

1 BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE
2 STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

3 PUBLIC HEARING

4 THE REGENTS REFORM AGENDA: "ASSESSING" OUR PROGRESS

6
7 Buffalo City Hall
8 Common Council Chambers, 13th Floor
9 65 Niagara Square
10 Buffalo, NY 14202

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12
13 October 16, 2013
14 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

15
16 PRESIDING:

17 Senator John J. Flanagan
18 Chair

19 SENATE MEMBERS PRESENT:

20 Senator Patrick J. Gallivan

21 Senator Mark J. Grisanti

22 Senator Michael H. Ranzenhofer
23
24
25

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1 SENATOR FLANAGAN: So, good morning.

2 Nice of all of you to be here.

3 Again, appreciate your patience, and let's
4 start today's hearing by standing and saying the
5 Pledge of Allegiance.

6 I'll ask Senator Ranzenhofer to lead us in
7 the pledge.

8 (All participating in the hearing
9 recite, as follows:)

10 "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the
11 United States of America and to the Republic for
12 which it stands, one nation under god, indivisible,
13 with liberty and justice for all."

14 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you very much.

15 So a couple of quick things:

16 I'm very grateful to be joined by my
17 colleagues Senator Gallivan and Senator Ranzenhofer,
18 both of whom have a deep and abiding interest in
19 education, as I do believe all of you do who have
20 joined us today.

21 This is our third in the series of
22 five hearings.

23 The first hearing took place on Long Island;

24 The second hearing in Syracuse recently;

25 Today, of course, in Buffalo.

1 Two weeks from now we'll be in the city of
2 New York;

3 And our last hearing will be in Albany,
4 two weeks thereafter, right after Veteran's Day.

5 And I hope people generally understand that
6 the thrust of what we're trying to do is, frankly,
7 listen, seek input from the educational community,
8 including administrators; principals; teachers;
9 parents, most notably; to get a sense of where we
10 are in terms of educational policy in the state of
11 New York.

12 And I would remind everyone that we in the
13 Legislature play a critical role, but we have a
14 unique role, and, educational policy, as many of you
15 know, is set by the Board of Regents and the
16 State Education Department.

17 I see Regent Bennett who will be joining us
18 this morning to testify, and he can certainly offer
19 comments to that effect.

20 But, I want everyone to clearly understand
21 that all the comments that we get are made part of
22 the written record.

23 Everything that we've received to date,
24 including emails from any part of the state, have
25 been made part of the record already.

1 Anything that we have submitted here today is
2 either up online or will be up online, and for
3 people who want to submit comments hereafter, you're
4 certainly entitled to do that.

5 That will all be made part of the public
6 record.

7 In addition to that, I think it's important
8 to recognize that we are having these hearings
9 because we want to seek input from people.

10 The Governor is not doing any hearings,
11 SED and the Regents are not doing any hearings, the
12 Assembly is not doing any hearings, so the Senate is
13 stepping out on this and trying to get a good
14 cross-section.

15 We've had comments from people about the
16 nature of our panelists and people who are
17 testifying.

18 There's no end game here.

19 The idea is to have a very diverse group of
20 opinions, and I think today is probably a very good
21 example of the diversity of those opinions.

22 And our expectation is, that we will work
23 together as a conference and probably come up with a
24 set of recommendations after all this is done,
25 something that might be -- I think it will be useful

1 for everyone to take a look at.

2 But I just want to reiterate that everything
3 that we have will be forwarded to SED, to the
4 Regents, to the Governor, and, frankly, it's
5 available for public review.

6 And, we have a number of people who have
7 joined us today.

8 I'm going to go over a couple of quick
9 things.

10 First of all, I want to thank our Senate
11 technology people because, half the reason that
12 we -- well, probably more than half the reason, but
13 the reason we get all this stuff done is because of
14 the great staff people that we have helping us all
15 the time.

16 So if you look out on camera, these folks are
17 the ones who make you look good.

18 Beyond that, the policy is, in case anyone
19 can't read these signs in front, reading of
20 testimony is not a fruitful endeavor.

21 If you're going to come up and you're going
22 to be speaking, summarize what you have to say,
23 please; and if people are reading, I will politely
24 and diplomatically stop you from doing that, because
25 the idea is to have a dialogue.

1 Everyone can read the material.

2 I've had a chance to look at most of the
3 material that's been submitted before today, so
4 I would just remind everyone, I have this nifty
5 little timer here, just in case, and it's not to be
6 disrespectful to anybody, but we have a lot of
7 people to testify.

8 And I'll just add one last comment:

9 Senator Maziarz who couldn't be with us here
10 today, he always describes his district as being
11 75 and sunny every single day, and now I understand
12 why, because these lights up here make it feel like
13 it's 75 degrees sitting back here.

14 But it is -- actually, this is a beautiful
15 facility, as many of you know.

16 This is my first time having the opportunity
17 to sit in this council chamber, and, this building
18 is absolutely gorgeous.

19 So, we are fortunate to be in the city of
20 Buffalo and to be hosted by the common council and
21 everyone that works here.

22 So, without any further ado, I would again
23 thank my colleagues for being here.

24 And, the first two folks who will be joining
25 us today are Regent Bennett, and

1 Nicholas Storelli-Castro from the State Education
2 Department.

3 REGENT ROBERT M. BENNETT: Thank you very
4 much, Senators, and particularly Chairman Flanagan,
5 for doing this.

6 I think these hearings are gonna be very,
7 very useful and helpful, and we look forward to the
8 summary that you send on to the State Ed Department
9 and to the Board of Regents.

10 And, I want to welcome you to
11 Western New York.

12 It's my great privilege to serve on the
13 Board of Regents, representing 98 school districts,
14 from Jamestown to Youngstown, 22 colleges and
15 universities, many cultural organizations, many
16 agencies serving people with disabilities, and the
17 49 professions that we license at State Ed.

18 As kind of an aside, but critical I think to
19 the reform movement, is my strong belief, starting
20 back in 1994, in family-support centers to help
21 families address issues that may affect their child
22 in school.

23 I'm a firm believer in expanding, rapidly
24 I hope, career- and technical-education credit hours
25 and associate assessments.

1 And I have always believed that pre-K should
2 be available to every child that needs it in the
3 state, because an early start really creates great
4 opportunities long term.

5 Some of the things I'm going to say in
6 summary you may have heard from other hearings, but
7 I would like to just comment on a couple of things.

8 One is that, in '07, the Regents summoned all
9 of the many parts of USNY, (the University of the
10 State of New York), and one of the speakers we heard
11 was Nick Donofrio, who was the executive
12 vice president of IBM for global strategies.

13 And his very brief speech basically said that
14 he wasn't happy with the graduates that we were
15 sending on to further education or to IBM for
16 employment.

17 He said they were -- "We were not able to
18 hire them, and that IBM didn't really have to stay
19 in New York State," but they wanted to, they wanted
20 very badly to; and thankfully they did.

21 Now they really, I think, have gone a little
22 further and adopted a high school, but, that was
23 kind of a wake-up call then.

24 And at about the same time, the new learning
25 standards were just beginning to be discussed by a

1 wide range of people now known as the "Common Core
2 Learning Standards."

3 We also looked a data about remediation
4 levels of our graduates in community colleges and
5 four-year colleges, some as high as 50 percent in
6 English and math, for which they had to pay, and for
7 which they got no credit, and if they enrolled in
8 more than one central remedial course, they
9 generally didn't stay.

10 We also compared ourselves to NAEP, that
11 gold-standard of student performance, and we did not
12 compare well.

13 And we heard frequently from the business
14 council and employers that some of our graduates,
15 not the kids that left school, which is bad enough,
16 but our graduates were not ready to start meaningful
17 employment, for a wide range of reasons.

18 So, I think that it was, when it came time to
19 vote on the Common Core, it was an easy vote to say,
20 yes, we should adopt this.

21 At the same time, we submitted an
22 application, as you know, to Race to the Top, and
23 several things occurred from that, and related
24 developments.

25 We certainly need to have a data-informed

1 instructional system, so the data system has to be
2 improved.

3 We believe in principal and teacher
4 evaluation, obviously.

5 We believe that it was important to identify
6 the lowest-performing schools and offer them
7 incentives for turnaround.

8 Mixed success there, I would say.

9 And we believe that the learning standards
10 could be a new set of rigorous standards, fewer
11 standards, actually, that would help kids get ready
12 for college and careers that they chose.

13 In addition, part of the reform movement is,
14 in fact, we commissioned a study on whether there
15 are industry-based assessments that are useful and
16 relevant in categories of careers; and, lo and
17 behold, they came back and found 13 such categories,
18 saying that, not only are their assessments good,
19 they're as good as Regents exams or maybe better.

20 So the burden is on the Board of Regents now
21 to figure out a way to really expand career and
22 tech ed for all students; not some students, all
23 students.

24 We, of course, would like to see -- every
25 budget year we ask for this -- is an expansion of

1 pre-K and better teacher preparation for early
2 childhood.

3 Soon we will adopt standards, thanks to the
4 New York State and national PTA, on family
5 engagement.

6 Entirely measurable standards, there are
7 six categories.

8 They'll be before us at the November Regents
9 meetings.

10 We'll have a public debate on it; send it to
11 the field and get input yet again.

12 We have also, in fact, changed
13 teacher-preparation programs and
14 leadership-preparation programs.

15 One of my hopes that, in
16 leadership-preparation programs, we can have schools
17 of business help us with communications and
18 marketing and customer service, which I think is an
19 important factor in managing a school.

20 In my many years on the Regents and in
21 teaching and in higher ed, I absolutely believe one
22 of the most important persons in the whole reform
23 movement is, in fact, the principal of a school.

24 Usually when you have an outstanding
25 principal, you have outstanding results for those

1 kids.

2 They're fully engaged, really high-quality
3 teaching, and tremendous results by any measurement
4 at all.

5 We have an attachment about the evolution of
6 the Common Core Learning Standards, and who was
7 involved.

8 There was a claim that it wasn't approved
9 by -- or, wasn't developed by anybody but outsiders.

10 That's false.

11 As you see the list, you'll see that that's
12 true, and, including the time when we voted to adopt
13 the standards in 2010.

14 Also attached will be a timeline of all the
15 training that we did over the last 2 1/2 years,
16 which continues, in terms of, in Albany, in the
17 field, and several thousand people came to that
18 training, and I think that the feedback has been, it
19 was very, very helpful.

20 As to assessments, the number of state
21 assessments has remained the same.

22 There has been no increase in state
23 assessments, and I would like that for the record,
24 because it is, in fact, a fact.

25 Local assessments, in terms of APPR and the

1 Common Core being merged, as it must be, and is in
2 very great high-performing districts, 60 percent,
3 20 percent, 20 percent.

4 You all know the 20 percent is state
5 assessments.

6 The other 20 percent is very important
7 because it's a local decision, and there are many
8 options there.

9 It is not a state test.

10 So, that how you determine where a child is
11 at the beginning of the year and at the end of the
12 year seems to be good educational policy anyway, and
13 so that the locals are free to use last year's
14 assessments, portfolio assessment, any other
15 observations that they think will be helpful to
16 them.

17 And in the case of kids with special needs,
18 quite frankly, an IEP is pretty much equivalent to
19 an SLO (a Student Learning Objective).

20 It's the same content in the file.

21 So one of the suggestions made by,
22 Superintendent Ambrose said, "Why don't you let us
23 do that, and if we have a really good IEP, we don't
24 need an SLO."

25 And I said, "That makes a lot of sense to

1 me."

2 So I'm going to share that with the
3 Commissioner and Chancellor Tisch.

4 Also attached, I think very useful, is the
5 fact that we have a Q&A of all the questions that
6 have been raised about any aspect of privacy, our
7 assessments to Common Core, the frequency of
8 testing;

9 The fact that contracts that we have for
10 testing companies must meet the approval of the
11 State Comptroller and the State Attorney General,
12 and they have done so;

13 All this about our own accountability system
14 that we got, and when getting a waiver from the
15 federal government, to account to the Legislature
16 and the Governor, and to the public, about how we
17 spend \$57 billion in the P-12 system in the state of
18 New York.

19 I would, if you'll permit me just to share a
20 couple of best practices, because I think they're
21 very, very noteworthy in terms of implementing the
22 Common Core and the Reform Agenda, as well as
23 teacher development and leadership development, the
24 goal, of course, is, at the end of twelfth grade, to
25 be career- and college-ready.

1 We think that's an admirable, achievable goal
2 for all students.

3 And so the question is, then, What about
4 these learning standards?

5 What are they?

6 How good are they?

7 How much do we know about them; that is to
8 say, how much have we shared with parents?

9 How many teachers have been trained and
10 retrained and offered professional development in
11 the learning standards?

12 And in the case of Lew-Port School District,
13 which is in Niagara County, Senator Maziarz's
14 district, the school down there where my
15 two granddaughters go, in fourth grade and
16 eighth grade, took the time, on several occasions,
17 to have sessions for parents about:

18 Why are we doing these new learning
19 standards?

20 Why are they a higher level of learning?

21 Why are they requiring better teaching?

22 Why are we doing this at every single grade
23 level?

24 And, what do we expect of a graduate to be
25 able to achieve?

1 So there were lots of questions and answers.

2 And in the case of Lew-Port, they, as many
3 schools do, track the assessment of their students
4 every week; so that my daughter can tell whether
5 Alice and Claire are doing well every single week.

6 And part of that assessment, of course, is an
7 assessment, in terms of their portfolio, their
8 files, their projects, whatever tests that they
9 decided on locally that they would think would be
10 useful to kids.

11 Because, one of their philosophies is, kids
12 learn a lot from making mistakes, and it's quite all
13 right to make a mistake, because you can really then
14 learn what you should have done, and it's very
15 helpful.

16 The other example I would give, and this is
17 Amherst, which I believe you know about already --

18 I know Senator Ranzenhofer knows about
19 Amherst.

20 -- but I would say to you that, in 2010,
21 Amherst knew that the Common Core had been adopted
22 by the Regents, and they introduced an instructional
23 action plan at that time, and so they spent about
24 14 months in training all their teachers, all their
25 teacher aides, all their assistant principals, all

1 their principals, the superintendent, and selected
2 school-board members, on "What does this mean for
3 our students?"

