our school. Save our school. Save
5 our school. Save our school. Save our school.
6 Save our school. Save our school.

7 MR. WHITE: Thank you to the School
8 Leadership Team. I will now call on a
9 representative from the Citywide Council on High
10 Schools to make a statement this evening.

11 KIM LANDSMAN: Hi, I'm Kim Landsman. I'm
12 the Manhattan parent representative to the
13 Citywide Council on High Schools. I just wanted
14 to make one thing clear here, which is that my
15 being here is not meant as a statement that we
16 endorse the decision that has been made about
17 this school. We were not consulted on it. We
18 have not expressed any view on it. We're here
19 because the statute requires us to be a joint
20 participant in the hearing. Thank you.

21 [applause]

22 MR. WHITE: Thank you. I would now call on
23 Mr. Matt Bitz [phonetic] from Council member
24 Brian S. Dickens' [phonetic] office to make a
25 statement before our public comment.

1 MATT BITZ: Good evening. First of all,
2 on behalf of Council member Dickens, happy new
3 year, and the [crosstalk] Council member wants
4 to say thank you to all the parents, teachers
5 especially, especially all of the students, all
6 of the young people here tonight. Good job.
7 [applause] On December 21st Council member
8 Dickens sent a letter to Chancellor Cline
9 regarding the situation here at Choir Academy.
10 I'm just going to take a moment to read it, and
11 we'll let the words speak for themselves. "Dear
12 Chancellor Cline, I write to you today to urge
13 you in the strongest possible terms to
14 reconsider your decision to close the high
15 school at the Choir Academy of Harlem in my
16 Council Manic District. This decision must be
17 reversed, and the Choir Academy must continue to
18 operate at both the middle school and high
19 school levels for a number of reasons. First,
20 the "statistics," regarding graduation rates
21 upon which the decision to close Choir Academy's
22 high school has been made are dubious at best.
23 On one hand, the statistics named by the City
24 indicate that 57% of seniors at the high school
25 graduated. However, New York State statistics

1 indicate otherwise. In fact, state statistics
2 say that over 7% of seniors graduated, and over
3 80% of those children are from disadvantaged
4 backgrounds and they graduated. Certainly,
5 these discrepancies between how the city and
6 state tracks graduation rates respectively have
7 been cited by parents and students as dubious
8 and possibly fraudulent. Before any decision to
9 close this or any other public, non-charter
10 school in New York City is made the achievement
11 gap that this indicates must be carefully re-
12 examined. I cannot consent to any school in my
13 district being closed due to incorrect or
14 misleading statistics.

15 Second, if there were indications that the
16 school complex was not making drastic annual
17 improvements, a stronger case for closing the
18 high school might be made. However, the reality
19 is quite promisingly to the contrary. The
20 middle school at Choir Academy has made
21 tremendous strides in improving both academic
22 performance and school culture. Those students
23 who were part of this middle school
24 transformation going from a B rating to an A
25 rating over the last two years, will likely now

1 move on to be a part of the transformation of
2 the high school at Choir Academy.

3 Third Choir Academy only a few short years
4 ago was subjected to the traumatic and
5 controversial loss of the Boys Choir of Harlem.
6 In the wake of that incident, the school was
7 given a new principal, Dr. Paris, who has worked
8 wonders on the middle school. It is my opinion,
9 though, that Dr. Paris has been given neither
10 the time nor the resources to effectively
11 transform the high school in such a short
12 period. I am convinced that the combination of
13 an active student body here tonight, and engaged
14 staff with the appropriate funding and support,
15 will make the high school at Choir Academy a
16 continuing success." [applause] Fourth,
17 there's more, there's more. "Fourth, it is
18 unconscionable that the Department of Education
19 would even consider closing a community school
20 like the Choir Academy where so many of my
21 district's children go to school especially when
22 the MTA is cutting student metro cards and many
23 of these children would be forced against their
24 will to relocate to different schools possibly
25 in different boroughs. This also means that the

1 kids would need to learn new faces, make new
2 friends, engage with new teachers and travel to
3 new places. While new experiences can be a
4 positive change in children's lives, upsetting
5 their lives in the middle of high school can be
6 damaging and possibly dangerous depending on
7 where the kids are going. Fifth and most
8 importantly, these children and their parents,
9 this principal and her staff, must be given
10 every opportunity to strive for success rather
11 than being told flatly that since they have
12 failed the school will be closed. As President
13 Obama might say this is a teachable moment for
14 the Department of Education, for Choir Academy
15 and all the people involved in it. I would like
16 to propose a recommendation for your
17 consideration. I would like the Choir Academy
18 to be given an extension of another total school
19 year. Furthermore, I would like the appropriate
20 personnel at the Department of Education to work
21 with both school faculty and the parents for an
22 inclusive assessment of the matter that is so
23 critical to the very fabric of my community. In
24 addition, a year's extension would also give you
25 ample time, ample time to reassess your

1 statistics and perhaps include pertinent data
2 that may have been omitted the first time
3 around. I stand for the students. I stand for
4 their parents and the faculty when I say to you
5 that every child deserves a quality public
6 education. Neither I nor my community wish to
7 see any more public schools in my district
8 closed. I hope that we can arrive at an
9 agreement over this issue, but be assured that I
10 will exhaust every procedural rule to ensure
11 that this school and these children are given
12 the chance that we all deserve, the chance that
13 the Department of Education should be providing
14 without impunity to all New York City school
15 children-the chance to learn and to excel. I
16 thank you all for your attention to this matter,
17 and I look forward to your expeditious review of
18 my proposal that would give Choir Academy an
19 additional year to be assessed and re-evaluated.
20 Sincerely, Inez Dickens, Majority - - "

21 MR. WHITE: Thank you to Council member
22 Dickens. [applause] We will now proceed with
23 the public comment portion of this evening's
24 meeting. To reiterate, when called upon you
25 will be called for odd numbers to my right, the

1 left-hand side of the auditorium, and even
2 numbers to my left, the right-hand side of the
3 auditorium. Mr. Landsman of the Citywide
4 Council on High Schools will be calling speakers
5 this evening. You will have two minutes. You
6 will see a sign come up that says you have 30
7 seconds so please wrap up your comments. After
8 that you will see a sign saying that time is up,
9 and we ask again given that we have many
10 speakers this evening so that all voices can be
11 heard you do limit your comments to two minutes.

12 MR. LANDSMAN: I have as number one - -
13 DeJohn, but I assume that's you. Okay, good.
14 Number two is Joanne Frank, and number three is
15 Amber Body [phonetic]. And let me say in
16 advance if I mispronounce a name, I apologize.
17 I got yours right, didn't I?

18 JOANNE FRANK: Good evening. The Department
19 of Education has announced the closing of 20
20 schools some of them with new principals, some
21 of them just beginning to turn around, and a
22 full eight of them that were opened not very
23 long ago by the head of the Department of
24 Education himself, Chancellor Cline. CSA
25 embraces accountability and believes that

1 schools will succeed when given the proper
2 support. In the case of several of these
3 proposed closures, we must ask if some of the
4 schools are being held accountable while the
5 apparatus that supports them is not. In those
6 cases, we must inquire if the schools were
7 really failing and by what measures were they
8 failing. We must ask if the Chancellor truly
9 put each of these schools through a thorough
10 process to ascertain whether they have been
11 provided adequate support and guidance by their
12 superintendents and school support organizations
13 and if the office of student enrollment had
14 leveled the playing field. CSA is asking the
15 Department of Education to lay bare the process
16 by which they determined that each of these
17 schools be closed. In the case of this school
18 we want to know what the superintendent did
19 besides visiting the school to announce the
20 closing. We need to know how thorough the
21 superintendent was in the process of helping
22 this school to succeed. The Department of
23 Education needs to include an analysis of the
24 goal of the appropriate school support
25 organizations, since each school pays an school

1 support organization to advise them on student
2 achievement, coach the principal and perform
3 many other support functions. What sort of
4 service did the school get for its money?
5 Finally, Department needs to assess how fairly
6 the Office of Student Enrollment minimize the
7 challenges in this school and so many other
8 challenges. It is important to know if this
9 school was sent an unusually large proportion of
10 English language learners and children with
11 special needs without providing the financial
12 means to support these children. When every
13 question is asked and answered, we are likely to
14 discover that this school can flourish with the
15 proper support. Thank you.

16 [applause]

17 MR. LANDSMAN: Is Amber Body here?

18 [applause]

19 MS. AMBER BODY: Hello, I'm Ms. Body. I'm a
20 graduate of Spellman College and moved to New
21 York City to render my mathematical services to
22 young individuals within inner city schools. I
23 stand before this audience grieved by the
24 school's circumstances. I have yet fully
25 grasped the justification of the high school's

1 closing nevertheless any schools closing in
2 New York City. It is written in section one of
3 the Educational Impact Statement that this
4 proposal addresses the need to provide higher
5 quality schools. Yet the policy makers of the
6 Doe have failed our community. Having not the
7 slightest idea how to provide our kids with the
8 quality education as their own school in which
9 they have created are also being truncated,
10 Brunch New Day Academy, Global Enterprise High
11 School, Brooklyn's Middle School for Academic
12 and Social Excellence. Do these names ring a
13 bell? Well, they should. In a recent article
14 published by the UOT these schools are not only
15 being closed but are also schools that were
16 originally established under the new policy to
17 replace another failing school. What does this
18 mean? It means that the policy has failed us.
19 It means that maybe it's not the schools that
20 need to be phased out, it's the policy that
21 needs to be phased out. [applause] This shows
22 that replacing schools that are not meeting the
23 DOE expectations with new schools is not the
24 answer. Yet these practices are still being
25 implemented. So the cycle continues in which

1 poverty-stricken children of color are being
2 displaced. Their schools are being phased out,
3 and now they have to move. And the wellbeing of
4 these children are not being addressed, instead
5 disregarded by the DOE. A population being
6 displaced and scattered diminishes our students'
7 identity. When times are hard, let's not forget
8 about all that Choir has done for this community
9 and the world. [applause] But instead create
10 strategies--

11 MR. WHITE: [interposing] Thank you.
12 Please bring your comments to a close.

13 [applause]

14 MR. LANDSMAN: Number four is Robert
15 Spangler [phonetic] and number five Mel Erinson
16 [phonetic]. If both of you could come up and be
17 ready, that would move things along.

18 ROBERT SPANGLER: Hi. I think I have a
19 pretty good sense of the pain that you're going
20 through tonight, and I can also say that I'm
21 aware of the pressure that must be on all of
22 you. This is not an easy decision I'm sure, but
23 it's a decision that we want to make sure is
24 correct. And it's not going to be correct the
25 way things are going as far as I can see. I got

1 to know the boys choir at that time in 1996,
2 six months, six years after my friend here, and
3 I was so impressed. I came out to this school.
4 I just threw myself into it. I came out to the
5 school. I sat in with the teachers. I listened
6 to every concert that they had. I was part of
7 it, and I loved it. So, when Paula Turnbow
8 [phonetic] called me and asked me if I would
9 come on the Board of Directors, of course I said
10 yes. That in retrospect was a tough yes because
11 it became very obvious in the two years that I
12 spent on the board that Dr. Turnbow was a
13 genius. He was a good man [applause]. He loved
14 his kids, he really did, but he couldn't run a
15 company that had gotten so large. Remember what
16 he said about worldwide, that's where you were,
17 you were worldwide. So there wasn't really a
18 chance for him to do what he'd like to do. Now,
19 there's something that hits me. Dr. Paris has
20 only been here for a short period of time and
21 already we're getting A's, right. That's not
22 bad. Secondly, we hear now that maybe the
23 numbers from the state government are a little
24 different than what the city's are. But more
25 importantly you've got a bunch of kids who are

1 doing very well and want to keep on going. In
2 the meantime you're going to not allow them to
3 do it. Sorry.

4 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. If I could
5 just--I know we have a couple of requests for
6 Spanish translation. If the translator, if you
7 could announce yourself on the microphone once
8 more.

