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**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION - DIVISION OF  
PORTFOLIO PLANNING  
Grover Cleveland High School -  
4/2/12**

1 [START 290\_206.MP3]

2 MS. JENNY SOBELMAN: Ready?

3 DEPUTY CHANCELLOR MARC STERNBERG: Yeah.

4 MS. SOBELMAN: Good evening, ladies and  
5 gentlemen. My name is Jenny Sobelman and I'll  
6 be serving as the facilitator for this evening's  
7 joint public hearing. This is a joint public  
8 hearing of the Department of Education,  
9 Community Education Council 24, and the School  
10 Leadership Team to discuss the proposed closure  
11 and replacement of Grover Cleveland High School.  
12 I'm going to recognize the folks on the panel...

13 [Background noise]

14 MS. SOBELMAN: A couple notes--also, this  
15 evening's proceedings will be recorded and  
16 transcribed and I want to recognize the folks on  
17 the panel. I also want to quickly recognize, we  
18 have been joined by several of your elected  
19 officials. We're joined this evening by State  
20 Senator Joe Addabbo, Assemblywoman Kathy  
21 Nolan...

22 [Applause]

23 MS. SOBELMAN: We're also joined by  
24 Katherine Mooney on behalf of Councilwoman  
25 Crowley. The councilwoman may be joining us.

1 Also, Dorie Figliola from Assemblyman Miller's  
2 office.

3 [Applause]

4 MS. SOBELMAN: As well as Peter Pottier from  
5 Councilmember Reyna's office. We're also joined  
6 by Dmytro Fedkowskyj, the PEP rep for the Queens  
7 Borough President. So before we begin I also  
8 want to just run through quickly, run through  
9 the agenda for this evening's hearing. As you  
10 were coming in, folks saw the sign in table at  
11 the back so if you're interested in signing up  
12 for public comment, the microphone will be here  
13 and we'll have folks line up in the row here,  
14 and each person who signs up will be given two  
15 minutes for public comment. And we will be  
16 keeping time--there will be someone here in the  
17 front to let you know when you're 30 seconds,  
18 and then also when the two minutes has elapsed.  
19 And I think we've got a pretty long list of  
20 folks who want to speak so I am going to try and  
21 keep us moving through that, and if I  
22 mispronounce your name I do hope you'll correct  
23 the record for me. So again, if you'd like to  
24 sign up for public comment just make your way to  
25 the back. We'll keep that open for about 15

1 more minutes, and the other thing that's  
2 available in the back--there's notecards. If  
3 you have a question that you would like to pose  
4 to the members of the panel, write it on the  
5 notecard and then once we've exhausted the  
6 speaker list, we'll transition to a question and  
7 answer session, where we'll go through and  
8 answer the questions that are submitted. And as  
9 well, if questions come up through the public  
10 comment we will try and take an opportunity to  
11 answer them as well, and I just want to let you  
12 know in advance that sometimes we get a lot of  
13 questions that are similar, so we'll batch them  
14 together and just respond to one question,  
15 provide one answer that hits on a lot of  
16 different questions. And additionally, we may  
17 not have an opportunity to respond to all the  
18 questions that are posed here this evening, but  
19 I want to make sure everyone is aware that all  
20 of the questions and all of the comment is  
21 provided to the Panel for Educational Policy and  
22 also published online in a document called "The  
23 Analysis of Public Comment" which is made  
24 available prior to the Panel for Educational  
25 vote and that will take place on April 26th. So

1 as you see, we have a panel full of people and  
2 I've recognized our elected officials. If  
3 additional members of the panel arrive, we'll  
4 give them an opportunity to speak, and if  
5 additional members of the elected officials come  
6 in, we'll give them an opportunity to speak as  
7 well. So... Oh, and also, if questions come up  
8 after we've concluded this evening's hearing, I  
9 want to let folks know that there is an email  
10 and a phone number that are available to take  
11 your comments and your questions, and I'll give  
12 them to you a few times over the course of the  
13 evening and they're also available on the  
14 website--so it's D24proposals, D, the number 2,  
15 the number 4 proposals, at schools.nyc.gov and  
16 the phone number is (212) 374-7621. Okay, so  
17 now I'm going to introduce the folks we have who  
18 have joined us on the panel this evening, and I  
19 apologize in advance if I get your names wrong,  
20 as well. We have Jose Ferruzola who's  
21 representing the Citywide Council on High  
22 Schools.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. SOBELMAN: Maria D'Amico from CEC 24.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Geline Canayon representing  
2 the SLT.

3 [Applause]

4 MS. SOBELMAN: Connie Partinico, also from  
5 the CEC.

6 [Applause]

7 MS. SOBELMAN: Nick Comaianni, CEC  
8 president.

9 [Applause]

10 MS. SOBELMAN: Lydia Martinez from the CEC.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. SOBELMAN: Kathy Carlson, also from the  
13 CEC.

14 [Applause]

15 MS. SOBELMAN: And Brian Gavin from the SLT.

16 [Applause]

17 MS. SOBELMAN: And we are also joined by  
18 Deputy Chancellor Mark Sternberg.

19 [Background noise]

20 MS. SOBELMAN: So now what I'd like to do is  
21 invite the Deputy Chancellor to read the  
22 proposal.

23 MR. STERNBERG: Thank you, Jenny. Good  
24 evening. My name is Mark Sternberg. I'm the  
25 Deputy Chancellor for the Division of Portfolio

1 Planning in the New York City Department of  
2 Education. I want to thank you for being here  
3 this evening, and I want to in advance of  
4 presenting the proposal say a few quick words  
5 about what I think this evening is designed to  
6 accomplish and what it is not designed to  
7 accomplish and I'd like to start by discussing  
8 what this evening is not intended to be. This  
9 evening is not a decision point. We are here to  
10 hear the voices of this community. We are here  
11 to gather your feedback, and it is very clear to  
12 me that we will hear a very spirited defense of  
13 Grover Cleveland High School. This evening is  
14 not a moment in time where the Department  
15 intends to come here and convince all of you  
16 that if you oppose the proposal that you are  
17 wrong. This evening is a moment for us to hear  
18 your voices, collect your feedback, and to  
19 provide it to the Chancellor, to the Panel for  
20 Education Policy and to the decision makers at  
21 the Department of Education in advance of the  
22 April 26th vote about the formal proposal that  
23 is before us. So this evening is about sharing  
24 your views, and again, I expect, given the long  
25 list of speakers, I expect to hear about many of

1 the attributes of the school, both past and  
2 present. It is a moment when we, the  
3 Department, hope to address some of the  
4 questions and clarify why we have come to this  
5 proposal, and again, help you all understand  
6 both our reasons and the details of how the work  
7 is intended to move forward. I'll note that a  
8 decision like the one we are here to discuss,  
9 the proposal to close and replace any school, is  
10 the most difficult that we make, and I want to  
11 underscore that it comes from a place of wanting  
12 to serve all of our students more effectively  
13 across all of our schools in New York City. It  
14 is our view and our experience that the  
15 structures and the staff that come with a new  
16 school can more quickly accelerate the pace of  
17 reform. I do want to note that--

18 [Background noise]

19 MR. STERNBERG: I do want to note that in  
20 the case of Grover Cleveland, we see many  
21 strengths here, and I'll start with a very  
22 committed...

23 [Applause]

24 MR. STERNBERG: I'll start with a very  
25 committed school leader in Principal Denise

1 Vittor, who has...

2 [Applause]

3 [Break in audio]

4 MR. STERNBERG: Who has in her short time  
5 here at Grover Cleveland brought coherence and a  
6 clear strategy for how to organize the school  
7 for success and we are pleased to stand by Miss  
8 Vittor as our proposed new leader for the new  
9 school proposed for this campus. Further, it is  
10 our view that this very fine principal will be  
11 better positioned to lead fast reform that leads  
12 to better outcomes for more students quickly in  
13 the context of a new school on this campus. In  
14 conjunction with this proposal as a way to  
15 support the principal and her leadership and  
16 student success, the Department has submitted a  
17 School Improvement Grant application to the  
18 State Education Department to implement the  
19 turnaround model at this school. If approved,  
20 this grant would make available for the new  
21 school upwards of \$2 million a year for the next  
22 several years to support reform. I also want to  
23 make one clarifying point, Jenny--then I'll  
24 close--which is that if the proposal is approved  
25 and that will be subject to a vote by the Panel

1 for Education Policy at the end of April,  
2 April 26th, all current students enrolled here  
3 will be guaranteed a seat at the new school--  
4 that is, current 9th, 10th, and 11th grade  
5 students, and 12th grade students who do not  
6 meet their graduation requirements by the  
7 conclusion of this year, in addition to entering  
8 9th graders who have matched to the school.  
9 These students, again, will be guaranteed a seat  
10 at the new school. Jenny?

11 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. - - Thank you.

12 [Background noise]

13 MR. NICK COMAIANNI: Thank you.

14 [Background noise]

15 MR. COMAIANNI: Do you want me to go? Okay.

16 Hello, everyone.

17 [Background noise]

18 MALE VOICE 1: Good morning.

19 MR. COMAIANNI: It's not good morning--no  
20 wise guy, now. It's good evening. There you  
21 go. Thank you, students. My name is Nick  
22 Comaianni. I'm President of the Community  
23 Education Council. For all of you who do not  
24 know, what the Community Education Council is is  
25 today's school board--now, yesterday, school

1 board, they changed their name. Now they call  
2 us the Community Education Council. I'm also an  
3 alumni of Grover Cleveland.

4 [Applause]

5 MR. COMAIANNI: Not only did I come here,  
6 but also my other four siblings as well, and I  
7 think most of my family.

8 [Applause]

9 MR. COMAIANNI: On behalf of the Community  
10 Education Council, the members that are here  
11 tonight and the ones that aren't--I mean,  
12 tonight, we're here, we want to listen to  
13 everyone that has to speak about the proposal.  
14 I have spoken to your principal as well, and  
15 young man, it's really Denise Vittor--that's the  
16 proper way you say it. So, Miss Vittor--I do,  
17 we went through the numbers with the principal.  
18 I mean, I think as a principal that just took  
19 over the school she's doing a very fine job. I  
20 think the numbers that are being brought up and  
21 the way the principal showed them to me, I think  
22 the school is heading in the right direction,  
23 you know, currently, as it is, but...

24 [Applause]

25 MR. COMAIANNI: But like I said, after

1 tonight, and you know, as a Council, we never  
2 jump the gun--we like to wait. After tonight,  
3 when we meet, then we'll give a proper  
4 resolution to the Department of Education, and  
5 we'll take it from there, and then of course we  
6 have one of our PEP members over there, too, I  
7 know we didn't announce Dmytro Fedkowskyj as  
8 well, so he's at the vote there, too, so...

9 [Applause]

10 MR. COMAIANNI: I do ask one thing tonight.  
11 I know everyone has a lot to say, but the one  
12 thing that I like to see, and this is a co-  
13 hearing, so this is also my meeting, not the  
14 meeting of just the Department of Education--a  
15 little civility, make sure you give everybody a  
16 chance to speak. Don't go past your two  
17 minutes; if you're going to say less than two  
18 minutes, then say less. Just get to the point--  
19 say what you have to say. It's okay. But the  
20 main thing is so everyone gets a chance to speak  
21 before the time does finish is civility, respect  
22 the other person that's speaking. Either you  
23 like what they have to say or you don't--very  
24 important, let's agree to disagree.

25 [Applause]

1 MR. COMAIANNI: Thank you very much. - -  
2 You can leave it here unless someone else--it's  
3 fine. Leave it here, it's fine.

4 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.  
5 Excellent. Thank you so much, Mr. Comaianni.  
6 The next presentation from the panel will be  
7 from Brian Gavin, representing the SLT.

8 [Applause]

9 MR. BRIAN GAVIN: Thank you, everybody.

10 [Background noise]

11 MR. GAVIN: Wee bit of feedback--just a bit.

12 Okay? All right. Members of the Grover  
13 Cleveland High School family, esteemed guests,  
14 my name is Brian Gavin and I'm the Chairperson  
15 of the School Leadership Team which represents  
16 the students, the parents, the faculty and the  
17 administration of our school. The formal  
18 presentation of the SLT will include the point  
19 of view of the students, expressed by Geline  
20 Canayon, the parents expressed by PA President  
21 Kathy Carlson, and I will provide an overall  
22 view of the united perspective of parents,  
23 students, administration and teachers towards  
24 the proposal the DOE brings before you this  
25 evening to turn around Grover Cleveland High

1 School, to delete its name and all the  
2 traditions that go with it. This has been a  
3 trying few years for our school. Our leader for  
4 a decade, Dominick Scarola, fell ill during the  
5 spring 2011 term. There is no doubt in my mind  
6 that there is a direct correlation between the  
7 slight drop in graduation rate and the gap in  
8 leadership due to Mr. Scarola's absence. Every  
9 ship needs an able captain at the rudder. Our  
10 principal's ill health forced him to retire,  
11 effective September 1st, yet the Department of  
12 Education did not provide a replacement  
13 principal until mid-September, so essentially,  
14 we were all put in a terrible position. We had  
15 an ill retired principal who was soldiering on  
16 without any official authority, tasked with  
17 implementing and reorganizing the school under a  
18 brand new model, the restart model, and the DOE  
19 was absent without leave. Finally, a new  
20 principal was appointed. We were very happy to  
21 welcome back Miss Denise Vittor, a dedicated  
22 educator from our neighborhood that I had the  
23 pleasure of working with 21 and a half years ago  
24 as a special educator in this school. She has a  
25 track record of success with PLA schools,

1 particularly Queens Vocational High School  
2 which, I believe, the Deputy Chancellor can  
3 correct me if I'm wrong, is poised to come off  
4 the list?

5 [Background noise]

6 MR. GAVIN: Okay, depending on the state--

7 MR. STERNBERG: Waiting on the state.

8 MR. GAVIN: Waiting on the state, okay.

9 She's really worked tirelessly to compensate for  
10 the loss of millions of dollars of funds,  
11 primarily stemming from the 2.5% budget cut from  
12 the Department of Education in August, and the  
13 loss of Title 1 status due to more stringent  
14 requirements, again, courtesy of the Department  
15 of Education. The solid past relationship Miss  
16 Vittor has had with our EPO High Schools That  
17 Work has given us high hopes that we would be  
18 allowed to continue to improve academics at  
19 Cleveland and enhance our ties with community.  
20 Miss Vittor was able to turn around Queens  
21 Vocational High school after five plus years of  
22 hard work. Here, she was not even given five  
23 months before the rug was pulled out from under  
24 her and the community, thanks to the Department  
25 of Education playing political games with our

1 students, our parents and faculty. All the  
2 work we have done in implementing successful  
3 small learning communities where students have  
4 not just classes but a home and a career path  
5 will be undone by removing the staff who  
6 designed them.

7 [Applause]

8 MR. GAVIN: The carefully nurtured rapport  
9 between teachers and students in our school will  
10 be negated. Much of our new principal's time is  
11 spent reflecting and assessing what was working  
12 in the school and what areas needed more  
13 attention in consultation with the EPO, the  
14 faculty, and the School Leadership Team. This  
15 was done with an eye to the funding we would be  
16 receiving under the restart model over the next  
17 three years. As a team, we began crafting  
18 plans, long and short term, that would build  
19 upon our strengths and address our weaknesses.  
20 Miss Vittor corrected scheduling and compliance  
21 issues and began forging partnerships that would  
22 make our school more successful. Grover  
23 Cleveland was chosen by Lenovo as one of five  
24 schools in the United States of America to  
25 headline a program for the development of mobile

1 phone applications that would lead to  
2 competitive employment in the industry.

3 [Applause]

4 MR. GAVIN: Maria Corporation [phonetic],  
5 you might have heard of them, is a new partner  
6 for our hospitality and small learning  
7 community, as are a number of restaurants and  
8 businesses. Through LaGuardia Community  
9 College, we offer college now courses in  
10 psychology, English, math, and business, SAT  
11 preparation for STEM students and the STEP  
12 engineering partnership. LaGuardia and the  
13 Greater Ridgewood Youth Council are on our  
14 National Academy Foundation Design Team, among  
15 others. Grover Cleveland, a school that the  
16 Department of Education has proposed to close,  
17 has been chosen by the Department of Education  
18 as a lab site for iLearn, one of only nine demo  
19 sites in New York City. Yes, they are sending  
20 other schools to us to learn from us, yet they  
21 seek through this proposal being put before the  
22 PEP to close this high school.

23 [Applause]

24 MR. GAVIN: We are working to establish a  
25 partnership with the University of Bridgeport to

1 offer martial arts to our students. We are  
2 expecting a visit from them in the next few  
3 weeks.

4 [Applause]

5 MR. GAVIN: We are one of two schools,  
6 Townsend-Harris being the other, to offer a  
7 girls' wrestling training center in our new  
8 wrestling gym which was created this year with a  
9 \$5,000 grant from Beat the Streets.

10 [Applause]

11 MR. GAVIN: We are also looking to add  
12 natural or artificial turf to our schoolyard so  
13 we can expand our athletic programs,  
14 particularly for girls.

15 [Applause]

16 MR. GAVIN: We continue to be the only  
17 school in New York City to offer Oracle  
18 certification, which provides students with an  
19 industry standard certification in technology  
20 equivalent to two years of college instruction.

21 [Applause]

22 MR. GAVIN: We continue to offer a college  
23 level research project in science and social  
24 science leading to the Intel competition. Our  
25 plant sciences program continues to expand--two

1 fields plus a greenhouse, and is self-funded  
2 following the SLC business model.

3 [Applause]

4 MR. GAVIN: We have an active civil air  
5 patrol chapter that teaches students aeronautics  
6 and piloting aircraft.

7 [Applause]

8 MR. GAVIN: There are many new and  
9 continuing programs, plus many on the drawing  
10 board, that collectively will improve our school  
11 and increase its importance to this community.  
12 The Department of Education acknowledges as such  
13 in the educational impact statement as the  
14 Department of Education essentially mandates  
15 that we continue our programs, minus up to 50%  
16 of the staff who designed and partnered for  
17 these programs.

18 [Applause]

19 MR. GAVIN: Parents, if under turnaround all  
20 the students are guaranteed a seat at the new  
21 school, the students, why is the School  
22 Leadership Team, which represents those bodies,  
23 dead-set against instituting turnaround here at  
24 Cleveland? Because the parents, the students  
25 and staff on the School Leadership Team realize

1 that the people make up the school. It's not  
2 just the building, even one so steeped in  
3 tradition.

4 [Applause]

5 MR. GAVIN: Let's take a look at what will  
6 happen if a few key people don't make the cut  
7 under turnaround, or, disgusted at being treated  
8 like garbage by the Department of Education,  
9 transfer to a school elsewhere without as many  
10 challenges.

11 [Applause]

12 MR. GAVIN: If Russell Nitchman goes, there  
13 goes plant science. His hard work showed  
14 Councilmember Crowley that he was worth  
15 investing in, and she funded the greenhouse.  
16 You can see Mr. Nitchman early in the morning  
17 and well after school has ended either working  
18 with student volunteers or working solo in his  
19 fields--our very own Farmer Brown.

20 [Applause]

21 MR. GAVIN: If Andrew Woodbridge [phonetic]  
22 goes, there goes our civil air patrol, and the  
23 Lenovo program, and the other tech programs are  
24 crippled, because he holds the certifications  
25 necessary.

1 [Applause]

2 MR. GAVIN: With the SLC model in demand  
3 across the city, and with the kinds of  
4 certification he holds, I see no reason why he  
5 wouldn't be gobbled up by another school if a  
6 shortsighted committee passed him up, or he  
7 decided to move on. If we never had Hany  
8 Morisi, we would not have a girls' wrestling  
9 gym.

10 [Applause]

11 MR. GAVIN: Students wouldn't benefit in the  
12 science classes when he goes out and spends his  
13 own money on cow hearts so he can model  
14 dissections the DOE does not fund. They  
15 wouldn't see the giant tortoise, the snakes, or  
16 the other creatures in his menagerie that he  
17 cares for and shares with them.