4 And then they had several sessions with
5 parents, and explained to them why this might be a
6 little more difficult in grades 3 through 8.

7 And, in fact, when the test results came out,
8 they're fully prepared to explain it.

9 But they said a very, very bad approach would
10 be trying to teach to the test; doesn't work.

11 These are deeper-understanding requirements
12 in the Common Core, and they expect more from
13 students, and they expect students to be fully
14 engaged.

15 So it is not test prep in Amherst, at least,
16 and in many of their colleague districts in my area,
17 which would include Clarence, Williamsville,
18 Sweet Home, and so forth.

19 They made sure that there was a major role
20 for teachers in every step of the way, including
21 teacher leaders, and I think that the superintendent
22 there would attribute the success and the progress
23 they're making, and they say it is a
24 work-in-progress still, is because they engaged
25 teachers from the beginning.

1 So when the Commissioner came there, he heard
2 mostly from teachers and parents about why it's
3 working in Amherst.

4 And, so, I think that that's an example that
5 it can be done, and it could be done; it's an
6 embracement of the Common Core Learning Standards.

7 She also shared with me, the superintendent
8 there, that EngageNY, in the last year, has improved
9 remarkably in terms of opportunities to take
10 advantage of, in terms of what should be done and
11 how it should be done.

12 They participated in all the training that
13 have been offered for the network teams through
14 BOCES, and in Albany, and there's a really, really
15 solid relationship in terms of use of EngageNY.

16 So I think, I hope, the attachments that
17 Nicholas has prepared, and you probably already
18 have, answer many, many questions.

19 And I'd be certainly happy to answer any
20 questions that you might have, and I will conclude.

21 And I kind of read from an outline, if that
22 was okay.

23 [Laughter.]

24 REGENT ROBERT M. BENNETT: Thank you very
25 much.

1 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Regent Bennett, first of
2 all, thank you for your service.

3 Appreciate the work that you do do.

4 And, Senator Gallivan.

5 SENATOR GALLIVAN: We hear the college- or
6 career-ready often, and I know that I attended a
7 hearing in Albany that the Commissioner was at about
8 a year or two ago, and we talked about that.

9 Clearly, everybody would acknowledge that
10 college is not for everybody.

11 I mean, I think we understand that.

12 Up until about a year or two ago, I was
13 hearing many complaints that there was just no room
14 in the high school curriculum to prepare kids for
15 something else other than college.

16 So despite hearing the career- and
17 college-ready, what changes have been made?

18 It seems that there has been some changes
19 made in the last several years about the
20 career-ready part of it.

21 REGENT ROBERT BENNETT: Correct.

22 We have had 450 new career-oriented,
23 career-pathway programs registered with the State.

24 And in order to register and be approved, you
25 have to demonstrate that these are legitimate

1 careers with real jobs, with real pay, and,
2 requirements that you have to, again, prepare
3 properly for that career, and very likely take a
4 test to enter the career, take a test at the end of
5 that career preparation.

6 So, more programs have been registered.

7 In addition, and this has been true for about
8 six years now, school districts can already offer
9 nine credit hours in career-pathway types of
10 courses.

11 I would like to see that doubled, quite
12 frankly, and increase the number of credits for
13 graduation.

14 But -- and I've made that known to my
15 colleagues on the board.

16 But I think, if we're gonna be really serious
17 about career education for all students, then we
18 have to act accordingly and really begin in seventh
19 grade, and prepare all of our districts for that
20 fact.

21 Now, some districts do it better than others.

22 Many use BOCES.

23 But, in the case of Buffalo, for example,
24 Emerson High School is probably one of the best
25 career-pathway programs there is.

1 It's a restaurant that's entirely run by
2 students, and they do very well on Regents exams.

3 They are learning practical applications of
4 what they're reading in their textbooks, and so they
5 do it every day.

6 They order the food; they store the food.

7 They prepare the food; they serve the food.

8 They run the cash register; they account for
9 the money.

10 And then they go to class and learn what they
11 did, and what they gotta do the next day to serve
12 their customers.

13 So it's a really great success story.

14 I wish we had a lot of more of those
15 throughout the state.

16 And if it takes legislation, then I would
17 certainly be the first in line to encourage it, to
18 be able to change the nature of the curriculum to
19 offer more career-oriented courses, and we're not
20 going to worry about the assessments because they
21 already exist.

22 SENATOR GALLIVAN: How are schools looked
23 at -- I mean, are schools looked at differently, if
24 on a local basis they say that, "We've got more
25 kids, especially in rural areas," and we look at the

1 opportunities, and we hear of that skills gap:
2 manufacturing, agriculture, engineering; businesses
3 like that?

4 Engineering, I guess, would be excepted out
5 of that, even though there is the gap because of the
6 higher education required, but we keep hearing of
7 these skills gap, and it's different in different
8 regions of the state.

9 Are any schools -- I mean, do schools have
10 the opportunity to take their students in the
11 direction that's best for them?

12 Or, under the new standards, is everything
13 completely standardized that you can't have any
14 local flavor?

15 REGENT ROBERT BENNETT: No, there's many
16 opportunities in the English and math implementation
17 to draw in other subject matters, which Amherst has
18 already done, so you'll see the learning standards
19 alive and well in science and in history and global
20 studies, and where they've integrated the
21 curriculum, they have co-teaching opportunities.

22 The rural areas have done an extraordinarily
23 good job in career-pathway programs, and in
24 contracting the community colleges to have
25 early-learning opportunities, and particularly in

1 the field of agriculture for which there are many,
2 many jobs.

3 Paul Smith College, for example, is
4 contracting with school districts up in the
5 North Country, and I never would have thought of
6 this, for jobs in forestry.

7 They don't -- they can't find enough people.

8 Light manufacturing is an unmet need in
9 Buffalo right now; and so BOCES, and I hope Buffalo,
10 will pay attention to that and develop that.

11 They're free to do it right now.

12 It's not contrary at all to the learning
13 standards.

14 NICHOLAS STORELLI-CASTRO: If I could just
15 add, one perfect example of what the
16 Chancellor Emeritus was discussing was
17 P-TECH schools, which you may have heard of.

18 We have --

19 SENATOR GALLIVAN: I'm sorry, what schools?

20 NICHOLAS STORELLI-CASTRO: P-TECH schools.

21 In the state budget, there was an allocation
22 that created grants for 10 schools throughout the
23 state.

24 We actually ended up funding 16 schools
25 throughout the state to replicate the P-TECH

1 high school in Brooklyn.

2 This has really been a great success story.

3 It was mentioned in the State of the Union.

4 It's basically a marriage between a
5 high school in New York City, which was before it
6 was -- before, this was a struggling school, adopted
7 sort of by IBM, the City University of New York now
8 offers career training.

9 The graduates are first in line for jobs at
10 IBM.

11 They graduate with an associate's degree, at
12 no charge to the students.

13 We're now replicating those schools
14 throughout the state in every region of the state.

15 The one in this portion of the state escapes
16 my mind, I'll get that to you.

17 But, this is an example where the schools are
18 able to partner -- the requirements are to partner
19 with industry in the region, partner with the
20 higher-education institution in the region; graduate
21 those kids with, not only an associate's degree at
22 no charges to the students, but with the skills to
23 then enter that career field.

24 And the goal here is to train kids for those
25 essential jobs in each region.

1 So we're very excited about it.

2 We're in the planning year.

3 Those schools will open in the coming school
4 year, and we'll hopefully prepare kids, as you
5 mentioned, Senator, for sort of the local career
6 needs.

7 REGENT ROBERT M. BENNETT: The local example
8 is Trocaire, City of Lackawanna School District, and
9 the health care -- and the health-care field with
10 the Catholic Health System.

11 There's another example, and I hope that in
12 the next legislative session, we can make
13 charter schools eligible for all of these RFPs that
14 come out, because right now, for some reason,
15 I don't understand the reason, they're not eligible
16 for a P-TECH grant or a community school.

17 Right now we have the health sciences charter
18 school which, in fact, is governed by all the health
19 employers in Buffalo and Erie county, in the
20 Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus.

21 Those kids are guaranteed a job, or,
22 subsidies to go on for a two- or four-year degree.

23 And, there's going to be a gap for
24 health workers in our community of, roughly, six to
25 ten thousand people over the next five years.

1 So this is one school that is attacking that
2 problem, with three or four hundred kids.

3 No conflict of interest here.

4 My daughter's involved in that, and she's
5 sitting in the audience.

6 Is she still awake?

7 SENATOR FLANAGAN: So far, yeah.

8 REGENT ROBERT M. BENNETT: Oh, good.

9 [Laughter.]

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Senator Ranzenhofer.

11 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Thank you, Chairman.

12 And before I ask my question, I just want to
13 thank the Chairman for convening this hearing.

14 As he said, there are a lot of entities, such
15 as the Assembly, the Governor, and others that are
16 not conducting these hearings.

17 But I just want to thank you for your
18 leadership in bringing this series of five hearings,
19 one here to Buffalo and Western New York.

20 I will just note for the record, that,
21 although you've not been in this chambers, I know
22 you're no stranger to Western New York and have been
23 here many, many times on the issue of education.

24 For Regent Bennett, first of all, thank you
25 for your service.

1 And, I just want to pick up on the
2 conversation that you were just having with
3 Senator Gallivan.

4 And my understanding right now, in order to
5 get a Regents diploma, is you just need a certain
6 number of units in math and you need a certain
7 number of units in science, until you have the
8 appropriate number of units in order to graduate
9 with a Regents diploma; but, yet, the policy, and
10 you're talking about trying to match education with
11 employment.

12 Like, for instance, in the area of
13 computer science, if you took computer-science
14 courses, that would not count towards your math or
15 your science requirement.

16 And some of these other programs that you're
17 talking about, whether it be engineering or applied
18 technologies, the policy of the Regents, as
19 I understand, is not to credit those towards your
20 graduation.

21 So my question is:

22 With these Common Core Standards, and trying
23 to be college- and career-ready, is there any
24 opportunity to give credit for the non-traditional,
25 you know, math, science, but some of these other

1 areas, like computer science and others, where you
2 can get credit for taking these courses; and again,
3 many of them may be more applicable in today's
4 workforce than simply the math and the science that
5 we had?

6 REGENT ROBERT M. BENNETT: There are some
7 opportunities, but they're not enough.

8 I think the curriculum needs a thorough
9 attack and revisit, which is on our agenda, and has
10 been for a while, particularly in career and
11 tech ed, but, right now, students can take applied
12 math and applied English and other applied courses
13 and get credit; in some other courses they can't,
14 and that's what we probably should try to change.

15 Because I think the choices for students
16 should be the order of the day as long as they are
17 proficient in math and English as a basic tenet,
18 because --

19 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: And I would say that if
20 you're taking a computer-science course, which
21 I think is a higher-level learning requirement, that
22 certainly would qualify as, you know, basic
23 math/science principles.

24 Again, that's just one example.

25 You know, you had mentioned some other

1 examples where credit is being given, but,
2 certainly, you know, some of those higher-learning
3 areas, like computer science, I think would
4 encompass that, and I think you'd have a better job,
5 because, you know, kids don't take classes they
6 don't get credit for in graduation.

7 I think that would actually help your
8 Common Core Standards, in getting more kids in
9 classes that have a direct application for them
10 going out, either to college or to the workforce,
11 because, you know, you talk about the, for instance,
12 jobs in agriculture.

13 A lot of people think of jobs in agriculture
14 as jobs on the farm, but if you go to some of these
15 plants, you have people running very high-tech
16 machines and computer systems.

17 You know, it's not the notion of, you know,
18 sitting on the stool, you know, in these type of --
19 whether it's food processing, milking of dairy, or
20 whatever the case may be.

21 You know, these jobs require high school,
22 and, in many cases, college education, in order to
23 acquire those skills.

24 So I think that by encouraging kids to take
25 some of these type of classes -- and, again, I'm

1 just picking on computer science because it just
2 seems the natural fit -- I think that you would, you
3 know, do a better job of getting these kids
4 career-ready, college-ready, because it's a very
5 applicable with-it type of course that a lot of kids
6 would take if you were able to make that adjustment.

7 REGENT ROBERT M. BENNETT: I totally agree,
8 and I think more applied-type courses should be
9 introduced, and the sooner the better, because
10 I think that, in the field of technology in
11 particular, I think the students are way ahead of
12 everybody.

13 When I was forced to buy an iPad, I asked
14 my third-grade granddaughter to show me how the hell
15 it worked, and I said, "What are all these symbols?"

16 She said, "You only to have worry about two
17 of them, grandpa, and it will work for you"; and she
18 showed me, and by Lord in heaven, it works.

19 It's great, it really is.

20 So they don't know anything else, and so how
21 we apply that, though, to the basics, is very
22 important.

23 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Thank you.

24 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Regent Bennett, just a
25 couple of things, as much comment, or comments, as,

1 potentially, a question.

2 Yesterday I had a chance to meet with
3 Senator Ranzenhofer in some of his districts, and
4 I would clearly agree that there were at least
5 several superintendents who felt that EngageNY had
6 come a long way, and that there's a wealth of
7 information.

8 At the same time, there is a frustration that
9 it's almost a little too rote; that it's hard to get
10 a human being on the phone.

11 And if you are a school district personnel or
12 administration, that doesn't necessarily make you
13 special in any way, other than, if you're the head
14 of an entity, sometimes it might not be a bad idea
15 to give them access to people so that they can get
16 more timely responses.

17 That's part of one thing that we heard
18 yesterday, and not isolated.

19 I've heard that before.

20 I would say, listening to what has transpired
21 at these hearings, but in a whole slew of meetings
22 separate from these hearings, I think the problem
23 that the Regents in particular have is a perception
24 of a major disconnect between, SED and the Regents,
25 and the people who are educating our children,

1 whether they're principals, as you spoke to directly
2 before, or teachers or parents, trying to wrap their
3 arms around these fundamental changes.