9 MALE VOICE: [foreign audio]

10 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

11 MEL ERINSON: My name is Mel Erinson. I'm
12 the treasurer of the United Federation of
13 Teachers, and I've been a teacher in the New
14 York City public schools for 52 years.
15 [applause] In my 52 years as a teacher in the
16 New York City school system, I have never
17 witnessed the mismanagement of the school system
18 that we are seeing at this time. I want to ask
19 the people on the board if you are a decision
20 maker I hope that your mind is still open. And
21 if you are not a decision maker but just going
22 to let people know what you heard tonight, I
23 hope you let them know things in a fair manner.
24 This closing of this school and the 20 other
25 schools in the City of New York is one more

1 example of the epic mismanagement of the Board
2 of Education. We've seen it with insane
3 pressure for test prep in our schools that
4 according to the national test scores has not
5 paid off one iota. We've seen it in the
6 organization and reorganization, the new
7 reorganization, the organization that's going to
8 happen in the next few weeks that the schools
9 all across the city are being led by people who
10 don't know what they're doing. [applause] They
11 know nothing about education so they give the
12 schools a budget, they give the schools a
13 principal, and then they say to the schools you
14 are on your own, sink or swim. Just like a
15 Burger King or a McDonald's each school is
16 treated like a franchise to succeed or fail by
17 itself.

18 MR. WHITE: Thank you, please bring your
19 comments to a close.

20 [off mic]

21 MEL ERINSON: In closing because I want to
22 follow the rules because we want this community
23 to be heard, listen to the community and make
24 sure that in your decision making you take into
25 consideration what the community asked for.

1 Thank you.

2 [applause]

3 MR. LANDSMAN: Number six looks like Curlin
4 [phonetic] and number seven is Lorraine White.

5 JAMES WALLER: Hi, my names is James Waller,
6 and I'm a former alumni of both the Boys Choir
7 of Harlem [applause] and the Choir Academy of
8 Harlem. My question and kind of my concern is
9 that you guys have decided to close this school,
10 a school that I grew up in from the time I was
11 eight years old until the time I graduated high
12 school with honors when I was 18. And this is
13 the first time that I'm hearing about any review
14 whatsoever. It's kind of funny that you don't
15 involve the alumni of an organization so strong
16 and ask us, you know, is there anything that you
17 guys can do to come and speak to these kids and
18 try to improve, you know, the test scores and
19 the grades that they're getting but then you
20 call a meeting and I hear about it on the news
21 that you guys are closing the school. You guys
22 are quick to put out press releases when you're
23 doing something, but you're never quick to put
24 out a press release and ask for, you know, the
25 community's help and I think that you're doing a

1 great injustice to these kids and a great
2 injustice to their families because these kids
3 are growing up in families. I was one of the
4 first people in my family to go to college, and
5 my family wasn't necessarily a bad family. They
6 just weren't--my family wasn't educated on the
7 opportunities that were out there for them. And
8 this building, and this school, and these
9 teachers that are here, a lot of them that I
10 don't know because I haven't been involved for a
11 while, I'm sure that they're giving the kids the
12 idea that there is something greater than 125th
13 Street, selling a CD on 125th or being a meter
14 maid for the New York City Traffic Department.
15 So please don't take the school away from these
16 kids. Don't take these teachers away from the
17 kids, and please don't take these kids
18 opportunities away from these kids. Thank you.
19 [applause]

20 MR. LANDSMAN: What number are you? Just
21 tell me what number you are because I think I--

22 GERARD ROBUCK: [interposing] I was number
23 seven, and I have some of my staff members who
24 relinquished their time. I had my cards until
25 they were snatched out of my hands from someone,

1 which I'd like to make a comment on first. My
2 ancestors died for that flag so I could have the
3 freedom to stand here and speak. [applause]
4 And in addition to that I have relatives dying
5 and fighting in Afghanistan now for my right to
6 stand here and speak. [applause] So don't show
7 these children who you say can't learn who you
8 make go to a classroom and study democracy when
9 there comes a chance to show what democracy is
10 you want to take it from them. Not tonight.
11 [applause] Good evening. My name is Gerard
12 Robuck [phonetic]. I'm a staff member here at
13 the Choir Academy of Harlem school. I'm going
14 to talk fast to try to get as much in, and I
15 have cut short my comments. I've been here
16 since 1998. I'm also a lifelong resident and
17 spent the first ten years of my life right here
18 on this land where this school sits on 128th
19 Street living in a home that my parents own
20 given to my mother by my grandfather the son of
21 a runaway slave who was an activist in this
22 community. It is through the City of New York's
23 declaring eminent domain that I had to move from
24 this block, but I'm proud to have come back and
25 work in my community and serve my people because

1 that's what I've dedicated my life to. The
2 students of the school have been used like pawns
3 on a chessboard for a long time. I have on too
4 many occasions witnessed tears shed, outcries,
5 Mr. Robuck, of why does this keep happening to
6 our school. I've witnessed the propaganda and
7 the planting of stories done to hurt children by
8 the same people who say they care about the
9 children. I have to listen and read a quote in
10 the *New York Times* by you, Mr. Deputy
11 Chancellor, by you Mr. White that says, it is
12 our believe, "that this school does not have the
13 capacity to turn around." What are you saying
14 to these children, that they can't learn, that
15 the middle school children that you give an A to
16 that would stay here and go to high school won't
17 succeed? Is that the label you're putting on
18 them? How could the same teachers like myself
19 and many others intimidated to speak in a
20 democracy, which in itself should not be.
21 That's why I'm standing here. [applause] How
22 could--how could we the same teachers succeed in
23 a middle school with an A but fail in the same
24 building in the same high school with a D? It's
25 hypocrisy and a fraud. This school had a

1 history of sending young black men like the
2 young brother you just heard speak to state
3 universities instead of state penitentiaries.
4 [applause] We taught the young men here to say
5 yes sir, instead of yes, my nigger. They walk
6 with their pants [applause] they didn't walk
7 around Harlem with their pants falling off of
8 their back side. They didn't walk around the
9 streets with their pants falling off their
10 backsides, Mr. Deputy Chancellor. They knew how
11 to dress, and they knew how to act, and we were
12 proud of what we had here in the school, okay,
13 and we had one of the highest graduation rates
14 of any school in the city until we were
15 destabilized. They took our fourth grade. They
16 took our fifth grade. They took more and more
17 space year after year after year. And the
18 majority of the people that worked here left,
19 but some of us stayed behind. And we've worked
20 our butts off and some of you students know that
21 to give you the best that we can and with
22 virtually no support, no resources. You move a
23 charter school into our building, and every
24 classroom has got a smart board, a laptop
25 computer, and our students [applause] and I

1 can't even get a metro card from the DOE to
2 take my kids to a Nick game. I have to go in my
3 own pocket, and I've got to watch Jeffrey Canada
4 brag on TV about how he can take his kids to
5 Disney World. [applause]

6 MR. WHITE: Please bring your comments to a
7 close. Please bring your comments to a close so
8 we can have all speakers speak.

9 MR. ROBUCK: Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Deputy
10 Chancellor, separate but unequal is a part of
11 our history that we've lived through before, and
12 we don't want to live through it no more. We
13 have teachers in this building who may be
14 intimidated to speak, but I'm not, okay, because
15 I'm over 55 and I did my 25, okay. So I'm not
16 intimidated. [applause] Sir, please bring your
17 comments to a close.

18 MR. ROBUCK: We have teachers who don't have
19 books. We have teachers who don't have
20 anything, anything.

21 MR. WHITE: Sir, please bring your comments
22 to a close.

23 MR. ROBUCK: I'm gonna close. I'm gonna
24 close. You accuse us of only having 25% of our
25 students go to the eighth grade. Well, let me

1 tell you something I do the recruitment for
2 this school, and myself and my principal is
3 very efficient. She'll send you an e-mail,
4 she'll put something in your box, she'll call
5 you at home, she's got my cell phone number.
6 She never communicated me through you anybody in
7 the DOE that we needed 30%, 40% of our students
8 to stay. A matter of fact, it was the DOE who
9 pressures guidance counselors through the
10 chancellors orders that multiple choices must be
11 put down on the student's high school
12 application. So we succeed, we succeed in
13 sending students to other schools because you
14 want to promote diversity, but now you want to
15 penalize us for it and close our school.

16 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

17 MR. ROBUCK: And on top of that.

18 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

19 MR. ROBUCK: And on top of that. I'm almost
20 done. I'm almost done. I'm almost done. On
21 top of that, on top of that, we have met our
22 recruitment goals. You said, and the chancellor
23 said numerous times they want small schools.
24 Our objective here has always been to keep this
25 a small school. We had over 70 incoming

1 freshman this year. We met our numbers.

2 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. Sir, we
3 thank you.

4 MR. ROBUCK: In closing I just want to say
5 this, and we all know this. If the color of our
6 skin was that of the back of my hand, we
7 wouldn't be here. [applause] If this was
8 Westchester, if this was Westchester, if this
9 was Westchester, if this was Westchester, this
10 wouldn't be going on. But they always do this
11 to us, and enough is enough. We need to stand
12 up and protect our children who are our future
13 and demand, and demand, that we have an
14 opportunity in the say of what happens in our
15 community. As I begun, my ancestors died for
16 that flag, sir, they died for it, to have a
17 right, and it's a sham, it's a sham and a
18 disgrace to students that you should be an
19 example of to talk about democracy and don't
20 give parents, and students, and a community not
21 to have a voice.

22 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. Thank you.

23 MR. ROBUCK: In what they're saying but to
24 have a decision.

25 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

1 [applause]

2 MIXED VOICE: Enough is enough. Enough is
3 enough. Enough is enough. Enough is enough.
4 Enough is enough. Enough is enough. Enough is
5 enough.

6 MR. LANDSMAN: I have on my list Lorraine
7 White who is the parent coordinator.

8 MR. WHITE: I want to--excuse me, if I could
9 make one comment this evening. I want to remind
10 the audience the comments are appreciated, the
11 comments are invited. We have 55 more speakers
12 remaining. We will be here later and later and
13 the meeting will be delayed until the room is
14 quiet.

15 MR. LANDSMAN: I have on my list Lorraine
16 White.

17 MR. WHITE: We will be here, I'm sorry, we
18 will be here later and later until, unless the
19 comments are kept to a minimum. The comment
20 period is two minutes, thank you.

21 MR. LANDSMAN: Is Lorraine White the parent
22 coordinator here?

23 FEMALE VOICE: She is.

24 MR. LANDSMAN: Okay, she's on my list. So.

25 [applause]

1 LORRAINE WHITE: I am Lorraine White. I
2 am the parent coordinator of the Choir Academy
3 of Harlem. It took a lot for me to come up
4 here. I have been here in this school since
5 1997. I have traveled with the boys and girls
6 choir of Harlem. I have taught the sixth grade.
7 I have wore many hats in this school, but this
8 hat that you all are about to throw in the ring
9 is really hurting my heart as well as the former
10 students that are here, the alumni came out,
11 former parents came out, former teachers are
12 here. I have watched the leadership of this
13 school change over, and over, and over, and
14 over, and over again. Enough is enough. Enough
15 is enough. I don't know how to tell you all,
16 sirs and madams, wherever you all are and what
17 you are all doing, enough is enough. We have a
18 principal now and all the principals that I have
19 worked with in the past, but we have a principal
20 now that took us from one grade to the next.
21 Give our high school a chance to do what they
22 have to do. Enough is enough. I don't know
23 what to say any more but enough is enough and it
24 needs to stop now.