18 [Applause]

19 MR. GAVIN: Without a Mirit Jakab, we  
20 wouldn't have a drama club.

21 [Applause]

22 MR. GAVIN: We wouldn't have our spring or  
23 fall festivals.

24 [Applause]

25 MR. GAVIN: No haunted house, and no winter

1 wonderland.

2 [Applause]

3 MR. GAVIN: All the children in the  
4 elementary schools around Grover Cleveland who  
5 are invited in for free to come in and enjoy  
6 this would miss out, because she was the  
7 architect of many of these programs.

8 [Applause]

9 MR. GAVIN: We wouldn't have the students  
10 she inspires to perform and volunteer for these  
11 events, not to mention we would lose a wonderful  
12 English teacher. If Steve Colbert [phonetic]  
13 leaves, or is not selected by the committee, we  
14 lose a teacher coordinator that gave last year's  
15 9th grade academy an 85% promotion rate.

16 [Applause]

17 MR. GAVIN: A teacher who works mornings,  
18 evenings and weekends to plan field trips,  
19 academics and activities that have engaged our  
20 9th graders. Studies show that the first few  
21 months of the 9th grade are crucial in  
22 preventing students from dropping out in the  
23 future. Our 9th grade academy and its  
24 coordinator have got that covered. He is  
25 irreplaceable.

1 [Applause]

2 MR. GAVIN: Despite the threats to their  
3 livelihoods and the constant bashing of teachers  
4 by the Bloomberg administration, the teachers  
5 here continue to persist in giving the students  
6 at Grover Cleveland the best possible education.  
7 Mr. Mahabir and Mr. Kiefer are science  
8 teachers...

9 [Applause]

10 MR. GAVIN: Who have been working for months  
11 to advise the International Bridge Building team  
12 uncompensated before and after school. Their  
13 work engages students who are nearly all English  
14 language learners, students who are new to our  
15 country. This Saturday, Grover Cleveland took  
16 seven of the top ten spots at the regional  
17 championships.

18 [Applause]

19 MR. GAVIN: The two top winners are two  
20 bilingual girls who came here in September, just  
21 a few months ago from the Dominican Republic.

22 [Applause]

23 MR. GAVIN: Mayor Bloomberg wants to run his  
24 school on a business model. Let me ask the  
25 audience this: What successful business takes

1 accomplished, successful workers, who are  
2 working for free, and threatens their job and  
3 their workplace? Can someone out there explain  
4 this to the School Leadership Team? Because  
5 ladies and gentlemen, we just don't get it.

6 [Applause]

7 MR. GAVIN: These teachers I mentioned are  
8 not exceptions; they're typical of the staff  
9 members at Grover Cleveland--hardworking  
10 professionals who go above and beyond the call  
11 of duty to help students achieve. Even now,  
12 teachers are planning to obtain CTE  
13 certifications to ensure the progress of our  
14 small learning communities on their own time and  
15 at their own expense this summer. And yet, the  
16 Department of Education solution is to cast  
17 these hardworking teachers into a limbo of the  
18 ATR pool, where they would travel each week to a  
19 new school as substitute teachers.

20 [Background noise]

21 MR. GAVIN: Carmine Pulera, a foreign  
22 language teacher...

23 [Applause]

24 MR. GAVIN: A foreign language teacher who  
25 has been recognized for excellence on the floor

1 of the New York State Assembly, and who has  
2 taught in this school for 42 years would have to  
3 reapply...

4 [Applause]

5 MR. GAVIN: Would have to reapply for his  
6 own job. The other day we had a group of  
7 principals from other schools give us a mock  
8 review and they visited Mr. Pulera's classroom,  
9 and the compliments they had were amazing and  
10 yet, he would have to apply for his own job.

11 [Background noise]

12 MR. GAVIN: And if Carmine decides to do so,  
13 what chance does he have when the Mayor openly  
14 disdains experience in the classroom as being  
15 important, and instead makes cost-cutting, not  
16 our students, his priority?

17 [Applause]

18 MR. GAVIN: And it doesn't stop there.  
19 Turnaround decimates the Parent Association as  
20 well. We have an active and growing Parent  
21 Association that is a vital part of our school  
22 community. Our parents work tirelessly and  
23 uncompensated to raise funds to make up for the  
24 shortfalls thanks to budget cuts, partnering and  
25 running our community festivals, providing

1 parent education and advocacy, inviting the  
2 community into Grover Cleveland, and seeking to  
3 engage our students in many different ways,  
4 including book fairs, yard sales, and  
5 beautification projects. If the school is  
6 closed under this turnaround proposal, the  
7 offices of the School Leadership Team, who  
8 worked so hard, and the Parent Association, who  
9 worked so hard and were democratically elected,  
10 would be turned out of office, and there would  
11 have to be new elections held in September.  
12 What an insult for so much hard work.

13 [Background noise]

14 MR. GAVIN: School organization is also  
15 damaged under turnaround. Many parts of this  
16 school are only possible because the staff has  
17 been willing via democratic vote to waive its  
18 rights under the contract via a school-based  
19 option vote. Our staff has decided that it's  
20 more important in certain circumstances to waive  
21 certain work rules and protections, such as the  
22 length of the school day, in order to meet the  
23 needs of the students. Get rid of the staff,  
24 close the school, the SBO no longer exists, and  
25 a school cannot be organized the way it is now.

1 The staff will be replaced with cheaper, less  
2 experienced educators, that may lack the  
3 dedication that this staff here has.

4 [Applause]

5 MR. GAVIN: For these reasons and many  
6 others, the SLT of Grover Cleveland High School  
7 has passed a resolution against implementing the  
8 turnaround model at our school. In this, we are  
9 following in the footsteps of the District 24  
10 Leadership Team, and the CEC 24. All of us,  
11 students, parents, teachers and the community,  
12 reject wholeheartedly the implementation of  
13 turnaround, because instead of providing help it  
14 puts us all back to square one.

15 [Applause]

16 MR. GAVIN: The last thing that Grover  
17 Cleveland High School needs is more radical  
18 change. The students crave some stability. I  
19 implore the Department of Education to come to  
20 its senses and let our experienced principal  
21 continue her vision for a bright future at  
22 Grover Cleveland with the staff and resources  
23 that she had in mind when these plans were put  
24 together. Thank you.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you very much, Mr.  
2 Gavin. Quickly, two notes before we move on...

3 [Applause]

4 [Background noise]

5 MS. SOBELMAN: So two quick notes before we  
6 move on--I also wanted to recognize that we've  
7 been joined by the District 24 Superintendent,  
8 Madeline Chan, and also I want to let folks know  
9 that the speaker sign in list has closed, so  
10 again, if additional comments or questions come  
11 up, you can use the phone and the email that I  
12 provided, and if you want to take advantage of  
13 the question card, if you want to participate in  
14 that portion of the evening, that's still  
15 available in the back of the room. And the next  
16 presentation will be from Kathy Carlson, also  
17 from the SLT.

18 [Applause]

19 MS. SOBELMAN: No?

20 [Background noise]

21 MS. KATHY CARLSON: Is it turned on? Hi,  
22 I'm Kathy Carlson, the president of the Parents  
23 Association.

24 [Applause]

25 MS. CARLSON: The Parents Association

1 opposes the implementation of the turnaround  
2 plan. It's the wrong plan for our school. We  
3 don't want to lose 50% or any large percentage  
4 of the school staff, or have the school name  
5 changed. The school has a great team here, and  
6 they shouldn't be broken up.

7 [Applause]

8 MS. CARLSON: We have a new principal who's  
9 wonderful with a proven track record of  
10 improving schools. Give her a chance.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. CARLSON: The Parent Association members  
13 are in the school almost every day and we see  
14 the dedication of the staff, the principal, the  
15 assistant principals, the teachers, the aides,  
16 the counselors, the administrators, the kitchen  
17 workers, the deans, the computer department, the  
18 custodians, the security department. We often  
19 see many of them coming in extra early, working  
20 late, even on Saturdays. Many staff members are  
21 alumni of the school themselves. They are  
22 passionate and dedicated to this school. They  
23 treat the students and the parents with caring  
24 and respect. I want to thank all the teachers  
25 and staff who work so hard and work long hours

1 to make a difference for our children.

2 [Applause]

3 MS. CARLSON: The parents appreciate all  
4 your efforts and we would hope that the DOE  
5 does, too. Implementing the turnaround plan  
6 would be a slap in the face of all of Grover  
7 Cleveland High School's dedicated staff members  
8 who work so hard to help students. Our  
9 assistant principal of math and the math  
10 teachers demonstrated some of their teaching  
11 methods at a recent meeting of the Queens High  
12 School President Councils.

13 [Applause]

14 MS. CARLSON: Which, by the way, happened  
15 from 7 to 9 o'clock in the evening. Many of the  
16 other Queens High School PTA presidents from  
17 some of the best Queens High Schools were very  
18 impressed and said they would like to bring  
19 these techniques to their schools, and wondered  
20 how they get Grover Cleveland teachers to work  
21 on Saturdays, because the teachers in their  
22 schools won't work on weekends. Why would we  
23 want to replace such teachers?

24 [Applause]

25 MS. CARLSON: We parents are also very proud

1 that the teachers here guide students to do  
2 community work--festivals, community cleanups,  
3 blood drives, all kinds of charity drives. And  
4 the students here have so many opportunities.  
5 They can get certified as a life guard. They  
6 can work in a greenhouse in the plant science  
7 program. There's computer programs which are  
8 the only ones of their kind in New York City.  
9 There are so many great clubs and sports teams.

10 [Applause]

11 MS. CARLSON: And students under the  
12 supervision of the computer teachers here have  
13 created and maintained a very impressive school  
14 website, GCHS.info.

15 [Applause]

16 MS. CARLSON: There are plans for adding  
17 more programs next year such as the arts  
18 program, health programs--if we lose the staff  
19 members who run these programs, the students  
20 will lose these opportunities. Chancellor  
21 Walcott and members of the DOE, please don't do  
22 this to our school. It's a very disruptive and  
23 expensive plan that will break up the school's  
24 dedicated team. It will hurt, not help the  
25 students. Thank you.

1 [Applause]

2 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much, Miss  
3 Carlson, and the final presentation from the  
4 panel will be from Celine Canayon--Geline  
5 Canayon.

6 [Applause]

7 [Break in audio]

8 MS. CANAYON: Good evening, everyone. I am  
9 Geline Canayon. I'm a senior here at Grover  
10 Cleveland High School, and I'm the Student  
11 Association President.

12 [Applause]

13 MS. GELINE CANAYON: As a student  
14 representative in the School Leadership Team,  
15 I've witnessed the students and staff of Grover  
16 Cleveland High School become part time activists  
17 with the solitary purpose of keeping the system  
18 of the school, its staff, and its name. Just as  
19 we've got time to breathe, when we've reached  
20 the goals that they have established for us, we  
21 are facing the same situation--the unproven  
22 turnaround model. Despite all this hardship, we  
23 still stand strong as a whole, getting bigger  
24 and better every year. We are an extraordinary  
25 school.

1 [Applause]

2 MS. CANAYON: We are one of the five schools  
3 nationwide that has a partnership with Lenovo,  
4 making apps for their first generation tablets.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. CANAYON: We are a demo site for the  
7 iLearn program, which allows students to  
8 complete their coursework anytime, anywhere. We  
9 garnered four medals in this year's regional  
10 Science Olympiad, where we placed first in  
11 events such as astronomy and rocks and minerals.

12 [Applause]

13 MS. CANAYON: Just this Saturday, we swept  
14 away the top five places in the regional Bridge  
15 Building Competition and for the fourth year in  
16 a row...

17 [Applause]

18 MS. CANAYON: We will be representing the  
19 whole region in the international competition in  
20 Las Vegas on May 5th.

21 [Applause]

22 MS. CANAYON: This all would not have been  
23 possible without the unending support,  
24 perseverance and dedication of the staff to  
25 create an innovative environment for us

1 students. But all this you would have to  
2 witness for yourself and experience for  
3 yourself, not from visiting classes two minutes  
4 at the most.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. CANAYON: Now, the very staff that got  
7 us to this point is in jeopardy. Grover  
8 Cleveland High School students and staff are  
9 united in their efforts to save the school which  
10 does not deserve to close down. We should not  
11 be used as pieces in the mayor's Monopoly game.  
12 Thank you.

13 [Applause]

14 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you very much. So now,  
15 before we move into the general public comment,  
16 I'm going to invite the public officials who are  
17 here with us this evening to give comments. Our  
18 first will be from state senator Joe Addabbo.  
19 Do you want to come here? Your call.

20 [Applause]

21 STATE SENATOR JOE ADDABBO: Good evening.  
22 First I want to thank everyone for being here  
23 tonight, and I want to thank the panel for their  
24 time. I always feel public hearing is less  
25 about the elected officials and more about the

1 public, so I'm going to be brief, but I aim  
2 here to show my support for Grover Cleveland  
3 High School, and the reasons why...

4 [Applause]

5 MR. ADDABBO: The reasons why it needs to be  
6 taken off the list for turnaround schools--you  
7 know, as an elected official, we serve as a  
8 bridge between everyone who's in favor of  
9 keeping this school open, and those who make the  
10 decisions, and we need answers. So I'm going to  
11 make a simple request here, and the first is to  
12 take Grover Cleveland off the list of turnaround  
13 schools. You know...

14 [Applause]

15 MR. ADDABBO: It's not only an emotional  
16 request, but it's a fact-based request, much  
17 laid out by Mr. Gavin. You know, the fact is,  
18 we have programs here like the restart program  
19 that it's working and we're not giving it a  
20 chance to work further. We have the fact that  
21 we have a principal here, and faculty that are  
22 working very hard to turn this school around,  
23 and they have turned it around, and we're not  
24 giving them a chance to make it go further.

25 [Applause]

1           MR. ADDABBO: We have a fact that we have  
2 programs like Lenovo and Izone [phonetic] and  
3 other programs here, EPO and other programs here  
4 that are working that we're not letting them  
5 work. These are fact-based reasons why this  
6 school needs to remain open. There is a fear of  
7 the unknown for the incoming freshman, for the  
8 outgoing senior--these questions needs to be  
9 answered, the fear of the unknown. These  
10 questions need to be answered. These people  
11 deserve answers. I'm working with you to try  
12 and get these answers, and keep this school  
13 open. Thank you very much.

14           [Applause]

15           [Break in audio]

16           MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much, Senator.

17           [Applause]

18           MS. SOBELMAN: The next speaker will be  
19 Assemblywoman Kathy Nolan.

20           [Applause]

21           MS. KATHY NOLAN: I want to thank all my  
22 colleagues in government, my dear friend State  
23 Senator Addabbo, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez  
24 who will be represented tonight, Assemblyman  
25 Mike Miller who will be represented tonight,

1 Councilwoman Crowley, all of them for joining  
2 with me, a proud alumni--alumna, alumnus--of  
3 this school.

4 [Applause]

5 MS. NOLAN: And the first thing I'd like to  
6 do--anybody, would all the alumni stand up who  
7 are here tonight?

8 [Applause]

9 MS. NOLAN: I feel very proud of that. And  
10 I want to say, I want to say to all--I'm class  
11 of '76. Class of '76, and Mr. Pulera was my  
12 Spanish teacher.

13 [Applause]

14 MS. NOLAN: I want to say to the people from  
15 the Department of Education who came from  
16 Manhattan, you have really awoken Ridgewood.  
17 Ridgewood can be kind of a sleeping giant--you  
18 know, we're a nice neighborhood, we work hard,  
19 we mind our own business, we get very little  
20 from the City, we don't get enough from the  
21 State. But this terrible threat to our  
22 community high school has been met, I think,  
23 with the strongest outpouring of support in my  
24 many years of community service. I want to read  
25 a brief and formal statement. Those of you who

1 know me know I don't like to read from a text,  
2 but I want the record to reflect that we love  
3 our high school and we don't want to see it  
4 close.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. NOLAN: Cleveland. As an elected  
7 representative of Ridgewood Queens, Chair of the  
8 New York State Assembly's Committee on  
9 Education, and a proud Cleveland graduate, I  
10 want to express my strong opposition to any  
11 closing or turnaround model of Grover Cleveland  
12 High School. Grover Cleveland High School is  
13 one of 33 New York City schools that were  
14 designated to receive a school improvement grant  
15 from the federal government under Race to the  
16 Top. I want the panel to know that I helped  
17 sponsor some of this in Albany, and I did not  
18 sponsor this so my high school could be closed.  
19 We sponsored it to improve it.

20 [Applause]

21 MS. NOLAN: In order to qualify, in order to  
22 qualify for these long overdue and long needed  
23 funds--for god's sake, the place looks just like  
24 it looked when I got here, 28 years ago--to  
25 qualify--35 years ago.

1 [Applause]

2 MS. NOLAN: In order to qualify for this  
3 grant, Cleveland agreed to undergo one of the  
4 reform models required by USDOE. Cleveland was  
5 placed in the restart model and spent the first  
6 half of this school year operating under that  
7 model. It was not until January when the City  
8 was unable to reach an agreement on these  
9 teacher evaluations that the City first began  
10 discussing closing Grover Cleveland High School  
11 with the turnaround model. I am deeply  
12 concerned about the effect this sudden change of  
13 course will have the on the students of Grover  
14 Cleveland High School. It will have a negative  
15 effect not only current students, but on the  
16 outgoing seniors and incoming freshmen as well.  
17 Even just the announcement of the possible  
18 closing has probably done damage to the school's  
19 future prospects, and it's outrageous that you  
20 would consider closing without some kind of a  
21 phase-out that would allow the juniors to  
22 graduate with their school.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. NOLAN: Whatever benefits you hope to  
25 achieve will be negated by the problems that

1 this causes. I can attest that parents will  
2 be very hesitant to send children to this  
3 school. We've heard from dozens of people  
4 worried and upset. My staff have been working  
5 with the Leadership team, with the new  
6 principal, to really support the model, the  
7 restart model, and the earlier proposals. When  
8 Chancellor Walcott, and yes, you, Deputy  
9 Chancellor Sternberg, and State Commissioner of  
10 Ed, John King, visited Cleveland in the fall,  
11 they both left--all of them left, all three of  
12 them, with a positive impression of the school.  
13 Under our new principal's leadership, the school  
14 has really made an effort to be a welcoming  
15 place for the community, welcoming families and  
16 community members. We've also worked hard here  
17 to create a safe and stimulating school  
18 environment, and yes, one that graduates more  
19 students, gets them into the colleges of their  
20 choice and the careers of their choice. The  
21 restart model was supposed to be a long-term  
22 plan with the school receiving funds and taking  
23 part in that model over three years. To decide  
24 after less than five months to abruptly pursue a  
25 different and more drastic route is bad public

1 policy, and whatever form the DOE chooses at  
2 this point, I believe, have lost tremendous  
3 credibility with me, and many members of the  
4 legislature.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. NOLAN: The closing--I know it's time to  
7 finish up. Those of you who know me know I'm  
8 talking as fast as I can. The closing and  
9 reopening of 33 schools is a tremendous  
10 undertaking and it puts a tremendous strain on  
11 DOE personnel and resources. Many serious  
12 issues are going to arise that will hurt the  
13 school. You know, we heard such wonderful  
14 testimony from that wonderful student government  
15 president and the other students outside--future  
16 assemblywomen and assembly members all--from the  
17 parents...

18 [Applause]

19 MS. NOLAN: You know, we know our school  
20 faces challenges and that there's work to be  
21 done, but this model will not achieve the  
22 changes that people want. I'm very proud to say  
23 that this morning, Borough President Marshall  
24 and every single member of the Queens  
25 delegation, congressional, state senate,

1 assembly and city council, rallied today and  
2 said we do not want to see schools closed.  
3 Queens elected officials stand united to support  
4 community schools which have a long tradition in  
5 Queens. We stand against abrupt closures of  
6 longstanding schools with no real planning--  
7 there's no parental input into this plan. These  
8 poor people are being asked, as if they have  
9 decision making power. They're sitting up here.  
10 We know they don't. We know that you do, and  
11 you have to listen to us. It's particularly  
12 inappropriate to use state resources to close  
13 these schools.