4 It seems to me that you have complaints about
5 SED not listening; you have complaints about
6 SED listening but not doing anything.

7 And in my estimation, I feel that SED is
8 listening, but there are not a lot of changes
9 coming, and people I think have some expectation
10 that there should be some modifications; a slowing
11 down, a smoothing of the implementation of
12 Common Core.

13 SED had represented that there should be
14 assessments and curriculum; they have to go hand in
15 hand, or hand in glove, and if you don't do it that
16 way, it's not going to work.

17 A lot of the people who spoke previously said
18 you don't have to do it that way; you don't have to
19 align them instantaneously.

20 So it strikes me that where we are going to
21 see a much more significant impact is, this year,
22 with the implementations of the Common Core into the
23 Regents.

24 And while we can talk about third- through
25 eighth-grade assessments, where parents are really

1 going to pay a lot more attention, in my estimation,
2 is when their child is coming home with a Regents
3 score that could be 20 to 30 points lower than it
4 traditionally has been.

5 That could affect their ability to graduate,
6 that could affect their ability to accessing higher
7 education.

8 And I would ask you to comment on that, but
9 I would strongly suggest that that, to me, and all
10 the people I've been talking to, that seems to be
11 where one of the major disconnects exist between
12 people in Albany and the people out in the field.

13 REGENT ROBERT M. BENNETT: I think with
14 regard to the availability of people in Albany, as
15 you well know, the State Education Department has
16 lost about 475 people in the last four years, for
17 budget reasons, and we've not really been able to
18 make much of that up at all.

19 It's not an excuse, it's just a reality.

20 But I do think better customer service would
21 be appropriate for sure, and I think that the timing
22 of the implementation of the Common Core, my worry
23 is, that there are -- I believe the majority of the
24 districts, like Amherst and their colleagues, are
25 well underway in implementation of the Common Core.

1 And this was really a forgiving year, in the
2 sense that no new schools would be identified, and
3 "proceed with caution" was the advice in terms of
4 teacher evaluation and principal evaluation.

5 My hope is we'll pay much more attention to
6 principal evaluation, given the significance of that
7 job.

8 But your point is well-taken.

9 Whether or not Regents exams in 2014 should
10 be introduced, we believe they should be.

11 There have been three years to prepare.

12 I would be hopeful that the locals have
13 gotten themselves prepared for that.

14 I think what we learned in the 3-through-8,
15 while the scores went down, the explanation of what
16 happened, and the comparison to last year, helped,
17 the conversion chart.

18 But what I had a chance to do with the
19 delegation here, the Assembly and Senate, was
20 explain to them how the scores were determined, in
21 terms of, when the Commissioner assembled about
22 90 teachers in the summertime, that looked at each
23 question for each grade level over a period of
24 five days and nights, in separate groups, then as a
25 collaborative group, in terms of:

1 Was the question fair?

2 Was it based on a learning standard or more
3 than one learning standard?

4 It had to be or it was thrown out.

5 And what should a student reasonably expect
6 to achieve at that particular level?

7 And they decided independently, and then
8 collectively, what the cut score would be, and these
9 were almost exclusively teachers from around the
10 state.

11 I'm happy to say Western New York was
12 well-represented.

13 And so that, when they came out, they're
14 shocked, of course; however, they're a beginning
15 base to say, we've got to do better every grade
16 level, and we've got to get kids ready, because
17 we -- right now, we are not competitive in terms of
18 our graduates.

19 I'm worried that the 2013 graduates are still
20 going to have trouble, when they go to college or a
21 career, not being able to demonstrate that they
22 understand basic math and English.

23 You can't get a job at GM Powertrain unless
24 you know technology and you know algebra, because
25 the sophistication of those machines that are

1 developing more engines than anywhere in the world,
2 you've got to have that, or you will not be hired.

3 So I think there's a staffing issue; however,
4 we can do a better job of responsiveness.

5 I've had my own experience with kids.

6 The letters I take the most seriously from
7 parents, are the parents of kids with special needs.

8 I personally follow up on every single one of
9 them, because I think these kids need our help more
10 than any other child.

11 And so pushing the State or pushing a school
12 district to do the right thing for these kids, that
13 I basically take on myself, and I know many of my
14 colleagues in the Regents are pretty involved, some
15 more than others.

16 But I think the point is well-made.

17 I will make sure that my colleagues know that
18 there is a perception that we're not as
19 well-connected as we might be to the 700 school
20 districts that exist.

21 There are some districts that we are
22 extraordinarily connected to, for obvious reasons:
23 the performance is very seriously low.

24 And, that's an ongoing saga.

25 But I appreciate the comment, I really do.

1 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you very much.

2 REGENT ROBERT M. BENNETT: Thank you.

3 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Appreciate your time.

4 Next we have Dr. Bolgen Vargas and
5 Dr. Pam Brown, superintendents, respectively, of
6 Rochester and Buffalo.

7 Is Dr. Brown with us?

8 SENATOR GALLIVAN: This is Dr. Brown.

9 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Oh, I apologize.

10 DR. PAM BROWN: Dr. Brown.

11 I'm not sure if my colleague is here.

12 SENATOR FLANAGAN: My apologies.

13 Dr. Brown, why don't you start, and we can
14 wait for your colleague from Rochester.

15 And, again, I would, please, just summarize
16 your testimony.

17 I know it's been submitted.

18 DR. PAM BROWN: Okay.

19 Well, good morning.

20 Senator Flanagan, and honorable members of
21 the New York State Standing Committee on Education,
22 I really appreciate this opportunity to discuss such
23 an important issue with you today, and that of
24 assessing our progress as we implement the
25 Regents Reform Agenda and Common Core Learning

1 Standards.

2 When I first came to Buffalo a little over a
3 year ago, I brought with me a vision of providing a
4 world-class education for every child, and since
5 that time, the district has adopted that vision;
6 and, certainly, our mission is to focus on preparing
7 every child for college and careers.

8 And I want to begin my remarks by saying that
9 I agree with the Commissioner of Education and the
10 Board of Regents on the need to provide rigorous
11 instruction for every student at every grade level,
12 and to measure our progress all along the way so
13 that we can make sure that all of our students are
14 going to be graduating on time and fully prepared
15 for college and careers.

16 Like many urban school districts, our
17 students face some challenges in achieving those
18 goals.

19 We have a poverty rate of approximately
20 86 percent, and as you probably know, poverty is the
21 number one predictor of success in school.

22 The achievement gap between children who live
23 in poverty and those who -- from more affluent
24 families continues to grow.

25 As a recent study shows, that was conducted

1 by Sean Reardon of Stanford University, over the
2 last 50 years, the gap in standardized test scores
3 between rich and poor families has actually
4 increased by a staggering 40 percent, and that gap
5 continues to grow.

6 Another challenge that we face in Buffalo is
7 that of an increasing population of students who
8 certainly enhance the diversity in our district and
9 give our students great access to other cultures and
10 languages, but certainly provides more challenge for
11 us in terms of being able to teach the
12 English-language learners who are of a population
13 that continues to increase.

14 I think we're at about 16 percent, as
15 I speak.

16 And, so, teaching the children English so
17 that they're able to fully engage in instruction at
18 our schools, and, certainly, to demonstrate their
19 competency on state tests, is certainly a challenge
20 for us in Buffalo.

21 However, we as a district and community are
22 rising to meet these challenges.

23 First and foremost, what we're doing, is
24 working with our leaders and teachers to make sure
25 that instruction is strengthened in every classroom

1 throughout the district, and, that that instruction
2 is fully aligned with the new Common Core Learning
3 Standards, and that it is informed by data to which
4 our teachers and all of our staff members have
5 increasing access.

6 So, some additional things that we're doing
7 in the district to meet these challenges include:

8 We have a new five-year strategic plan that
9 really will serve as the blueprint for our progress
10 as we move forward;

11 We are brokering partnerships and
12 strategically using the resources that are available
13 to us to provide opportunities for extended learning
14 time.

15 As we know, when students are behind in their
16 academic performance, they need, not only great
17 instruction, but they also generally need some
18 additional time with that grade instruction in order
19 to catch up.

20 And, so, we have worked with
21 11 community-based organizations; Say Yes to
22 Education; we're partnering with the city, the
23 county, and certainly utilizing district resources;
24 to make sure that we are providing access to
25 extended learning time, particularly for our

1 45 priority and focus schools.

2 We are putting additional intervention
3 systems into place.

4 We are very cognizant of our graduation rate
5 and we know that that is one of our top priorities
6 in terms of increasing it.

7 Our goal is to increase our graduation rate
8 to at least 80 percent by 2018, and we know that
9 that's a tall order, but we certainly believe that
10 we can achieve that goal, and we are putting
11 strategies into place so that we will make that goal
12 a reality.

13 Some of those strategies include new data
14 systems.

15 We have a new data dashboard that we're
16 using, which now includes a graduation monitoring
17 site, where we can look at, not only district-wide,
18 but school by school, what percentage of our
19 students are on track to graduate, what percentage
20 are just off-track and maybe just need to make up
21 one or two credits, which ones need more intensive
22 intervention.

23 And we're looking at that data and putting
24 programs into place to bring more students on track
25 to graduate on time.

1 An example of that is our new STAR Academy.

2 "STAR" stands for the Student Transition to
3 Academic Recovery, which will serve up to
4 200 students who are over-age and under-credited.

5 This will be through an extended day program,
6 through the use of technology and other
7 interventions, to try to get those students back on
8 track to graduate on time.

9 We are increasing access to career- and
10 technical-education programs.

11 The board just approved a new policy this
12 past spring to reduce some of the criteria that had
13 been required for students to get into those
14 programs.

15 We are providing extensive professional
16 development and coaching for our administrators and
17 teachers in particular.

18 We have just completed a new reorganization
19 plan, which includes four Offices of School
20 Leadership, which will be headed by chiefs of school
21 leadership who will work with principals and provide
22 coaching and professional development for them, to
23 make sure that their instructional leadership skills
24 are strong.

25 And there are also coaches in those offices

1 who will work with coaches and teachers at the
2 school level.

3 We have a new student code of conduct.

4 We are working to continue to decrease the
5 student suspension rate, as well as student
6 attendance.

7 We have -- the board has passed a new
8 resolution on creating a high school that will be
9 focused on medical careers, and so we are seeking
10 partnerships to make that a reality.

11 And we hope that that school will open in
12 September of 2014, which will also assist us with
13 our public-school-choice challenge that we are
14 facing at this point in time.

15 The board has also passed a new resolution to
16 seek the opportunity to reduce the compulsory
17 student attendance age to 4.

18 As we look at the research across
19 industrialized countries throughout the world, we
20 know that the U.S. certainly does not rank among the
21 top countries in terms of the percentage of our
22 students who have access to pre-kindergarten
23 programs by age 4.

24 And there is much research to indicate that
25 the more students have that pre-kindergarten

1 opportunity, certainly, in strong instructional
2 programs, that the better prepared they are for
3 kindergarten, and the better opportunity they have
4 to be on track, and, certainly, college- and
5 career-ready throughout their educational career.

6 We are taking steps to enhance our
7 curriculum.

8 We've adopted a new English-language arts
9 textbook and eResource series through
10 Houghton Mifflin.

11 We have begun using the math modules from the
12 State Education Department.

13 We're also piloting a core-knowledge early
14 childhood education program that's being provided to
15 us by the State Education Department.

16 And, so, those are some of the things that we
17 are doing to address the challenges that we face,
18 and we have begun to see some progress.

19 As of this past school year, our attendance
20 rate increased, and we also saw a significant
21 decline in chronic and severe absenteeism.

22 We had about 12 percent fewer students being
23 suspended from school.

24 We saw a significant decline in our student
25 dropout rate.

1 Our preliminary data for our graduation rate
2 indicates a sharp increase there.

3 And we certainly saw an increase in the
4 number and percentage of our graduating seniors who
5 applied for college and vocational school.

6 And, so, we certainly will continue to work
7 on that.

8 And, with all of that, we certainly
9 understand that, as we look at our college- and
10 career-readiness rates among our seniors, as well as
11 our students in grades 3 through 8, we have a lot of
12 work to do, and so we believe that by continuing to
13 implement some of the interventions and strategies
14 that I have mentioned to you, or all of them, and
15 perhaps more, that we will be able to reach rigorous
16 goals and objectives.

17 Some assistance that we would request from
18 the State Education Department would include:

19 Providing more opportunities for us to
20 increase and enhance access to extended learning
21 time for our students;

22 Helping us to decrease -- to change that
23 compulsory attendance age to age 4;

24 Providing more diagnostic information on
25 state test scores that we receive so that we can use

1 that data to drive our planning;

2 And, providing faster access to student
3 performance and accountability data.

4 And, so, I want to conclude my remarks by
5 thanking you, Senator Flanagan, and all of your
6 distinguished colleagues, for providing this
7 opportunity for me to address you this morning on
8 this very important topic.

9 We are absolutely committed to making sure
10 that we see drastic improvement in our schools in
11 Buffalo.

12 We know that can happen, and we appreciate
13 the opportunity to share some of the strategies that
14 we are implementing, with you.

15 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you.

16 Senator Gallivan -- I'm sorry.

17 Before I go to Senator Gallivan, we've been
18 joined by our colleague Senator Mark Grisanti.

19 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Thank you,
20 Senator Flanagan.

21 Senator Gallivan.

22 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you, Chairman.

23 Dr. Brown, thank you for your testimony.

24 You indicated that the dropout rate is
25 declining.

1 Do you know what that is?

2 DR. PAM BROWN: The dropout rate from the
3 2011-12 school year was over 28 percent, and this
4 past year it was just over 23 percent.

5 SENATOR GALLIVAN: All right, thanks.

6 At the very end of your testimony, you talked
7 about a number of what I believe to be very
8 important things, but, looking for the State help,
9 I'm translating most of it into the way -- I'm
10 translating most of it into a request for addition
11 funding.