25 [applause]

1 MIXED VOICES: Enough is enough. Enough is
2 enough. Enough is enough. Enough is enough.

3 MR. LANDSMAN: Okay, number eight is Diane
4 Fransy and number nine Ernest Bryant. Is Ernest
5 Bryant here? Oh.

6 DIANE FRANCIS: Hi, my name is Diane
7 Francis. I'm a faculty member at the Paul
8 Robeson High School, which we had our hearing
9 last night, but I'm also a proud member of the
10 student in this school, and I'm standing here
11 with, you know, grief in my heart not just
12 looking at the academic part in which I know
13 it's a lie about closing the school, but I'm
14 looking at the whole family, amen, because it
15 took a village to raise the child. Amen? And
16 I'm saying amen because I believe God is in
17 control. And I know He's gonna work it out. I
18 want to talk about the opportunity that He gave,
19 yeah, he makes me want to shout because I know
20 though--wait until the battle is over because
21 we're gonna shout now, because we're gonna win,
22 we are going to win. When I think about my
23 child going to Carnegie Hall, I am proud. I am
24 proud. Look at the opportunities that these
25 students have, and you want to take away a

1 legacy. Superintendent, what have you done to
2 help these children? What have you done to fix
3 the problem? What did you do besides sitting
4 there and giving them a notice that we're
5 closing down? What did you do? Well, we're
6 going to tell you, and it doesn't--it means if I
7 have to go and camp out on Bloomberg's lawn to
8 tell him that it ain't over, that it just, only
9 just begun. And as parents, and as faculty, and
10 as mothers, and as sisters, and as fathers we
11 will stand in the fight. [applause]

12 ERNEST BRYANT: Hello, my name is Ernest
13 Brant. I'm the vice president of the PTA here,
14 and just to piggy back on what our mother and
15 our sister over there said there's a Scripture
16 in the Bible that says can these dry bones live?
17 And if you know the story of those dry bones, we
18 know that God called winds from all parts of the
19 earth from the North, to the East, the South and
20 the West. We believe those dry bones are coming
21 to life now in Choir Academy. We thank God for
22 the vision of Canada and his audacious vision,
23 but those visions was built on principles of a
24 Dr. Turnbow. And those principles are still
25 alive to this day, and these dry bones are

1 coming to live, are coming to life in this
2 school with the principle, the faculty, the
3 staff, the parents. These children, our
4 students, will learn. It's amazing that a
5 school is given a city statistics called a
6 cohort about four years when our principal has
7 only been here going on three years. The same
8 way our school is given a graduate cohort of
9 four years, our principal needs to be given four
10 years to turn this school around. Our mayor who
11 robbed an election given him another four years
12 because he needed more time to bring the city
13 around, our principal needs some more time to
14 bring this school around. So it is unfair to
15 the DOE to eliminate any high school that they
16 haven't first put funds into properly and for
17 any school to be eliminated when their principal
18 is not being given enough time to make something
19 happen. [applause]

20 MR. LANDSMAN: I ask number fifteen to Sean
21 Brown and number twelve, Carlton Burkley
22 [phonetic] to come up.

23 [applause]

24 SEAN BROWN: Good evening. Good evening
25 panel members and representatives of the

1 Department of Education. My name is Desean
2 Ali Brown. It is with great pride and concern
3 that I'm here this evening. I've been a student
4 of Choir Academy of Harlem since fourth grade,
5 and I stand before you representing the
6 sophomore class. I entered this school under
7 the direction of the late Dr. Turnbow. I have
8 seen my changes occur since I've been a student
9 here and truly believe that I qualify to speak
10 on behalf my fellow students on the up and downs
11 of Choir Academy of Harlem. I will begin with
12 the dismantling of the reputation of the school.
13 This fine institution has performed for people
14 of all walks of life. We performed for
15 presidents as well as benefits for the homeless.
16 The education here has seen its fair share of
17 mismanagements by the board since the removal of
18 the passing of Dr. Turnbow. I witnessed
19 teachers not caring enough to teach while
20 counselors advised students to attend another
21 high schools. I have seen different principals
22 come in with an I'm going to make a change
23 attitude and fall into the system they vowed to
24 change and leaving us with more disadvantages
25 than before. Choir Academy of Harlem has come a

1 long way under the direction of Dr. Paris, the
2 principal who had guts to change things. We no
3 longer have students standing in the hallways.
4 Instead we have students very eager to pick up
5 and fix what is lost for us. We no longer have
6 substitute teachers who baby-sit classes.
7 Instead we have dedicated teachers who do their
8 best to educate us for the future. It is in
9 fact that the high school is not improved that
10 level officials think it should, but the fact
11 this entire school is two schools in one. Dr.
12 Paris has brought a junior high school student
13 school to a grade A. I feel that the giving, I
14 feel that given a chance she will be able to do
15 the same for the high school.

16 MR. WHITE: Thank you. Please bring your
17 comments to a close.

18 [crosstalk]

19 MR. BROWN: I have seen many programs put
20 back in place. I felt they were lost to the
21 school. It is funny because I transferred out
22 of choir, but I came back. I am so happy with
23 interest and compassion of our teaching staff.
24 Choir Academy educates the whole child. To many
25 schools such as Choir Academy is lost to our

1 community. I take great pride and honor as a
2 student of this school who was inducted into the
3 National Honor Society chapter of the school
4 when I say Choir Academy of Harlem deserves a
5 chance to prove that we can have a high school
6 with a grade just as a middle school under the
7 leadership of Dr. Paris and staff.

8 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. [applause]

9 CARLTON BURKLEY: I'll do my best. Good
10 evening. My name is Carlton Chuck Burkley. I
11 just want to give you a little background on me.
12 I'm an alumni, but not of Choir Academy. I'm an
13 alumni of IS201 the Arthur A. Schomberg School.
14 I graduated from this school back in 1974, and
15 just like my brother Robuck spoke, his house was
16 knocked down so that this school would be built,
17 you know, so we've been in this community, I've
18 been in this community of over 47 years and he's
19 been longer. And see we were taught back then
20 that even if you make it out, you come back, you
21 know, for the ones that are left behind and you
22 bring them up. So that's what we're here for.
23 Now, when I came up in the sixties, I have--I'm
24 a proud product of public schools. I'm one of
25 Bloomberg's retired New York City detectives.

1 I've been retired six years, all right, and I
2 want to give a shout out. I'm a member of the
3 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement - - and the
4 National Latino Officers Association and a
5 member of other organizations. I want to give a
6 shout out to Inez Dickens who ran a good race
7 because I was one of her opponents so this is a
8 man who came from across the street that came up
9 and ran for City Council last year. And I know
10 it's a bunch, it's so many more that are coming
11 out of this school. The new leaders of today
12 are going to come out of this school. So, I
13 wanted to thank Matt and let Inez Dickens know
14 even though we were opponents I will stand
15 behind any of my representatives when they're
16 standing for righteousness. All right, Dr.
17 Paris, Dr. Paris, right came here and like so
18 many other principals was supposed to be given
19 three to four years. The sister has only been
20 given two, and in those two years your
21 statistics are bogus. In the two years that she
22 has been here, the graduation rate for the high
23 school is over 70% and let me tell you, let me
24 tell you why this sister needs a few more years
25 because see she done already raised the eighth

1 graders, right, the middle school, and they
2 have an 85, close to an 85% graduation rate so
3 chances are giving her a chance and giving the
4 kids a chance, that she's going to have a 100%
5 graduation rate when they convert over. All
6 right, so she needs her time. This is one
7 reason why I was against mayoral control.
8 Everyone is quick to jump on parents when their
9 kids are not doing right, but when the parents
10 want to get involved, mayoral control takes that
11 away. That's why we had to do away with mayoral
12 control. I never want a man other than Jesus
13 Christ leading me anywhere, and Bloomberg is not
14 Jesus Christ. [applause] Right. Thank God for
15 history. Thank God for history because with
16 Canada in here, with Jeff Canada because see I
17 was fighting against Jeff Canada ever coming in
18 here because I knew when he wanted a small space
19 I said eventually he's going to want the whole
20 school. So, Jeff Canada, right, thank God for
21 history because see we see ourselves going back
22 to the 20s and the 30s just like brother Robuck
23 said when it was separate and unequal. Why do
24 my daughter and the other kids in the school
25 have, who was gracious enough to give up half of

1 their school have to see new computers and new
2 furniture and desks on one side of the school
3 when they weren't given anything for their side.

4 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much, sir.

5 MR. BUCKLEY: One second.

6 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. Your time
7 is up. Please wrap up.

8 MR. BUCKLEY: Okay, I will wrap it up, all
9 right. Let's not, let's not forget this, all
10 right. Bloomberg, your boss, right, was worth
11 \$5.8 billion when he took over as mayor. He is
12 now three times worth that and the economy is
13 doing bad. Where's he getting his wealth from?
14 It's coming from charter schools. That's where
15 it's coming from, and that's why he wants more.
16 And last but not least, right, Dr. Turnbow,
17 right, we want to bring this school back to the
18 way Dr. Turnbow had it. The only mistake Dr.
19 Turnbow made, was just like Kirzen [phonetic]
20 said he wasn't read for worldwide, and you know
21 what we're not going to make that mistake twice.
22 Every day I walk around, I carry a blue book. I
23 never leave home without it. It's my Bible.
24 I'm going to pray for you. I'm going to pray
25 for Bloomberg, and I'm going to pray that this

1 school, Choir Academy is not closed.

2 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

3 MR. BUCKLEY: Because we're going to
4 continue to fight until I die.

5 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. [applause]

6 MR. LANDSMAN: I have the next number
7 sixteen, Joshua Capland [phonetic] and number
8 seventeen Kashiva tell.

9 [applause]

10 MR. LANDSMAN: Is Joshua Capland here?
11 You're on.

12 JOSHUA CAPLAND: Whatever. As you said, my
13 name is Joshua Capland, and I'm a teacher here
14 at the Choir Academy of Harlem, I'm not from
15 here though. I was born and raised in Chicago,
16 Illinois, but from the very minute I set foot in
17 this community I have been welcomed with open
18 arms and with deep respect. I often reflect on
19 my first impressions of this community, walking
20 down 125th Street for the very first time with
21 starry eyes and an eager spirit I was struck
22 with awe. This neighborhood breathes life. It
23 breathes history, and it breathes promise for
24 the future. But today it only sighs. I stand
25 before you on behalf of my new community, my

1 home, because we are in great pain. Public
2 education has been a hallmark of our society
3 since before this country was even founded, and
4 today the very essence of public education is at
5 stake, and the liberty of the people of this
6 community is also on the chopping block. I have
7 faith in my country, faith in my city, and faith
8 in the people, but I have lost my faith in its
9 leadership. This community, the one that
10 breathed deeply has been choked by the invisible
11 hands of outside forces. Public schools are
12 meant not only to serve the community, but to be
13 a centerpiece of it. What you are proposing
14 before us today is a dangerous injustice. To
15 remove a public school from a community that
16 perhaps needs it most is not only immoral but
17 downright backwards. Closing a school is not
18 the solution to the problems faced here. We are
19 not asking to preserve our community to maintain
20 the status quo. Instead we are asking for the
21 dignity of responsibility to better ourselves so
22 that our students may someday better serve their
23 nation. After all, this is the goal of
24 education, the promise of public education, to
25 produce capable and independent learners, to

1 breed and train the next generation of
2 citizens so that they may provide for their
3 children a better world than we have provided
4 for ours. I conclude with the father of public
5 education in the United States, Thomas
6 Jefferson. "I know of no safe depository of the
7 ultimate powers of a society but the people
8 themselves, and if we think them not enlightened
9 enough to exercise their control with the
10 wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take
11 it from them but to inform their discretion by
12 education." This is the true corrective of
13 abuses of constitutional power.

14 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

15 MR. CAPLAND: I thank you kindly for your
16 ear, but I hope that while you have listened you
17 have also heard us.

18 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

19 [applause]

20 MALE VOICE: Good evening all. I come
21 before you this evening from a legacy, not the
22 legacy you know but the legacy of my family. My
23 family, by brother and I are part of the legacy
24 of choir. My brother before me took advantage
25 of the opportunities Choir had to offer the

1 academic challenges of advanced placement and
2 college courses. It was his enthusiasm and
3 motivation as well as my mom that brought me
4 here. The small comforting environment of Choir
5 and the dedicated parents who supported my
6 studies here as well as the performing arts is
7 what makes me proud. Do not phase out choir.
8 I'm a sophomore with two more years of study,
9 and I want that study to be here. Do not break
10 the chain of a legacy started by my brother,
11 followed by me that will be continued by all my
12 fellow brothers in my home, my school, the Choir
13 Academy of Harlem, thank you.