14 [Applause]

15 MS. NOLAN: And I think we have to ask--we  
16 have to ask the question, you know? Will sports  
17 teams be cut? You know, what sports teams get  
18 cut in this model? What educational opportunity  
19 programs will be eliminated? What will the  
20 mission and the theme of these so-called new  
21 schools be? Will they have to share the  
22 auditorium? Will they have to share the  
23 cafeteria? What will happen to the current  
24 Parent Association? What art and music programs  
25 will these so-called new schools offer? Will

1 they have remedial programs? All these  
2 questions just point out the unacceptable nature  
3 of this process. We want to urge New York City  
4 DOE, Chancellor Walcott, who is himself a  
5 graduate of a large Queens comprehensive high  
6 school--nobody has anything against the small  
7 high schools. They offer alternatives for some  
8 students, but there's something to be said for a  
9 large neighborhood comprehensive high school.  
10 Not every 14...

11 [Applause]

12 MS. NOLAN: When I came to Grover Cleveland  
13 in 1972, fresh off of Saint Aloysius, I didn't  
14 know I wanted to be a politician. I didn't know  
15 what I wanted to do. It was Cleveland that  
16 helped give me a wide variety of experiences.  
17 We had our New York Club--where's Mr. Zambratta  
18 [phonetic], our retired teacher? We had the  
19 plays. You know, I got to sing and dance; I  
20 wasn't very good, I said, I'd better be a  
21 politician, right? So you know, there were  
22 wonderful things here that gave me opportunity,  
23 opportunity to learn who I was. I'm wearing a  
24 little pin that was the brown and white--I don't  
25 know if even it's still the school colors, but

1       there used to actually be a brown and white  
2       and if you graduated in your senior class, you  
3       had to buy the ring but you could get the pin  
4       for free. So I wore it--I actually found it in  
5       my jewelry box all these years later. Why? Why  
6       did I keep it? Because Grover Cleveland is a  
7       part of me. It's a part of our community.

8               [Applause]

9               MS. NOLAN: So I want to thank everybody.  
10       Keep Grover Cleveland open. Thank you.

11              [Applause]

12              [chanting]

13              [Break in audio]

14              MR. COMAIANNI: Great, thanks. So Kathy,  
15       you and I have known each other about 30 years,  
16       right? Right, so can I count on you and Senator  
17       Addabbo at this time not to renew mayoral  
18       control and give all this back to the community?

19              [Applause]

20              MR. COMAIANNI: Or repeal those four years  
21       that are left and put an end to this mayoral  
22       control? Everybody knows here, in the past,  
23       you'd be able to come to a council sitting here  
24       which many former school board members are  
25       sitting there, Pat Grayson, who was the chair,

1 too, and Bob, you could come here and the  
2 decision would have been made right here by the  
3 people you could be staring at. It's a  
4 different story. So that's why I hope--and  
5 Kathy, you and I are friends, but I tell this to  
6 every elected official that comes to my meeting--  
7 -

8 MS. NOLAN: There is no question that the  
9 stakes are very high, and that many of us are  
10 looking--mayoral control expires in 2015, so  
11 it's a long time off, but we'd like to save  
12 Grover Cleveland now. But there's no question,  
13 there's no question--

14 [Applause]

15 MS. NOLAN: --That the response of the DOE  
16 on this issue is critical to many many members  
17 of the legislature. We've had many people sign  
18 a letter questioning it, and I can tell you that  
19 as someone who did support mayoral control and  
20 felt that it was time to go in a new direction,  
21 we're not happy when we see that it's being used  
22 as an excuse to close high schools, so we're  
23 looking forward to talking to you about that,  
24 and hoping that we can keep Grover Cleveland  
25 open.

1 [Break in audio]

2 [Applause]

3 MR. COMAIANNI: Thank you, Kathy; thank you,  
4 Jill. So, I'll leave it on that note--let's  
5 repeal it.

6 [Break in audio]

7 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much,  
8 Assemblywoman. The next speaker will be  
9 Katherine Mooney representing Councilmember  
10 Crowley.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. KATHERINE MOONEY: Good evening. This  
13 is a wonderful turnout. Believe me, I know how  
14 you feel. I think this is a great school. I  
15 have had many, many wonderful occasions of  
16 visiting and attending so many of these events  
17 to support your school. I am only speaking very  
18 briefly on behalf of the Councilwoman who will  
19 be coming later--Mr. Gavin, the PTA, the  
20 students, of course Assemblywoman Nolan, you  
21 have really said it all and made us see how  
22 wonderful this school is. My personal question  
23 to the mayor and to the Department of Education  
24 is, why aren't you looking at the new  
25 statistics? The statistics that are used to

1 make so many of these decisions are old by a  
2 couple of years and this school has come a long  
3 way.

4 [Applause]

5 MS. MOONEY: So very, very briefly, on  
6 behalf of Councilmember Elizabeth Crowley, I  
7 just want to read a few words from her: I  
8 strongly urge the mayor and the Department of  
9 Education to abandon this plan and reinstate  
10 Grover Cleveland, a school which has made  
11 tremendous progress in providing a quality  
12 education to a devoted community. Grover  
13 Cleveland has shown improvement in attendance,  
14 test scores and discipline. Why, in the face of  
15 this progress, would the mayor and the  
16 Department of Education reward them by closing  
17 the school? I will leave a longer statement  
18 here for you, but you have our full support, and  
19 the councilmember herself will be here later.  
20 Thank you.

21 [Applause]

22 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. The next  
23 speaker will be Peter Pottier, representing  
24 Councilmember Reyna's office.

25 MR. PETER POTTIER: Reyna, yeah. Good

1 evening, everybody. My name is Peter. I am  
2 here representing Councilmember Diana Reyna, who  
3 represents Williamsburg and Bushwick, Brooklyn,  
4 as well as Ridgewood, Queens.

5 [Applause]

6 MR. POTTIER: I'm going to keep this short,  
7 but Councilmember Reyna wants to specifically  
8 address how the Department of Education is not  
9 giving Principal Vittor a chance to implement  
10 the policies she was brought here to do.  
11 Principal Vittor is well qualified with her  
12 background at Queens Vocational, and it would  
13 seem appropriate to have her continue her work  
14 and revisit this issue after she has been given  
15 a chance to improve Grover Cleveland. It seems  
16 pretty clear after what's everyone's said that  
17 this school's turning around, and it doesn't  
18 make sense to get rid of the teachers who know  
19 the students and know the history at this time.

20 [Applause]

21 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. And the next  
22 speaker will be Dmytro Fedkowskyj, your Queens  
23 BP Panel Representative.

24 MR. DMYTRO FEDKOWSKYJ: - -

25 MS. SOBELMAN: Yeah, feel free.

1 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: The reason why I'm going  
2 to take this mike is because Mark already knows  
3 what I'm going the say: Keep Cleveland open.

4 [Applause]

5 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: So back in '84, I graduated  
6 from this building.

7 [Applause]

8 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: My mother graduated from  
9 here but I can't tell you when she graduated;  
10 she'll get mad. This has been a neighborhood  
11 building, school, facility, serving this  
12 community for many, many years, and the DOE's  
13 latest effort is not a carefully planned program  
14 designed to address specific needs in this  
15 building or in any of the schools that are  
16 proposed for phase-out. It's an arbitrary  
17 change in direction to the most drastic  
18 intervention, short of closing the actual  
19 school. As proposed in New York City, the  
20 turnaround model has three components; none of  
21 them address the problems that need to be  
22 addressed. We know this school could be  
23 successful under the leadership of Denise  
24 Vittor--we know it, and its administration and  
25 its teachers, we have the best the city can

1 offer in this building.

2 [Applause]

3 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: The change in direction was  
4 announced by Mayor Bloomberg during the State of  
5 the City address in January. This was only  
6 after he tried to pit parents against teachers,  
7 teachers against teachers--that didn't work.  
8 This proposal's also not going to work. I  
9 implore you to come out during the April 26th  
10 meeting. Do not think that this is over right  
11 now. The decision was made today that seven  
12 schools came off the list. That should lead to  
13 know that we still have a chance to save Grover  
14 Cleveland.

15 [Applause]

16 MR. FEDKOWSKYJ: I'm going to close it up  
17 now because there's a lot of people to speak,  
18 but I'm going to let you know and it's probably  
19 out there already--on April 26th, I'm going to  
20 be introducing a resolution to the panel  
21 opposing the turnaround model, and I want to  
22 read just the main part of that proposal right  
23 now: That the Panel for Educational Policy  
24 strongly opposes the DOE's decision to implement  
25 the turnaround model since it was hastily

1 conceived and arbitrarily composed after  
2 spending more than six months dissecting these  
3 same schools in 2011, whereby the DOE concluded  
4 that the restart or transformation models were  
5 proving successful with calculated vision to  
6 improve educational outcomes for the thousands  
7 of students it's going to affect. It also calls  
8 on Chancellor Walcott to withdraw all the  
9 proposals of significant change in school  
10 utilization and impose a moratorium on all  
11 school turnaround proposals until public  
12 presentations are made in every borough  
13 reflecting on how this method will raise student  
14 achievement in lieu of existing models. Thank  
15 you.

16 [Applause]

17 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, Dmytro. Okay, so  
18 the last person I have on the elected official  
19 sign in list is Leo Casey, representing the UFT.

20 [Applause]

21 MR. LEO CASEY: Good evening. My name is  
22 Leo Casey and I am the Vice President of the UFT  
23 that represents this school, and I want to tell  
24 you tonight that there is no educational  
25 justification for what the Department of

1 Education is trying to do to you.

2 [Applause]

3 MR. CASEY: And you don't have to take my  
4 word for it. The Department of Education itself  
5 set out standards for what it said a school  
6 would look like when it failed, and Grover  
7 Cleveland does not meet those standards.

8 [Applause]

9 MR. CASEY: And it's not just Grover  
10 Cleveland--19 of the 33 schools it wants to  
11 close doesn't meet its own standards for  
12 closing.

13 [Applause]

14 MR. CASEY: Can you imagine a teacher who  
15 would tell his students this is what you have to  
16 do to pass, and then fail 60% of them that met  
17 those standards? That is what the Department of  
18 Education is doing to you and to 18 other high  
19 schools.

20 [Applause]

21 MR. CASEY: There is only one reason why  
22 such an educationally invalid step has been  
23 taken here, and that is because it serves the  
24 political agenda of Mayor Bloomberg.

25 [Applause]

1           MR. CASEY: And so on behalf of the entire  
2 United Federation of Teachers I say stop holding  
3 Grover Cleveland hostage.

4           [Applause]

5           MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Okay, so  
6 we're now going to transition to the speakers  
7 who have signed up and just to sort of run  
8 through the process, and I apologize for the  
9 feedback--so each person who's signed up is  
10 going to have two minutes to speak. There's a  
11 young lady here who's going to hold up a sign  
12 and let you know when you've got under 30  
13 seconds, and then when the time has elapsed, and  
14 we do have a pretty long list. I'm going to try  
15 and keep us moving so everybody has an  
16 opportunity to speak. The microphone is here  
17 and they've actually saved an aisle along here,  
18 so I'm going to call folks up in a group of 10,  
19 and if you want to make your way up along the  
20 outside and then come in, or however it works  
21 out. So I'm going to read the names and also  
22 the numbers, and I apologize if I get your name  
23 wrong, but hopefully you've got your number. So  
24 the first speaker will be Joseph Thorsen, number  
25 two is David Pambianchi, number three is

1 Christine Martin, number four Alice Gluszaic,  
2 number five James Vasquez, number six was Leo  
3 Casey, number seven Washington Sanchez, and  
4 number eight, Rose Yates, number nine Maria  
5 Rozos, and number ten, Brett Green. So I'll  
6 give you... So Mr. Thorsen? Yeah, where do you  
7 want me to go--that way, or that way?

8 MR. JOE THORSEN: Is this on?

9 [Break in audio]

10 MR. THORSEN: No? Good evening. Good  
11 evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Joe  
12 Thorsen, and I...

13 [Applause]

14 MR. THORSEN: Thank you. All right. New  
15 York City's Department of Education, under the  
16 thumb of Mayor Bloomberg, is waging a campaign  
17 to destabilize and consequently weaken the  
18 United Federation of Teachers. Under the guise  
19 of pretending to improve education for students  
20 at Grover Cleveland High School, the DOE is  
21 creating an environment of despair, of  
22 confusion, of failure. That's right--by  
23 continually threatening to fire 50% of the staff  
24 at Grover Cleveland, the DOE is creating a  
25 negative educational environment. So, too, by

1 demanding that teachers create daily lesson  
2 plans whose comprehensive details would rival  
3 those of a general preparing a battle, the DOE  
4 is stultifying education, not allowing it to  
5 breathe, to work, to engage. Okay, let's assume  
6 that the mayor gets his way--the DOE is now  
7 allowed to fire up to 50% of the faculty. What  
8 fruit will this policy bear? They will have  
9 disheartened the 50% of the faculty who remain.  
10 They will have destroyed collegiality between  
11 the faculty that remains and the inexperienced  
12 teachers who replace the fallen. This will have  
13 the effect of institutionalizing a climate of  
14 mistrust. Is this their master plan to improve  
15 education? Humbug. Now, what really needs to  
16 be done--just look at the prep schools where the  
17 elite send their children, the mayor and his  
18 real choice for chancellor. Each prep school  
19 boasts a low faculty to student ratio--try 1  
20 teacher to every 9 students. Next, these prep  
21 schools open solid programs of engagement from  
22 the moment a student wakes until it's lights  
23 out. What exactly happens to our students?  
24 What are they offered? And so the discrepancies  
25 between the systems widen. Now, Mr. Mayor,

1       instead of firing 50% of the faculty, I say  
2       offer a real solution: Add 50%. Thank you.

3               [Applause]

4               [Break in audio]

5               MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
6       number two, David Pambianchi?

7               [Background noise]

8               MR. DAVID PAMBIANCHI: Hi, my name is David  
9       Pambianchi. I'm a school teacher in the Bronx,  
10       and I graduated from Grover Cleveland High  
11       School.

12              [Applause]

13              MR. PAMBIANCHI: There's \$600 billion across  
14       this country in tax payer funds for public  
15       schools. Businesses want that money. And how  
16       are they going to get it? They're going to try  
17       and privatize. Part of that solution--they  
18       don't care about the students, they don't care  
19       about your complaints, they don't care about the  
20       teachers. They want to close as many schools as  
21       possible, privatize as much as possible.  
22       There's money to be made in testing and  
23       programs. It goes on and on and I don't have  
24       three hours to talk about it. So they're going  
25       to do what they can--in Jamaica, they put

1 students in from Rikers Island to bring the  
2 statistics down so the data would look bad. In  
3 Stevenson in the Bronx, they sent in the truants  
4 and the gang members. They did everything they  
5 could to close the school, to squeeze the budget  
6 out so they could hire new people, and that's  
7 exactly what they're going to try and do right  
8 now, and from what I understand, you don't even  
9 have some of those issues, here, and if you  
10 don't have them, you're going to have them  
11 eventually. So this is all about the mayor, his  
12 cronies, his consultants to make a lot of money  
13 at the expense of everybody. I know a lot of  
14 people get up here. I think it's absurd if you  
15 heard Mr. Gavin--he covered pretty much every  
16 angle. No sane person would want to close the  
17 school unless somebody was going to make some  
18 kind of money out of it, and they don't care  
19 about anything. Thanks a lot.

20 [Applause]

21 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
22 number three, Christine Martin?

23 [Background noise]

24 MALE VOICE 1: Speak into the top of the  
25 mike.

1 MS. CHRISTINE MARTIN: Okay. Hello, my  
2 name is Christine Martin, speaking on behalf of  
3 the Council of Supervisors and Administrators.

4 [Applause]

5 MS. MARTIN: The Department of Education's  
6 latest attempt to close 33 schools which were  
7 already in a process of a three year reform  
8 program is a political maneuver that is not  
9 rooted in sound educational practice. Rather,  
10 it began as a ploy designed to avoid  
11 negotiations with CSA and the UFT over new  
12 principal and teacher evaluation systems.

13 [Applause]

14 MS. MARTIN: The motivation behind that ploy  
15 was to follow a turnaround model, a model that  
16 does not require principal and teacher  
17 evaluations and allows the city to close and  
18 immediately reopen schools under new names.  
19 What else would be new about these schools? 50%  
20 of the former teachers would be put into excess  
21 willy-nilly. There's nothing educationally  
22 sound about the intervention plan. It is being  
23 introduced for cynical reasons, not to help  
24 children. It will not contribute to the  
25 development...

1 [Applause]

2 MS. MARTIN: ...Of sound principal and  
3 teacher evaluation systems. Furthermore, in  
4 removing half the staffs from the schools, New  
5 York City Department of Education will  
6 destabilize schools throughout the system, one  
7 after the other like dominoes. While these  
8 human costs are the most important ones, there  
9 are also fiscal ones. Removing 1800 teachers  
10 and tossing them into the ATR pool where they  
11 will work as substitutes at full salary will  
12 cost the City approximately \$180 million  
13 annually.

14 [Applause]

15 MS. MARTIN: I will also say, I don't know  
16 if the turnaround is designed to have immediate  
17 result, but we all know that when you have  
18 immediate results, they are not sustained and  
19 lasting. Most of these schools are making study  
20 progress that they can build upon. This  
21 turnaround is not helping. It is undoing  
22 everything they've done.

23 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Thank you  
24 so much.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Next speaker is speaker  
2 number four, Alice Gluszaic.

3 MS. ALICE GLUSZAIMR. ALVAREZ: Gluszaic,  
4 Gluszaic.

5 [Applause]

6 MALE VOICE 1: You have two minutes. Speak  
7 into the top of the mike.

8 MS. GLUSZAIMR. ALVAREZ: Okay. Good  
9 evening, and thank you. Most of you know me.  
10 I've been a guidance counselor here at Grover  
11 Cleveland for twelve years--twelve very proud,  
12 proud years.

13 [Applause]

14 MS. GLUSZAIMR. ALVAREZ: I'm speaking from  
15 the heart. The last three years, we've been  
16 given different initiatives every single year,  
17 and as a team, a team of dedicated  
18 professionals, we've come together, we've met  
19 these strategies time and time again--a team  
20 that works together. My question is for  
21 Chancellor Walcott: You walked through our  
22 school in the fall. You assured us that what  
23 you saw you liked. We are a school progressing.  
24 When does a chancellor's word not mean anything?  
25 When he takes it back because the mayor tells

1 him to in January? Things get changed. Thank  
2 you.

3 [Applause]

4 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, ma'am. And the  
5 next speaker is speaker number five, James  
6 Vasquez.

7 MR. ARTHUR GOLDSTEIN: Actually, I'm Arthur  
8 Goldstein. I'm an ESL teacher and the UFT  
9 chapter leader at Francis Lewis High School and  
10 I write about education for New York Times  
11 SchoolBook.

12 [Applause]

13 MR. GOLDSTEIN: And I want to ask you why  
14 are we here? I'll tell you why we're here:  
15 Because Mayor Bloomberg, in a fit of pique,  
16 decides that he wants what he wants. What does  
17 Mayor Bloomberg want? First, he wants teachers  
18 rated highly effective, effective, developing,  
19 or ineffective, and ideally, he would like to  
20 fire half of all teachers and double class  
21 sizes. Now, these are interesting words,  
22 particularly because Mayor Bloomberg has taken  
23 almost a billion dollars to lower class sizes,  
24 and every year since he took that billion  
25 dollars, class sizes have gone up. So I'm going

1 to ask you--how would you rate Mayor  
2 Bloomberg, highly effective, effective,  
3 developing, or ineffective?

4 [Applause]

5 MR. GOLDSTEIN: So having taken \$1 billion  
6 for abject failure, Mayor Bloomberg now says the  
7 hell with class size reduction, let's just  
8 double them. For one thing, through attrition,  
9 Mayor Bloomberg has reduced our teaching force  
10 by 10% and many classes are at maximum. Now, I  
11 teach in a trailer in the back of a school at  
12 200% capacity thanks to Tweed's [phonetic]  
13 inability to plan. Mayor Bloomberg five years  
14 ago said he'd eliminate trailers by 2012. Back  
15 then, there were 400 trailers, and today there  
16 are 400 trailers, so I'm going to ask you: How  
17 do you rate Mayor Bloomberg? Highly effective,  
18 effective, developing, or ineffective? I put it  
19 to you that it is not Grover Cleveland that  
20 needs to be closed. It is Tweed that needs to  
21 be closed, and it is time for Mayor Bloomberg to  
22 take his incompetent and unqualified staff, get  
23 out of Ridgewood, and leave the business of  
24 education to educators. Thank you very much.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. And the  
2 next speaker is speaker number seven, Washington  
3 Sanchez.