12 Is that an accurate assumption?

13 DR. PAM BROWN: Well, some of it would
14 include additional funding.

15 As we look at -- we have 45 priority and
16 focus schools.

17 We had four of those schools that ended their
18 school-improvement grant funding this past school
19 year, and for those four schools, there was no
20 additional funding coming from the State to sustain
21 some of the strategies that had been put into place,
22 that in those schools we were beginning to see some
23 progress.

24 In order to sustain that progress, I think
25 that it would be beneficial for us to work with the

1 State to identify those strategies that seem to be
2 working and that seem to be promoting progress, and
3 then have an opportunity to sustain that progress
4 through some level of additional school-improvement
5 grant funding, for example.

6 I talked about extended learning time.

7 I know that there is some grant funding
8 available for this coming school year, and for the
9 next few school years, and we certainly intend to
10 pursue that funding, but, we will have to see
11 whether we will be one of the districts that will be
12 selected to receive that funding.

13 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Yeah, I do want to come
14 back to the extended learning time, but I just want
15 to ask one more question as it relates to funding.

16 While I'm not exactly sure, statewide, on a
17 per-pupil basis, City of Buffalo receives more State
18 funding than any school in Western New York, far and
19 away.

20 So I think the question that jumps out that
21 I'm sure you hear time and time again, how do you
22 answer, if you're getting more money and more State
23 funding than anyone else, with results that are
24 substandard, or, as compared to everybody else,
25 don't meet all these other schools' successes, how

1 can you make a request for additional funding?

2 DR. PAM BROWN: Well, first of all, I would
3 say that Buffalo is the third-poorest city in the
4 country.

5 And as I've shared, and as I'm sure that you
6 are aware, poverty is a strong predictor of school
7 success.

8 And, certainly, I think it becomes apparent,
9 as we looked at the research and some of the data
10 that I have shared in terms of access to
11 pre-kindergarten in the United States, and including
12 in Buffalo, there is a need for additional funding
13 for children who live in poverty.

14 And where we have such a high concentration
15 of poverty, among the highest in the United States,
16 I would hope that that would be taken into
17 consideration.

18 It costs more to educate children who live in
19 poverty.

20 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Now I will move off of --

21 DR. PAM BROWN: In addition --

22 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Oh, I'm sorry.

23 I'll move off of the funding, because I know
24 that's not the real focus of this.

25 DR. PAM BROWN: Okay.

1 SENATOR GALLIVAN: But let's go to the --
2 just talk briefly about the extended learning time;
3 the after-school, extended school-day instruction.

4 With what you're doing so far, what level of
5 participation are you getting?

6 DR. PAM BROWN: Well, this past school year,
7 we provided an after-school academic program lasting
8 two hours in each one of our priority and focus
9 schools.

10 We extended the invitation to all students.

11 We had I think, initially, about half of the
12 students signed up to participate in the
13 after-school program.

14 Those numbers did decline in some sites
15 throughout the school year.

16 But, I think it's important to note that we
17 have seen some improvement in student performance,
18 and I believe that some of that is attributable, not
19 only to the after-school program that we offered
20 this past year in 44 schools, but we also had a
21 comprehensive summer-school program that actually
22 yielded an additional 121 graduates, in addition to
23 improvement on pre- and post-test scores for other
24 students who participated in the summer program.

25 So we know that we're seeing progress being

1 generated, to some extent, as a result of these
2 extended learning-time programs.

3 We will certainly work on increasing
4 attendance.

5 That is certainly a major focus of ours for
6 this year as we launch an even more extensive
7 program through our partnership with Say Yes to
8 Education.

9 SENATOR GALLIVAN: And my final question,
10 actually, it follows through on that, the extended
11 learning, I mean, while we don't have any direct
12 indicator of cause of family breakdown, certainly,
13 in areas where you see greater poverty, you see more
14 problems in family and less family support.

15 One thing not talked about today, but I think
16 that you'll likely agree with, is family support for
17 kids in school is, maybe not critical, but extremely
18 important.

19 DR. PAM BROWN: Absolutely.

20 SENATOR GALLIVAN: If we continue with this
21 cycle of poverty, and the family structure stays the
22 way that it is, because jobs aren't available, for
23 whatever other distractions there may be, can you
24 have success with the extended learning in these
25 after-school programs?

1 DR. PAM BROWN: Absolutely.

2 I think that, certainly, the strongest
3 indicator -- or, the strongest factors in terms of
4 promoting academic gains, are those that we can
5 control in our schools; certainly, through strong
6 leadership and strong instructional practices in all
7 of our classrooms.

8 And so that is certainly a strong focus of
9 ours, but, in addition, we are implementing a number
10 of strategies to increase parent and community
11 engagement.

12 We have a parent facilitator in every school
13 this year.

14 This year, for the first time, we've launched
15 a school-based budgeting process to increase equity,
16 and so that the funds follow the children.

17 And we have charged these school-based
18 management teams in those schools, which include
19 administrators, teachers, and parents, with looking
20 at their data, determining their school's needs, and
21 using their resources to meet those needs.

22 So they have more autonomy with the use of
23 resources, along with the accountability that we
24 know all of our schools have.

25 We've also started using interpreters in all

1 of our district-sponsored events.

2 And, so, those are some of the things that
3 we're doing to try to engage parents more in our
4 schools.

5 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Okay, thanks.

6 I could spend the next four hours in
7 discussions with you, but for the sake of the
8 respect of everyone else's time, and our Chairman,
9 thank you very much.

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Senator Grisanti.

11 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Thank you,
12 Senator Flanagan.

13 Good morning, Dr. Brown; how are you?

14 DR. PAM BROWN: Good morning.

15 SENATOR GRISTANTI: You know, the -- you
16 know, it's such a cumulative problem, when you look
17 at the Buffalo School District, because not only is
18 it about parents not being involved, and I'm glad to
19 see that you're trying to implement some parent
20 groups into some after-school programs, and do what
21 you can with regards to attendance, and things along
22 those lines.

23 I think that's something that needs to be
24 done.

25 Just implementing, recently, interpreters in

1 the classroom, I think is far overdo, considering
2 that I don't think students that speak 45 different
3 languages just showed up this past year.

4 The concern that I have, and the concern that
5 I think a lot of people have, is on the graduation
6 rates.

7 Now, the last time we talked, I don't think
8 the numbers came out yet, but I know what the
9 graduation rates were for Hispanics, for
10 African-Americans, and for Caucasians for the priors
11 years.

12 Do you have exact numbers now as to what it
13 was this past year?

14 DR. PAM BROWN: Well, I have preliminary data
15 from this past year, and that preliminary data
16 indicates that our overall graduation rate, as of
17 the end of our summer program in August, was about
18 56 percent, and that's up from 48 -- just under
19 48 percent from the previous school year.

20 As we look at, for example, our
21 African-American male graduation rates, which I know
22 is a group of huge concern in the city, that rate is
23 just over 40 percent.

24 Now, you know, we're still reviewing and
25 auditing some of our data, but I believe that from

1 the previous year, what I was hearing, was that that
2 rate was around 27 percent.

3 So we do want to verify that, but we know
4 that this past year it was just over 40 percent;
5 and, similarly, for Latino male students in the
6 district.

7 So we do believe that we have seen an
8 increase among those student populations, but,
9 again, 40-some percent and 56 percent, I know that
10 those rates are not acceptable to anyone in the city
11 of Buffalo or in the state of New York.

12 So while we recognize that progress, we know
13 that we have to continue to work hard to make sure
14 that those numbers are increasing.

15 SENATOR GRISTANTI: And, you know, the
16 concern that I have, is because we have a great
17 program in Say Yes to Education.

18 DR. PAM BROWN: Yes.

19 SENATOR GRISTANTI: And the concern is, is
20 that students are not gonna take advantage of that
21 program if they're not graduating, and that's going
22 to continue to lead, as my colleague
23 Senator Gallivan stated, into a cycle of poverty of
24 continuing all over again and all over again.

25 And I don't want to dwell on the money

1 factor, because I'm sure we'll have talks, not only
2 by the end of this year and throughout the next
3 legislative session, but the concern is the dollars
4 getting from the top to the bottom of where it needs
5 to get, with regards to the teachers and the
6 students in the classrooms and the after-school
7 programs.

8 Those are the things that I want to see.

9 And, you know, I know it's not a popular
10 idea, but that's why I actually asked, and had
11 legislation, to go ahead and let the residents have
12 a say, or a vote, in the school-district budget just
13 like everybody else does in the city of Buffalo,
14 because the fact of the matter is, it's not just the
15 City of Buffalo's money.

16 The City of Buffalo itself puts in very
17 little money into the school-board budget, but the
18 amount of the money that the State put in comes from
19 taxpayers all across the state, including Kenmore,
20 Tonawanda, Hamburg, you know, areas in that realm.

21 And I think that it's important that we have
22 a transparency to see exactly where these dollars
23 are going.

24 And that's something that I wanted to talk to
25 you about, not today, but after the fact.

1 Getting to the issue of Common Core, what has
2 the City of Buffalo done to implement this, in the
3 sense that, it came out roughly three years ago, and
4 gave the City of Buffalo an opportunity of
5 information for its teachers and -- and as to how to
6 teach these programs?

7 That's question number one.

8 Question Number 2:

9 Do you also agree that social studies,
10 science, and other avenues of education need to be
11 tested, and not just the language and math?

12 DR. PAM BROWN: In answer to your first
13 question, as to what has been done in the city of
14 Buffalo to implement the Common Core Learning
15 Standards, when I arrived in the district in July of
16 2012, I learned that many opportunities for
17 professional development had been provided here in
18 the district for teachers and administrators.

19 All, or almost all, of those opportunities
20 were on a voluntary basis; and, so, some educators
21 had participated, others had not.

22 I believe the vast majority of educators in
23 the district had not participated in all of the
24 modules of the Common Core Learning Standards, even
25 though they had been offered.

1 So this past school year, we tried to be a
2 little more intentional about reaching out to those
3 teachers and administrators who had not
4 participated, along with others who had and
5 extending their professional development, but
6 keeping track of what percentage of our educators
7 had participated in all of the modules.

8 In order to ensure that all of our leaders
9 and teachers had participated in some professional
10 development, I had Superintendents Conference Day.

11 I actually added one in January of 2013,
12 which required attendance by all teachers and
13 administrators for Common Core professional
14 development.

15 I instituted this year two
16 Superintendents Conference Days before the year
17 started, so that we could engage all of the staff.

18 So, some of the professional development has
19 been voluntary, some of it has been mandatory.

20 We've partnered with American Institutes for
21 Research.

22 They're continuing to do professional
23 development.

24 And the Offices of School Leadership that
25 I referred to you -- referred to earlier, will be

1 charged with continuing to provide in-depth PD to
2 the schools that they serve, through coaches, and
3 through the supervising principals and chiefs of
4 school leadership.

5 So it's going to be a continuing process.

6 In addition, when I arrived, there were not
7 Common Core-aligned curriculum materials available
8 to the students, so this past year we adopted a new
9 English-language arts textbook series for grades
10 K through 6, a series that is aligned to the
11 Common Core, including eResources.

12 We are using now the math modules provided by
13 the State Education Department; the core-knowledge
14 curriculum of early childhood education.

15 So we're seeking every opportunity to improve
16 our instruction, make sure it's Common Core-aligned,
17 make sure it's data-driven, and to give our students
18 access to the curriculum materials and tools that
19 they need in order to improve their performance.

20 Your second question had to do with including
21 science and social studies in the testing program.

22 I would -- I certainly think that I would
23 support that.

24 My recommendation would be to phase those in,
25 to give districts an opportunity over the next

1 couple of years to fully integrate the Common Core
2 Standards into English-language arts and math, while
3 also working to do so in science and social studies,
4 and then to possibly start the testing program in
5 science and/or social studies a couple of years from
6 this point in time, so that we can have that phased
7 in.

8 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Now, what are you
9 hearing, or what's being told to you, whether it's
10 from your principals, whether it's from other
11 teachers that you may know, as to what the
12 problem -- what the problems may be?

13 Is it that they do not have the materials
14 that allow them to try to implement these on the
15 kids?

16 Is it that too much time is spent on the
17 core-standards testing rather than testing in a
18 cumulative roundabout way?

19 Is it that -- uh, you know, they didn't have
20 the "fill in the circles" in kindergarten through
21 fourth grade?

22 I mean, most kids can't even color in between
23 the lines, and they gotta -- they gotta --

24 You know, is it things like that on the test?

25 Is it things along the lines of, of how does

1 a child write a coherent paragraph in a
2 Common Core Standard testing that's in seventh
3 grade, when they're never, you know, told to do that
4 before?

5 I mean, what are the problems?

6 And I know you may have stressed on this
7 before I got here, I know you were talking, but,
8 what do you see are the problems?

9 I mean, I think everybody agrees that, you
10 know, there's some testing that needs to be done.

11 The question is:

12 How much testing?

13 Is the testing being done right?

14 And what do we need to do to move it forward?

15 So what are you hearing with regards to your
16 faculty and your people that you know?

17 DR. PAM BROWN: Well, certainly, I'm hearing
18 that it's clear that the bar has been raised; that
19 the curriculum must be more rigorous, and that the
20 standards that are in the Common Core are more
21 rigorous standards.

22 So I'm hearing that, for example, children
23 who are in fourth grade who took the Common Core
24 tests, that the teachers saw that there were skills
25 there that, traditionally, had been taught in

1 fifth grade, or even sixth grade.

2 So there's no question that the standards are
3 more rigorous.

4 However, we also understand that that has to
5 be the case if we're going to make sure that every
6 child is graduating college and career-ready.

7 I also learned that not every child in the
8 district had a textbook that they could take home
9 with them, so that they could study and prepare for
10 tests, or just brush up on the lesson that would be
11 taught the next day, or just for independent reading
12 at home, which is so important.

13 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Let me stop you there.

14 Why would they not have a textbook?

15 DR. PAM BROWN: I'm not certain, but we have
16 worked to alleviate that situation, and that's why
17 we adopted the new English-language arts series,
18 that's why we have adopted the math modules, so that
19 we are certain that children have access to the
20 learning tools that they need.

21 And I would go back to what I said earlier;
22 there's -- you know, we have children who are
23 several years behind -- who are already several
24 years behind in their academic performance, so now
25 the bar is raised so that they must perform at a

1 higher level.