14 [applause]

15 MR. LANDSMAN: Number 18, Diamond Gross
16 [phonetic], and number 19 Samuel Garcia. Number
17 19 Samuel Garcia.

18 DIAMOND GROSS: Good evening. My name is
19 Diamond Gross. I stand before you as a
20 representative of the senior class of the Choir
21 Academy of Harlem. [applause] The senior class
22 is very concerned about the phasing out of the
23 school. We do not agree with the proposal of
24 the DOE. We believe the students here at Choir
25 deserves a chance to succeed and become a better

1 academic achiever. By phasing out the school,
2 students of the now and of the future will not
3 be able to have a chance, and they may be very
4 uncomfortable and not welcomed in the zone
5 school. Even though the seniors will be
6 graduating in June of this year, we will not be
7 forced out of the school, but we will be
8 affected. There is one thing that I have
9 learned in my years of attending this school.
10 It is to never give up. We refuse to give up on
11 the dream and the legacy of the late Dr. Walter
12 J. Turnbow. It is because of him that we are
13 sitting in this auditorium tonight. It is also
14 because of him that we should not let this
15 school go down the drain. Give us the time and
16 opportunity to progress and to make a
17 difference. We as a student body believe in
18 change, and we believe in the future. Thank
19 you.

20 [applause]

21 SAMUEL GARCIA: Good evening. I'm going to
22 be speaking on behalf of an eighth grader who is
23 not here whose name is Alfonso Small. My name
24 is Alfonso Small, and I'm an eighth-grade
25 student here at Choir Academy. I wanted to come

1 to Choir Academy of Harlem High School. I
2 have been a student here since sixth grade. I
3 have participated in sports activities, music
4 programs, art and other activities, which I did
5 not have no exposure to in my former school. I
6 do not want to attend another high school. I
7 fear traveling across town or going to the Bronx
8 to a new high school because of the gang problem
9 that exists. You older people don't understand
10 what we young people have to go through every
11 day just to get from the West side of Harlem to
12 the East side of Harlem and passing through
13 different projects and gangs. You are
14 jeopardizing their safety." Now, on behalf of
15 myself, I went to school in the community just
16 as well. I'm not alumni here, but I went to
17 Junior High School, 43 - - which is on 128
18 Amsterdam. I had an audition here in 1998 to
19 come here. I didn't get in, but now I stand
20 here as a paraprofessional. And my question to
21 you is you're speaking of a phase out, but my
22 concern is what happens with the special
23 education students and they get locked out and
24 have no opportunity at other high schools where
25 there is no certification at all? What happens

1 to the fact of the matter is as a para in the
2 classroom I see these kids every day working
3 hard trying to get themselves out of special
4 education just so they can be in regular ed. So
5 what happens to the opportunities and chances
6 that they get - - ?

7 [crosstalk]

8 MR. WHITE: Why don't you finish your
9 comment, and then I'll answer your question.

10 MR. GARCIA: The opportunities that these
11 kids are not given is not fair. Speaking on
12 behalf of a young man who has two kids of his
13 own, I don't want my child to go to a charter
14 school. I don't want my child to go to a
15 private school. I do want my child to go to a
16 public school because I believe in the staff and
17 I believe in the teachers that is in public
18 schools because I went to a public school
19 myself.

20 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

21 [applause]

22 MR. LANDSMAN: Number 20 is Ashley Pope.

23 [crosstalk]

24 MR. LANDSMAN: Look, folks, this is for us
25 to listen to you, and we need to get through

1 this. We are now at about 20, which is about
2 a third of the way through or less so we've
3 really got to move this along. I'm sorry, but
4 number 20, Ashley Pope, number 21 Ruth Ross.

5 MR. WHITE: As the speakers are approaching
6 the panel, I can respond to the gentleman's
7 comments briefly to clarify. Students who are
8 in the school are able to stay in the school
9 whether they are special education or whether
10 they're general education or English language
11 learners, and they will be able to graduate from
12 this school.

13 [crosstalk]

14 MR. LANDSMAN: Ms. Pope? [crosstalk] Come
15 on, folks. [crosstalk] I know, and we're here.

16 MR. WHITE: You can begin your comments.
17 Please be quiet. Thank you.

18 MR. LANDSMAN: Go ahead, please.

19 MS. POPE: Good evening. My name is Ashley
20 Pope, and I'm a sophomore of Choir Academy of
21 Harlem. [applause] I will be speaking on
22 behalf of Cuba Gooding, Sr., who recently wrote
23 a letter to Choir Academy about the concern of
24 the closing of the school. "My name is Cuba
25 Gooding, Sr. I am a member of the 70 Souls

1 Group the Main Ingredient. My son is Cuba
2 Gooding, Jr., the Academy Award-winning actor.
3 I visited the Choir Academy of Harlem in June of
4 2009 and met many of the students, staff and
5 principal. I was impressed by the student's
6 love of music but also with the fact that the
7 New York City Department of Education was
8 supporting students from my former community,
9 Harlem, with the arts program that included
10 singing, learning to play instruments and being
11 a part of the choir. I grew up in Harlem, New
12 York and started my career as a singer in New
13 York City. I did not have any opportunity to
14 receive formal training in a school, and the
15 benefits that you are providing to students are
16 immeasurable. My former community of Harlem
17 needs a school that offers art instruction,
18 especially music to students in middle and high
19 school. I am urging you to change your mind
20 immediately." Excuse me. "And keep the Choir
21 Academy School open. Yours truly, Cuba Gooding,
22 Sr."

23 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

24 MR. LANDSMAN: Ruth Ross.

25 RUTH ROSS: My name is Ruth Ross. I'm a

1 parent. I moved from a three-bedroom house in
2 Alabama, February 2008 to a one-bedroom-
3 apartment here in New York City, a sacrifice I
4 made as a parent because my son had a desire to
5 attend a high school with performing arts. I
6 say it's ludicrous to close the school at a time
7 when America is on the fringes of economic
8 collapse. Education has proven to be a
9 relationship to a strong economy in any nation.
10 Let our children's education be a priority at
11 all costs. Don't let their future education be
12 contingent on what will be but what already is.
13 This building is here, and this high school is
14 here. Let this school stay here. Why propose?
15 This is what a proposal is, uncertainty. Choir
16 Academy High School is here. Please don't phase
17 it out. Don't phase out any school that was
18 down, but has no where now but to go up, up in
19 grades, up in enrollment, up in producing
20 productive members of our society. Thank you.

21 [applause]

22 MR. LANDSMAN: Number 22, Jasmine Moore
23 [phonetic], and number 23 Bisenti Montavo
24 [phonetic].

25 JASMINE MOORE: Good evening. My name is

1 Jasmine Moore. I am an eighth-grade student
2 here at Choir Academy. I planned on attending
3 the Choir Academy of Harlem High School and put
4 it as my first choice on my high school
5 application. My mother, Michelle Moore, also
6 wanted me to attend the Choir Academy of Harlem
7 High School. I have learned to love this school
8 since the seventh grade, and the teachers and
9 staff have helped a lot. As a former
10 cheerleader captain, I learned to take on a role
11 as a leader. I do not want to go to another
12 school and travel a long way to the Bronx or
13 downtown or go to a school with metal detectors.
14 I want to go to school with my classmates and
15 people I know, not strangers in any over-crowded
16 big school with thousands of students where I
17 will just be a number. I have learned to play
18 the trombone here at Choir Academy of Harlem.
19 What will happen to my skills in learning to
20 play an instrument now that I must attend a new
21 high school. Do you care?

22 [applause]

23 Like I said, do you care? By closing Choir
24 Academy of Harlem High School, I will not be
25 able to continue my music education. I do not

1 want to be affected with big changes. It
2 seems the department of education is playing
3 with our education. Ya'll playing with our
4 education. Ya'll need to stop.

5 [applause]

6 And we gonna fight.

7 MALE VOICE: So as per your agreement I am -
8 - my two minutes to my brother, Mark.

9 MARK: Good evening, all. God is good.

10 [crosstalk]

11 MARK: God is good all the time. God is
12 good all the time, amen. Now, we are here
13 tonight with the blessing of the almighty, and
14 we have to understand what is going on and what
15 we need to do, no disrespect to you all and I
16 know some of you all are down with this even if
17 it's on the down low. I know that, but we gotta
18 be here and use our knowledge and our minds.
19 And we've got to be clear, okay. We've got to
20 be clear. What's going on is that Bloomberg and
21 all these people, all these rich people,
22 billions from Wall Street are destroying public
23 education. If you look in this building here,
24 there is a charter school here already, and
25 charter schools are private companies taking

1 public money. It's all about them making
2 money. Now, these Wall Street people already
3 wrecked the economy. Now they want to wreck the
4 public schools just so they can make more and
5 more money. Now, Brother Carlton was right.
6 This can only happen because there is mayoral
7 control. We don't need mayoral control. We
8 need a people's board of ed where the people
9 control the schools where the people control the
10 community, where the people control our money
11 and what we do with it. All right, now this
12 whole thing is also extremely racist. If you
13 look at where these charter schools are invading
14 our public schools it's in Black and Latino
15 communities, Black and Latino communities. Now
16 that Obama is President and Sotomayor is on the
17 Supreme Court, they want to keep us down even
18 more. [applause] But we can't let that happen,
19 and we're not going to let that happen. So we
20 have to educate, agitate, organize. The young
21 people, the educators, school staff, parents,
22 administrators and community, we've got to
23 organize. Now, don't think you all that this
24 starts here or ends here. On the 21st we're
25 going down to Bloomberg's house, and we're going

1 to be in front of his house. And we're going
2 to tell him you can't close our schools. On the
3 26th the Panel for Educational Policy out in
4 Brooklyn Tech, the UFT is giving us buses. We
5 going out to Brooklyn, and we going to tell them
6 the same thing.

7 MR. WHITE: Thank you for your comments.

8 MARK: On the 28th we gonna be at
9 Metropolitan AME church.

10 MR. WHITE: Please bring your comments to a
11 close.

12 MARK: On 135th Street because we gonna
13 bring Harlem out. We gonna bring Harlem out.
14 Now, I want you all to repeat after me.
15 Education is our right, fight, fight, fight.
16 Education is our right, fight, fight, fight.
17 Education is our right.

18 MIXED VOICES: Fight, fight, fight.

19 MR. WHITE: Sir, please bring your comments
20 to a close. Your time is up. Your time is up.

21 MARK: I'll bring my comments to a close not
22 because of you but because my brothers and
23 sisters out here want to speak too. If we need
24 to do, we got to do what we need to do, and the
25 Lord will be with us. If need be, we got to be

1 willing to go on strike. We got to be willing
2 to sit in. We got to be willing to take our
3 streets, and we got to be willing to take this
4 school.

5 MR. WHITE: Bring your comments to a close,
6 sir.

7 MARK: I'm going to end up with a closing
8 remark, and we got to be real clear about this.
9 We got to be willing to shut down City Hall not
10 Choir Academy, Shut down City Hall, not Choir
11 Academy. Shut down City Hall, not Choir
12 Academy. Shut down City Hall, not Choir
13 Academy. God is good all the time.

14 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. Thank you.

15 MARK: God is good.

16 MIXED VOICES: All the time.

17 MARK: Praise God.

18 [applause]

19 MR. LANDSMAN: Twenty-four is Mark Torez,
20 and 25 is Shania Beavernote [phonetic], I think,
21 but I probably got that mispronounced. And if I
22 could just echo one thing that Mr. Montivo said,
23 that it is a matter of consideration for
24 everybody in this room that you stick to the
25 time limits. Is Mark Torez still here? Never

1 mind, okay. Twenty-five, Shania, and while
2 she's getting up could 26.

3 [crosstalk]

4 SHANIA: Good evening, I am the 8th grade
5 vice president of Choir Academy. The bond
6 between my parents, teachers, and school staff
7 members that I have developed and - - that I
8 love should not be changed because of the
9 teenagers that were not given a chance for
10 success. You can't make students learn after
11 they've been ripped away from their home, family
12 and happiness. Don't just discuss the education
13 of kids, consider how they feel and what
14 conditions make us learn better. When you look
15 at our school badge on our uniform, you see the
16 family history and most importantly a generation
17 of kids entering Choir Academy young while
18 increasing knowledge all the way to 12th grade.
19 That will not continue if you let strangers into
20 our school or as some students call it our home.
21 Choir Academy opens their doors to troubled
22 kids, kids who learn slower and others. Don't
23 punish the school for not being perfect. You
24 are talking about shutting a high school down,
25 but as I see it, it's separating a big family.