4 MS. GENE REEF: Yeah, no, I'm not  
5 Washington.

6 MALE VOICE 1: Good.

7 MS. REEF: Yeah.

8 MALE VOICE 1: Speak into the top--you have  
9 two minutes.

10 MS. REEF: Okay. As you all know, I am not  
11 Washington Sanchez. My name is Gene Reef and  
12 I'm the President for Queens High School  
13 Presidents Council. We were the Council that  
14 had your math teachers doing a workshop for our  
15 parents across Queens to show what math can look  
16 like, how math can be better, so we thank you  
17 for that, by the way. But what I'd like to go  
18 over--I don't want to put blame anywhere. I  
19 want to go over because I was here two months  
20 ago at a meeting where you all spoke, you all  
21 were heartfelt, emotional, students, parents,  
22 teachers--the DOE was there, but we're doing  
23 this again, so I say, did you hear? Did you  
24 hear what was said? All I can say is that  
25 you've done--the plan for the CTE classes,

1 you've got it already. You have everything  
2 you could have here for a perfect high school,  
3 to show students what is out there, to make them  
4 interested, so why are we doing this again? I  
5 don't know. It's a process. I'm hoping  
6 somebody listens. I have a feeling they're not.  
7 It's just going to go through, but this is what  
8 I say: You've unified this school. You've  
9 unified the community and you've unified the  
10 politicians, parents and staff to go against  
11 you, because you have not done anything to show  
12 how you can improve something that is working.  
13 And that's all I have to say.

14 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

15 [Applause]

16 MS. SOBELMAN: Speaker number eight is Rose  
17 Yates. Speaker number eight, Rose Yates? No?  
18 Speaker number nine, Maria Rozos?

19 [Applause]

20 MALE VOICE 1: Speak into the mike. You  
21 have two minutes.

22 MS. MARIA ROZOS: Okay. Hello, everyone.  
23 My name is Maria Rozos. I'm the master teacher  
24 here at Grover Cleveland High School, ESL  
25 Department.

1 [Applause]

2 MS. ROZOS: Officially speaking,  
3 approximately one in three students here at  
4 Grover Cleveland is either a current or former  
5 ESL student, and I'm sure the unofficial count  
6 is much, much higher. Let's look at the  
7 research: According to Dr. James Cummings, one  
8 of the world's leading authorities on second  
9 language acquisition, it takes a second language  
10 learner five to seven years to acquire academic  
11 language, the language needed to pass English  
12 exams, Regents exams in their second tongue,  
13 English. However, ESL students are held to the  
14 same standard as the mainstream native speakers  
15 of English, and are expected to graduate in four  
16 years, even though this goes against language  
17 theory and research. As a school...

18 [Applause]

19 MS. ROZOS: As a school, we work tirelessly  
20 to prepare our ESL students for college and  
21 careers. Some of our achievements are the  
22 following: We're a pioneer school in adopting  
23 the achieve 3000 program, a differentiated web-  
24 based program for our ESL population. Today  
25 this program has been adopted by most city

1 schools across New York City. We've recently  
2 received a grant which allows us to partner with  
3 Dr. Kay Kansala [phonetic], an expert in English  
4 language development, scholarship and classroom  
5 practice. We've implemented her 3D discuss,  
6 describe, debate program in several of our ESL  
7 classes in an effort to better serve our long-  
8 term ESL students. We've also partnered--

9 [Crosstalk]

10 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you - - comment to a  
11 close.

12 MS. ROZOS: --With CFES, College for Every  
13 Student, a nonprofit organization committed to  
14 helping underserved youth prepare for, to gain  
15 access to, and succeed in college. Through this  
16 partnership our ESL students are preparing for  
17 college, mentorship, and leadership.

18 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you.

19 MS. ROZOS: The fact that six out of the  
20 seven last valedictorians were students from  
21 immigrant families is a testament to our  
22 achievements.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. SOBELMAN: Ma'am, if you could wrap up.

25 MS. ROZOS: But the greatest accomplishment

1 of all of this is the safe and nurturing  
2 environment we've all created here at Grover  
3 Cleveland, where every student's culture and  
4 language is celebrated. It would be a great  
5 shame if this impressive work would come to an  
6 abrupt end. Please allow us the opportunity to  
7 continue the outstanding work we've begun here  
8 at Grover Cleveland High School. Thank you so  
9 much.

10 [Applause]

11 MR. COMAIANNI: I have to announce  
12 something, and I'm glad that everyone's speaking  
13 and saying their piece, which is very important,  
14 and contrary to what the lady said, we are  
15 listening. There are people on this dais who  
16 are listening to everything you have to say, but  
17 most importantly, we have a list of 70 speakers.  
18 When you have the time up sign, just finish off,  
19 try to put it within that two minutes--they'll  
20 give you a few seconds more, but the moderators  
21 are not trying to be rude. It's just very  
22 important, or we're going to be here till  
23 midnight. Just have respect--a lot of people  
24 want to speak, so once you get the tap just  
25 finish what you have to say and let's move on

1 with the instructions they have so everybody  
2 has no surprise. Once you go over the two  
3 minutes and if once they tap you and you just  
4 keep going, they're going to cut the microphone  
5 and go to the next speaker, okay? So let's move  
6 on, now--call the next speaker.

7 MS. SOBELMAN: Okay, so speaker number ten  
8 is Brett Green and before you get started, let  
9 me call up the next set of folks.

10 [Applause]

11 MS. SOBELMAN: Quickly, before you get  
12 started, I'm just going to call up the next set  
13 of folks, so hold on just one moment.

14 MR. COMAIANNI: Okay.

15 MS. SOBELMAN: Speaker number eleven, Donald  
16 Zigler.

17 [Applause]

18 MS. SOBELMAN: Number twelve, Mirit Jakab.  
19 Number twelve is Mirit Jakab. Number thirteen,  
20 Angel Acosta. Number fourteen, Matt Brown.  
21 Number fifteen, Joshua Perez. Number sixteen,  
22 Selena Vasquez. And number seventeen, Nita  
23 Durakovic. Go ahead, sir.

24 MR. BRETT GREEN: Okay. All right,  
25 distinguished panel, students, parents,

1 colleagues and guests, my name's Brett Green.  
2 I'm a music teacher here at Grover Cleveland  
3 High School. Thank you--that's eating into the  
4 time. I have been a member of this dedicated  
5 faculty for over 15 years. On behalf of the  
6 students, community, and staff I'm here to state  
7 my case as to why our school should not be  
8 closed. I'm not one to blow my own horn as it  
9 were, as I more often prefer to keep what I do  
10 in the background and not necessarily broadcast  
11 my contributions to both community and school.  
12 That said, however, now is as good a time as  
13 ever to talk about a few things that my  
14 colleagues and I have done to continue to enrich  
15 the lives of our students and of those within  
16 our wonderful community of Ridgewood. Our  
17 annual holiday music performances at the  
18 Bushwick-Ridgewood Senior Citizens Center have  
19 always been a highlight of the holiday season,  
20 both to our community and to our students who  
21 participate. I can wholeheartedly attest that  
22 all involved truly look forward to it. Our  
23 students acquire a greater sense of pride as  
24 they selflessly engage in giving back to their  
25 community through their participation in these

1 performances and our seniors are truly  
2 enthralled by the entertainment. Worthy of  
3 note, as well, is our ongoing partnership with  
4 the Grammy Foundation, which continues in  
5 generously affording scholarships and awards  
6 totaling in the thousands to our deserving  
7 students. Stated clearly on my behalf and of my  
8 colleagues, Grover Cleveland High School is our  
9 home. We really care about what happens here.  
10 Really? I'd like to tell you a story,  
11 illustrating this point, but unfortunately I'm  
12 out of time.

13 MS. SOBELMAN: If you want to submit it for  
14 the record, we can - - the record as well.

15 [Crosstalk]

16 MR. GREEN: In summation, I have related  
17 these details to you in an effort to provide you  
18 with just a few examples of the unrelenting  
19 commitment I happen to share with my esteemed  
20 colleagues for both our students and community.  
21 Our wonderful staff and I continue in our  
22 tireless efforts, devoting countless unpaid  
23 hours towards achieving outstanding academic  
24 excellence for all our students.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir.

2 MR. GREEN: In utmost honesty, I feel that  
3 this level of dedication is truly unmatched and  
4 you will be hard-pressed to find it anywhere  
5 else. Closing Grover Cleveland High School and  
6 replacing its staff represents an extreme error  
7 in judgment.

8 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir.

9 MR. GREEN: If you maintain your current  
10 course of action, you will be making a big  
11 mistake. Do not make a big mistake. Do not  
12 close Grover Cleveland High School.

13 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir.

14 [Applause]

15 MS. SOBELMAN: Speaker number 11, Donald  
16 Zigler?

17 [Applause]

18 MR. DONALD ZIGLER: - - Perfect.

19 MALE VOICE 1: Two minutes, two minutes.

20 MR. ZIGLER: I got you, two minutes.

21 Listen, I'd like to quote Abraham Lincoln. He  
22 said a government for the people, by the people,  
23 and the committee, SLC, and the people here have  
24 said Grover Cleveland should stay open. We  
25 teach our students that democracy works, that

1 when the people have a mandate, the elected  
2 officials should listen. Everybody here had  
3 said Grover Cleveland should stay open. Why  
4 should anybody say different? We teach our  
5 students that democracy works; majority rules.  
6 It's a disgrace that the impact statement was  
7 made without consultation with the community  
8 that's sitting right here. How dare you?

9 [Applause]

10 MR. ZIGLER: That is discrimination. How  
11 dare you? This is 2012 and not 1912.

12 [Applause]

13 MR. ZIGLER: Keep Cleveland open. The  
14 people have spoken. These students, these  
15 parents, the community has spoken. Listen to  
16 what they say. Your salary is taxpayer  
17 supported.

18 [Applause]

19 MR. ZIGLER: - - Taxpayer supported. The  
20 homes you live in is paid for by taxpayers.  
21 Leave Cleveland open. The bottom line here is  
22 the people here, the parents, the community want  
23 Cleveland open. It's a disgrace that you want  
24 to do something different. Cleveland rocks.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
2 number 12 is Mirit Jakab.

3 [Applause]

4 MS. MIRIT JAKAB: This is for the short  
5 people.

6 [Applause]

7 MS. JAKAB: So my name is Mirit Jakab and I  
8 teach English and drama here, and I wanted to  
9 read a letter that was sent to us by a parent in  
10 the community thanking us for one of the events  
11 that we ran over here. So the letter reads: "I  
12 would like to thank the staff, students of  
13 Grover Cleveland High School for hosting the  
14 fall festival on Friday, October the 28th of  
15 2011 for the students and the parents of PS153.  
16 Everyone who attended had a great time. The  
17 students from Grover Cleveland really put a lot  
18 of effort and time into making it a great night  
19 for all the children who attended. People  
20 complain about the school, but the students I  
21 met there on Friday are getting a very good  
22 education, and are learning to give back to the  
23 community by participating in these events. I  
24 hope there will be more events like this in the  
25 future at this school so that people can see the

1 great job that the staff is doing there, as  
2 well. The best part of the fall festival was  
3 the haunted house. The students acted like  
4 characters from various horror movies and spooky  
5 characters throughout the house. They really  
6 scared the kids and the parents of 153. The  
7 students were also very patient in explaining  
8 the activities to the children who attended the  
9 event. All the students and the staff that I  
10 encountered on a Friday at this school were  
11 friendly and knowledgeable. I hope that more of  
12 these family oriented events in Grover Cleveland  
13 High School will occur. There aren't that many  
14 in the area. Thank you. Sincerely, Charlene  
15 Stubbs, class of 1989."

16 [Applause]

17 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you very much. Speaker  
18 number 13, Angel Acosta.

19 MALE VOICE 1: Two minutes.

20 MR. ANGEL ACOSTA: Sure. My name is Angel  
21 Acosta. I'm a program director for a national  
22 nonprofit--it's called College for Every  
23 Student, and I want to talk to the community and  
24 share that over the last couple of years we've  
25 been able to work with the ESL population in

1 this school to help them in terms of  
2 leadership development and access to higher  
3 education. If you want to see the work we've  
4 been doing, on Wednesday we're taking 54  
5 students from the ESL program here to Roger  
6 Williams University in Providence, Rhode Island.  
7 We've seen improvements in student leadership.  
8 We've seen improvements in academic aspirations--  
9 --so that's for the community. Now, as far as  
10 the New York City Department of Education, this  
11 community outpour should be a reflection of how  
12 you need to stop with your managerial hopscotch.  
13 You need to stop with this bureaucratic hot  
14 potato.

15 [Applause]

16 MR. ACOSTA: And the last thing I'll say--  
17 I'll keep it really brief because we're getting  
18 the point: How is changing the school's name  
19 going to do anything when you're still operating  
20 under the same game?

21 [Applause]

22 MR. ACOSTA: Very simple: Just don't close  
23 the school. Thank you.

24 [Applause]

25 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker

1 number 14 is Matt Brown. Number 14, Matt  
2 Brown? Speaker number 15, Joshua Perez.

3 [Applause]

4 MALE VOICE 1: You have two minutes. - -

5 MR. JOSHUA PEREZ: Studies by an  
6 informational website known as KGB shows that  
7 the average time spent in school is 13 years.  
8 Most people choose to continue with at least  
9 another two years in college. In percentage,  
10 that is around 12%. We spend most of our  
11 childhood and early years in adulthood  
12 developing characteristics in school. Over the  
13 last three years, the faculty at Grover  
14 Cleveland has pushed me to pursue my career  
15 choice and my dream, and have grown on me as a  
16 tightknit family. The teachers are vast  
17 libraries of knowledge and who not only care  
18 about the students, but will not stop until we  
19 graduate the correct way. And after Bloomberg  
20 decides, it will be up to us, the politicians,  
21 bankers, congressmen, and simply the generation  
22 of tomorrow to fix the situation--maybe even  
23 Bloomberg's grandchildren and great-  
24 grandchildren. Cutting out faculty and changing  
25 the school around will only disrupt the molding

1 of our minds, and there is no need to disrupt  
2 us as the future of this school and the other 32  
3 on the list. Save our school and stop holding  
4 our school hostage.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. The next  
7 speaker is speaker number 16, Selena Vasquez.

8 MALE VOICE 1: - -

9 MS. SELENA VASQUEZ: All right.

10 [Background noise]

11 MS. VASQUEZ: Hello, my name is Selena  
12 Vasquez. I am a tenth grader and this school  
13 has changed my life. My teachers have  
14 encouraged me to join sports, get good grades  
15 and start getting ready for college. Changing  
16 50% of the current staff will not change the  
17 school in a positive way but in a negative way.  
18 Many of the students that attend or have  
19 attended Grover Cleveland High School have  
20 formed great relationships with current staff  
21 and have grown to trust them. Mr. Irizarry  
22 [phonetic] has been there for me when I needed  
23 someone to talk to.

24 [Applause]

25 MS. VASQUEZ: Mrs. Serrano [phonetic] has

1 also encouraged me to do my best and never  
2 give up on things in life.

3 [Applause]

4 MS. VASQUEZ: Mr. Sapolo [phonetic] and Mr.  
5 Suen [phonetic], Miss Jakab and Mr. Warner make  
6 learning in class fun and creates hands-on  
7 activities and incorporates real life situations  
8 in their lessons that can relate to students and  
9 catch their attention. They also make sure that  
10 every student is serious about continuing with  
11 career and college education. The staff and the  
12 school should not be penalized for something  
13 that is not their fault. The teachers have no  
14 control over the students' decision and it's the  
15 parents' responsibility to make sure the child  
16 is going to school and passing.

17 [Applause]

18 MS. VASQUEZ: This school offers many  
19 programs to help students succeed, so if  
20 students are not succeeding it is not the  
21 teachers' fault, and I am living proof of that.

22 [Applause]

23 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. So the  
24 next speaker is Nita...

25 MS. NITA DURAKOVIMR. ALVAREZ: Durakovic.

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Before you begin, let me  
2 just call up the next five speakers. Speaker  
3 number 18, Jonathan Morales. Speaker number 19,  
4 Alba De La Cruz. Number 20, Russ Nitchman.  
5 Number 21, Guy Lahora, and number 22, Alice  
6 Kasten. Please just announce yourself--I  
7 apologize, I didn't get your last name.

8 MS. DURAKOVIMR. ALVAREZ: Nita Durakovic.

9 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

10 MS. DURAKOVIMR. ALVAREZ: Hello, everyone.

11 FEMALE VOICE 1: I love you, Nita.

12 MS. DURAKOVIMR. ALVAREZ: My name is Nita  
13 Durakovic. I'm currently a senior of the class  
14 of 2012 and a Student Association vice  
15 president. I want to start off by thanking  
16 everyone in coming out tonight and supporting  
17 Grover Cleveland High School. This school has  
18 immense meaning, not only to me, not only to the  
19 teachers, but entire neighborhoods. Our school  
20 is very much involved in the community. We  
21 organize safe school functions for every season.  
22 Let me emphasize this once more: Safe school  
23 functions which are open to the community.  
24 These functions, such as the spring carnival,  
25 winter wonderland extravaganza are created and

1 organized in an approachable way. We feature  
2 kid-friendly activities such as face painting,  
3 movie rooms, theatre productions, and much more.  
4 The students and teachers work as hard as  
5 possible to produce amazing productions for the  
6 neighborhood. We go up and beyond to include  
7 Ridgewood and the outlying areas. In short,  
8 Grover Cleveland gives back. We are here for  
9 you, and in order to keep our legacy of giving  
10 back, you need to keep us open. We need your  
11 support. Thank you.

12 [Applause]

13 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
14 number 18, Jonathan Morales.

15 MR. JONATHAN MORALES: Greetings, members of  
16 the Grover Cleveland family. This school for  
17 many of us has become a home. Many of us bond  
18 with our teachers on a daily basis, in the  
19 lessons taught and examples shown by our  
20 teachers. Our teachers are the second most  
21 influential people we have in our lives. Our  
22 teachers are not just teachers. They are our  
23 second mothers and fathers and teach us valuable  
24 lessons just the same.

25 [Applause]

1           MR. MORALES: Those of us who are lucky  
2 enough to go to Grover Cleveland know that we  
3 are all a family. We form bonds so strong here  
4 that they can never break, and help mold us into  
5 the adults we are meant to be. This school has  
6 become an example to all schools which should do  
7 the same by welcoming an environment where  
8 values are instilled in us from the day we  
9 register, and those values are unity and  
10 diversity.

11           [Applause]

12           MR. MORALES: [foreign language 01:35:17]

13           [Applause]

14           MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much, sir. Next  
15 speaker is speaker number 19, Alba De La Cruz.

16           MS. ALBA DE LA CRUZ: Good evening students,  
17 parents, teachers and staff. Today we are  
18 gathered here concerning the issue of the  
19 closing our school, Grover Cleveland. I have  
20 come to love this school as a second home. In a  
21 short time I have come to love it all. As a  
22 student, I have had priceless moments that I  
23 will cherish forever and not trade for anything  
24 in this world. This school offers a lot of  
25 activities such as sports, leadership programs

1 and community involvement. I think this  
2 school should not close because the teachers  
3 here do everything within their power to help us  
4 students succeed. One of the teachers that has  
5 helped me a lot is Miss Robertson. Without her,  
6 I would never pass my English Regents with a  
7 score of an 83. And Mr. Valentine, and Mr.  
8 Lacastro [phonetic] who helped me write this  
9 speech.

10 [Applause]

11 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Next  
12 speaker is speaker number 20, Russ Nitchman.