2 Well, that puts them farther behind.

3 So, certainly, we know that the results that
4 we got on our state test this year were not
5 acceptable, but now I believe that we're in a better
6 position, now that we have provided professional
7 development for our teachers and administrators, and
8 we'll continue to do so.

9 We're putting the tools in the hands of the
10 students and teachers to help them to be even more
11 effective with instruction, and we do expect to see
12 better results.

13 SENATOR GRISTANTI: And besides being told
14 the results, are you being told, like, problems in
15 certain areas?

16 Are parents being told?

17 I mean, I know a lot of information is going
18 into some national registry.

19 I have legislation out there, protecting, you
20 know -- you know, a child's personal information,
21 which I think is, you know, ridiculous you'd
22 actually have to do legislation to do that.

23 But are you actually being told; or is it
24 just this information being put in a registry, and
25 that's it?

1 DR. PAM BROWN: Well, we are told that there
2 is certain information that will be available to the
3 public.

4 We have not been required to put that
5 information -- well, we do input certain data
6 through our accountability office.

7 We do provide information to parents on a new
8 parent portal that we have, so that they're able to
9 track their student's test scores, as well as
10 grades, and disciplinary data, as well as
11 attendance, on a daily basis.

12 So, we're hoping that that increased access
13 to information for parents will be helpful, and help
14 them to monitor their student's progress and promote
15 their success.

16 But -- so, that's where we are at this point.

17 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Okay.

18 Thank you, Dr. Brown.

19 I'll pass it over to my other colleagues.

20 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Dr. Brown, just one
21 question.

22 You were talking before about SIG grants and
23 funding.

24 DR. PAM BROWN: Yes.

25 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I just want to make sure

1 I understand, and, certainly, I can check this
2 independently, but, is the lack of continuity in
3 funding based on performance by the district, or, a
4 lack of funding because there's no more SIG grants?

5 DR. PAM BROWN: It's my understanding that
6 the school-improvement grants are available to us
7 for a particular period of time, and, that,
8 I believe, has been about a three-year period.

9 There is another type of grant that is,
10 I think, a school-innovation grant, that only lasts
11 for two years.

12 So when the term for each one of those grants
13 runs out, that funding is gone.

14 And so the point I was making earlier was
15 that, certainly, among those four schools that are
16 no longer receiving school-improvement grant funding
17 as of this year, several of those schools were
18 making marked progress, and we certainly know that
19 there's some specific strategies that were being
20 used in those schools that were being effective.

21 And, so, we were able to provide some
22 additional support for those schools, but nowhere
23 near the level of funding that they had been
24 receiving through the school-improvement grant.

25 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you very much.

1 DR. PAM BROWN: Thank you.

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Next we have Linda Hoffman
3 and Jim Sampson.

4 Jim Sampson with the Buffalo Board of
5 Education;

6 And, Linda, I think we're getting a hat-trick
7 with you today; you have Erie 2, Chautauqua, and
8 Cattaraugus.

9 LINDA HOFFMAN: BOCES, and I'm also area
10 director for New York State School Boards
11 Association, representing Erie, Niagara, Orleans,
12 Genesee, and Wyoming counties.

13 And among my responsibilities on my BOCES and
14 on my NYSSBA, and all the rest of the things I do,
15 I represent school districts that are rural,
16 suburban, small cities, and even Buffalo, as my
17 NYSSBA role.

18 I'm going to go kind of off script here a
19 little bit, because --

20 JIM SAMPSON: Who starts?

21 LINDA HOFFMAN: I guess I'm going to start,
22 because I'm a lady, I -- ladies go first.

23 SENATOR FLANAGAN: That's the house rule.

24 [Laughter.]

25 LINDA HOFFMAN: I've been a school-board

1 member, as you can see, for -- since 1981.

2 I've seen reforms come from
3 Commissioner Ambach, Sobol, Mills, Steiner, and
4 King, and through all of this, I've known everybody
5 is concerned about testing.

6 We've always had testing.

7 We've had testing -- high-stakes testing for
8 kids, in terms of what they do personally on their
9 own grade work, in order to graduate, in order to
10 move on to the next class, in order to do that.

11 And then we moved into even higher-stakes
12 testing for school districts and schools when we
13 went to NCLB, and, NCLB is not going to go away.

14 We still are going to be required to do
15 testing in third through eighth grades, and I don't
16 see any stop to that because I don't see any hope of
17 anything happening in Washington to change the
18 Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

19 So the testing is not going to go away, but
20 now we have decided that we're going to go to
21 Common Core testing, and, we never had protests
22 about the tests before.

23 Teachers were part of the high-stakes
24 testing.

25 People didn't protest the tests that we had

1 under NCLB, even though they're rigorous.

2 And, I don't know whether it's because
3 they're locally developed then; the standards were
4 locally developed, and now we're going to national
5 standards and people are fearful of that.

6 People are fearful of a large corporation
7 being in charge of the tests instead of the Board of
8 Regents and State Ed.

9 And I think that there has not been enough
10 rollout to parents especially, about the kinds of
11 tests that their children are getting.

12 We used to know, you know, it was 100 points
13 on the test.

14 You got 20 points from your essay, you got
15 20 points from your two small essays.

16 You got -- you know, parents and students and
17 teachers knew what was expected of them, and it has
18 changed so rapidly that many people have been
19 feeling left out, left behind.

20 And I think that 3012-c is -- was the
21 response that was necessary to get the waiver from
22 some of the NCLB requirements, and I understand why
23 it was done, and I understand the time frames in
24 which it had to happen.

25 Unfortunately, because it was in such a

1 compressed time frame -- uhm, how shall I say it? --
2 I won't say mistakes were made, but I would say
3 that, uhm, it left out some periods that might have
4 brought more thoughtful reflection on the
5 implications of the law.

6 We can't do anything about NCLB, but you
7 gentlemen can do something about 3012-c.

8 I don't know if you will with this, but we're
9 asking about assessing our progress, and part of our
10 progress is dependent on that law.

11 So, I also have some questions about PARCC.

12 It's in my written statement, but I will talk
13 from a member of a rural community.

14 I live in Springville, New York.

15 It's 25 miles from here.

16 I have no cable.

17 I have no high-speed, unless I pay \$250 a
18 month to Verizon for a 4G connection.

19 Many of our students in our rural areas don't
20 have computers.

21 We have students in Springville who come and
22 sit in the parking lot so that they can connect to
23 the school's Wi-Fi.

24 They don't have it at home.

25 And we talk about going on to the next step

1 of the testing and doing it on computer.

2 I have grave concerns about that; about the
3 district's capabilities of doing that, and I have
4 grave concerns about the pedagogy.

5 I have concerns that our teachers are going
6 to be looking at third-, fourth-, fifth-, and
7 sixth-graders who will have to do essays on a
8 computer, who will have to move things, objects --
9 because I haven't quite seen it yet -- but,
10 supposedly, move objects on the math sections, who
11 do not have that knowledge of how to do it.

12 They don't have the understanding of how to
13 do these things.

14 They know how to write, "See you later",
15 "CUL8er," you know, with an "R", but they don't know
16 how to write essays on the computer.

17 They don't know how to do those things.

18 They're capable of filling in the dots,
19 because they've been doing that for quite a while,
20 but the new capabilities on the PARCC testing,
21 I think are going to be -- are gonna have to be
22 very, very carefully looked at.

23 And that districts, students, teachers, and
24 parents need to be considered and talked to and
25 listened to about influencing those -- that next

1 level of testing.

2 I will also piggyback on some of the things
3 that have been said about BOCES and career and tech
4 education.

5 So, I abhor vacuums, and when we have our
6 BOCES education, we have students who come to us,
7 for junior and senior year, for half a day, and
8 spend up from -- anywhere from 15 minutes to half an
9 hour each way on the bus from their home district to
10 the BOCES centers.

11 And that's here.

12 It's worse at the BOCES centers in the
13 North Country and other places where you have
14 greater geographic distances.

15 But they are -- and -- and we are pushing in,
16 which is appropriate, English and science and math
17 into those modules that they take; and they're
18 taking their exams and they're doing very well, but
19 they would do so much better if we had a full-day
20 program.

21 And that's in the legislation.

22 They would do so much better if they could go
23 for four years, or they could elect to do a
24 four-year program, a half day for two years, and
25 then full day for the next two years.

1 We're talking about career.

2 I mean, we say "college- and career-ready"?

3 In order to be career-ready, we have to
4 really look at our career and technical education,
5 like the Regent Bennett said, and do some real
6 refurbishing of it, and look at what we need to do
7 for our students.

8 Because that's where I'm at:

9 I've been an advocate for students for 31
10 years.

11 Thank you.

12 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you.

13 Mr. Sampson.

14 JIM SAMPSON: Yes, thank you.

15 Welcome to Buffalo, and this beautiful
16 chamber, and I hope you got a chance to enjoy the
17 city.

18 I was elected to the school board in May --
19 Buffalo School Board in May as a "reform" candidate.

20 I don't know what that means.

21 And I've been continually identified as a
22 "reform" member of the Buffalo Board of Education.

23 But let me give you just a real quick
24 background about myself -- not intended to be a job
25 interview -- but, I've had the opportunity to run

1 three large child-welfare agencies: one here in
2 Buffalo Gateway-Longview, and then two in Wisconsin;

3 And I was also vice president of a
4 health-care system in Wisconsin specializing on
5 serving kids.

6 Also, I spent the beginning of my career in
7 corrections, and I think I've had the opportunities
8 through my professional life to see what happens to
9 children and adults who don't have access to
10 high-quality, relevant, and germane educational
11 opportunities.

12 I don't remember talking to any inmate in a
13 prison in Wisconsin that graduated from high school.

14 Probably the one common denominator of kids
15 in foster care is they frequently come from families
16 whose parents don't have a high school education or
17 have not graduated from high school.

18 I retired from Gateway not too long ago, but,
19 three years ago, I had the opportunity of serving as
20 the first president from -- for Buffalo Reform Ed,
21 at the request of Katie Campos who helped found that
22 organization, and also was its first
23 executive director.

24 So, I have some sense of maybe what reform
25 is, but, from my perspective, reform is not

1 necessarily charter schools, it's not necessarily
2 vouchers.

3 What it is, is, how we learn to focus on what
4 happens in the classroom, day in and day out.

5 I would also suggest that poverty may be an
6 indicator of success, but adults use that as an
7 excuse so we don't have to try and be held
8 accountable.

9 I don't know of any greater pathway out of
10 poverty than a high-quality education, and, that's
11 our responsibility as a community and as adults, and
12 I think as a board of education.

13 I would say about the Common Core Standards,
14 that I think New York State is to be commended for
15 being the second in the nation, right behind
16 Kentucky, in advancing the Common Core Standards as
17 a new way of learning; and, in fact, Regent Bennett
18 mentioned the word "reform."

19 There probably is no greater reform that's on
20 our doorstep in New York State than the
21 Common Core Standards, and, hopefully, how it will
22 reinvent the kind of work we do in every school in
23 the state.

24 I think it's important that, my kids, who I'm
25 not going to say how old they are, but all the kids

1 who are entering school now are entering a much,
2 much different world than the world that I entered
3 when I left high school and college, and that's
4 changing every day.

5 And at the same time, much of what we do in
6 an educational structure hasn't changed all that
7 much since I was in high school.

8 This is the one opportunity we have, I think,
9 to really dramatically change that.

10 To give you a little bit of background, yes,
11 graduation rates in Buffalo may have gone up, we
12 don't know for a fact, but we do know one piece of
13 data that's very, very critical:

14 If 50 percent of the kids we had last year,
15 maybe 3,000 kids eligible to graduate, who entered
16 the freshman year four years previous, if 50 percent
17 graduated, that means we had about 1500 kids
18 eligible to go to college.

19 Within that number, 10 percent were college-
20 or career-ready, which means we're having a really
21 bad return on our investment.

22 And, I think the Common Core Standards is
23 going to be directed at helping change that.

24 This becomes particularly important for
25 Buffalo.

1 I always get disoriented when I'm in these
2 chambers, of where Main Street is.

3 If you go to Main Street, wherever it may be,
4 and look at the medical corridor, we're expecting to
5 have over 10,000 advanced manufacturing jobs there
6 within the next few years.

7 This district is not equipping kids to either
8 go to college or to assume a job in that
9 advanced-manufacturing capability.

10 Close to 50 percent of the kids who leave
11 Buffalo and go to Erie Community College have to
12 take remedial courses, and from our perspective,
13 that's unacceptable.

14 So what I would suggest is that, for all the
15 criticisms the Common Core Standards is receiving,
16 and I appreciate the genesis for that, and the
17 concern for that, I think it represents an
18 incredible opportunity for the kids of this
19 community, whether they've been in City Honors, or
20 whether they're going to Riverside, or whether
21 they're going to East High School, and I see the
22 principal for Lafayette, or, Lafayette High School,
23 I think it offers a great opportunity.

24 I am very, very concerned that the district
25 does not have the capacity or the resources to

1 provide the kind of training and support for
2 teachers and principals to carry this out, because
3 that is where the reality is.

4 And I think Dr. Bennett mentioned that, that
5 without that kind of support, and without that kind
6 of staff development, we're going to have an uphill
7 struggle in implementing the Common Core Standards
8 here in the city.

9 So, thank you.

10 SENATOR GRISTANTI: I have no questions.

11 SENATOR GALLIVAN: No questions.

12 LINDA HOFFMAN: Wow, no questions.

13 Really?

14 Okay.

15 SENATOR FLANAGAN: You're not getting off
16 that easy.

17 Linda, to your point, I just wanted to make a
18 comment.

19 We -- our colleagues have taken a very hard
20 look at the PARCC issue and the assessments, and the
21 computer-based testing.

22 Even if we had the money and we could
23 distribute it, I'm not sure it would work --

24 LINDA HOFFMAN: Right.

25 SENATOR FLANAGAN: -- because of exactly the

1 issues that you raised.