1 Thank you.

2 [applause]

3 FEMALE VOICE: Good night. I graduated from
4 Brandise [phonetic] High School in 1974. I
5 graduated 90th out of a class of 462 students
6 with an average of 93.6. [applause] The
7 reason, the reason for our failure in our school
8 is not our students. It ain't our teachers.
9 It's the people who run that system. This is--
10 what's happening here with Choir Academy is
11 modern time plantation activity. What they're
12 doing is they're calling you. They're saying
13 that your work ain't good enough because the
14 master said so. The master ain't running the
15 business. Teachers, we run the business.
16 Students, you provide our action. You react to
17 what we teach you. Keep on reacting to what we
18 teach you, and they can't do anything about
19 this. Gather, galvanize and mobilize. Close it
20 out if you have to because we are not slaves.
21 We got rid of that many years ago, and you've
22 learned that now because they failed to teach
23 you that before. But we are teaching you that
24 now so understand that the movement of these
25 people is not to make anything better for you

1 but to destroy you, and we don't want our
2 jails full. We want our colleges full. Our
3 colleges are filled with Black folks and
4 Hispanic folks, and they want to shut that down
5 because Obama made the difference. Our Justice,
6 our new Justice made the difference. They don't
7 want to see those kinds of difference. You all
8 are doing too much. Keep on doing what you do,
9 kids, and we're keeping this school open for
10 your activity.

11 [applause]

12 MR. LANDSMAN: Thank you. Number 27,
13 Christopher Patreo [phonetic], and number 28 has
14 a name I'd probably mispronounce so I won't try.

15 FEMALE VOICE: Okay, on behalf of Beach
16 Channel High School and Jamaica High School we
17 want to make an alliance with Choir Academy.

18 [applause]

19 FEMALE VOICE: With your academy of Harlem,
20 and even though we're in totally different
21 boroughs, we feel the same pain as you guys.
22 And besides that we're also fighting, so join
23 the alliance, which is a group headed up by me
24 and a girl, Rachel Alley [phonetic] from Jamaica
25 High School and we hope to see you guys in the

1 coming weeks, and we will have rally at Beach
2 Channel High School on the 24th.

3 [crosstalk]

4 FEMALE VOICE: The 24th, and that's after we
5 visit Mayor Bloomberg's house. I have seen a
6 lot of stuff go on. I had a meeting with
7 Chancellor Cline where I was rudely blown off by
8 his--pretty much his staff because they said he
9 was not in the building and I don't like that
10 they did that to me. That's why I started this
11 fight, and that's why I will end this fight.
12 And this alliance will not end here. Any school
13 that needs help will get help.

14 [applause]

15 MR. LANDSMAN: Is number 29 here, number 29.

16 [crosstalk]

17 MR. LANDSMAN: I'm sorry, number 28. Is
18 number 28 here, not--okay 29, Alfred Anthony, go
19 ahead.

20 [applause]

21 MR. LANDSMAN: While he's up could Laverne
22 Christian please come up on this side?

23 ALFRED ANTHONY: Good evening, my name is
24 Alfred Anthony. I am 11th-grade high school
25 student here at the Choir Academy of Harlem

1 School. I have been at this school since the
2 4th grade. I have good experience first hand
3 turbulence in the school. Now I have seen
4 neglect and loss in music classes, teachers,
5 after school programs and even the Boys Choir of
6 Harlem which I performed and dreamed of
7 traveling with. Now, you panel members have an
8 obligation to see that the if you believe in
9 this country you urge to keep Choir Academy
10 school open. Now, I have been here with the
11 alumni there, even my sister there. Now, I'm
12 not going to sit here and let you all close the
13 school, and that's the end of that right there.

14 MR. LANDSMAN: Number 30, Laverne Christian.
15 Go ahead. Are you number 30? Number 31, it
16 looks like Willie Abercrombie. Okay, go ahead.

17 FEMALE VOICE: Hi, my name is - - , and I'm
18 the 8th grade treasurer of the student body here
19 at Choir Academy. How do you expect the high
20 school here to do good if the Board of
21 Education, better yet if you didn't provide us
22 with enough supplies and support in the first
23 place. It all has to do with academy grades,
24 which means that the DOE doesn't expect people
25 that look like me, or my peers, to make it. And

1 they expect, and they expect that from the
2 charter schools. They expect them to make it,
3 and the charter schools have double and triple
4 the amount of money that we get. It's like they
5 already set us up for failure, so do you expect
6 us to make it in conditions like this? Other
7 schools have laptops and smart boards in every
8 class? But what do we have, three, maybe four,
9 maybe even nothing, and in these conditions, I
10 think we deserve a second chance to prove
11 ourselves. And I rephrase the we because there
12 is going to be a high school in Choir Academy of
13 Harlem. No one is going to take away my school,
14 better yet our school, and I have hope in us the
15 student education, no wait, the student, the
16 education system, thank you.

17 [applause]

18 WILLIE ABERCROMBIE: Good evening. My name
19 is Willie James Abercrombie the third, and I am
20 here to represent all of Choir Academy. Since
21 birth my mother has taught me that education is
22 nourishment for the mind. What gives you the
23 right to take away my food? Every day I come to
24 school and I want to learn. I want to learn,
25 and it hasn't always been that way. Part of

1 being a man is admitting when you're wrong,
2 and I'm going to admit that I was wrong for some
3 time because I thought that education was a
4 game. It was a joke, and I know now that I was
5 wrong. I mean I need education. I need to
6 learn. I need to work. I need to provide. I
7 need to perform. I never knew that about
8 myself. I never knew that I liked to sing, I
9 liked to dance, or I liked to play instruments.
10 I didn't know that until I came here. I came to
11 this school because I wanted to get away from
12 discrimination, and I wanted to get away from
13 violence. I wanted to find a place where I had
14 a family. I live across the street. This is my
15 family. This is my community. This is my
16 school, and my mother didn't give up on me. I'm
17 not giving up on anybody in here, and I am not
18 going to let you give up on my school. Thank
19 you.

20 FEMALE VOICE: I'm sorry, but I stayed up
21 until four o'clock writing my speech so I'm
22 going to finish, but I'm going to do it the
23 right way. All right, like I was saying before
24 I was interrupted, when times are hard, let's
25 not forget about all that Choir has done for us

1 and the world, okay, but instead create
2 strategies supplementing good changes that the
3 administration, the teachers, and our students
4 have implemented to preserve and enhance the
5 learning environment of this school. To not do
6 so is a disgrace to those who have put in time,
7 money and effort to ensure the wellbeing of
8 Choir Academy of Harlem its children and the
9 community. Let me help you out. One way of
10 doing so is by utilizing funds to provide
11 schools in need of assistance with additional
12 resources instead of creating new schools.
13 According to the educational impact statement,
14 the DOE will spend approximately \$2 million if
15 not more to establish and fund a fully phased-in
16 school to replace Choir Academy of Harlem. This
17 is a time in which the school needs to
18 experience a Renaissance, a re-birth, not a
19 death. Use some of that money to help build
20 this program. Provide our students with more
21 books, computers, smart boards, software and
22 quintessential resources needed to help build a
23 brighter future for our children. I still have
24 yet taught a mathematics class with no less than
25 30 students. Provide the school with funds to

1 create smaller classes. After all, after all,
2 is this not the reason why the DOE is currently
3 being sued. We have played the game long
4 enough. We've implemented research-based
5 practices, taken the advice of DOE consultants
6 and quality review leaders. The school's
7 overall test scores have increased, and the
8 middle school went from a C to an A in two
9 years. The high school improved also, however,
10 the grading scale was manipulated to make it
11 look as though the school had not progressed.
12 Choir Academy is constantly progressing and
13 reflecting positive changes as test prep,
14 extracurricular activities, after school
15 intervention programs have been put in place to
16 help some of the students at risk. High school
17 and middle school teachers are going above and
18 beyond, volunteering their own time, using their
19 own money, I spent over \$2,000, over thousands
20 of dollars to make sure that my students had a
21 quality education.

22 MR. LANDSMAN: I'm sorry, could you wrap it
23 up please?

24 FEMALE VOICE: - - supplies have been made
25 available to us. Many of the laptops,

1 projectors, books, and basic school supplies
2 have been funded by the teacher. Please raise
3 your hand if you put money into your classroom.

4 MR. WHITE: Please bring your speech to a
5 close. Please bring your comments to a close.

6 FEMALE VOICE: I'll be back. I'll be back.

7 MR. LANDSMAN: Thank you. Number 33, Tanya
8 Reed, number 34 Sirani Peralta [phonetic].

9 RAVEN GONZALEZ: Good evening. My name is
10 Raven Gonzalez. I am an 11th-grade student here
11 at Choir Academy of Harlem. I have attended
12 this school since the fifth grade. It was a
13 fulfilling and motivational experience for me to
14 attend the middle school and then become a high
15 school student here. I did not have to change
16 schools to make new friends on the - - with new
17 teachers and staff. Now, it is my hope that you
18 panel members will vote to keep Choir Academy of
19 Harlem High School open, and since this is what
20 I like to do most, I'm going to tell you all
21 something in the form of poetry. Choir has been
22 around for a long time. We getting closed for a
23 victimless crime. Excuse me for all the - - but
24 this is how I express myself better. I should
25 go and send Obama a letter. Listen. Dr.

1 Turnbow had a dream, but his last name wasn't
2 King. He wanted to take Choir to the extreme.
3 Wow, we should do it just for him, just to keep
4 his soul happy and satisfied. Hopefully with
5 this I'm saying things could change and things
6 can just be rearranged. All I hope for is for
7 Choir to stay alive and to keep the dream going.
8 Rest in peace, Dr. Turnbow. Thank you.

9 KENYA REE: Hi, my name is Kenya Ree
10 [phonetic], and I'm a sixth-grade student here
11 at Choir Academy of Harlem. I believe and I
12 know that our high school should not be shut
13 down. If the high school gets shut down, what
14 are the middle schoolers gonna do? The high
15 schoolers are like the middle schoolers' family.
16 Plus I'm sure every person here that goes to
17 Choir is tired of moving from school to school.
18 I'm tired of moving from school to school
19 myself. Without high schoolers a giant chunk of
20 Choir Academy is missing. If you really think
21 about it, if your children went to this school,
22 would you like this school to be shut down?

23 [applause]

24 Plus there's many a people that has very
25 great talent in this school including myself

1 like for instance one of the high schoolers
2 that helps the cheerleaders, Shiba [phonetic],
3 and without here there wouldn't be that much
4 help with all the - - assemblies and carnivals
5 and stuff we have. And my two friends, Sirahi
6 [phonetic] and Bernadetta [phonetic] they want
7 to be, when they grow up and get older, they
8 want to be actresses and this school will help
9 them with that. This school will help many
10 people fulfil what they want to do and be when
11 they get older, so I'm asking you please don't
12 shut Choir Academy down. Thank you.

13 MR. LANDSMAN: Number 34 Sirahi Peralta and
14 number 35 Bernadetta Sarpong. You've already
15 spoken.

16 FEMALE VOICE: Hey, you made the rules, two
17 minutes. All that has been done to help improve
18 the school, all these things have been done to
19 help improve the school despite the obstacles
20 and stumbling blocks that the educational
21 figures have faced in efforts of improving this
22 school. However, the number does not reflect
23 such things. It does not reflect the turnover
24 rates of principals and teachers over the past
25 five to seven years. We have had two principals

1 in one semester my first year of teaching at
2 this school. The record does not indicate our
3 students' social, psychological and economical
4 backgrounds, the homes they come from and the
5 issues they are faced with on a daily basis.
6 The record does not reflect such things and such
7 circumstances are not taken into account when
8 comparing our school progress to our White
9 racial counterparts in the suburbs.