13 [Applause]

14 MR. RUSSELL NITCHMAN: I know. Okay, I'm  
15 that plant science teacher, if you care to look  
16 at my greenhouse, it's overflowing. We planted  
17 zucchini and yellow squash today, which I don't  
18 think any other high school does. I will try to  
19 be respect, but you guys, the DOE, have made  
20 this personal. You're trying to take away my  
21 position. You're trying to hurt my students.  
22 So with all due respect and cordiality, I say to  
23 the DOE who support turnaround, shame on you.

24 [Applause]

25 MR. NITCHMAN: Come on. Chancellor Walcott

1 was here in the fall, and he promised--I  
2 wasn't there, but what I heard from multiple  
3 things--I will not close your school. Where has  
4 that promise gone? Like the previous speaker  
5 who spoke said are you listening--I've been to  
6 the pep rallies. You guys don't listen. The  
7 students don't want it. The parents don't want  
8 it. The teachers don't want it. The  
9 administrators don't want it. Our former  
10 principal doesn't want it. Our current  
11 principal doesn't want it--she loves her staff.  
12 Only the DOE wants it. Mr. Walcott, Mr.  
13 Bloomberg want it, and his cronies want it. Are  
14 they educators? No. Let the professionals make  
15 decisions. Keep our school open.

16 [Applause]

17 MR. NITCHMAN: Sir, we pour out our blood,  
18 sweat and tears for these kids. They're like  
19 our families, and I love them.

20 [Applause]

21 MR. NITCHMAN: All of our students do. A  
22 63% graduation rate is the City average. To  
23 fall three points below that and get on this  
24 list statistically is hardly a significant  
25 figure. Two years ago, in 2009, 2010, we had a

1 62% graduation rate. Why aren't we off this  
2 list? We can do this. We're shooting higher  
3 than 62%.

4 [Applause]

5 MS. SOBELMAN: Sir, if you could wrap up.

6 MR. NITCHMAN: The money, the \$58 million--  
7 it will cost us \$180 million to replace the  
8 teachers and put them as ATR. What is the  
9 difference between what Bloomberg's doing and  
10 being a prostitute? Doing anything for \$58  
11 million--he's doing this to us for \$58 million.  
12 Why?

13 [Applause]

14 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir.

15 [Background noise]

16 MS. SOBELMAN: Sir, before you get started,  
17 I have a request from the panel. We're going to  
18 take a five minute break. Ladies and gentlemen,  
19 I just want to let you know, we have a request  
20 from the panel. We're going to take a five  
21 minute bathroom break, but don't go too far  
22 because we will get started in five minutes,  
23 okay? If the panel members could make their way  
24 back up to the dais, we'll try and get started  
25 soon.

1 [Break in audio]

2 MALE VOICE 1: ...Gentlemen, please find our  
3 seats again. Ladies and gentlemen, can we  
4 please find our seats again?

5 [Break in audio]

6 MALE VOICE 1: Ladies and gentlemen, please  
7 find our seats again so we can continue.

8 [Break in audio]

9 MS. SOBELMAN: Good evening. Just to remind  
10 folks that I'm going to call up the next set of  
11 speaker, so speaker number 21 is Guy Lahora,  
12 number 22, Alice Kasten, and then I'll go ahead  
13 and call up the next five who can join us.  
14 Evelyn Lema, number 24 Anthony Sanchez, number  
15 25 Maria Lakas, number 26--oh, no, that's Kathy  
16 Carlson, she spoke. So number 27 is Kayla  
17 Serrano. And I think we have our panel so we'll  
18 just settle here for a moment and then you can  
19 get started.

20 MALE VOICE 1: Shh, shh.

21 [Background noise]

22 MS. SOBELMAN: You already spoke in the  
23 panel, though.

24 MR. GUY LAHORA: Do I start? Start now?

25 MS. SOBELMAN: She wants to speak a second

1 time. Okay.

2 [Background noise]

3 MS. SOBELMAN: Go ahead, speaker number 21.

4 MR. LAHORA: How you doing, everybody? I'm  
5 Guy Lahora. I'm a senior at Grover Cleveland.

6 [Applause]

7 MR. LAHORA: So I'm going to start off  
8 saying that some of these teachers had an impact  
9 on my life. I feel like we have a bond. These  
10 teachers are Miss Smith, Miss Jakab and Mr.  
11 Gill. These teachers have been there for me,  
12 like Mr. Gill--he would nag and nag me to read  
13 and write anything but I never did, and he would  
14 show me that he cared. Miss Smith is one of the  
15 best teachers out there. I remember a semester--  
16 -sorry, I remember one semester I would have a  
17 hard time writing. She would keep urging me to  
18 write and I would get upset. Then I realized  
19 she isn't just doing it because it's her job--  
20 she's doing it because she cares and she wants  
21 me to do good. So I thought about it, going  
22 into the new semester, and I was trying my  
23 hardest for her just to see her proud of me. I  
24 even went to tutoring and Miss Jacob was a  
25 teacher. I did not want to let Miss Jacob down,

1 so I tried my hardest for both of them, and to  
2 prove it I passed my English Regents, just for  
3 them.

4 [Applause]

5 MR. LAHORA: And for all my past English  
6 teachers I had. That shows how good these  
7 teachers are, and how much they care. They  
8 watched me grow into a better student. I don't  
9 want these teachers going anywhere. These are  
10 real teachers, the ones that care.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
13 number 22, Alice Kasten.

14 MS. ALICE KASTEN: Thank you. Yeah. Hi, my  
15 name is Alice Kasten. This is Thomas N. George  
16 [phonetic], and together we are the coordinators  
17 of the New York City Science Olympiad. Neither  
18 one of us are on the faculty of Grover  
19 Cleveland; we have no professional connection  
20 with Grover Cleveland, except that Grover  
21 Cleveland is wonderful enough to host the  
22 Science Olympiad and has been doing that for  
23 many, many years.

24 [Applause]

25 MS. KASTEN: I retired after 34 years

1 teaching science in New York City schools, not  
2 here, and I've been working as a science  
3 consultant in the schools for the past 11 years.  
4 I've been in a lot of schools. You can tell  
5 when you walk into a building whether or not the  
6 school is functioning. Grover Cleveland is  
7 functioning.

8 [Applause]

9 MS. KASTEN: I've been here a fair amount in  
10 my capacity as a coordinator of the Olympiad.  
11 So has Tom, and as I said, Cleveland has been  
12 hosting us for years. I've found the  
13 administration and the science faculty to be  
14 always professional and amazingly giving of  
15 their time. They volunteer their time, they  
16 come in on Saturdays, they help the kids, they  
17 help us. Passing classrooms, I find they're  
18 always orderly and instruction is going on. I  
19 was going to leave--I had signed up, but I was  
20 going to leave when I heard everybody saying the  
21 things that I was going to say about the Bridge  
22 Competition and the Lenovo grant and all of  
23 that, but I felt that it was important that you  
24 hear from somebody who's not intimately  
25 connected with the school, somebody who's not on

1 the faculty.

2 [Applause]

3 MS. KASTEN: Incidentally, I graduated from  
4 Jamaica High School which sadly no longer  
5 exists, and I would not like that to happen to  
6 Grover Cleveland.

7 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you very much.

8 MS. KASTEN: It's a very special place here.  
9 If you didn't know it before, you've certainly  
10 heard it over and over again this evening, and  
11 you don't close the door on those special  
12 places.

13 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

14 MS. KASTEN: Thank you.

15 [Applause]

16 MS. SOBELMAN: Speaker number 24 is Evelyn  
17 Lema.

18 MS. EVELYN LEMA: My name is Evelyn Lima,  
19 but in the end who I am makes no difference. I  
20 am a proud Hispanic. I am proud of my heritage,  
21 and proud to be from a diverse culture. But in  
22 the end, that makes no difference, because I am  
23 not here today representing myself, nor am I  
24 representing where I am from. I am here  
25 representing every culture, everyone. I am here

1 representing my family, the Grover Cleveland  
2 family that I as well as many others have been  
3 so openly accepted by. Throughout many years in  
4 Grover Cleveland, we have gone through rigorous  
5 and antagonistic phases which made us known as  
6 infamous to most people who hear this name.  
7 Like Grover Cleveland himself, we are  
8 misunderstood and not well known, and this is  
9 why we are being taken advantage of.

10 [Applause]

11 MS. LEMA: Grover Cleveland offers many  
12 programs, opportunities and experiences that in  
13 the end make us better people in the future.  
14 It's fair to say that such a school opens a gate  
15 to whoever feels broken down, lost, and  
16 forgotten. It's a shame that anyone would want  
17 to close this gate, a gate that often feels like  
18 God's gate to Eden over a dispute that won't go  
19 in favor towards them. It's a shame that the  
20 future of these kids are at stake and lie in the  
21 hands of what I see and can refer to as a bully.  
22 So the question rises: Bloomberg, why are you  
23 bullying these teachers? Why are you bullying  
24 these students? Why are you bullying these  
25 schools? The ignorance that you show may be

1 bliss to you, but to others causes - - and  
2 disarray. Grover Cleveland, since 1931, has  
3 grown in diversity, community, and programs.  
4 We've lasted through thick and thin. Being  
5 built since the Great Depression, we were built  
6 in an economically tough era and lasted to see  
7 prosperity and failure, and rest assured that we  
8 will fight to see more. Si se puede--yes we  
9 can. We can and we will fight to keep this  
10 tradition going.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. LEMA: I'm not asking for a billion  
13 dollars--Bloomberg, you can have that. I'm not  
14 asking to run for mayor--Bloomberg, you can keep  
15 that. I am asking for a reasonable proposition--  
16 -keep Grover Cleveland open. Give us a chance,  
17 because with the hard work that we've been  
18 doing, and the great efforts we've been putting  
19 in, we promise that Grover Cleveland won't be  
20 just that school in Ridgewood. Grover Cleveland  
21 will be that school that made the impossible  
22 possible.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Thank you  
25 so much.

1 MS. LEMA: Now that I think of it, I laugh  
2 to myself. Walking into this school, walking up  
3 the stairs to my fourth period class, I saw a  
4 huge sign rise above me. This sign read "No  
5 place for hate." I didn't think I would need to  
6 make use of that sign, as it didn't apply to me,  
7 but now I see that it can be of use, so  
8 Bloomberg, if your mission is to close us down,  
9 if your mission is to bully us until we plummet  
10 to the ground, if for one second you think that  
11 what you're doing is right, then all I have to  
12 say is laissez faire, hands off, let it be,  
13 because bullying is a crime of hate, and Grover  
14 Cleveland is no place for hate.

15 [Applause]

16 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you.

17 [Applause]

18 MS. SOBELMAN: Our next speaker is speaker  
19 number 24, Anthony Sanchez, and as Mr. Sanchez  
20 is making his way I do want to just remind  
21 folks--we've got a young lady in the front who's  
22 going to hold up a sign to let you know you've  
23 reached 30 seconds and then to let you know that  
24 time has elapsed. If we could try and keep it  
25 closer to the two minutes, we do have a very

1 long list of speakers. Mr. Sanchez?

2 MALE VOICE 1: Two minutes. - -

3 MR. ANTHONY SANCHEZ: I got you. Hey, guys,  
4 I graduated in 2000 from Grover Cleveland.

5 [Applause]

6 MR. SANCHEZ: You guys are ridiculously  
7 awesome, by the way.

8 [Applause]

9 MR. SANCHEZ: I mean, in my 12 years being  
10 out of Cleveland I've noticed that in life and  
11 in love there are things that aren't completely  
12 clear. There are issues that arise and can't  
13 simply be swept under the rug in order to move  
14 on. These are areas in life that are called the  
15 gray areas. These moments and situations don't  
16 merit a yes or a no answer. They require deep  
17 thought and much soul searching. They require  
18 you to seek out a solution from a place that is  
19 not bound by the propriety or efficiency of  
20 empirical data, although the data does point in  
21 favor to Cleveland. But it is bound to the  
22 hearts of the people that are affected. I think  
23 it's safe to call what Bloomberg is doing evil.  
24 It's evil to break families apart. At Grover  
25 Cleveland, we are a family. When I was here in

1 2000 and from what I can see, it still remains  
2 the same.

3 [Applause]

4 MR. SANCHEZ: The things I learned here at  
5 Cleveland have served as an anchor for me for  
6 the last 12 years. God and music have been a  
7 lifeline for over a decade for me. God I  
8 received because of his love for me, and music,  
9 that I got here with Mr. Green at Grover  
10 Cleveland High School. Edmund Burke said it  
11 best, and I'll finish with this: The only  
12 necessary for the triumph of evil is for good  
13 men to sit around and do nothing. We won't.

14 [Applause]

15 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. And speaker  
16 number 25, Maria Lakas?

17 [Applause]

18 MALE VOICE 1: - -

19 MS. MARIA LAKAS: Thank you. Yeah.

20 MALE VOICE 1: - -

21 MS. LAKAS: Okay. Okay. My name is Maria  
22 Lakas and I have been an English teacher here at  
23 Grover Cleveland High School for the past 13  
24 years. I'm glad to see that you're looking now,  
25 because I noticed that when the students were up

1 here, I noticed that you weren't looking.

2 [Applause]

3 MS. LAKAS: I noticed that you were chewing  
4 your gum, and you put your head down, and you  
5 weren't paying attention to them. But I like it  
6 now that you're looking at me because we're--  
7 maybe, I'm probably older than you, but I'll  
8 tell you one thing. My story with this school  
9 goes back a long time ago. However, as an  
10 English teacher, part of what we teach our  
11 students is irony. As a teenager, my mother  
12 tried to get me out of Bushwick High School and  
13 into Grover Cleveland High School for a safety  
14 transfer, and I was turned down, even though I  
15 lived in Himrod Street--just not close enough  
16 Himrod Street. Was it irony or was it fate? I  
17 did my student teaching here and then I was  
18 hired right off the bat. Okay, was it irony or  
19 fate? I don't know. Coming to teach here for  
20 me was one of the best things that ever happened  
21 to me because I became involved with students.  
22 For us, for me, in particular, I was accepted as  
23 a hip, mother-like figure to these kids, and  
24 this is something that all the data and all that  
25 you have here, and all, like, the student before

1 me said, this empirical data, this is about  
2 real feelings. I still maintain a connection  
3 with my students--13 years it's been since I've  
4 been here, and we still communicate with each  
5 other. Our motto here is "unity in diversity."  
6 We need to show everybody here that we get along  
7 and that we will work hard with the students  
8 here. They all know that we work hard, harder  
9 than anybody to get you guys where you need to  
10 be in life.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

13 MS. LAKAS: So please--

14 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

15 MS. LAKAS: Make sure that you think  
16 carefully before you close this school down,  
17 because we're not going down without a fight.

18 [Applause]

19 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. And the  
20 next speaker is speaker number 26, Kathy  
21 Carlson.

22 MALE VOICE 1: Two minutes.

23 MS. CARLSON: Hi, I'm Kathy Carlson, the PA  
24 president, but I also wanted to talk about my  
25 son who's here. The staff has a great impact on

1 the lives of many students I've met in this  
2 school, and my son is one of them. My son's  
3 been here four years and he's graduating in  
4 June. The dedicated and caring teachers here  
5 have helped my son become an honors student.  
6 His computer teachers have given him the skills  
7 to build a computer at home after a few weeks in  
8 his computer class. He's taken several computer  
9 classes now and he's been building computers,  
10 diagnosing them and setting up computer  
11 networks. He helps maintain the school's  
12 website and has a part-time job fixing computers  
13 thanks to Grover Cleveland High School.

14 [Applause]

15 MS. CARLSON: Grover Cleveland High School's  
16 been very good for my son, and he plans to study  
17 computer technology and college in September,  
18 and I want to thank all the teachers and the  
19 staff here who have helped him excel and helped  
20 him find his career as they have many other  
21 students.

22 [Applause]

23 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Our next  
24 speaker is speaker number 27, Kayla Serrano, and  
25 before you begin, let me just call up the next

1 five speakers. Amanda Reyez, number 29 is  
2 Vashtee Haran--excuse me, Ragoonanan. Number 30  
3 is Flerines DeJesus, number 31 Edina Music, 32  
4 Adrian Bordoni, and 33 Brian Gavin. Number 27?

5 MALE VOICE 1: Speak into the top of the  
6 mike.

7 MS. KAYLA SERRANO: Okay. Hi. My name is  
8 Kayla Serrano and I have attended Grover  
9 Cleveland High School for the past two years,  
10 and I am in fact a graduating senior.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. SERRANO: I am a student in the  
13 dramatics class and I would like to tell you  
14 about our school activities that do not show up  
15 in your statistics. In the beginning of March,  
16 myself and the fellow members of the drama class  
17 put together a bullying play. On the news were  
18 constant stories of teenagers committing suicide  
19 over being bullied at school. This really made  
20 us wonder if we can stop this issue before it  
21 reached that point here at Grover Cleveland. We  
22 quickly put together a play which showed the  
23 many ways of bullying, and after the play so  
24 many students came up to me and the other actors  
25 telling us how the play not only affected them

1 but was able to help them one way or another.  
2 Aside from the bullying play, we have put on a  
3 winter fall festival for the middle and  
4 elementary schools. The fall festival had  
5 haunted house and a safe trick or treating for  
6 the kids. The winter festival had a place for  
7 the children to take pictures with Santa, a  
8 movie room, cookie and ornament decorating, and  
9 a play about Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa,  
10 showing the different aspects of each culture.  
11 Both festivals included free food and raffles  
12 for the kids and parents to get free things.  
13 All of these events have helped us to give back  
14 to the community, and helped us to learn real  
15 life communication skills. These things would  
16 not have come to life if this was really a bad  
17 school. In fact, this school and our teachers  
18 are actually pretty great. I really wouldn't  
19 want to see the teachers that taught me most of  
20 what I know to be placed in another community  
21 because they are beneficial in Ridgewood, and  
22 the entire community would suffer if the  
23 turnaround model would go into effect. Thank  
24 you for listening.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

2 Speaker number 28, Amanda Reyez.

3 MS. AMANDA REYEZ: All right, got you. I  
4 have in no way disrespect for the individuals  
5 who are trying to make changes in the school.  
6 In my opinion, I'm sure someone can agree--not  
7 all changes are good and for the best. Do not  
8 give us a new name on a white sheet and call it  
9 helping because it's really not. You can avoid  
10 conflict and all the problems that we've been  
11 having, supposedly, but it's everywhere. Also,  
12 involving our teachers, we need teachers to  
13 understand us Grover Cleveland students, which  
14 is what we have already. I'm not looking at us  
15 as a species, but as a union, a group of  
16 developed people who are helping the developing.  
17 I speak to the people who know who they are.  
18 Having your face in a billboard is nothing like  
19 seeing the faces of students such as myself  
20 succeed in troubling time. Who are you,  
21 shutting us down? We own this. You got nothing  
22 on us.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. Speaker number  
25 29, and please do introduce yourself. I know I

1 didn't get your name right.

2 MS. VASHTEE RAGOONANAN: Hello. My name is  
3 Vashtee Ragoonanan. I am the Student  
4 Association Secretary at Grover Cleveland High  
5 School.

6 [Applause]

7 MS. RAGOONANAN: Throughout my four years at  
8 this school, I have experienced nothing but  
9 positive things. With the help of the  
10 outstanding teachers and staff, my fellow  
11 classmates and I have become incredible scholars  
12 as well as well-rounded people. My peers are  
13 able to balance their academics, sports, jobs,  
14 as well as other extracurricular activities.  
15 Being able to juggle all of these things have  
16 paid off greatly. We have alumni and current  
17 seniors who have been accepted to schools like  
18 MIT, NYU, Columbia, Adelphi, Fordham, Barnard,  
19 Penn State, Pace and many more. Our students  
20 and staff should not be held accountable for the  
21 few students that have not performed to the best  
22 of their abilities. Shutting down our school  
23 will not help the students in any way. If 50%  
24 of our staff will be gone, that means the  
25 student-teacher bonds will be broken. When

1 these bonds are broken, students lose their  
2 interest in class and in their work. Isn't that  
3 what we're trying to prevent? This turnaround  
4 model will not help our school. Thank you.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. Speaker number  
7 30, Flerines DeJesus?