2 The Senate passed legislation, that if the
3 State thinks it's a good idea, that they have to pay
4 for it.

5 So, it's kind of the gist of what it was.

6 It's a -- let's put it this way:

7 In your 32 years being on the school boards?

8 LINDA HOFFMAN: Yes.

9 SENATOR FLANAGAN: The legislation, make sure
10 that it's a fully funded mandate.

11 LINDA HOFFMAN: That would be very, very
12 nice.

13 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Exceedingly rare, perhaps,
14 as well.

15 But, Jim, just one quick question:

16 If you were particularly coming in as someone
17 with a wealth of experience, but a new member to the
18 board, if you were to mark the Buffalo School
19 District for their implementation of Common Core,
20 for the changes that are coming now, on a scale of
21 1 to 10, 10 being the highest --

22 JIM SAMPSON: Where is it today?

23 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I'm sorry?

24 JIM SAMPSON: What is the end of the
25 question, excuse me?

1 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Yeah, how would you grade
2 the district, based on what you've seen as someone
3 who has very broad background but newly elected to
4 the board?

5 JIM SAMPSON: On a score of 1 to 10?

6 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Yes, sir.

7 JIM SAMPSON: Probably below 5.

8 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay.

9 Senator Ranzenhofer.

10 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Thank you both for
11 coming here today and testifying.

12 And a question for you, Jim.

13 You had mentioned that you feel very
14 strongly, and I think this has been the common
15 theme, that the Common Core Standards are very good,
16 but your concern is, right now, that at the
17 principal level and the teacher, it's not being
18 implemented in the schools.

19 The program is good, but it's not getting
20 into the classroom to have its effect, if
21 I understood you correctly.

22 What needs to be done in order to make sure
23 that these standards, which everybody has said are
24 good and more rigorous, that they actually get into
25 the schools so the kids benefit from this more

1 rigorous and thorough curriculum?

2 JIM SAMPSON: I think that, you know,
3 I mentioned that we do much the same things we did
4 when I was in high school, and we probably do much
5 the same things we've done for the past 100 years in
6 public education, particularly in urban districts.

7 I think we're organized around, and people
8 will disagree with this, but as you look at
9 everything that we do in Buffalo, we're organized
10 around central office, and that's where the
11 resources are.

12 I think we ought to be organized around the
13 school, and we should put as much in the way of
14 resources into each one of our 57 schools.

15 We've got some wonderful principals, and
16 I think if they had more access to resources, with
17 support from central office, not direction from
18 central office, with the understanding -- and they
19 know this, as do teachers -- that the real
20 difference is going to take place in what happens
21 between the child/the student, and the teacher and
22 families, and I think with the right kind of
23 support; in other words, almost flipping the
24 district upside down.

25 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: So are you saying,

1 then, that you believe the resources are sufficient,
2 but, the allocation, it being top-heavy as opposed
3 to ground up?

4 JIM SAMPSON: Oh, I -- as a board member and
5 elected official, I would be hard-pressed to ever
6 ask the State for more money, to Senator Gallivan's
7 point.

8 I mean, if a school is getting a student --
9 a school-improvement grant, at the end of that
10 grant, there's been no discernible progress in
11 turning that school around, I think it's -- how can
12 we ask for more money?

13 You know, what we ought to be doing is
14 saying, Why isn't that school turning it around?

15 And, perhaps, closing it and opening it as a
16 different kind of school.

17 I think there's plenty of resources in this
18 district, if used wisely, could accomplish the job.

19 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: So when you open as a
20 new school, I mean, how does that change the dynamic
21 if you just have a different coat of paint and a
22 different label?

23 JIM SAMPSON: Well, I think what you -- you
24 know, Sam Radford is in the audience, and he's been
25 a driving choice behind the parental-choice plan,

1 and I think that's a good plan.

2 I think it -- I'm glad that the State's
3 holding us accountable to our responsibility for
4 parental choice, but I also think it's an
5 opportunity for this district to implement reforms
6 way beyond what the State is requiring on the short
7 term.

8 For example, within that plan, we're going to
9 be looking at least two, perhaps even more schools,
10 that are non-performing, which means the students in
11 that school are in non-performing schools, of
12 actually closing it, and opening it as a
13 district-sponsored charter school.

14 That changes the governance of the school, it
15 changes where the resources are, it changes the
16 leadership, and it changes the accountability.

17 I'm also a trustee and a founding member of a
18 charter school, and I really appreciate the creative
19 attention between what SED requires, and New York
20 has got one of the best enabling legislations for
21 charter schools, and knowing that, if parents aren't
22 satisfied, they'll go someplace else, and they'll
23 have that opportunity.

24 So I think, through creative thinking,
25 creative discussion-making, engagement of critical

1 stakeholders, especially families and parents, we
2 can find ways to change the culture in schools.

3 And I don't want to dismiss at all, and I'm
4 not intending to do that, we don't listen enough to
5 principals and teachers about how we can change the
6 culture of a school.

7 We direct them of what it's going to be.

8 And we should -- it should to be the
9 opposite; we should be asking them, "What needs to
10 be done for you to be able to do your job?"

11 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Thank you very much.

12 LINDA HOFFMAN: And I would agree with that,
13 and many suburban and rural schools also, that are
14 failing, or our school districts; are grades are
15 failing, and our children that are failing.

16 That we need to be talking to the principals
17 and the teachers, and saying, "What do you need?"

18 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Thanks.

19 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you very much.

20 JIM SAMPSON: Thanks.

21 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Next we have, and I'm sure
22 I'm going to botch this somehow, but I know he's
23 been with us before at at least one hearing:

24 Dan Drmacich, principal, retired teacher,
25 and, Naomi Cerre, principal of Lafayette High

1 School.

2 You look like you're coming in from opposing
3 corners here.

4 [Laughter.]

5 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I would thank everyone
6 again for their patience while these folks are
7 joining us, and just would remind everyone,
8 summarizing, because I know, Dan, you have very
9 extensive testimony.

10 A concise summary is hugely helpful, and we
11 will continue the house rule, that, ladies first.

12 Naomi.

13 NAOMI CERRE: Good afternoon.

14 First of all, I want to say that I'm
15 extremely happy to be a principal in the
16 Buffalo schools, as well as the principal of
17 Lafayette High School, which is the pride of the
18 west side.

19 I'm here today to first say, as I was
20 listening to you, the many conversations regarding,
21 and testimonies regarding, our situation with our
22 students.

23 Each student deserves a high-quality
24 education no matter of their race, their religion,
25 or their socioeconomic status.

1 The issue is, is that it cannot be a
2 one-size-fits-all approach onto education, because
3 that has never really worked, and never will.

4 The best approach for a better outcome for
5 students is a child-centered education customized to
6 students with appropriate resources and support for
7 educators.

8 Lafayette, the demographics, as you well
9 know, 70 percent is ESL, 45 different languages,
10 over 30 different countries are represented, and the
11 native tongue for my students is varied and very
12 complex.

13 Students and their families have arrived in
14 Buffalo seeking refuge.

15 Many come from war-torn locations and have
16 seen various horrors as young people.

17 Despite the limitations, they have navigated
18 the schools, the community, language, and different
19 customs, and they have pursued educational goals
20 with humility.

21 You have read and have seen many versions
22 from the media that describe Lafayette as a failing
23 school.

24 We are a priority school, not a failing
25 school.

1 These scores are not a reflection of the
2 learning and quality of teaching happening in the
3 school.

4 Intervention for ESL support, it is just not
5 stand-alone quality instruction.

6 You must have customized supports to support
7 ESL students, especially as it relates to a
8 literacy-filled environment.

9 The question that should be raised is:

10 Are the students being failed at Lafayette?

11 Four of six of the failing high schools in
12 Buffalo have the highest concentration of
13 non-English speakers, and that would mean if there
14 was more customized supports in those schools and
15 moving in a direction to also teach gen-ed teachers
16 how to really work well and support our ESL
17 population, there might be a significant increase in
18 our graduation rate, as well as, our dropout rate
19 would also reduce.

20 Many students are SIFE students; and that is,
21 students who have interrupted or no formal
22 education.

23 They have arrived at this country -- in this
24 country with either no education, or they've had an
25 informal or interrupted education; and, therefore,

1 indeed, are struggling to navigate the system.

2 Language fluency takes five to seven years,
3 so we are requiring that our ESL students complete
4 in four years.

5 They need a -- at least, minimally, a year,
6 if not more, of English immersion to transition into
7 our high schools.

8 Despite the language navigation, students are
9 expected again to meet graduation requirements.

10 Now, I want to say this is not typical just
11 to Buffalo, this is not typical just to
12 New York State.

13 It is a national crisis, that we are not
14 receiving enough supports and resources in relation
15 to ESL coaches, ESL coordinators, as well as
16 interpreters.

17 I have 45 different languages and 2 standing
18 interpreters at this time, even though we are moving
19 towards hiring additional interpreters.

20 There's a need for that level of support.

21 Another thing that I want to mention, as it
22 relates to all children, if we're talking about
23 addressing students in relationship to poverty, many
24 do not come from a language-rich environment; so,
25 therefore, literacy is an issue.

1 If we do not, and I repeat, "if we do not"
2 take a diagnostic, prescriptive approach to
3 addressing reading and writing with our students,
4 how many programs or extended day or learning pieces
5 that the district puts out, or that the state puts
6 out for us, indeed, we need to make sure that
7 students, we know where they are in their levels,
8 and how to prescriptively work with students and
9 develop a treatment plan.

10 If you have high levels of students that have
11 reading difficulties or literacy difficulties,
12 having an extended program can be wonderful, but if
13 it's not addressing, specifically, those issues
14 related to literacy in a more prescriptive
15 diagnostic approach, then we are not moving in the
16 direction that we should.

17 And that's a conversation that must be had by
18 all educators and by all politicians and by
19 communities, that, indeed, we are looking at
20 programs, and, yes, we are looking a standards, but
21 are we addressing students' levels in a more
22 diagnostic way, in a more prescriptive way?

23 And that's a question that really has to be
24 looked at.

25 I added two additional reading teachers to my

1 budget, because I wanted to make sure that all of my
2 students are tested at their levels.

3 Do note, that when they come in, that they
4 are not tested in their native language, and that is
5 something that also needs to be done.

6 Every student should have an opportunity to
7 be tested in their native language to see if,
8 number one, that they not only speak, but they write
9 and read in the language that they come forth from
10 their native country.

11 So, clearly, when we have students that walk
12 into our school buildings who need an abundance of
13 resources, we are not a failing school; we are a
14 priority school.

15 And "priority school" means exactly that;
16 that, indeed, we should have priority saturation of
17 resources and priority saturation of capacity and
18 building capacity.

19 And a lot of this has been due to the fact
20 that there hasn't been enough research and data that
21 has been accepted by our educators regarding what
22 our needs are for ESL students.

23 So at this time, I want to say to you that we
24 do need to increase those customized supports, not
25 just in the area of ESL supports, but in literacy

1 supports; a more diagnostic, prescriptive approach.

2 And we're asking that, that that's really
3 formally looked at on all levels, so that the value
4 of having immigrants come to the west side is a
5 fantastic thing.

6 When I walk down the streets of Grant Street
7 and I walk into my school and I hear 45 different
8 languages, I'm excited about the opportunities that
9 Buffalo could possibly have if we really invested in
10 this particular population.

11 They are an asset; they come in ready to
12 work.

13 And I just want to thank you for listening,
14 and for taking the opportunity to hear my testimony.

15 Thank you.

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Naomi, you must be a lot
17 of fun to work with.

18 I wouldn't want to get in trouble and have to
19 go to the principal's office.

20 [Laughter.]

21 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Dan, go ahead, please.

22 DAN DRMACICH: Thank you.

23 My name is Dan Drmacich.

24 I'm a retired principal from Rochester City
25 School District, where I was the principal for

1 23 years.

2 Prior to that, I taught for 20 years within
3 the system.

4 I think it's important to note that
5 School Without Walls is a member of the
6 New York State Performance Standards Consortium,
7 which probably some of you haven't heard of, but
8 it's been approved over the past almost 20 years by
9 the New York State Regents, in terms of having more
10 flexibility with the curriculum, more flexibility
11 with assessment.

12 In fact, the only Regents or Common Core
13 exams that our students would take to be the ELA.

14 But what's interesting about it, if you do
15 the research, and I've noted this on my testimony
16 that you have a copy of, is that students from
17 consortium schools, despite the fact that they have
18 more special-ed students, more ESL students, that
19 they have more students who are behavioral issues at
20 times, they perform much better.

21 In fact, it almost replicates the research
22 that was done back in the 1940s when the
23 8-year study was done on progressive schools that
24 were across the country in the '20s, 30s, and
25 '40s under John Dewey.

1 And what they did was called the
2 "8-year study," to find out how graduates of
3 progressive schools would do in comparison to
4 graduates of traditional high schools.

5 And they had over 300 colleges involved, over
6 100 schools were involved, and they found out that
7 the kids of progressive schools, the graduates who
8 were accepted into college on no basis other than
9 teacher and principal recommendations, that these
10 kids performed as well as or better than students
11 from traditional schools.

12 The other variable about this, which is very
13 interesting, is that those kids scored much higher
14 in citizenship; that they're more likely to vote,
15 that they were more likely to participate in
16 community activities, in terms of changing things in
17 their neighborhoods.

18 That type of thing has been replicated by the
19 consortium schools in New York State.

20 So I encourage to you take a look at that in
21 terms of a more genuine, authentic model of
22 education reform.

23 I'm going say a few things about the reform
24 model in New York State, that I hope it's not too
25 insulting, but I'm going to be direct and blunt.

1 I think it's a complete disaster, and the
2 reason I say this is -- well, as I said in my
3 testimony, it's on wrong track, headed in the wrong
4 direction, on the wrong train.

5 And what I'd like to say about this is that,
6 if I were an enemy of New York State, or an enemy of
7 this country, and I wanted to disrupt the education
8 system, I can't think of a better way to do it than
9 what our reformers in New York State and in this
10 country have done.

11 Andrew Cuomo, Arne Duncan, our Board of
12 Regents, our Commissioner, are all ignoring the
13 research in terms of what research says makes an
14 effective education for kids.