10 - - is what is taking place now in Harlem,
11 the death of the name and the history of Choir
12 Academy of Harlem is another means of it. Do
13 not be fooled. An Ivy League school would never
14 be phased out or closed because of its rich
15 tradition and the legacy that it holds to its
16 communities and its people, so why is Choir
17 being closed? This is a problem that requires
18 serious surgery, a problem that can only be
19 taken on by specialists who knows how to fix it,
20 not kill it. Meet Choir where we are and
21 strengthen this school like it strengthens the
22 community. Housing multiple schools in one
23 building is not the solution. Depriving our
24 kids of funds and resources is not the solution,
25 and closing down our school is definitely not

1 the solution. We need a policy that nurtures
2 and up lifts these young individuals, a policy
3 that truly takes into consideration the problems
4 that exist within the African American and
5 Latino community. Phasing our school is not the
6 answer, but an escape route. Although the DOE
7 and its policy makers may find it more feasible
8 to start all over again rather than fix the
9 problems that exist within these schools, the
10 issues that inner city schools continuously
11 phase, would not disappear without an effective
12 call to action. Thank you. I'm done.

13 [crosstalk]

14 MR. LANDSMAN: You've now confused me
15 entirely with what number we're up to. What
16 number are we up to?

17 MALE VOICE: Hey, hey, Mr. White, you should
18 put your phone away. Be respectable, you know.
19 I'd get an F for something like that. I'd get
20 in trouble. I'm just saying.

21 [crosstalk]

22 MR. LANDSMAN: Okay, number 36 is Jinay
23 Salter [phonetic] and number 37 is Dr. Kevin
24 Bond [phonetic]. Jinay Salter.

25 [applause]

1 MR. LANDSMAN: Go ahead, Dr. Bond.

2 DR. KEVIN BOND: Good evening, everyone. My
3 name is Dr. Bond. I am actually the assistant
4 principal of Stephan Decater Middle School 35
5 and - - . I'm also a pastor of Citadel, a
6 praise and worship church located in Brooklyn,
7 and I also am a national board member of the
8 Gospel Music Workshop of America. I am here
9 today because one of my members from my church
10 who actually lost her mother and her father a
11 couple of years ago and she has no one, but I've
12 seen a substantial change in her since she's
13 been coming to Choir Academy. And I want to
14 tell you that there is a danger when we allow
15 students who have been motivated by something,
16 and that something is this, to take that away
17 and then expect them to carry on as usual. So,
18 we have amongst us a community of life-long
19 learners. I've heard teachers putting money in
20 their pockets or putting money in the classrooms
21 so the classroom could go on. I've heard of
22 students coming together to form alliances and
23 coming together to have rallies and marches so
24 that their school can stay together. I've heard
25 parents here tonight because they are so

1 concerned about their children. You've got
2 teachers, parents, children, educators all here
3 tonight to make sure the school does not close.
4 Whatever deficiency that they had, the energy
5 level is here. If you've got students that are
6 concerned about their school and keeping it
7 open, then we know their grades are going to
8 come up. Whatever the problem was, now at my
9 school, which is a public school, we get public
10 students every day from charter schools because
11 their parents felt it wasn't doing what it
12 needed to do. And so I'm saying that to say
13 this. These students here, these parents, this
14 community, and these others that are here
15 tonight, it would be an injustice, an injustice
16 to what everything this school stands for to
17 close it down for a charter school or any other
18 school. They're here. They love what they do.
19 Let them continue what they're doing. If they
20 need more help for academics or whatever, let's
21 come together and let's chip that in. Let's
22 give them what they need so that they can all
23 become alumni of the school.

24 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much. Thank you.

25 DR. BOND: I want to thank you. One other

1 thing, and I'm going to sit down. I promise
2 you I will. To Choir Academy we started and we
3 had a lot of very bad changes, a lot of
4 difficult things that we had to deal with. The
5 thing that kept us going and I believe the thing
6 that will keep you going no matter what they say
7 about you're not going to be able to continue
8 the Choir Academy, this one phrase changed my
9 life, and I think it will change yours as well.
10 Repeat after me and say, what's coming,
11 [crosstalk] is greater [crosstalk] for Choir
12 Academy [crosstalk]. What's coming [crosstalk]
13 is greater [crosstalk] for Choir Academy.

14 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much, thank you.

15 MR. LANDSMAN: Number 38, Shiva Chalise
16 [phonetic] and number 39, Antia Bright.

17 [crosstalk]

18 MR. LANDSMAN: Sorry, Antea, okay.

19 ANTEA BRIGHT: How you all doing? My name
20 is Antea Bright. I'm president of the school,
21 and I am very friendly with everybody in this
22 school. I love each and every last one of you
23 guys, and for you all to sit here and tell me
24 that I've got to be taken away from my family is
25 really wrong of you and its disrespectful. I

1 just want to let you know I was here since
2 fourth grade, maybe even longer than that
3 because we had SMI. Well, we came here in the
4 summer time. It kept us off the streets. We
5 went home late at night to make sure that we
6 wasn't outside hanging out in gangs, shooting up
7 people, robbing all these stores, and if you
8 look at us now are you telling me you can't see
9 that we all love each other and we're working
10 hard? I bust my butt every day in this school,
11 and I'm telling you right now if you want to
12 look at my report card and see my report card
13 and you're telling me that you got to shut down
14 this school for stupid reasons. Are you
15 serious? Are you kidding me? Hold on. Let me
16 tell you what you all are doing to us, all
17 right, because the space that you all are taking
18 up in our school, hold on, the third floor is
19 being clustered with students. The hallways are
20 getting smaller due to the construction by the
21 windows. The bathrooms are being closed so we
22 can't use the bathroom. So where we gonna pee?
23 Oh, okay, the gym and auditorium has been shared
24 with the promise kids causing the Choir Academy
25 kids to have to be clustered in all these places

1 in the gym and we're being denied the right to
2 assemble in the auditorium. Are you kidding me?
3 Uh-uh. The lunchroom is being crowded with the
4 choir and promise kids because they are given
5 the same lunch periods, and the kids have to
6 share their lunch period as well as watch their
7 behavior because the kids are surrounded by
8 promise kids so we try to hold our language down
9 in respect for you all. Okay, we got limited
10 resources so kids don't have the best school
11 supplies due to the low budget of the school.
12 People within the performance choir as well as
13 the class don't have music sheets. This is
14 supposed to be a performance music school, oh
15 okay, and it's being given and sung to by the
16 teacher to learn the words. We don't have music
17 sheets to sing a song. Are you kidding me?
18 Okay, let me ask you a question. How is there
19 supposed to be a music school when we have no
20 money to buy the sheets of music for the kids?
21 It's bad enough that we are running on low
22 supplies, so why do we have to suffer because of
23 you all. You answer my question.

24 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

25 FEMALE VOICE: Oh, okay.

1 MR. WHITE: Please bring your comments to
2 a close.

3 [crosstalk]

4 MR. LANDSMAN: You're up.

5 SHIVA CHARLES: Hello, everybody, my name is
6 Shiva Charles, and I'm a senior at the Choir
7 Academy of Harlem. It took a lot for me to come
8 up here. I'm going to be honest with all of you
9 all. It's just wrong how you're trying to take
10 away our name to put some bogus school here.
11 For what? What's the reason? All of these
12 teachers here, every single last one of them,
13 they don't have to stay. The don't get paid,
14 some of them don't even get paid to stay after
15 school but they stay. Half of these--these
16 seniors now are graduating with regents diplomas
17 if you don't notice because I will be graduating
18 with one. We don't low class ourselves for no
19 locals. There's no locals at all so for you to
20 shut down our school it's for what, what's the
21 reason? To put another school in here that is
22 just going to do just as bad. If you don't
23 know, I am a part of the SGO so I do know what
24 goes on. I do know what's been said, and for
25 you all, you all don't give no type of credit

1 where it's due. High school has went up.
2 Ya'll, that's when you decide to like change
3 ya'll little report card, okay, change it all.
4 That's disrespectful because as you know high
5 school has went up a whole lot as well. As
6 Tireka [phonetic] said, the gentleman who just
7 got up there, he was a worker, I'm not even
8 going to lie. He was a worker, but now he goes
9 to class. He does what he have to do, and if
10 you see his report card today, he's doing better
11 and better as anybody else school today. So for
12 you to shut down our school, what's the reason?
13 What is it? Please let me know. You all want
14 to give us money because we do good for singing.
15 Why we can't have money for supplies?
16 Everybody, two kids or three kids to one
17 notebook, and if I was you I wouldn't shut down
18 anything because all these teachers and all
19 these kids we survivors, we do with what we
20 have. The books that we don't have we make it
21 do, and the grades that we have is wonderful
22 just from your one textbook, just from your one
23 simple textbook. All of our--my senior class
24 will be graduating with a regents diploma.
25 Thank you.

1 [applause]

2 MR. LANDSMAN: Number forty, Herlin Collin
3 [phonetic], and number 41 is Sean Kirkland.

4 HERLIN COLLIN: Testing. How ya'll doing
5 tonight? [crosstalk] The energy is dying in
6 here. How ya'll doing tonight? [crosstalk] I
7 came in this school when I was in fourth grade.
8 I went to SMI. I stayed for as long as I could.
9 I love this school with all my heart. I don't
10 even know where did I get my morals from in life
11 if it wasn't from this school. So, I'm not
12 gonna sit here and pour my heart out to somebody
13 I don't feel like is listening, so I'm gonna
14 talk to my people. [crosstalk] First of all,
15 first of all, you know this little thing it's
16 called a hearing but they don't want to hear.
17 They call this a hearing to generate fear. Now,
18 be clear the reason why we're here is we feel
19 like something is being taken away from us, and
20 they've given us so much frustration and stress,
21 but we already know in our hearts that we
22 already gonna rise because the simple fact that
23 our grades are going up and our people are
24 smiling more and more, everybody is starting to
25 connect is getting. That's why they called this

1 hearing to see if you're going to break.
2 They're not going to stop nothing that's
3 bringing money in, and we're getting our
4 education at the same time. Like I look at this
5 panel and I see the man, and when I look at it,
6 it look more like Hitler's health plan. Now
7 listen it's something like this. It goes like
8 this. It goes like this. If there's cancer in
9 the community, they try to catch it early, and
10 if you get, it comes back, you go through the
11 process again. You feel me. So, if it ain't
12 better in five years, its dead. But now they
13 trying to find a way to kill it off slowly so
14 they're trying to kill it off in your head. You
15 know, like your community is still here. You
16 know where to meet. You all are still
17 connected. Ya'll know how to teach. Ya'll know
18 what classes to go to. Ya'll know how to feel.
19 This here is a front. Ya'll got to keep it
20 real. You know what I mean? That's all I want
21 to say.

22 [applause]

23 KERLINE COLLIN: Hi, my name is Kerline
24 Collin [phonetic]. I'm the high school senior
25 class president. I attended this school since

1 the 7th grade, and I'm proud to say that I'm
2 going to be a graduate and product of the Choir
3 Academy of Harlem. First, I would like to say
4 that this school was built on integrity, pride
5 and hope, hope that young, Black girls and boys
6 would not be gang bangers, yet singers, that
7 they won't be statistics, yet self--sorry, yet
8 successful. Now, what you guys are trying to do
9 today is bring us down, and that's horrible. We
10 have fought a bigger fight than you. We will
11 defeat you. We are better than you. What you
12 guys try to do is always put in our head that we
13 are not better. We learned from that the first
14 time. We learned from that the second time,
15 and, oh, we learned this time. You're not
16 shutting us down because you know why? Because
17 we have made progress in this school. Since Dr.
18 Turnbow was here we made progress in the school.
19 Until this day we still have been making
20 progress in this school. You know what you guys
21 did? You changed the cut score so we can seem
22 like, oh, we're failures. But you know what
23 everybody in this room know we're not failures.
24 We're successful people who will continue to be
25 successful people because we are Choir Academy

1 of Harlem and you guys are saying that we're a
2 bunch of students that can learn. Wow, that's
3 sad. So, minorities, we're unable to learn now.
4 What? Something's wrong with us? Our mind, our
5 brains, it doesn't work properly. I'm not
6 understanding how we're not unable to learn
7 because I learned today. Everybody learn today?