8 MS. FLERINES DEJESUS: Thank you. Welcome  
9 teachers, students, fellow classmates and staff  
10 members. My name is Flerines DeJesus. I am a  
11 junior in Grover Cleveland High school.  
12 Cleveland needs to stay open as a school. Yes,  
13 there are some things that have to change, but  
14 me and my fellow classmates have taken the  
15 school as a second home. There are bonds that  
16 cannot be broken with students, teachers, and  
17 staff members. Teachers have put everything  
18 they go to help us all, and all that effort  
19 might just go to waste. Our futures depend on  
20 us and on the ones who don't want to give up.  
21 Here, we are encouraged to keep moving forward.  
22 We are comfortable and safe. They help us  
23 realize who and what we want to be. There are  
24 events that I want to cherish and keep with me.  
25 I have met great people who have helped me

1 through so much, and helped me through some  
2 very tough times. We will all feel devastated  
3 if this school closes down. Thank you for  
4 giving us the opportunity to hear our voices.  
5 Please do not close our school down. Thank you.

6 [Applause]

7 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
8 number 31, Edina Music? Number 31, Edina Music?  
9 Number 32, Adrian Bordonì?

10 FEMALE VOICE 1: - -

11 MS. SOBELMAN: Great, thank you so much.  
12 Number 33, Brian Gavin.

13 [Applause]

14 MS. SOBELMAN: Oh, actually, before you go,  
15 let me call up the next five, sorry.

16 MR. GAVIN: It's okay.

17 MS. SOBELMAN: Number 34, Michelle Abraskin-  
18 -

19 MR. GAVIN: Abraskin.

20 MS. SOBELMAN: Number 35, James Vasquez.  
21 Number 36, Charles Gering. Number 37 from the  
22 panel already spoke. 38, Enahi Nushi. Okay.

23 MR. GAVIN: Okay, go? My name is Brian  
24 Gavin. I've been teaching special education at  
25 Grover Cleveland High School for 22 years and

1 I'm also the UFT chapter leader at Cleveland.  
2 For the past few years, the students and staff  
3 members have lived under the threat of the  
4 imposition of one of these federal models, the  
5 latest being turnaround. I can't begin to  
6 describe the effects that this has had and will  
7 have in the future on the entire school  
8 community. Students are anxious, upset at the  
9 prospect of losing their favorite teacher,  
10 scrambling to get college recommendations before  
11 their teachers are forced out, concerned that  
12 during their all-important senior and junior  
13 years, they will have teachers that are  
14 inexperienced, don't know them or their  
15 community, leaving them unprepared for colleges  
16 and careers. Students are afraid that classes  
17 and programs they've been looking forward to  
18 attending will be unavailable. Grover Cleveland  
19 has been a safe and secure haven for all kinds  
20 of students. We accept everyone and work hard  
21 to meet student needs. The kids know this, and  
22 they fear that their safe haven will disappear.  
23 Their job is to learn. The actions of the DOE  
24 have forced them into becoming advocates for  
25 their school instead of preparing for college

1 and a career. Alex Mormon [phonetic], past  
2 student representative on the SLT and student  
3 body president confronted not one but three  
4 chancellors as an advocate for our school. She  
5 sat on a panel with Joel Klein and Cathie Black.  
6 When Alex confronted Chancellor Black,  
7 Chancellor Black got a panicked look on her face  
8 and was rescued by a subordinate, who promised  
9 to answer her questions in a future email.  
10 Needless to say, that never happened and not  
11 long after that, we had a new chancellor. I  
12 guess the mayor has not yet learned the dangers  
13 of unilateral kneejerk reactions as he seeks to  
14 implement turnaround in retaliation for his  
15 inability to impose an agreement on teacher  
16 evaluation with the UFT. Alex went up to Dennis  
17 Walcott at the UFT Spring Education Conference  
18 she was attending with the entire School  
19 Leadership Team last May, and spoke with him  
20 regarding the school. In October, Chancellor  
21 Walcott visited our school, and Geline Canayon  
22 who succeeding Alex as student rep on the SLT,  
23 escorted the chancellor around the building.  
24 According to Geline, the chancellor liked what  
25 he saw, and related that the school was not as

1 had been represented to him. Yet--

2 MS. SOBELMAN: Sir, if you could wrap up.  
3 If you could just bring it to close.

4 MR. GAVIN: Okay, sorry.

5 MS. SOBELMAN: And if you have additional  
6 testimony to submit, please do.

7 MR. GAVIN: That's all right. I'll just  
8 close now. Thank you.

9 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

10 [Applause]

11 MS. SOBELMAN: Speaker number 34, Michelle  
12 Abraskin.

13 MS. MICHELLE ABRASKIN: Hello. I am  
14 Michelle Abraskin. I am a social studies  
15 teacher at this school, and an AP psychology  
16 teacher.

17 [Applause]

18 MS. ABRASKIN: I came here six years ago. I  
19 used to be involved in social work and I came  
20 here six years ago and I could not have imagined  
21 working with a better staff or with a better  
22 group of students. I've worked with students of  
23 all levels and in every level, whether they have  
24 problems with English, whether they're ESL,  
25 whether they have trouble writing--whatever it

1 is, they work hard, and I'm talking not only  
2 of the staff, but of the students themselves.  
3 And people keep saying that this is like a  
4 family here, and I very much agree with that,  
5 that there is a nurturing environment in this  
6 school. I think the students see it, even if  
7 they're not here, many of them have spoken about  
8 that outside of this meeting, and I think that  
9 needs to be taken into consideration. These  
10 schools on this list, you need to look at them  
11 individually and I don't really think that's  
12 being done like it should be. There is a lot  
13 that goes on in this school that is very, very  
14 good and there have been things that people have  
15 said all night. I'll just add a few more that  
16 weren't said--the debate team in this school, we  
17 do Lincoln Douglas debating.

18 [Applause]

19 MS. ABRASKIN: Three years ago we came in  
20 first place in New York City. Last year, we  
21 came in the semifinals, and we are debating  
22 again this year, hopefully to a win.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. ABRASKIN: There's also the Gisele  
25 [phonetic] program that we've implemented in

1 this school that has a 90 minute class of  
2 history and English combined for ESL students,  
3 and I will tell you, I've never seen students  
4 work harder and I've never seen better results,  
5 and it shows. And it is extremely important to  
6 keep programs like this going, and this school  
7 is a pioneer in that sort of involvement between  
8 different departments, and I couldn't imagine  
9 working with anybody else. And that's what I  
10 have to say.

11 [Applause]

12 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
13 number 35, James Vasquez.

14 MR. JAMES VASQUEZ: Good evening. Thank  
15 you. Good evening. I'm James Vasquez. I'm the  
16 district representative for Queens high schools  
17 for the United Federation of Teachers, and I've  
18 been here many times at Grover Cleveland, and I  
19 have question a for you, Deputy Chancellor, and  
20 for the chancellor and for the mayor: Are you  
21 listening to the community? Are you actually  
22 listening to the people?

23 [Applause]

24 MR. VASQUEZ: for the last 10 years, the  
25 mayor's failed policies of education here have

1 sat there and turned out crowds and crowds of  
2 students, parents, and educators sitting there  
3 telling them that the chancellor is wrong or  
4 that the mayor is wrong, but you still do  
5 whatever it is that you politically want. In  
6 January you said it was about evaluations. You  
7 said it was about the \$58 million. Well, now  
8 there's the possibility for an evaluation and  
9 yet you still don't want to come to an  
10 agreement. In fact, in your EIS statement, you  
11 sit there and say that even if there's an  
12 evaluation and even if you don't get the \$58  
13 million, you're still going to go forward. Why?  
14 Because it's all a political game. This is not  
15 about education for these kids, or any of the 33  
16 schools in the city.

17 [Applause]

18 MR. VASQUEZ: The fact that you guys have  
19 even admitted today by sitting there and  
20 releasing seven of these schools from the 33  
21 that you're looking to close says that you guys  
22 know that you are wrong. It is a political game  
23 that you are playing.

24 [Applause]

25 MR. VASQUEZ: We know what happens at the

1 Panel for Education Policy. The only reason  
2 it's there, the only reason it's a public  
3 display at all is because the law says so. The  
4 only reason you are here now, the only reason  
5 you have parents and community leaders here now  
6 is because the law said so, because if the law  
7 didn't say it, you would do whatever you guys  
8 wanted anyway.

9 [Applause]

10 MR. VASQUEZ: To be clear, to be clear, many  
11 of these schools that you guys decided today  
12 that were not going to be put on the closure and  
13 the turnaround list that you guys said didn't  
14 even have these public meetings like this, so  
15 you guys know you're wrong. It's about time you  
16 sat there and did something for our kids. Don't  
17 close Grover Cleveland or any of these schools.

18 [Applause]

19 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Next is  
20 speaker number 36, Charles Gering.

21 MR. CHARLES GERING: Good evening. My name  
22 is Charles Gering, and I'm the past president of  
23 the Glendale Kiwanis Club. For the past six  
24 years, I have been the glee club advisor to the  
25 Grover Cleveland Kiwanis Key Club. The key club

1 is comprised of students of Grover Cleveland  
2 High school who wish to better the communities  
3 in which they reside. Some of the recent  
4 activities that they have engaged in are a  
5 cleanup of Grover Cleveland Park. They planted  
6 light bulbs--I'm sorry, not light bulbs, tulip  
7 bulbs in the median at the Union Turnpike and  
8 Myrtle Avenue. They did holiday bell ringing on  
9 behalf of the Salvation Army, and they visited  
10 senior citizens centers to sing and read to the  
11 guests. So you see, closing Grover Cleveland  
12 would deprive the community of many of these  
13 worthwhile benefits that the glee club engages  
14 in. So I urge you, on behalf of the community,  
15 don't close Grover Cleveland High school.

16 [Applause]

17 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you very much. Speaker  
18 number 38. If you would just introduce  
19 yourself.

20 MS. ENAHI NUSHI: Yeah. My name is Enahi  
21 Nushi, and I'm a sophomore of Grover Cleveland  
22 High School and a part of the student council.  
23 I would like to thank you all so much for being  
24 here today to save our school from closing. Let  
25 me tell you some facts about our school. It is

1 separated in different academies--hospitality  
2 and tourism, art and design, information and  
3 technology, and engineering, and as a part of  
4 the academy of art and design, I can say that it  
5 is helping me a lot to create an idea of what I  
6 want to do in my further education. I am  
7 learning how to use Adobe Illustrator and  
8 Photoshop, among many other programs that I  
9 would not learn in a typical high school.  
10 Overall, the way the school is structured  
11 currently is helping me achieve my career and  
12 college goals, and therefore it should remain  
13 the same. Overall, we have dedicated teachers  
14 that are always willing to help us, and they  
15 should too remain here. Well, thank you again  
16 for being here. I hope all the support will  
17 save Grover Cleveland High School from closing.

18 [Applause]

19 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
20 number 37--and quickly before you get started,  
21 if I could just call up the next set. We have  
22 James Vasquez again, so number 40 is Jesus  
23 Alvarez, excuse me. 41 is Eliana Crespo, 42  
24 Xiomara Rosario, 43 Danny Vargas, Sr.

25 MS. CANAYON: Hello. I'm Geline. I'm here

1 again in front of all of you. Four years  
2 ago, I started as a freshman in this school.  
3 Also, four years ago, I came to this country. I  
4 was lost and in culture shock, but with the help  
5 and coordination of all the departments in this  
6 building, I found my place. There was always  
7 help available to me when I needed it, whether  
8 it was 6 in the morning or 7 at night. This  
9 applies to more than half of the students in  
10 this school. Every soul in this school strives  
11 to achieve success. We have already turned  
12 around our school from the persistently low  
13 achieving school that you believed us to be to a  
14 fully functioning very efficient high school.  
15 Now you want us to turn around again--simple law  
16 of physics, if you turn around twice, you go  
17 back to where you came from.

18 [Applause]

19 MS. CANAYON: We are already moving forward,  
20 so just leave us alone and don't hinder our  
21 progress. Thank you.

22 [Applause]

23 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
24 number 40?

25 MR. JESUS ALVAREZ: All right. I would like

1 to present myself, but then I thought, I'm  
2 just another statistic to you, so what's the  
3 point? Well, outside of that auditorium there  
4 is supposedly the DOE's plan to adjust the  
5 school, to fix the school, but in reality it's  
6 just going to disrupt the flow and the system of  
7 this school. As a junior of this school, I've  
8 already set a system--I've gotten comfortable  
9 with these teachers, but with this plan, 50% of  
10 the teachers would be gone, and what kind of  
11 comfort are we going to find in that? Coming  
12 next year without 50% of the teachers would be  
13 like starting all over again, and just like the  
14 speaker before me said, she said that if you go  
15 behind twice you're going to come back to where  
16 you originally were which makes absolutely no  
17 sense, so where's the logic in that?

18 [Applause]

19 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
20 number 41, Eliana Crespo.

21 MS. ELIANA CRESPO: Yeah, that's fine. Good  
22 evening. My name is Eliana Crespo and I'm  
23 currently a senior at Grover Cleveland. First,  
24 let me start off by saying I can't grasp that  
25 our school is on the verge of being closed down,

1 because there are amazing teachers that have  
2 changed my life here. Miss Smith, my English  
3 teacher, opened my eyes to seeing the truth  
4 behind college. I learned to be more  
5 responsible, outspoken, and take on any  
6 challenge. Honestly, it's an educator like her  
7 that makes a student. Someone who can motivate  
8 you, someone who pushes you beyond your own  
9 limit. These are the teachers we have at Grover  
10 Cleveland, who care and actually love their job.  
11 Because of teachers like Miss Smith, you have  
12 students--students like me who are optimistic  
13 and are open to learning something new every  
14 day. But teachers aren't the only ones who make  
15 a student at Grover Cleveland--coaches do also.  
16 My volleyball coach, Miss Dowadoska [phonetic],  
17 she is truly an incredible woman.

18 [Applause]

19 MS. CRESPO: She is an educator, a coach,  
20 and my role model. Not only do I look up to  
21 her; I also learn from her. I learn how to be a  
22 leader and work hard for anything it is I want.  
23 Being a part of a team helped me to grow in  
24 various aspects. With all I've acknowledged, I  
25 know it will take me a long way in college and

1 in my life. Because of my experiences at  
2 Grover Cleveland, I find myself, I've found  
3 myself, and I've found my identity, so why would  
4 you close us down? It makes no sense.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
7 number 42, Xiomara Rosario?

8 MS. XIOMARA ROSARIO: Hi. I'm Xiomara  
9 Rosario. I'm a senior at Grover Cleveland High  
10 School. I've been here for three years. I  
11 originally didn't start here--I was at John  
12 Adams High School, and because of my prior  
13 experience in John Adams, I know what it is to  
14 have teachers who really don't care, who tell  
15 you to your face that whether you do homework or  
16 not or show up, that they get paid anyway. So  
17 coming here to Grover Cleveland, I got the total  
18 opposite experience, and when I came here I was  
19 pretty surprised that teachers actually cared  
20 whether I did my homework or not, or whether I  
21 showed up to class, or whether I did what I had  
22 to do, or whether or not they cared that I  
23 graduated on time or early. I've never had that  
24 before until I came here, and you know what? I  
25 have a little sister that's in junior high

1 school and if she chose Grover Cleveland as  
2 an option to come to high school, I'd be so  
3 proud of her. But I would be hurt if she  
4 couldn't experience being on a bowling team with  
5 Mr. Fitz.

6 [Applause]

7 MS. ROSARIO: Or having volleyball for gym  
8 with Mr. Sullivan and Miss Broderick, and being  
9 with Mr. Morisi for wrestling.

10 [Applause]

11 MS. ROSARIO: Or having Miss Smith as an  
12 English teacher, Mr. Catalano, Mr. Calls for  
13 math--these teachers are amazing, and there's so  
14 many more other teachers on the staff that I  
15 can't even name because it's such an amazing  
16 staff here that's taught me so much and has  
17 given me experience that I'm never going to have  
18 again. And I know that I'm leaving but give us  
19 a chance, give Cleveland a chance, give the next  
20 kids a chance, give these amazing teachers--you  
21 don't know them, but we do, and you have to give  
22 them a chance, because you know what? They've  
23 blessed my life and they're going to bless the  
24 next kids coming. So thank you for listening.

25 [Applause]

1 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. So speaker  
2 number 43 is Danny Vargas, and before you get  
3 started, I'm just going to call up the next set.  
4 Number 44 is Bryant Asprilla, number 45, Gabriel  
5 Vargas, number 46 Roslyn Sternllet, 47 Jessica  
6 Klett, and 48 Elizabeth Clark. Sir?

7 MR. DANNY VARGAS: Yes, good evening. My  
8 name is Mr. Danny Vargas, senior, and I am a  
9 parent, and my son attends currently here at  
10 Grover Cleveland. He's in the special ed.  
11 Program and I want to say that he's been coming  
12 here for the last three years, and he's been  
13 making achievements due to the wonderful  
14 teachers that they have in the school that have  
15 dedication to making the students be able to  
16 achieve graduation status, and I want to say,  
17 not to close Grover Cleveland because it is a  
18 wonderful school. It's a community school, and  
19 I also come here and I volunteer my time to work  
20 with the PTA staff. I am not getting paid for  
21 this. This is out of my goodness and good will  
22 to be able to help the students and the teachers  
23 here to make this a better school.

24 [Applause]

25 MR. VARGAS: And I ask that you not take

1 these students' expectations away. Let them  
2 achieve their goals and let them become pillars  
3 of this school for years to come. Let them  
4 graduate. Do not let them go down and take away  
5 Grover Cleveland and bring the whole thing down.  
6 Let's build it back up and build a fortress and  
7 let these kids get the careers that they  
8 deserve. Thank you.

9 [Applause]

10 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Thank you,  
11 sir. Speaker number 44, Bryant Asprilla.  
12 Number 44?

13 MR. BRYANT ASPRILLA: Hello. My name is  
14 Bryant Asprilla, but the City probably knows me  
15 better as student 269228342.

16 [Applause]

17 MR. ASPRILLA: I would just like to remind  
18 you all of the sacrifices that will be made if  
19 you close down Grover Cleveland. You will take  
20 away the pride of former students looking back  
21 at their glory days here. What do you expect  
22 them to say when, what do you expect them to  
23 respond to the question "Where is your old high  
24 school?" You will destroy the personal  
25 relationships that are built by teachers, such

1 as for me personally, Mr. Gill, who guides my  
2 new found passion for philosophy, Mr. Green who  
3 inspired my musical drive, Miss Gluck [phonetic]  
4 who helps my pursuit of a proud military career,  
5 Miss Baile [phonetic] who takes the time out of  
6 her busy schedule to give me wonderful life-  
7 changing advice. But the sacrifice that pains  
8 me the most, the sacrifice of the proud clubs  
9 and teams that help students grow as responsible  
10 citizens--if the school closes down, there will  
11 be no home for the Grover Cleveland Tigers.

12 [Applause]

13 MR. ASPRILLA: I am a Grover Cleveland  
14 wrestler. I am a Grover Cleveland Tiger. Don't  
15 take that away from me.

16 [Applause]

17 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
18 number 45, Gabrielle Vargas.

19 MR. GABRIEL VARGAS: It's actual Gabriel  
20 Vargas, so just clearing that up. Hi, I'm a  
21 senior at Grover Cleveland High School. These  
22 past few years have been some of the best years  
23 of my life. The teachers in the school are so  
24 wonderful and they help me through my everyday  
25 life getting through each day by day doing the

1 best that I can. I actually have Tourette's  
2 Syndrome so all my middle school life I was  
3 teased by a whole bunch of people for like, what  
4 I have, and when I came to this school I felt  
5 more welcome here, more safe in this school than  
6 I had ever in my life. Like, the kids here are  
7 warming, the teachers here are helpful, and  
8 like, they really care about you a lot. I have  
9 teachers--when I was here, I was unsure about  
10 what I was going to do, and I didn't know what I  
11 was going to do for college. Then I took a  
12 psychology class with Miss Larenzoni [phonetic],  
13 one of my favorite teachers, and she helped me a  
14 lot and guided me and now I actually want to go  
15 to college and study psychology, so by taking  
16 away these teachers and closing down the school,  
17 you're making a big mistake because this school  
18 is not only a school, but it's also our second  
19 home and our family. Thank you.