15 They don't deal at all with what motivates
16 kids to take a more effective, engaging approach
17 into education.

18 They ignore what motivates teachers to teach
19 more effectively, to be more creative, more
20 competent, and ignores all the research in terms of
21 what makes an effective humanistic organization that
22 adults and kids can thrive in.

23 It is not paid any attention to.

24 What we end up with is reformers, including
25 our Governor, our Education Commissioner, and also

1 the corporate leaders of Gates, Broede [ph.], and
2 Walton, is to turn our students into products.

3 All they're interested in is test scores.

4 If you look at what's tested, there's nothing
5 in there that really asks a kid to apply their
6 learning to the real world.

7 That's the real test, and nothing is done,
8 because it's cheaper to do it this way.

9 So our kids are basically -- they basically
10 become products.

11 Teachers and principals are being turned into
12 technicians as opposed to -- who can produce high
13 test scores, as opposed to really working on what
14 engages kids.

15 I want to make one point here that's kind of
16 interesting; is that there's a socioeconomic
17 principle called "Campbell's Law."

18 Campbell's Law says that whenever you reduce
19 a socioeconomic goal in a country, a city, a state,
20 whatever it might be, into a number, corruption and
21 perversion of the process to get you there is
22 inevitably going to occur.

23 And that's happened within New York State and
24 around the country.

25 All we have now is more "teach to the test";

1 "\"One size fits all\";

2 Narrow the curriculum for the sake of
3 disregarding art, music, citizenship, character
4 development, and student interests;

5 Focus on test scores rather than the joy of
6 learning;

7 Even ignore poverty as a variable that
8 seriously affects student engagement in learning.

9 I get insulted every time I hear this,
10 because I dealt with kids who lived in poverty, for
11 40 years in the district and, I know poverty affects
12 them.

13 It's not only poverty -- we all know about
14 the heroic examples of kids who exceed poverty, but
15 those are far and few between in terms of what
16 happens to the rest.

17 I think what we look at is that, even if we
18 look at the graduates of high schools in large
19 cities, like Buffalo and Rochester, and we find out
20 that only 14 percent of kids from -- who are
21 low-income Black and Hispanic students graduate from
22 college, compared to 54 percent of Caucasian
23 students.

24 So, I think what we're at, is that we need to
25 reevaluate where we're at with this reform movement,

1 because it doesn't make much sense to me in terms of
2 the direction that it's going.

3 It's ignoring the research.

4 How can you do that?

5 I don't understand it.

6 What I have submitted to you in terms of
7 testimony, I put in the form of eight myths that
8 exist within New York State, and pretty much around
9 the country, in terms of the Common Core and the
10 efforts, the high-stakes standardized-testing
11 movement that's gone on, in terms of trying to
12 reform education, which I refer to as "deform" as
13 opposed to reform.

14 But I encourage you to read my testimony and
15 look at the myths in there.

16 You heard from the last person who gave
17 testimony, the school-board member, on charter
18 schools.

19 Charter schools, in general, are not
20 effective.

21 The research from the CREDO Report, in terms
22 of Stanford University, proves this.

23 You know, there's exceptions, there's good
24 charter schools, but, by and large, they aren't any
25 better, and most are worse than public schools.

1 So you've got to look at the research in
2 terms of what the research is saying.

3 I have no idea why New York State pushed for
4 more charter schools and evaluation of teachers
5 based upon test scores.

6 It's both craziness.

7 It doesn't make any sense.

8 If you look at the research in terms of
9 motivation, I mean, look at the popular book
10 "Drive," by Daniel Pink, it challenges all of this
11 by thorough research.

12 So, I could go on and on in this because
13 I feel so passionate about it, but what I do want to
14 do, is just take a couple of minutes to --

15 If I could, two minutes, please?

16 Okay.

17 -- is to review the recommendations that
18 I have for you, and I promise not to read it.

19 First of all, I think the New York State
20 Assembly and Senate needs to reestablish its efforts
21 in terms of creating a war on poverty in
22 New York State.

23 You will see much higher test scores, if
24 you're gonna measure kids by test scores, if you
25 just focus on poverty, and deal with things like

1 medical care and other things, job training, parent
2 training, early childhood education, incentives for
3 middle-class suburbs to create sliding-scale housing
4 developments.

5 You'll get a much more drastic impact in
6 terms of increase of student performance if you deal
7 with that.

8 Increase legislation to give incentives to
9 middle-class suburbs to partner with urban schools
10 to create metropolitan school districts.

11 If you look at the book "Hope and Despair in
12 the American City," by Gerald Grant, who is
13 professor emeritus at Syracuse University, he
14 compares Syracuse to that of Wake County,
15 North Carolina, which isn't perfect, but it has a
16 92 percent parent-approval rating in terms of their
17 kids' education there, and that's with a district of
18 150,000 students.

19 Provide funding to reduce all -- and this one
20 I'm sure will blow you out of the water -- reduce
21 all poverty-stricken schools to a student-teacher
22 ratio of 12:1.

23 Declare a moratorium on the use of
24 Common Core and high-stakes testing until it can be
25 field-tested for five years.

1 Require each student to demonstrate their
2 proficiency different.

3 Through that -- this is really a new paradigm
4 if we're going to go to this, but it makes much more
5 sense.

6 It's what colleges do in terms of college
7 dissertations.

8 Evaluate kids based on a portfolio of all
9 their work, as opposed to that of a test score,
10 which are completely unreliable and invalid.

11 Again, look at the research in terms of what
12 the research says.

13 Lastly, providing incentives to school
14 districts to replicate schools that adhere to the
15 consortium that I talked about.

16 Rescind the charter legislation.

17 Rescind APPR.

18 Require New York State to shift their role to
19 more of a helper as opposed to an imposer of
20 unreasonable unfunded mandates.

21 Work with the Board of Regents to come up
22 with four new sets of diplomas.

23 Come up with a vocational diploma for those
24 students who -- there's no loss of honor in terms of
25 being a good electrician, a plumber, a carpenter.

1 Why can't we do that?

2 A new set of graduation requirements for any
3 district that would want to come up with something,
4 as long as it's approved by the body.

5 And, lastly, I know you're not going to like
6 this, but encourage the resignation of
7 Commissioner John King.

8 John King does not support anything that
9 I just talked about.

10 Nothing.

11 In fact, there's so much outrage about this,
12 in terms of New York State, he recently canceled
13 four PTA conferences, forums, that were to be held
14 in New York State.

15 Is that the spirit of democracy that we want
16 to model for our kids?

17 And, lastly, Board of Regents:

18 I would encourage you to seek legislation
19 that would require all Board of Regents members to
20 hold degrees in education and/or psychology, with at
21 least three years of teaching experience, so that
22 they can relate more effectively to the teaching
23 profession.

24 Thank you.

25

1 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Dan, that was a little
2 over two minutes, but there's a lot of material;
3 there's a wealth of detail in your testimony.

4 I did have a chance to go through it, and
5 including the myth and reality.

6 And, Naomi, I think I'd rather go get in
7 trouble in your principal's office than him.

8 [Laughter.]

9 SENATOR FLANAGAN: But, you know, there's a
10 lot of provocative stuff in there, and we do
11 appreciate it.

12 So, Senator Gallivan.

13 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Naomi, I have one question
14 about your testimony, and I just may not have heard
15 it correctly.

16 You talk about some of the facts and the
17 challenges that the kids are facing -- the language
18 challenges of people that are coming into our
19 melting pot.

20 But, anyway, written testimony says, "Across
21 the nation, including a region, lawmakers have not
22 taken supportive research seriously."

23 Then I thought I heard you say, but I might
24 have misunderstood, that there was not any research,
25 or enough research, in this area.

1 Did I hear correctly, or no?

2 NAOMI CERRE: I'm saying that districts have
3 not really looked at the data and the research in a
4 serious way, to connect with the capacity of
5 resources, as well as professional development.

6 SENATOR GALLIVAN: So there is research out
7 there regarding --

8 NAOMI CERRE: Yes, there is.

9 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Could you -- if you have
10 time in your busy day, could you point us to some of
11 that research, just in follow-up, whether it's my
12 email or whatever it may be?

13 NAOMI CERRE: Absolutely.

14 SENATOR GALLIVAN: All right.

15 NAOMI CERRE: Absolutely.

16 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Thank you.

17 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Yes, good morning; how
18 are you?

19 A couple of questions, I want to follow up
20 from previous testimony.

21 Did your students get the curriculum and the
22 books that were needed for the Common Core?

23 NAOMI CERRE: Yes, we have our books.

24 We still do need -- because we are a school
25 that has so many different languages, there needs to

1 be a review of curriculum.

2 There needs to be review of what kind of
3 supports need to go on in the classroom in order for
4 content teachers who do not have a background in
5 ESL, to actually instruct with ESL strategies.

6 So, we've been working with the multilingual
7 ed department, thanks to Dr. Alsace, along with
8 Johns Hopkins and national experts, but that just
9 began as of the end of last year, as far as the
10 intensive kind of professional development and
11 review of curriculum.

12 So we're looking at rigor.

13 We're looking at Bridges for Academic
14 Success, which is a program that's coming out of --
15 actually, New York State is supporting it, to
16 actually work with students and teachers regarding
17 professional development, as well as delivery of
18 instruction, because the kind of delivery
19 instruction for ESL students is quite different than
20 it would be in a different classroom.

21 SENATOR GRISTANTI: But the students that
22 have a language barrier, how are they able to take
23 the test?

24 NAOMI CERRE: The -- we have, again, some
25 interpreters, and we do have an opportunity to offer

1 students in the classroom what we call "ESL
2 periods," where they are learning certain levels
3 English immersion.

4 Is it intense enough to meet the level of
5 impact?

6 The answer would be no.

7 They need more time.

8 They need more time.

9 So, yes, we do have materials.

10 Yes, we are reviewing more materials that --
11 within our transformation framework, to address that
12 piece, but there has to be a district-wide universal
13 protocol in how we address and provide supports and
14 curriculum and resources to ESL, as well as
15 bilingual students.

16 SENATOR GRISTANTI: And would you agree --
17 because it's, you know, just an observation from the
18 last three speakers:

19 We had, when I got here, the first speaker
20 that was, you know, all for Common Core;

21 We had, the second speaker that I was here
22 for, somewhere in the middle;

23 And now we have, you know, it's got to be
24 done away with.

25 So there's definitely not continuity.

1 I mean, there's questions of how to fix it,
2 or how to do things, or what have you.

3 But my question to you, then, is this:

4 The -- there was talk by the Board of
5 Education newest member, Jim Sampson, about, you
6 know, having the ability of having resources in your
7 school, rather than you having to go through the red
8 tape to get the resources from city hall.

9 Do you agree with that?

10 NAOMI CERRE: Yes, I do.

11 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Okay.

12 What are the problems that you are seeing?

13 Is it strictly funding?

14 Is it having somebody listen to you as to
15 what's needed at Lafayette?

16 I mean, what are things that you see that are
17 needed, that are not being attended to by the board?

18 NAOMI CERRE: Let me say this --

19 SENATOR GRISTANTI: By the administration,
20 I should say.

21 NAOMI CERRE: -- it's not just a district
22 issue.

23 It is a trickle-down effect that -- in
24 regards to supporting ESL students.

25 So when we're talking about resources, yes,

1 funding is definitely a high priority, but the other
2 piece, is knowing what resources should be in place;
3 the kinds of resources that should be specific to
4 each building.

5 Every building has a different face and a
6 different culture, and a different tone and tenor;

7 And, accountability:

8 When you send out a standard, any kind of
9 standard, you have to make sure that there's
10 differentiated -- just like we have differentiated
11 instruction, there has to be differentiated
12 accountability from the federal government, to the
13 state government, to the district, all the way down
14 to the building level; and all of those have to be
15 aligned.

16 We're given the standards to work with, which
17 is fine, but, you have to have levels of supports
18 and building capacity, with strengthening teachers,
19 their ideas, and even views of an ESL child;
20 diversity training.

21 Recruitment in HR has to be changed, where
22 we're not just recruiting internally, but we're
23 recruiting outside of the district, to meet
24 bilingual and ESL pieces.

25 So there has to be a shift in our thinking on

1 how we work with schools.

2 Bennett is different, has different needs,
3 than Lafayette, and you cannot give me the same
4 resources that you would at Bennett.

5 It's just a different -- it's apples and
6 oranges.

7 SENATOR GRISTANTI: There was talk also about
8 grants that expire after two or three years.

9 Now, those grants, my understanding, are
10 supposed to actually be to aid your school, to aid
11 Bennett, to aid other schools.

12 NAOMI CERRE: Correct.

13 SENATOR GRISTANTI: The odd thing is, that
14 the grant money was actually used, in some
15 circumstances, to hire administrators, rather than
16 that money going to the schools themselves to
17 implement the programs that are needed that the
18 grant was supposed to be used for.

19 So it was, either, that the money was coming
20 out of the money that the State was giving for the
21 education, or the City gave under the budget, but
22 then it was said, no, it was grant money that was
23 used so it wasn't any moneys from the State or the
24 City; it was grant money that was used to hire
25 additional administrators.

1 NAOMI CERRE: Well, I --

2 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Now, grant money that's
3 set up for grant money is supposed to go to your
4 school or to Bennett or to McKinley or to any of the
5 other 40 schools to -- plus, to utilize for
6 implementing the programs in your schools; correct?

7 NAOMI CERRE: Well, I can only speak for
8 Lafayette and East [sic] because we are -- we have
9 not received SIG funding as of yet, because of
10 the -- we did not -- the application process was not
11 fully processed correctly; so, therefore, we lost
12 that grant funding; and, therefore, Easton and
13 Lafayette, we were -- we received a mandate from the
14 New York State Commissioner to move forward with
15 working with BOCES, which was not a framework, but
16 it's definitely a positive addition.

17 But most importantly, wherever we are,
18 whether it's SIG grant or there's a combination of
19 SIG grant and district funding, there has to be a
20 level of understanding of what the needs are for
21 that building.