8 MIXED VOICES: [crosstalk]

9 FEMALE VOICE: Oh, I learned today, and I
10 feel like I learn every day. And I will learn
11 tomorrow, and you guys will never stop my
12 education. Why? Because I'm a young, driven,
13 Black expressive woman and you'll never, never
14 stop that. [applause]

15 MR. LANDSMAN: At the risk of incurring some
16 more wrath, I want to say something as a parent
17 representative. As a parent representative, not
18 as a DOE person that if you want to accomplish
19 something, you need to talk to, not yell at, Mr.
20 White. This is your chance to talk to him.
21 It's up to you. [crosstalk] Number 42 is
22 Antwone Boguard [phonetic], number 45 is Sean
23 Garia [phonetic]. [crosstalk] Number 42 is
24 Antwone Boguard on my list, and number 45 is
25 Sean Garia. [crosstalk]

1 ANTWONE BOGUARD: Testing. [crosstalk]

2 Whose school?

3 MIXED VOICES: Our school.

4 ANTWONE BOGUARD: Whose school?

5 MIXED VOICES: Our school.

6 ANTWONE BOGUARD: Whose school?

7 MIXED VOICES: Our school.

8 ANTWONE BOGUARD: My name is Antwone
9 Boguard, and I'm here to support the students,
10 and teachers, and parents at Choir Academy. I
11 come before you as someone who has taught and
12 interacted with this community for 21 years. I
13 believe extremely in public education, central
14 to my philosophy of life. Let me begin with the
15 reasons given by the DOE to close down Choir
16 Academy of Harlem. Low graduation rate and low
17 registration, that's a laugh. These are two
18 sick, ridiculous and stupid reasons and a big,
19 fat lie. Even if this was true, why not provide
20 the necessary support to help the school move
21 forward? I'll tell you why because I'm going to
22 speak truth to power. It is because the DOE
23 stands for department of evil. It is becoming
24 clearer to an increasing number of people,
25 parents, students, teachers and many others

1 stakeholders that the DOE, department of evil,
2 is undermining public education, the last
3 democratic bulwark of our society. The
4 department of evil's lies have been uncovered.
5 The DOE is not about quality public education.
6 It is not about making the lives of our students
7 and communities better. You want to know what
8 this department of evil is really doing?

9 MALE VOICE: What?

10 MR. BOGUARD: Do you want to know what it's
11 doing? It is outsourcing education into the
12 private hands of greedy entrepreneurs to be
13 private operators of charter schools, break up
14 the teachers union and turn our students into
15 guinea pigs.

16 MR. WHITE: Please bring your comments to a
17 close.

18 MR. BOGUARD: Do you want to be guinea pigs?

19 MR. WHITE: Please bring your comments to a
20 close.

21 MR. BOGUARD: Shame on you, the Department
22 of Evil, DOE, stop your lies to the people.
23 Support our public schools, and keep them open.
24 Thank you.

25 SEAN GARIA: Good evening, my name is Sean

1 Garia, and I'm a graduate of the Choir Academy
2 of Harlem's 2001 graduating class. [applause]
3 After the Choir Academy I went off and received
4 an undergraduate degree from Westminster Choir
5 College in Princeton, New Jersey. I am now a
6 program development associate for Mid-America
7 Productions Incorporated in Carnegie Hall.
8 Mid-America Productions is the largest
9 independent producer of concerts at Carnegie
10 Hall in New York City and--sorry I'm a little
11 nervous, and the - - . I stand here in front of
12 you today as a testament of what this community
13 and high school sends out into the world. I
14 would not be the man that I am without the solid
15 academic and artistic education that I received
16 here at the Choir Academy of Harlem and Boys
17 Choir of Harlem. I beg of you today to allow
18 this high school and institution to continue its
19 support for our young ambassadors. Allow my
20 brothers and sisters to use this institution of
21 excellence as an anchor into the world of
22 endless dreams and possibilities. Thank you.
23 [applause]

24 MALE VOICE: Well, first I want to say I
25 want to thank all the students in particular

1 that came out. It's very important because
2 you are the future and that's why we're here.
3 Remember that. You are our bedrock, okay. I
4 want to say to you, John White, in particular,
5 there's a disconnect with you and us, all right,
6 and it's not more prevalent than the fact that
7 they noticed that you was on your Blackberry.
8 And instead of even if you erred in judgment
9 instead of realizing that you know what this
10 might not be the best time for me to continue
11 on, you were as defiant as ever and you
12 continued to do whatever you wanted to do just
13 like the DOE. I mean they say in the Bible, and
14 I heard a lot of Scriptures being quoted out of
15 the mouth of babes, these are our babes. You
16 can learn from everybody, but you refuse to have
17 one humble bone in your body exposed to us. All
18 right, this is Harlem. Harlem, USA, okay, this
19 is the Boys Choir, Choir Academy of Harlem is
20 world renowned. You can go anywhere in the
21 world and you say Boys Choir of Harlem, they
22 know what you're talking about, all right, so
23 it's bigger than the name. This is a village
24 that you're strippin', all right, and we seen
25 this. And a lot of points was made when they

1 talked about racism. This is gentrification
2 going on. We've got Marcus Garvey Park
3 [phonetic]. The drummers go there every
4 Saturday. All the sudden we get new neighbors,
5 and they don't want the drummers there no more.
6 All right, they want to rename the park back to
7 Mount Morris Park. You got to understand the
8 dynamics of what's going on here, okay. It's
9 not just about education and people said I heard
10 a person say that, you know, slavery is past,
11 race--no, it's covert. You're talking to--hold
12 up. I got coupons. Who was 46? That's
13 [crosstalk] I signed them right behind--

14 MR. WHITE: [interposing] Mr. Hargraves,
15 please finish your comments. Let's go.

16 MR. HARGRAVES: Thank you, thank you. All I
17 would like to say to everybody here is that now
18 is the time. It's an inconvenience. It's cold
19 outside. You worked at school all day because
20 that is your job. You didn't just go to school.
21 You went to work. Your parents went to work.
22 You gotta, you gotta buckle up for the ride.
23 It's not easy. Study your history. You talk
24 about inner city, you look at the color of your
25 skin. The blue print has already been laid.

1 It's called slavery. We overcame that. The
2 blueprint has been laid out. What I would like
3 to say is it bothers me that all the sudden
4 people who don't look like us all the sudden
5 have our best interest at heart. So I just want
6 to ask a fundamental question. How many of you
7 all have an NAACP card? They sell them to
8 everybody. All you have to do is get a
9 membership. How many of your panel that cares
10 so much about Black people, how many of you all
11 have made a donation to 100 Black Law
12 Enforcement who cares, or the African Poetry
13 Theater? I mean do you all just care when it's
14 convenient because the underlying current is
15 that you know what you're going to get
16 financial, reap financial benefits. The money
17 is the root of all evil, and when you unmask
18 this and go to the bedrock of the situation,
19 it's all being funded by billionaires Bloomberg,
20 Bill and Belinda Gates, the Walton family, I
21 mean--what is it, the Walton family. I'm going
22 to close it. I'm going to say this to you. My
23 thing is this. What do you gain from quitting?
24 Nothing because you didn't achieve what you set
25 out to do. So if you close the school, what is

1 gained by closing the school? You only close
2 the school because there's something wrong with
3 the structure, the infrastructure or something
4 because you're going to condemn it. Or you
5 close it because it's going to be changed from a
6 school to a warehouse. The same time that
7 you're going to use, and energy and finances
8 that you're going to use to bring in a new
9 school can be used to implement better changes
10 in the existing school. So what is the real
11 reason? Understand, read between the lines.

12 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

13 MR. HARGRAVES: Don't be fooled by
14 everything you heard. It is a Black/White
15 situation. It's cut and dried like that, and
16 you have White neighbors who will work with you,
17 who will fight with you. Understand that too.

18 All right.

19 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

20 [applause]

21 MR. LANDSMAN: If I've read the last
22 speaker's coupons correctly, I think we're up to
23 47, Beatrice Agiano [phonetic] and number 48
24 William Hargraves, III. [crosstalk] Okay, I
25 didn't read the coupons correctly, so we're up

1 to 52, Carolyn Buelbox [phonetic]. How many
2 coupons did you have? How many coupons did you
3 have?

4 MR. WHITE: No, no, no, no, no, let's go,
5 let's go.

6 MR. LANDSMAN: That wasn't an invitation.

7 MR. WHITE: Let's go.

8 MR. LANDSMAN: Beatrice, number 47, Beatrice
9 Agiano [phonetic] and number 52, Carolyn
10 Buelbox, are they here still?

11 MR. WHITE: Let's call down others.

12 MR. LANDSMAN: Okay, in the meantime let's
13 go on to 49 Patrick Brown and 54 Pat--I'm sorry
14 I can't read the last name.

15 MALE VOICE: [off mic] Mr. White.

16 MR. LANDSMAN: Can you just tell me your
17 number before you speak?

18 BEATRICE AGIANO: I'm 47, I apologize.

19 MR. LANDSMAN: Okay, thank you. Go ahead.
20 [applause]

21 MS. AGIANO: Thank you so much. Good
22 evening. My name is Beatrice Agiano, and I'm a
23 graduate of the class of 2008. I just want to
24 thank all my fellow community members, and
25 students, and alumni and past teachers for

1 expressing their deep heartfelt contentions
2 about the state of the school and its future. I
3 would like at this time to offer a different
4 perspective. Over the years we've often made
5 the mistake of failing to keep things in
6 perspective. It's not about let's close a
7 school down because I have my diploma already,
8 or I don't care because I'm not surprised. It's
9 about acknowledging the fact that although 2005
10 Madison Avenue is an important part of the
11 manifestation of a dream, we have all been given
12 the capacity to carry out that dream and to
13 sustain that dream in our individual and
14 collective lives. We've been here already.
15 Doc's last push towards the end was to show us
16 that his dream, which is now our dream is far,
17 far too great to be contained in a singular
18 structure. We have to begin to truly
19 internalize some of the ideas from his legacy.
20 Having been born into a society that thrived
21 from oppressing Black people and suppressing
22 Black thought, he was still able to take his
23 dream and institutionalize it in a way that
24 compelled nations around the world to respect
25 and acknowledge the ideas and the intellect of

1 Black children. Slavery has made us prone to
2 blaming the man. However, few of us are willing
3 to make the immense sacrifices necessary to
4 provide a future for our generation and for our
5 race. I'm not asking anyone to disregard
6 criminal activity. My question is who is
7 willing to scrub toilets for someone else's
8 children, as Doc did for us? Are we willing to
9 give of ourselves to the community so that the
10 generations to come can benefit from this? As
11 beneficiaries of this dream, what are we willing
12 to do to ensure that our young brothers and
13 sisters can stand on risers? Thank you.

14 [applause]

15 FEMALE VOICE: Fifty-four and then fifty-
16 three. We have 49 too. Sorry.

17 FEMALE VOICE: Hi, my name is - - , and I'm
18 in the sixth grade.

19 [crosstalk]

20 FEMALE VOICE: Hi, my name is - - and I'm
21 in the sixth grade. I'm not trying to
22 disrespect you all or nothing, but early on when
23 you said that, that was disrespect. First of
24 all, that was not disrespect. That was passion
25 because you all don't understand you all taking

1 our school away. Do you know you all taking
2 our education away? Why stop our learning
3 progress? For other schools I can't talk--I
4 can't say no more right now. I just can say
5 education is the key, and I also want to say
6 that when you all take away our school, the high
7 schoolers, what happen if nobody else get
8 accepted to other schools? What are they gonna
9 do? Thank you very much, bye.