20 [Applause]

21 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
22 number 46, Roslyn Sternllet.

23 MS. ROSLYN STERNLLET: Hi, my name is Roslyn  
24 Sternllet. I am the former college counselor at  
25 Grover Cleveland High School.

1 [Applause]

2 MS. STERNLETT: I retired three years ago.  
3 When I think of the immigrant population at  
4 Grover Cleveland high school, I think of my  
5 father. I think of the year 1923, when he  
6 arrived in the United States from Poland. He  
7 did not have the opportunity to attend high  
8 school here. Now, 2012, immigrants are arriving  
9 at the same age as my dad, and enrolling in our  
10 high school, graduating, and attending college.  
11 But it is not within their cohort group, so  
12 instead of the color photograph of these  
13 students being looked at, the mayor and the  
14 Department of Education are looking at the black  
15 and white--numbers. Numbers is what they're  
16 looking at, not the child and the fact that this  
17 child at Grover Cleveland High School learns the  
18 English language, graduates, and becomes quite  
19 successful. The wonderful, caring staff at  
20 Grover Cleveland High School looks at the child  
21 and says "How can I help him or her become  
22 successful?" These students may not graduate in  
23 the cohort group, but they do graduate and go on  
24 to become successful citizens. In my tenure as  
25 college advisor at Grover Cleveland high School,

1 I worked with this wonderful, amazing,  
2 hardworking, caring staff. It was an honor and  
3 privilege to work with them.

4 [Applause]

5 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
6 number 47, Jessica Klett?

7 MS. JESSICA KLETT: My last name is actually  
8 Klett, not Kleet.

9 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you.

10 MS. KLETT: My name is Jessica Klett, and I  
11 am from the Grover Cleveland High School class  
12 of 2010. Even before I graduated, I was aware  
13 of the constant nitpicking that has been  
14 targeted at our school. With every school,  
15 there are always things that must be worked on,  
16 but I never imagined that Grover Cleveland would  
17 receive such verbal abuse in regards to its  
18 students and teachers. Students of Grover  
19 Cleveland learn how to work hard. They learn  
20 how to become adults, they learn how to make  
21 something of themselves in this world despite  
22 the challenges they face. What I'd like to know  
23 is what kind of example do you think you're  
24 setting for these young adults by constantly  
25 bashing and attacking the school where they're

1 being educated?

2 [Applause]

3 MS. KLETT: Have you stopped to think how  
4 all of that nitpicking has been affecting their  
5 mindsets in and out of the classroom? A child's  
6 education is not something to be messed around  
7 with. Mayor Bloomberg treats our public schools  
8 as if they are businesses, and by doing so, he  
9 is jeopardizing students' educations. The  
10 students of Grover Cleveland are not  
11 experiments. They are the future of this world.  
12 You think that every step you're taking is in  
13 the direction of making things better for them,  
14 but it's time to receive a reality check. In  
15 addition to ignoring the students, you seem to  
16 forget that the teachers of this school are not  
17 just teachers. You don't know these teachers  
18 like we do. The teachers of Grover Cleveland  
19 high School have families. They have children  
20 to provide for and bills to pay. Once you  
21 become a teacher, it becomes your life. These  
22 teachers sacrificed their time and energy for  
23 the betterment of the students of this school.  
24 Those who are here tonight in this auditorium  
25 have impacted me in ways you will never

1 understand. Think about the teachers you had  
2 when you were our age. Would any of you be  
3 where you are today without them? How many of  
4 them inspired you?

5 [Applause]

6 MS. KLETT: How many of them gave you  
7 encouragement when no one else would? How many  
8 of them gave up some of their time to give extra  
9 help to you? Where is your gratefulness? Is  
10 this really how you want to repay the people who  
11 are following in the footsteps of the educators  
12 before them? It is a disgrace that the mayor of  
13 this city and all of his minions have no  
14 compassion for the lives that are being impacted  
15 in this school.

16 [Applause]

17 MS. KLETT: How can you even consider  
18 removing 50% of the teachers? Where is your  
19 logic? This needs to stop. Progress has been  
20 made at Grover Cleveland High School, but that  
21 is ignored. It is the politicians of this city  
22 that are underperforming--not our students and  
23 definitely not our teachers.

24 [Applause]

25 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

1 MS. KLETT: I just have one more  
2 sentence.

3 MS. SOBELMAN: Okay, go ahead and wrap up.

4 MS. KLETT: You have started a war with us.  
5 It's all of us against you. We're not going  
6 anywhere and we will fight.

7 [Applause]

8 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Elizabeth  
9 Clark is speaker number 48, and quickly before  
10 you get started I'm just going to call up the  
11 next several. So 49 is now I believe Abraham  
12 Hoyos--there were some numbers switching, so we  
13 also have number 51, Concetta Arcamone, 53, Pat  
14 Grayson, 54 JoAnn Berger, 55 Diana Rodriguez and  
15 56 Daryl Vega. Go ahead.

16 MS. ELIZABETH CLARK: Hi. My name is  
17 Elizabeth Clark. I am a graduate of Grover  
18 Cleveland. I am a lifelong community member. I  
19 am a parent, and I am a teacher at Grover  
20 Cleveland High school. As all of those things  
21 the only thing I can say is I need to ask the  
22 question why? Why would you do this to these  
23 children? You've heard it over and over again--  
24 I'm not going to belabor the point. This school  
25 is built on relationships. The relationships

1 that the teachers have built with the  
2 students is lifelong. It's real. We come here  
3 every day, we support this school in every way.  
4 For the past three years these students have  
5 been beaten up and terrorized, afraid that their  
6 school was going to close, afraid that they  
7 weren't going to have a prom, afraid that their  
8 last days in this building were going to be with  
9 new people. That is not fair. They do not  
10 deserve that. These are good students who work  
11 hard. This is a staff that for the past three  
12 years has come together time and time and time  
13 again. We have given of our money. We have  
14 given of our time. And we have given of our  
15 love. And it is wrong--it is wrong what you are  
16 doing. These students deserve more. This  
17 building deserves more. And the people that  
18 inhabit it deserve more, and that's all I have  
19 to say. Thank you.

20 [Applause]

21 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
22 number 49, Abraham Hoyos.

23 MR. ABRAHAM HOYOS: Hello. My name is  
24 Abraham Hoyos. I'm a student here, junior,  
25 member of the key club and the bowling team. We

1 all share a common cause here--to learn, make  
2 friends, learn how to grow up, and learn some  
3 more. Our name comes from the 22nd president of  
4 our country and to some that name might not seem  
5 so significant, but to us it is. It defines who  
6 we are and what we make of this school, and now  
7 somebody wants to take that away from us. Well,  
8 we say you can't take that away from us.

9 [Applause]

10 MR. HOYOS: It was President Kennedy who  
11 once said the torch has been passed down to a  
12 new generation of Americans. And as students,  
13 we are a new generation. My sister graduated  
14 from this school, class of 1996. After that,  
15 she went on to become a student at Fordham,  
16 earned a degree, and also went on to spend some  
17 time studying at Columbia.

18 [Applause]

19 MR. HOYOS: And she was also taught history  
20 by our very own Mr. Donald Zigler, who I can  
21 proudly say is my history teacher this year.

22 [Applause]

23 MR. HOYOS: I can honestly say that teachers  
24 here have given me guidance, knowledge, and what  
25 it takes to prepare for my future. Bloomberg

1 hasn't given me any of that.

2 [Applause]

3 MR. HOYOS: Just because he's got money,  
4 people might not have the guts to stand up to  
5 him, but we do, because we believe in what's  
6 ours. So if you people ever go down to City  
7 Hall one day, look at Bloomberg, stare him  
8 straight in the eye and say "Stop playing  
9 politics with our education."

10 [Applause]

11 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir.

12 MR. HOYOS: Thank you.

13 MS. SOBELMAN: Next speaker is speaker  
14 number 52, Concetta Arcamone. Next speaker is  
15 speaker number 52, Concetta Arcamone. Number  
16 53, Pat Grayson.

17 [Background noise]

18 MS. SOBELMAN: Great. Thank you so much.  
19 Number 54, JoAnn Berger. Number 55, Diana  
20 Rodriguez.

21 [Applause]

22 MS. DIANA RODRIGUEZ: Thank you. All right.  
23 Good evening honorable guests, ladies and  
24 gentlemen, parents and students. I'm going to  
25 make this quick. The chancellor in his wisdom

1 decided to take seven schools off the closing  
2 list this evening. I cannot remember the names  
3 of the seven schools but what I want to ask is  
4 why were these schools taken off the closing  
5 list? We have the reason and the right to know  
6 why. I think we are all reasonable people here.  
7 Can you explain this rationale to us? Grover  
8 Cleveland High School just got a new principal,  
9 Miss Vittor, a very successful principal, who  
10 earned the distinction of taking Queens  
11 Vocational High School off the PLA list, not  
12 because of politics or playing with students'  
13 lives, but by hard work and academic  
14 achievement. We are proud to have Miss Vittor  
15 as our principal because she is successful at  
16 making the tough decisions to get Grover  
17 Cleveland High School off the closing list, but  
18 the Department of Education pulled the rug from  
19 under our feet. The chancellor visited our  
20 school recently in October, this past fall, and  
21 was amazed and shocked to see that learning was  
22 going on at Cleveland. He made the statement  
23 that he had been misled and that we are in fact,  
24 and I quote, "a great school," and that he'd be  
25 there to support us give us all the assistance

1 we need to make Grover Cleveland high School  
2 a school that all of us can be proud of. He  
3 lied to us. What kind of a role model is the  
4 chancellor who lies to students to make himself  
5 look good? I do not know. What kind of a role  
6 model are you? Where is your loyalty to the  
7 students? You said the students must come  
8 first. Are you aware of the thousands of  
9 students' lives that will be disrupted by the  
10 closing of this school, and by replacing it with  
11 inexperienced teachers? What kind of person is  
12 the chancellor knowing very well that he lied to  
13 us, knowing very well that you guys are turning  
14 your backs against us? We cannot trust the  
15 chancellor anymore. He should be held in  
16 contempt in the eyes of the people, in the  
17 people's court.

18 [Applause]

19 MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you. We are a  
20 predominately immigrant school, and do we not  
21 have equal rights? Is this the message that you  
22 want to send to the rest of the world, that  
23 immigrants are treated as second class?  
24 Education is a given born right and is not a  
25 privilege. All of us earned that right

1       regardless of where we are from. This  
2       country was built on an immigrant population.  
3       We are a part of that immigrant population. My  
4       name is Diana Rodriguez. I am senior class  
5       president at Grover Cleveland High School, and I  
6       would greatly appreciate if my questions would  
7       be answered. Thank you.

8               MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much.

9               [Applause]

10              MS. SOBELMAN: The next speaker is speaker  
11       number 56, Daryl Vega. Before you get started,  
12       let me just call up the next several. Number  
13       57, Carlos Ballinas, number 58, Bryan Franco,  
14       number 59, Lissy and Kada Nowarro, number 60,  
15       Nancy Byhoff, number 61 Sarah Ginannonm, and  
16       number 62, Gary Giordano. Sir?

17              MR. DARYL VEGA: Good evening, ladies and  
18       gentlemen. I am Daryl Vega, a student at Grover  
19       Cleveland, and I am here to advocate for my  
20       school because I sincerely believe it should not  
21       be closed and restarted. I have spent my whole  
22       high school career here, and I can honestly say  
23       that I find no reason why the school is even in  
24       danger of being revamped. Ever since I was a  
25       freshman, I've always been engulfed with the

1 guidance and knowledge of all of my teachers,  
2 even teachers that I have not had in the past or  
3 currently have had always look out not only for  
4 me but also for all the other students. So  
5 saying that we have incompetent teachers or  
6 teachers that don't care here in Grover  
7 Cleveland is completely absurd. There are also  
8 so many opportunities in the school that no  
9 student should ever feel left out or believe  
10 that there is not a club or a team that is  
11 suited for them. This is the place where I've  
12 spent days before and after school to study, and  
13 also practice for the sports that I play. I  
14 share this experience with other students who  
15 are successful student athletes. We here as a  
16 student body come together for a cause that  
17 should be fought for. Why should we stand idly  
18 by when 81 years of history is about to be wiped  
19 clean? This school was made during the time of  
20 the Great Depression and has survived past those  
21 hard times, into wars that this country has been  
22 through. The school and this building has come  
23 out unscathed from all those problems. We will  
24 resolve the problems that we have now, and  
25 withstand it all, just like the other problems

1 that have tried to topple our walls in the  
2 past. You all have the power to save our  
3 school, the influence to prevent this from  
4 happening. This school has made me who I am and  
5 pushed me beyond the limits I thought I had, and  
6 for that I am forever grateful. Thank you.

7 [Applause]

8 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
9 number 57, Carlos Ballinas.

10 MR. CARLOS BALLINAS: Good evening. My  
11 name's Carlos Ballinas. When I came to Grover  
12 Cleveland, I didn't have faith in myself, and  
13 how you call it--I was like, scared, and I  
14 didn't know if I could make it in high school.  
15 My first teacher that braced my faith was Mr.  
16 Shaw [phonetic], he's my math teacher.

17 [Applause]

18 MR. BALLINAS: He tutors. He comes at 6 in  
19 the morning, he tutors me, and today he still  
20 tutors me. I'm a senior now. He tutors me  
21 still for trig. He's preparing me for Regents.  
22 And another teacher that braced my faith was  
23 Miss Jacobs--she was my English teacher.

24 [Applause]

25 MR. BALLINAS: I was afraid that I was going

1 to fail the English Regents, but when I told  
2 her that I was afraid, she provided tutoring for  
3 me and other students. When I got an 88, I was  
4 like, oh my god, I can't believe I passed this  
5 English Regents.

6 [Applause]

7 MR. BALLINAS: I'm grateful that she's still  
8 here. Hopefully I will see her even more in the  
9 future, and most of all, I met my mentor, Mr.  
10 Mahabir, when I was five years old, and I didn't  
11 even know he was going to be my mentor, until  
12 today--12 years pass, I had him for earth  
13 science. He...

14 [Applause]

15 MR. BALLINAS: He helped me so much. I'll  
16 never forget him. And when senior year came, he  
17 chose me to be in his physics class and I will  
18 never forget that. I would not let him, I would  
19 not fail him, and I hope from you, you can  
20 decide that this school can be open.

21 [Applause]

22 MR. BALLINAS: And I'd wish you'd consider  
23 that. Thank you.

24 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. The next  
25 speaker is speaker number 58, Bryan Franco.

1 [Applause]

2 MS. SOBELMAN: Mr. Franco?

3 MR. BRYAN FRANCO: Sorry, give me a minute.

4 [Background noise]

5 MR. FRANCO: I'm good. I'm good. All  
6 right. I'd like to introduce myself. My name  
7 is Bryan Franco. Sorry. And what Cleveland  
8 provided for me--first off, I come here at the  
9 crack of dawn and I don't leave until the sun  
10 sets, that this building, it's my home away from  
11 home and it keeps not only me but many students  
12 away from the streets, and if Bloomberg wants to  
13 help us, how about instead of using the fund  
14 money to close the school down, to destroy this  
15 building, to break this family apart, pretty  
16 much--instead of doing that, why doesn't he give  
17 it to us so we can make this school more better  
18 than what it already is? Not too many people  
19 know, but this school used to have a gymnastics  
20 team. It used to have a mechanics class. But  
21 now we can't even afford props for events that  
22 we want to hold for the community, like if you  
23 look at the Power Point all those props, all  
24 those things, we raised the money for it. Not  
25 only being students, but we gathered up all the

1 money just to give back to the community,  
2 still. So...

3 [Applause]

4 MR. FRANCO: So instead of using that money,  
5 why doesn't he just give it to us, like I was  
6 saying, so it could be better, so we could be  
7 better? So we could have more clubs--give the  
8 students a reason to stay in school. Make more  
9 clubs, make more sports, you know, and I'm  
10 telling you--I guarantee, no, I promise, if you  
11 were to give us that money, the graduation rate  
12 would shoot up, and all the students would want  
13 to come here, all the middle school students,  
14 all the elementary students would want to come  
15 here.

16 [Applause]

17 MR. FRANCO: And there was one more thing--  
18 this quote that somebody dear to me that I look  
19 up to, Diana Rodriguez--she said this, and it's  
20 true. Education is a right, not a privilege.

21 [Applause]

22 MR. FRANCO: Thank you.

23 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. The next  
24 speaker is speaker number 59, Lissy and Kada  
25 Nowarro.

1 MS. LISSY NOWARRO: Thank you. Thank  
2 you. Good evening, we're Lissy and Kada  
3 Nowarro. We're graduates from the class of  
4 2011.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. NOWARRO: For us, being at this school  
7 was a great experience. Even though it was a  
8 short period of time, we were able to receive  
9 encouragement and skills we needed to go out  
10 there in the world and do our best. Right now,  
11 I'm a Long Island University Brooklyn Campus  
12 student. I'm in my biology bachelor's. She's a  
13 fashion designer student for - - school.

14 [Applause]

15 MS. NOWARRO: And thanks to the help of our  
16 beloved teachers, and our programs offered at  
17 this school, not other schools, this one,  
18 especially the ESL department that helped us and  
19 encouraged us the most. We were and will be  
20 able to accomplish our most beloved dreams in  
21 life. This school gave us the welcoming feeling  
22 of home, which is how a school is supposed to  
23 be, which is how a school is supposed to feel.  
24 Thanks to our teachers, thanks to our staff that  
25 prepared us for the future, we now can stand and

1 be able to be the new future of this country.

2 [Applause]

3 MS. NOWARRO: Please, if you turn around  
4 just one minute and look at these pictures and  
5 look at what we're doing, you will know what a  
6 real school is. If you want to know what a real  
7 school is, come over here, we'll show you. This  
8 is a real school. Please, please...

9 [Applause]

10 MS. NOWARRO: These students over here,  
11 these young people, us, we are the future of  
12 this country. If we are the future in this  
13 country and we are trying so hard to keep our  
14 school working, if we're trying to earn this,  
15 why are you backstabbing us and not helping us?  
16 You should encourage us. Thank you.

17 [Applause]

18 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
19 number 60 is Nancy Byhoff.

20 MS. NANCY BYHOFF: Good evening. My name is  
21 Nancy Byhoff. In 2004 it was time for me to go  
22 to high school. It had seemed like no other  
23 high school wanted me except for Cleveland. As  
24 you probably all did, I heard nothing but  
25 negative things about this school. I remember

1 crying--don't judge me--on the day of  
2 orientation, fearing that I was about to  
3 experience the worst four years of my life. But  
4 as time would have it, four years later I cried  
5 at graduation at the thought of leaving all the  
6 friends and faculty who made my high school  
7 experience an amazing journey. Unless you have  
8 attended Grover Cleveland, you wouldn't have the  
9 slightest idea of how much of a family we all  
10 are, and even as I make my yearly visits, the  
11 same chemistry--

12 [Applause]

13 MS. BYHOFF: Thank you, that one clap. As I  
14 make my yearly visits, the same chemistry  
15 between the faculty is deeply rooted and felt  
16 among everyone. If you make the decision to  
17 layoff Grover Cleveland's amazing faculty who  
18 helped improve my life as well as many others,  
19 you are doing no one any good. These teachers  
20 were more than just educators--they were friends  
21 who students found trust in and relied on. I've  
22 witnessed students who were bound to fall  
23 through the cracks and drop out find hope in  
24 their futures with the help of Grover  
25 Cleveland's faculty. Do yourselves a favor and

1 believe me when I say this faculty is beyond  
2 inspirational, and each one of them deserves  
3 their job at this school. Thank you.

4 [Applause]

5 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
6 number 61, Sarah Ginannonm.