10 [applause]

11 TERRENCE WRIGHT: My name is Terrence
12 Wright, and some people on that panel know who I
13 am. I don't know if I'm going to be able to
14 make that time because it's very passionate to
15 me, and I'm quite sure if anything is passionate
16 to you, you would want to take more time. But
17 there before this school was there was a
18 dreamer, but the dreamer was God who gave the
19 dream to Dr. Turnbow. Dr. Turnbow then wanted
20 to have something more from starting from an
21 Effasus Church Choir, 1968, to building a school
22 that you all allowed him to have. Yes, we don't
23 condone criminal activity, but the demise
24 happened and it broke down and you helped to
25 break it down. [crosstalk] And I'm not speaking

1 to you that's necessarily on this panel.
2 It's to whoever hears me knows who did this.
3 You know what you're doing, so you have the
4 control to make it right. Change your decision
5 if you are the person that really cares about
6 people who care about their people and about
7 their children. The first class of 1996 the
8 president is here, and I'm going to ask that
9 every alumni, gentleman, boy or girl, I want you
10 to fill each aisle so they can see. Come down
11 the aisle, but I want the president of the
12 alumni boys and girls choir of Harlem alumni
13 association, Mr. Jimmy Kimbro, who is the first
14 of the graduating class of 1996, the first class
15 that graduated from this school. I know that I
16 don't have much time, but I'm going to ask you
17 to give me this time and look around and see all
18 of these alumni, boys and girls, who are know
19 men, yes. The dream started with Dr. Turnbow,
20 and the dream began this Choir Academy school.
21 And the question was asked why am I coming back
22 then the Boys Choir of Harlem is no longer here?
23 That was the question that was asked upon me. I
24 said I don't know, but I'm gonna let god lead me
25 here to be here to say the right things so that

1 you will understand whoever it is that's
2 making the decision to start something new.
3 Don't end it. Start something new. Don't end
4 it. Start something new, and if you want to
5 know what the tools are, if you want to know
6 what made it become to sing in front of your
7 presidents, your presidents, it was because he
8 used what God gave him and it was song. And
9 when you broke the Boys Choir of Harlem from
10 this, you broke the Choir Academy of Harlem, and
11 when we started the school, you now who went on
12 those tours with us? It wasn't board of
13 education that was teaching them every day on
14 every day of out there for three weeks on a
15 tour. It wasn't board of education keeping them
16 grades up that was out there with us. It was
17 people in the Boys Choir of Harlem who went on
18 tour, counselors, my alumni brother. Please
19 don't touch that mic. Please let your--no, I'm
20 going to get there, and I appreciate you because
21 you're allowing me to do this because you didn't
22 do it with everybody else. And I appreciate
23 you, but I know it's God stopping you. But as
24 I'm saying this, it was, it really was the
25 continuation of people who loved. It was Dr.

1 Turnbow who brought on people like this old
2 board of the Boys Choir of Harlem who decided to
3 say you know what he's dead, but the dream, the
4 legacy is still living and we want it to still
5 live. So, so, so, give us a chance. You say
6 the sixth grade, and you say the seventh grade,
7 and the eighth grade are doing well under that
8 principal over there who went and decided to say
9 you know what I'm going to give what the kids
10 want. We're going to bring the alumni to come
11 and sing. Hey, give us an opportunity to sing.
12 Let us sing. Let these children sing. Give
13 them the tools they need. Don't cut them off.
14 I could sing for you, but that's not why I'm
15 here. But this president of 1996 the first
16 class the president of our alumni association
17 decided to come back. And I would like for you
18 just to give him one minute as I leave.

19 [applause]

20 JIMMY LAWRENCE KIMBRO: Good evening. My
21 name is Jimmy Lawrence Kimbro. I'm part of the
22 first graduating class of the Choir Academy of
23 Harlem. When I attended this school there was a
24 98% graduation rate. I attended George
25 Washington University. I currently own and

1 operate my own business. I'm here just to
2 let you know that when you have a school that
3 had a high rate like that, the worst thing you
4 can do is to turn that away. That means that
5 there's something in here that you don't see on
6 those papers. It's a spirit here that will
7 allow this to rise up to where it was before.
8 Okay, now this is--this is something special,
9 this is something special, and this franchise
10 isn't worth burning. Now, I'm a business owner
11 myself. I deal with numbers. Numbers cannot
12 equate what this building can do. These kids
13 and there's something about this from the
14 beginning times. It's just--it's hard to
15 explain. All I ask is that you think, just
16 think about what the Choir Academy of Harlem,
17 Boys Choir and Girls Choir of Harlem have done.
18 I've traveled every state in the United States.
19 I've been all over Europe. I've been over to
20 Japan because of this. There's no school that
21 you can tell these kids to go to next year that
22 will ever give them the opportunity to travel to
23 every state in the United States before they're
24 the age of 18-years-old. This is an amazing
25 opportunity for you, amazing opportunity. All I

1 ask you to do is use your heart, think about
2 the spirit that you've heard tonight. God
3 bless.

4 MALE VOICE: And we want to say thank you,
5 and if you want the tool to get it back going
6 again, if you want the school, you had a tool
7 and they were taught and they went, and they
8 went to colleges and they learned more. If you
9 want a tool to get it back started, to get it
10 right back up to where it was so we can sing in
11 front of presidents again, come ask me. I'll
12 get a choir in here, and I'll get students that
13 will want to do this. Ask these children right
14 here. Ask this man right here what to do. Just
15 ask. I just ask you to ask us, and we can do it
16 to bring it back. Thank you so.

17 [applause]

18 MR. LANDSMAN: I would actually be inclined
19 to end on that note, but we do have three more
20 speakers if they still want to speak. They're,
21 um, 53, James Johnson, 56, Christine Jackson,
22 and 55, Doyle Gross.

23 JAMES JOHNSON: Good evening. I want to
24 thank you for allowing me to speak and for
25 staying so long. My name is James Johnson. I'm

1 the CEO of the New York Pops Orchestra, and
2 we are responsible for these pictures here you
3 see. [applause] The New York Pops is the
4 largest independent pops orchestra in the
5 country. We perform a concert series at
6 Carnegie Hall, tour internationally and appear
7 on recordings and television. Last year Kirsten
8 Deyoung [phonetic] introduced me to the Choir
9 Academy of Harlem. I went to a rehearsal to
10 hear the children sing and met with Dr. Paris
11 and the choir directors. I was impressed. The
12 New York pops engaged the boys choir many, many
13 years ago. What I heard was not the boys choir.
14 I heard the Choir Academy of Harlem performing
15 choir, and I was impressed. As a result of my
16 impression of this choir, we invited the choir
17 to perform with the orchestra at Carnegie Hall
18 last April with Adena Menzell [phonetic] and - -
19 McDonald [phonetic]. In addition, we asked the
20 choir to perform with us on the Macy's Fourth of
21 July telecast, which was seen by more than 10 m
22 million people in this country. The performing
23 choir of the Choir Academy of Harlem a few
24 months ago was the envy of every choir in this
25 country. I just want to say one more word about

1 the New York Pops and what we believe in. We
2 support Dr. Ellen Paris and her efforts. We
3 believe she's making a tremendous difference in
4 the lives of these young people. We see a
5 tremendous improvement in the quality of the
6 choir and we want to be affiliated with the
7 choir in the future. I come to you as an
8 institution that has 27 years of history at
9 Carnegie Hall, has an enormous audience and a
10 number of backers. We are prepared to support
11 the choir if you'll allow it to continue. Thank
12 you very much.

13 [applause]

14 DEACON GROSS: Good evening, everyone. My
15 name is Deacon Gross. I'm Diamond Gross'
16 father. I'm here for one reason, and that's to
17 save our school and our children. [applause] I
18 wrote down a lot of things and a lot of notes,
19 but I have a headache because I listened to so
20 many things that I didn't understand what was
21 going on. I went to Carnegie Hall last year and
22 seen my daughter sing. She's a senior. When
23 her grades was low, I told her years ago I'm
24 taking you out of Choir Academy. You know why
25 she's still here because her teachers called me

1 at my house and says don't do it. We need
2 her voice. Don't do it. Let her sing. Against
3 my own better judgment I said to myself, okay, I
4 can't clip her wings. I was trying to be a
5 father, but I seen a school that I needed to
6 support my daughter when I was at work and not
7 at home. I said to myself they care that much
8 to call me to request her to remain here. She's
9 right there. I went there. I seen them sing at
10 Carnegie Hall. I never felt so honored in my
11 entire life.

12 [applause]

13 You say there's a problem. Why wasn't it
14 brought to us earlier? Why you wait until the
15 last minute to close the school? When there's a
16 problem, you bring something at an earlier date
17 so the school can function at a peak level so
18 you have time to bring it up. You have a
19 president that's only been here three years.
20 Regardless of that, the system was failing long
21 before she came here and it had to be
22 documented, but you let it go on. They were
23 given a better chance to improve their grades in
24 school and the graduation status. Equal
25 opportunities to all. This is not a

1 dictatorship. It should be a voting
2 democracy. - - stats are fraudulent, foreign.
3 This is very discouraging to our children trying
4 to be responsive, productive members of society.
5 I heard a young lady speak just a few minutes -
6 - my daughter. I said who is that? She said
7 Beatrice. That child was very articulate. I
8 listened to her, and I said to myself that young
9 lady speaks college material in this school. I
10 listen to her, and I said to myself, wow, I'm
11 57-years-old and I think I'm very articulate. I
12 said she's a child and she's sitting here
13 without a piece of paper addressing a forum in a
14 constructive manner. I personally wanted to--
15 okay, I stand here and all I see is anger and
16 frustration from the students. They get no
17 support. They got no resources. I talked to
18 the teachers years ago. I said, excuse me, I
19 said Diamond why you coming home with handouts?
20 What the hell is a handout? A printout? Where
21 you get this from? I come to the school. I
22 said to myself, I said excuse me what's the
23 problem? We don't have no books. Why you don't
24 have no books? I said excuse me, I don't
25 understand what do you mean? Oh, we have to

1 make copies and hand them out to the
2 students. I said, when I went to school--

3 MR. WHITE: [interposing] Please bring your
4 comments to a close.

5 MR. GROSS: When I went to the school, when
6 I went to school, years ago, we had books How
7 come in 2009, 2010 a high school and the
8 technology that we have, we don't have the
9 technology that needs efficiently to produce
10 prominent members of society?

11 MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir.

12 MR. GROSS: I got no--one more thing I have
13 to say. One more thing I got to say, right
14 here, it's very simple. It says right here, it
15 says why does a caged bird sing. Last year
16 history was made. Barack Obama said yes we can.
17 That young gentleman stood over there and said
18 yes we can. Barack Obama inhabited a whole ball
19 of wax and everybody throws at his feet like he
20 is the culprit that initiated everything in
21 America when we all know Barack Obama only been
22 there ten months and is bring us out of a
23 deficit. Let these children bring us out of a
24 deficit that did not stem from them, that as
25 inhabited by people that are sitting on a podium

1 with a Blackberry disrespecting other people.

2 MR. WHITE: Thank you.

3 MR. GROSS: If you was in a--

4 MR. WHITE: [interposing] Thank you very
5 much.

6 MR. GROSS: If you was in a board meeting,
7 you would have been tossed out because you
8 disrespected the CEO of that particular
9 corporation.

10 MR. WHITE: Thank you very much.

11 MR. LANDSMAN: Our last speaker is number
12 56, Christine Jackson. Are you still here?

13 CHRISTINE JACKSON: Hello, I'm a parent of a
14 student, Jacqueline Lane [phonetic]. She's been
15 here two years. She's the last one to go out of
16 seven children. This school is fantastic. She
17 has done a great job. I've been in this
18 community all my life and I'm 47 and what I've
19 seen go through this community is horrible. The
20 children don't have a chance if nobody gives
21 them a chance. There's so many children running
22 these streets in these schools getting stabbed
23 up, the West side the Bronx, I'm afraid for my
24 child to leave here. She's doing great. She
25 had a 65 first marking period, came back with a

1 90 and an 85 in another class the second
2 marking period. Please, I beg of you all, if we
3 don't give these kids a chance, where will they
4 get it from? Where will they get it from? It
5 is hard out here. It's a struggle. They doing
6 great. Who says that their marks can't go up?
7 Who says that they can't learn? These kids are
8 smarter than you will ever know, and you know
9 what if you give them a chance, they'll show
10 okay, because we instill in our children, we
11 instill in our children there is no such word as
12 can't. You can do anything you put your heart
13 to do. Just give them a chance, all right.

14 MR. WHITE: That--thank you very much,
15 that's our final speaker and that brings to a
16 conclusion this evening's hearing. Again, if
17 you'd like to register public comment, you can
18 submit written comment on the Department of
19 Education's web site. Thank you very much for
20 attending this evening, and have a good weekend.

21 [crosstalk]

22 [END OF RECORDING]

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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 Trisha Ruckart

Date January 12, 2010