7 MS. SARAH GINANNONM: Well, I haven't been  
8 speaking on the microphone since three years ago  
9 when I was Senior Class President of 2009. I  
10 began Cleveland as a shy quiet freshman, always  
11 did what I had to do academic-wise and continued  
12 on my way. Throughout the four years at Grover  
13 Cleveland, I was taught by the most inspiring  
14 and motivated teachers around. They all knew  
15 what I was capable of, but yet continued to push  
16 me to my limits, knowing it was only for the  
17 best. I've managed to make great friends who I  
18 still speak to, but better yet, Grover Cleveland  
19 was and still is my second home. These teachers  
20 aren't only educators, but they're family.  
21 Although I don't visit much, every time I do,  
22 they welcome me with open arms. Just know that  
23 if you decide to let go any of these teachers,  
24 you are making one of the biggest mistakes you  
25 will ever make in your life. You will be taking

1 away the opportunity for incoming freshmen  
2 and the rest of the students to experience the  
3 best learning experience in their lives. If you  
4 were to ask me if I were to come back to Grover  
5 Cleveland, I would do it in a heartbeat. I am  
6 now in my third year of nursing school at  
7 Adelphi University and I can only thank Grover  
8 Cleveland High school and these wonderful  
9 teachers who have molded me into the outgoing  
10 young lady I turned out to be. It is these  
11 teachers who held my hand as I paved the path I  
12 am taking today, so I beg you to reconsider your  
13 decision, like everyone here. Everyone else  
14 deserves a second chance.

15 [Applause]

16 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
17 number 62 is Gary Giordano, and as you're making  
18 your way to the microphone I'm going to call up  
19 the next set of speakers. Number 63, Max Pena,  
20 number 64, Liza Dabkowski, number 65, Jennifer  
21 Ario, number 66, Eni Sejdini, number 67,  
22 Clarissa Singwaller, and number 68, Stephanie  
23 Ramirez. Number 62?

24 [Background noise]

25 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Number

1 63, Max Pena? Number 64, Liza Dabkowski?

2 [Background noise]

3 MS. LIZA DABKOWSKI: Hi, my name is Liza  
4 Dabkowski. I have two children out of four who  
5 come to this school, a tenth grader and a ninth  
6 grader. And I am a PA secretary and SLT member.  
7 I have lived in Ridgewood for 22 years. Then I  
8 meet people like Miss Gorman from the Department  
9 of Education at a community meeting that  
10 mentions the teachers of Grover Cleveland have  
11 to reapply, and if they reapply for their jobs  
12 they have to meet a criteria. But don't they  
13 meet the criteria now? Shame on you that you  
14 say that this school does not have qualified  
15 teachers to teach my both children. What I have  
16 seen is that Grover Cleveland, they do have  
17 qualified teachers who are here every day unlike  
18 those at the Department of Education. What is  
19 the real reason that Grover Cleveland is  
20 closing? Every quality review that I have read  
21 going back to 2005 all state that Grover  
22 Cleveland is well established and proficient.  
23 There are many programs offered here because our  
24 teachers and students have earned them through  
25 hard work and dedication. I have been here at 6

1 o'clock in the morning to help the school and  
2 never seen anyone from the Department of  
3 Education. If you care, what are you doing  
4 during the school activities that are taking  
5 place in the school? I hope that also 65% of  
6 the Hispanic children who are in this school and  
7 other immigrants will be catered to in order to  
8 pass their classes, since many need more than  
9 four years to graduate. We are not an English  
10 speaking community. We are an immigrant  
11 community that needs more time to learn. A  
12 question to you all: Do you know where Farmers  
13 Oval is? If you do not know where Farmers Oval  
14 is, which is a simple park here in Ridgewood,  
15 then how can you cater to our needs? Only we  
16 know from the community what is good for this  
17 school, not the Department of Education. And  
18 I'm going to quote someone--Admiral Yamamoto,  
19 who many don't know, or maybe do know, which is  
20 the man who attacked Pearl Harbor. He says,  
21 "I'm afraid we have awakened a sleeping giant,"  
22 and that giant is Grover Cleveland.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you. Speaker number  
25 65, Jennifer Ario?

1 MS. JENNIFER ARIO: Hello. My name is  
2 Jennifer Ario. I'm a senior student and an ESL  
3 student. Buenas noches. [foreign language  
4 02:49:49]

5 [Background noise]

6 MS. ARIO: [foreign language 02:50:50]

7 [Background noise]

8 [Applause]

9 MS. ARIO: [foreign language 02:51:28]  
10 Grover Cleveland has been my home for the past  
11 two years, and I hope, I hope that continued to  
12 be the home for my brother and sister. Please,  
13 - - don't close our school. Thank you.

14 [Applause]

15 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
16 number 66, Eni Sejdini? Number 66, Eni Sejdini?

17 [Background noise]

18 MS. SOBELMAN: Okay, Pat Grayson?

19 [Applause]

20 MS. SOBELMAN: Okay, great. Yeah, you can  
21 go right after this.

22 MS. PATRICIA GRAYSON: Here I go, you got  
23 it. My name is Patricia Grayson and I am the  
24 chairperson of the education committee on  
25 Community Board 5. Since the committee hasn't

1 had an official meeting and was able to make  
2 a resolution, I'm going to speak for myself on  
3 this matter. I'm a parent, a grandmother, a  
4 former PTA president, a former elected school  
5 board member, and I'm currently a civic leader.  
6 I have a long history with Cleveland since my  
7 son was a student here in the '90s.  
8 Unfortunately, Cleveland disappeared from the  
9 radar for many years. The students, the  
10 teachers and the administration didn't receive  
11 the help and the encouragement that their  
12 community offered and is now offering them. The  
13 current restart program is accomplishing great  
14 things with the help of Miss Vittor, her  
15 supervisors, her teachers, and her students, and  
16 her outside affiliations. Students are here to  
17 learn, to succeed, and do be functioning as a  
18 part of a greater community. The turnaround  
19 model was explained as a continuation of all the  
20 good things that are happening at Cleveland.  
21 Then, of course, all the same students would be  
22 there, except that the name and the number of  
23 the school, and half of the current faculty will  
24 be changed. However, I saw no new innovative  
25 programs--they weren't mentioned, and no magic

1 pill was offered to fix the current  
2 underfunding of what should definitely be a  
3 Title 1 school, or the extreme hardship of  
4 having to bring foreign born students without a  
5 working knowledge of English up to a level that  
6 allows them to pass and eventually graduate. No  
7 educational magic bullets, just change the name  
8 and the number, keep the same students, change  
9 half the teachers, and everything will be like I  
10 tell my grandchildren--all better. You can't  
11 convince me, and you certainly can't convince  
12 the most important segment of this population,  
13 the students, that this is going to be all  
14 better.

15 [Applause]

16 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank so much. So the next  
17 speaker will be JoAnn Berger, followed by Gary  
18 Giordano.

19 MS. JOANN BERGER: Hi, thank you. My name  
20 is JoAnn Berger and I am the president of  
21 District 24's Presidents Council, and I'm a  
22 member of the CB5's education committee, and I'd  
23 like to speak in favor of continuing the restart  
24 model that began in September with Miss Vittor.  
25 The educational plan that she has for this

1 school is extremely impressive--I've met with  
2 her a few times already now. And the support  
3 that she's gotten immediately from the staff,  
4 existing staff on this, and the students. I did  
5 have the opportunity while we were going through  
6 all of this to really read the EIS, and I don't  
7 see where it states how Grover Cleveland  
8 students would benefit and improve academically.  
9 This statement speaks about implementing quote,  
10 "a rigorous screening process to measure  
11 competencies of prospective staff." Nowhere in  
12 the EIS does it say how the turnaround would  
13 improve or raise the graduation rate, and I  
14 interpret this to be the DOE's words to say that  
15 what they're doing is cleaning house. Well, my  
16 house isn't very clean, and I have three  
17 children. It runs smoothly, and it's not clean  
18 because I'm paying attention to my children's  
19 social and academic growth, so if you come to my  
20 house, it won't be clean, but my kids are going  
21 to be well developed and they're going to be  
22 successful academically.

23 [Applause]

24 MS. BERGER: And I think that if my house  
25 was cleaned, I would have been neglecting my

1 duties as a mother, and we need to look at  
2 the duties that these teachers are coming,  
3 because I've heard students say when they come  
4 to school, these are their second parents, and I  
5 keep hearing from the DOE, parent involvement,  
6 parent involvement--this is coming from a  
7 parent. We need that partnership between the  
8 parents and the teachers and the students.

9 [Applause]

10 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Speaker  
11 number 62.

12 MR. GARY GIORDANO: All right, you ready?  
13 I'm Gary Giordano. I'm the District Manager at  
14 Community Board 5 in Queens, and I'd also like  
15 to ask for the Department of education to allow  
16 the restart model to progress. The school to my  
17 knowledge has only been part of this restart  
18 program since September, and already, because of  
19 whatever bureaucracy or craziness, you're  
20 jumping to turnaround. Give them an opportunity  
21 to show that they have turned things around  
22 already without needing a turnaround program.

23 [Applause]

24 MR. GIORDANO: I think from what I've seen  
25 you have a principal that has energized both the

1 staff and a lot of the student population. I  
2 firmly believe that. I think they have a very  
3 good chance of exceeding a 60% graduation rate,  
4 even though to my knowledge, 300 of the 2050  
5 students are special ed students, and 25% of the  
6 school population are ELL students, and they  
7 still have a very good shot at achieving 60%,  
8 which would be much easier in a situation where  
9 you didn't have those harder than normal student  
10 populations. But to change everything to  
11 turnaround at this stage of the game when  
12 restart hasn't even gotten an opportunity to  
13 work is not only fair, it's very unwise, and  
14 it's detrimental to the school community and the  
15 entire community. Thank you.

16 [Applause]

17 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you, sir. Speaker  
18 number 66, Eni Sejdini? Number 67, Clarissa  
19 Singwaller?

20 [Applause]

21 MS. CLARISSA SINGWALLER: Good evening. My  
22 name is Clarissa Singwaller. I am currently a  
23 senior at Grover Cleveland High School, and in  
24 the Achieve Now academy for a year and a half  
25 now. if it weren't for the coordinator, Mr.

1 Pappas, and the staff of Achieve Now, I would  
2 have been a high school dropout. Our teachers  
3 have always given the confidence, motivation and  
4 drive to help us succeed. They have always  
5 helped us and cared for our education,  
6 wellbeing, and always kept a professional  
7 relationship with their students. I've grown to  
8 love and understand all my teachers, from Mr.  
9 Sapolo's sarcasm to Miss Lariano's [phonetic]  
10 cheerful, refreshing spirit. Our students and  
11 teachers unintentionally learned each other's  
12 habits. We've gotten to know each other on not  
13 only a teacher-student level, but we've built  
14 trust and friendships, the type of comfort where  
15 we don't feel embarrassed or reluctant to  
16 confide in our teachers. Isn't this what our  
17 school systems have been aiming to achieve? Why  
18 tear down a structure's foundation when we've  
19 met our goals? If I can sum up in one word what  
20 Grover Cleveland teachers, students, staff and  
21 faculty all have in common, it's tenacity--the  
22 ability to keep going on and facing our  
23 obstacles. It doesn't mean you overcome them;  
24 it just means we haven't given up. And I  
25 believe each and every one of us have proven

1 this by showing up here tonight. We may or  
2 may not overcome this obstacle, but we damn sure  
3 haven't given up.

4 [Applause]

5 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. Next  
6 speaker is speaker number 68, Stephanie Ramirez.  
7 Stephanie Ramirez? Okay, so we have exhausted  
8 the speaker signup list and we're going to  
9 transition into the Q and A portion, so as I  
10 said earlier, folks took advantage of the  
11 notecards that were in the back and wrote down  
12 questions. We've batched them together so we  
13 won't be repetitive, and some of the questions  
14 might not be responded to tonight, but they will  
15 be included in the analysis of public comment  
16 which is posted online and published and  
17 provided to the panel members prior to their  
18 vote on April 26th, and if additional questions  
19 or comments come up after this evening in  
20 advance of the vote, please do send them to  
21 d24proposals, that's  
22 d24proposals@schools.nyc.gov and you can also  
23 leave voice mails at (212) 374-7621, and I'll  
24 now invite the Deputy Chancellor to run through  
25 the questions and answers.

1 MR. STERNBERG: Thanks, Jenny. There are  
2 three sets of questions. I think we'll be able  
3 to answer them pretty quickly. First of all, I  
4 want to thank everybody for their comments. I  
5 think I said at the beginning that I expected to  
6 hear a spirited defense and support for Grover  
7 Cleveland and I certainly heard that, and was  
8 particularly moved by some of the students who  
9 spoke this evening. I appreciate everyone being  
10 here and your time and your passion for this  
11 school. So let me jump through some questions  
12 here--the first set of questions ask about the  
13 process, the technical process of moving forward  
14 if the proposal is approved by the Panel for  
15 Education Policy, how would the new school be  
16 staffed? And there are some, again, technical  
17 questions about the 18D process. The first one  
18 is who makes up the 18D committee? The 18D  
19 committee--we refer to 18D, that is provision  
20 18D of the city's contract with the UFT, which  
21 articulates the technical process by which a new  
22 school replacing a closing school is to be  
23 staffed. I want to make the point here that  
24 this is an entirely school-based process. All  
25 decisions about who would be rehired into the

1 new school is, again, those decisions are  
2 made at the school level by a committee that by  
3 contract will include the proposed new leader  
4 for the school, and we've voiced our support for  
5 Principal Vittor to be that leader. There will  
6 be four other panel members on this committee,  
7 two appointed by the chancellor, and two  
8 appointed by the UFT president, so a total of  
9 five committee members who would convene, first  
10 to establish the criteria against which applying  
11 staff would be evaluated, and then to, again, go  
12 through the work, one staff member at a time of  
13 evaluating their eligibility for the new school,  
14 against those criteria. The next question asked  
15 about the number, the percentage of staff that  
16 would be rehired into the school. There have  
17 been many comments this evening, so  
18 specifically, will half of the staff at the  
19 current school be removed and not rehired into  
20 the new school? So article 18D requires that a  
21 minimum of 50% of qualified senior staff from  
22 the closing school be rehired into the new  
23 school. What the chancellor has articulated and  
24 we've been very clear about this and I certainly  
25 appreciate the opportunity to clarify this, is

1 that there is no minimum. We are not--what  
2 we are telling personnel committees is to engage  
3 with each applicant in earnest, and to decide on  
4 the merits of each applicant who should be  
5 rehired, and who should not without any  
6 attention to the number or the volume of  
7 rehiring that is to happen at this school. So  
8 each applicant would be evaluated based on their  
9 individual merits, and our message to principals  
10 and to these committees is simply the following:  
11 Build the best faculty you can for the new  
12 school without attention, again, to any specific  
13 target or number of staff that is the right  
14 number, again, those are decisions to be made by  
15 the committee. The next question is about why  
16 we want to fire old teachers who have more  
17 experience and is this because of money, that we  
18 want to pay the new teachers less--the answer to  
19 that is no. Our message, again, to these  
20 committees is to construct the best faculty  
21 possible. If that means that everyone who  
22 applies meets that bar and the committee feels  
23 that each applicant is positioned to move  
24 student achievement in the best way, and the  
25 quickest way possible, then those, again, are

1 decisions that are made by the committee  
2 without attention to their seniority status or  
3 tenure in the building. The next two questions  
4 are about, sort of, the why question that we got  
5 a lot this evening--so what are the benefits of  
6 opening a new school? If the school is shut  
7 down, what will happen to the programs? We  
8 heard about some of these--the Science Olympiad,  
9 the Bridge Building Program, and the Lenovo  
10 program. So again, I mentioned when we started  
11 this evening about the strengths that we see  
12 here in the new school leadership, and there are  
13 clearly some very committed faculty who have  
14 done tremendous work in this building, and the  
15 concept of a new school is to build around the  
16 strengths that exist in this building, to  
17 construct a faculty that will bring forward into  
18 the new school the many very real and very  
19 tangible strengths that we heard about this  
20 evening into the new school, surround those  
21 strengths with other structures that are  
22 designed to lead to student achievement,  
23 increase student achievement at a faster pace,  
24 more students graduating, accumulating their  
25 credits and going onto college, ready for the

1 challenges ahead. It is designed to, again,  
2 build on those strengths and bring in new  
3 structures around those strengths, and new  
4 adults around the very talented adults that are  
5 already here to drive better outcomes more  
6 quickly. That has been our experience in  
7 pursuing a new school strategy across the city.  
8 A lot of very kind words have been said this  
9 evening about the restart program. I want to  
10 note that that program is enabled by SIG  
11 funding, and because we do not have a teacher  
12 evaluation deal with UFT, we are not able to  
13 maintain that funding for restart to move  
14 forward absent the turnaround deal, the  
15 turnaround proposed here which of course is  
16 subject to FCD [phonetic] approval. Lastly,  
17 I'll address the question about the seven  
18 schools that were removed today from the  
19 turnaround list. The chancellor has spoken  
20 about this. He talked about the constant  
21 evaluation of schools that the Department  
22 conducts, the conversations we have in and  
23 around schools with teachers and students and  
24 parents in these schools, the visits to these  
25 seven schools and all 33 that his senior staff

1 has made, and it is our evaluation at this  
2 time that these seven have the capacity to  
3 continue a turnaround process in their schools  
4 absent a closure and replacement by a new  
5 school. Our conversations about the schools  
6 remaining on the list continue, as they have  
7 this evening. We will continue to look at  
8 schools one school at a time to evaluate if that  
9 capacity exists. Jenny?

10 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. So that  
11 is the end of the--

12 [Background noise]

13 [Crosstalk]

14 MS. NOLAN: But a lot of that disagree with  
15 that. I just want to make that clear.

16 MS. SOBELMAN: Understood.

17 MS. NOLAN: We appreciate your answering  
18 those questions, but we disagree with those  
19 conclusions, and there's going to be a hearing  
20 of our committee April 11th at 250 Broadway to  
21 talk about whether the restart model can go  
22 forward, and to consider that Commissioner King  
23 look at the City's proposal very, very  
24 carefully. I don't think it's the bed of roses  
25 that you're suggesting. As you know, I don't

1 think this can be implemented in a way that's  
2 effective for Grover Cleveland, and the hundreds  
3 of people that are here tonight obviously do not  
4 agree with that.

5 [Applause]

6 MS. SOBELMAN: Thank you so much. So I was  
7 going to say we're wrapping it up, but I think  
8 the CEC president has a final comment.

9 MR. COMAIANNI: Oh, I first want to say--  
10 hold on, echo, echo, echo. Good? Okay. First,  
11 I want to say it was a pleasure listening to all  
12 you students especially tonight. I mean, I went  
13 to this school, like I said, as well, and it was  
14 very good to listen to you guys all speak from  
15 the heart and that's where I felt it was coming  
16 from.

17 [Applause]

18 MR. COMAIANNI: And that takes a lot of  
19 courage as a student. I couldn't do it at your  
20 age, so you got me beat. If I would have went  
21 up there at your age, I would have gone, "um,  
22 um, um" so you have me beat, absolutely. I do  
23 want to say--Kathy, thank you very much,  
24 actually, that's good to know because that is  
25 true--you are the chair of the Education

1 Committee in the State of New York, so if the  
2 chair tells you there's something else that  
3 could be done, absolutely. Any way I could fix  
4 that echo? No? Okay. I just want to say one  
5 thing as well--Mark, thank you very much for  
6 coming, and your staff. I know they have to  
7 have these meetings by law, but as I learned in  
8 the last decade of doing this, is never shoot  
9 the messenger. You know, they're doing their  
10 jobs, they come here, and they give the message.  
11 You're not going to have, obviously, Chancellor  
12 Walcott here--he's going to be over at the PEP  
13 meeting when they have that. In this particular  
14 meeting, I mean, you had enough people in the  
15 stairs to listen to you guys and hear you guys  
16 as well, you know, just like Pat Grayson said,  
17 the Chair of CB5 Education Committee, as  
18 President of Community Education Council slash  
19 School Board or whatever you want to call it,  
20 ourselves when we meet, you know, we'll pass a  
21 resolution and of course I will make my  
22 recommendations to Deputy Chancellor as well via  
23 email on behalf after I speak to the rest of the  
24 council. And with that being said, thank you  
25 very much, everyone. This was great to hear

1 from the entire community and the school.

2 [Applause]

3 MS. SOBELMAN: Great. I think that wraps it  
4 up, and we'll go ahead and adjourn now. Thank  
5 you so much and get home safe.

6 [END 290\_206.MP3]

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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 

Date April 5, 2012

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