22 So no matter if it's SIG grant, if the
23 SIG grant comes today, it will leave, and there has
24 to be a universal protocol on how certain schools
25 are supported.

1 Yes, principals are given a budget to work
2 with, but, still, there's this formula based on
3 enrollment versus need, and so when you're working
4 with the budget, you have to look at the needs of
5 the school, and the needs of the students, as well
6 as the teachers.

7 So, we're talking about a shifting of
8 thinking on everyone's part.

9 There's no pointing fingers; it's just a
10 shift of thinking, and how do we go about doing that
11 in a transformation process?

12 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Everybody working
13 together.

14 Now, is that working now?

15 I mean, I know it's just been implemented
16 with BOCES.

17 Any idea of how many students are actually
18 taking advantage of it?

19 NAOMI CERRE: From my building, 58 students
20 are taking advantage of it.

21 SENATOR GRISTANTI: And that's similar, Dan,
22 to what you were talking about, is, you know, not
23 everybody's going to graduate, but getting them into
24 plumbing, electrical, you know, things that are
25 taught at McKinley.

1 Out of curiosity, do they still have the
2 travel program at LaFayette?

3 They used to have the travel-and-tourism
4 program.

5 NAOMI CERRE: No.

6 When we were going through this
7 transformation turnaround process, that is a part of
8 the transformational framework, so this year is a
9 planning year to implement firm CTE programs.

10 And that's aligned with the National Academy
11 Foundation (NAF).

12 SENATOR GRISTANTI: All right.

13 Thank you, Naomi, and thank you, Dan, for
14 being here.

15 NAOMI CERRE: Thank you.

16 2:00:18:9

17 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Two quick comments before
18 I say "thank you":

19 Dan, To your point about other venues and
20 forums not taking place, I think that underscores
21 the value of what we're trying to do by having
22 people like you and Naomi, and others similarly
23 situated, testify before us.

24 And, Naomi, one of the things that I have
25 found enlightening, and a tad disconcerting is,

1 I don't mind that New York State gets blamed for
2 things that New York State is actually responsible
3 for; and that's justifiable, because we take credit
4 for things that we do well, also.

5 But, I'm finding that there's a disconnect,
6 to some extent, between what parents know for sure,
7 and the role of the federal government.

8 A lot of the things that we're talking about,
9 English-language learners, students with
10 disabilities, when they have to take tests, even if
11 it's not advisable, they're hamstrung to a degree by
12 federal regulations that force us to do some of
13 those things.

14 So, frankly, I think one of upshots of what
15 we should be doing collectively, is working more
16 closely and putting more pressure on our federal
17 colleagues.

18 They're a little otherwise engaged right now,
19 but putting more pressure on them to make some
20 potential changes.

21 But thank both, very much.

22 NAOMI CERRE: Thank you.

23 DAN DRMACICH: One other thing is,
24 I encourage all of you to read at least a couple
25 chapters of this book, "A Reign of Error," by

1 Diane Ravitch.

2 A lot of research, a lot of good
3 recommendations in here.

4 2:02:11

5 SENATOR FLANAGAN: And, thank you.

6 And our next panel is Deann Nelson,
7 Carrie Remis, and Eric Mihelbergel.

8 I'm going to say that one wrong.

9 I don't mean to botch it, but, Eric, you'll
10 forgive me in advance.

11 All right, Eric, you obviously know you're
12 going third.

13 ERIC MIHELBERGEL: I'm sorry?

14 SENATOR FLANAGAN: You obviously know you're
15 going third.

16 ERIC MIHELBERGEL: Yes.

17 SENATOR FLANAGAN: And, again, please do the
18 best you can to summarize.

19 We have a lot of people who are still coming,
20 and I appreciate your patience.

21 So, Deann why don't we start with you,
22 please.

23 DEANN NELSON: Oh, good, okay.

24 The devil is in the details, so I'm going to
25 show you some details.

1 [Inaudible.]

2 SENATOR GRISTANTI: You just got reprimanded.

3 DEANN NELSON: I want to talk about rule of
4 law.

5 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Can you put the
6 microphone closer to your mouth.

7 DEANN NELSON: Yes, I will.

8 Thank you.

9 Friedrich Hayek, who is a Nobel Prize-winning
10 economist, writer, philosopher, wrote "The Road to
11 Serfdom," said that "Rule of law is the embodiment
12 of freedom."

13 It distinguishes a free country from a
14 country with arbitrary government.

15 Well, we're here today because rule of law
16 has been broken in our state and country.

17 I want to -- there's five of them that I can
18 discern.

19 The U.S. Constitution, the Tenth Amendment,
20 which gives education rights to the states;

21 20 USC, Section 1232a, which is the
22 prohibition against the federal government getting
23 involved in education;

24 The New York State Constitution, Article 11,
25 Sections 1 and 2, which the Legislature has

1 responsibility for education, and the Legislature
2 has responsibility for overseeing the Board of
3 Regents;

4 New York State Law, Article 35, Section --
5 Statute 1709, giving boards of education
6 responsibility for local control;

7 And the last one, the Family Educational
8 Rights and Privacy Act, which, up to this time,
9 considered the privacy of students in our state.

10 But, the federal government decided they
11 would change the definitions, and so this no longer
12 is applicable.

13 And, so, because we have this grand -- our
14 grand principle has been trounced, has been broken,
15 has been violated, the Board of Regents should be
16 replaced, and the Commissioner of Education should
17 be replaced.

18 Now, the second point that I wanted to talk
19 about was the mathematics program.

20 Mr. Grisanti asked about textbooks.

21 Well, in the mathematics program, there are
22 no textbooks.

23 There are three questions that we should be
24 asking about the mathematics program; EngageNY
25 mathematics:

1 One is, what is the research base for this
2 program?

3 Number 2:

4 What is the effect size of this program?

5 And, Number 3:

6 Was this program field-tested before it was
7 imposed on our children?

8 The first one, I could find no research on
9 EngageNY mathematics, so, there is no effect size.

10 "Effect size" is a very important concept.

11 I'm listed as a parent and a grandparent, but
12 I also have a doctorate from UB in educational
13 psychology, and I was a school psychologist, I was
14 guidance counselor, I taught health.

15 I am certified as a school-nurse teacher, and
16 I am certified in elementary.

17 So, I have a broad background in this.

18 Effect sizes are so important, and the work
19 of Dr. John Hattie in 2009 was groundbreaking work
20 on effect sizes, because you can compare
21 effect sizes of programs.

22 He took, and he had 800 meta-analyses.

23 That means, he took a lot of different
24 studies.

25 He had 52,000 studies, in fact.

1 And he did -- and he had millions of
2 students, millions of subjects, that he was looking
3 at in all of this.

4 What he determined was, that an effect size
5 of 0.40 is the hinge.

6 Anything at this point or above is effective.

7 It works for all students.

8 Anything below this works on some students.

9 And let me just give you an example:

10 For years, and it's still being used today,
11 whole-language reading was implemented.

12 It has an effect size of .06.

13 That's hardly better than chance.

14 It doesn't work.

15 Yet, when children were in that program, they
16 flowed into special education because the program
17 was so poor and so weak.

18 We have Ze'ev Wurman saying that
19 "The Common Core will be the cessation of
20 educational standards in our country."

21 I'm so glad I followed Dan, because I believe
22 in most of what he said.

23 Instead of having rigorous programs --
24 because the math program is not rigorous -- but
25 instead of having rigorous programs, we're going to

1 have critical thinking and twenty-first-century
2 skills.

3 These do not cut it for our students.

4 We know already that college-readiness is a
5 myth, because there are people on the standards,
6 readiness standards, who would not agree to sign off
7 on them because they were so weak.

8 What we're going to get is a dumbing-down in
9 our colleges if this goes on.

10 R. James Milgram said that, by grade 5, our
11 students would be a year behind other countries, and
12 by grade 7, they would be two years behind.

13 Now, this program that we have, the EngageNY,
14 here are some just general things about that:

15 I looked at nearly every -- every frame,
16 every sheet, in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2,
17 grade 3, and most of grade 4.

18 Those are our most important grades, where
19 children learn the basics, then have to master the
20 skills, and they're not going to do it with this
21 math program.

22 The program is unwieldy, it is cumbersome, it
23 breaks things down into very small parts, and then
24 they use the parts.

25 They don't use the whole numbers.

1 It's expensive.

2 A class, for instance, of 18, which is the
3 reasonable number, uses anywhere between 126 and
4 162 sheets of paper per day, plus colored computer
5 ink.

6 Parents do not get to see a textbook.

7 All they get to see is this one sheet that
8 comes home.

9 They can't look ahead and see, Let's see,
10 what's going on?

11 What's coming?

12 What will you be doing?

13 They can't look back to help a child, because
14 they have no textbook to look at it.

15 They just have a worksheet.

16 And we see that much of what they do is done
17 with manipulatives.

18 These are Unifix Cubes.

19 They use cubes, they use their finger, they
20 use their hands, they use their arms, but we want
21 children to get it into their brains.

22 We want them to master the facts so that they
23 can apply this in math work, math problems.

24 But they don't do this with this program.

25 There's no criterion of what is mastery in

1 this program.

2 And Dan reported --

3 I call him Dan, because I didn't really catch
4 his last name and I know it's a difficult one.

5 -- "one size fits all."

6 Just think now:

7 Some of you are younger than others and you
8 have young children.

9 Think about your children being in a program.

10 Say that you have a disabled child; they're
11 in this program.

12 Or that you know children who are
13 low-performers; they're in this program.

14 Everybody goes through the very same thing.

15 Could we just -- okay, let's just look here
16 now; okay?

17 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Again --

18 DEANN NELSON: Yes.

19 SENATOR FLANAGAN: You need to -- you need to
20 wrap up, please, because you have extensive
21 testimony which --

22 DEANN NELSON: Oh, I know, but we were
23 20 minutes late in starting.

24 Maybe I can have five of those minutes?

25 Could I?

1 No, but --

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: We have a whole host of
3 other people.

4 DEANN NELSON: -- but you need to look at
5 this so that you understand what's going to --
6 what's happening.

7 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I'm a very good reader and
8 I'm an excellent listener.

9 I'm listening very carefully to everything
10 that you're talking about, including the cubes, but,
11 I'm just asking you, if you would respectfully --
12 continue.

13 DEANN NELSON: Okay, am I to continue?
14 Did you say, or not?
15 Somebody else?

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Continue so that --

17 DEANN NELSON: What is your decision?

18 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I would appreciate it if
19 you could wrap up your comments so we can have the
20 other panelists.

21 DEANN NELSON: How about, this is like a
22 movie; we'll go through this really quickly.

23 Do you have your packet there?

24 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I was told I wasn't
25 allowed to look at it yet.

1 DEANN NELSON: You were -- you cheated.

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: No, I didn't.

3 DEANN NELSON: Oh, okay, let's look at it
4 now.

5 [Laughter.]

6 SENATOR GRISTANTI: He's waiting for you to
7 tell him it's okay for him to look at it.

8 DEANN NELSON: Okay, let's go.

9 All right, okay.

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: K through 5, Lesson 19.

11 DEANN NELSON: All right, here we go, we're
12 gonna go pretty fast.

13 Number one --

14 SENATOR GRISTANTI: I don't have that.

15 SENATOR FLANAGAN: He doesn't have a copy of
16 that.

17 DEANN NELSON: I know.

18 I couldn't afford to give you all copies, and
19 I didn't know how many there would be, so look on
20 with Senator Flanagan.

21 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Senator, you're the only
22 one being tested.

23 SENATOR FLANAGAN: There's -- I will just say
24 for the record that there's at least 8 -- there are
25 20 --

1 DEANN NELSON: There's 19.

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: -- 19.

3 DEANN NELSON: Yeah.

4 And I gave you an article there on, "Closing
5 the Door on Innovation."

6 This was by 118 educators, prominent people
7 in our society, who have said, this "one size, one
8 all," this national curriculum, it closes the door
9 on innovation.

10 And it does.

11 There's no research to support this math
12 program; yet everybody in New York State, all of the
13 schools in New York State, are using it.

14 What's going to happen if it's a
15 boondoggle? -- which I think it is.

16 That means that our children are ill-prepared
17 to go on to college.

18 There's no pre-calculus.

19 There's no calculus.

20 You go to a good school, a good college, and
21 you want to go into the business program, first
22 thing they ask you, "Have you had calculus?"

23 But you don't get it with this program.

24 If you look here, Sheet Number 1, everything
25 they want to do is, they break down numbers into the

1 component parts --

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Excuse me.

3 I'm not going to go through 19 pages right
4 now.

5 I will -- I promise that I will look at
6 these, but if you -- please, don't go through every
7 page.

8 DEANN NELSON: Okay.

9 How about I go to a page, like, page 3?

10 Can we look at that?

11 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Go ahead.

12 DEANN NELSON: Okay, because this is a
13 homework page for kindergarten, it's the fifth
14 module.

15 Look at the reading level.

16 Children are not reading at this level in
17 kindergarten.

18 There's, almost every word in that first
19 sentence is an irregular word.

20 What if you're a low-performer?

21 You can't do it.

22 Your mother doesn't know how to do it.

23 See, you get two pages of this, and look how
24 few things are on the page.

25 That's expensive, and they only use one side.

1 Let's see.

2 Go to, let's look at -- let's look at page 8.

3 And thank you for being so agreeable.

4 SENATOR FLANAGAN: You're welcome.

5 Thank you as well.

6 [Laughter.]

7 DEANN NELSON: I know, I'm driven.

8 Okay, Number 3, look it, here's a simple
9 addition: 18 plus 6.

10 But we have to break it down into its
11 component parts, and we use the component parts, we
12 don't use the "18" and the "6."

13 We're in grade 2, "grade 2," and they're
14 doing this.

15 So we add the 8 and the 2 to get 10.

16 So got 10 plus 10 plus 4 equals 24.

17 We could have just learned to carry and add
18 the 18 plus the 6.

19 Let's go to 11, okay, we're jumping ahead
20 here.

21 Look how fast we're moving.

22 Thank you, Senator.

23 SENATOR FLANAGAN: "11" will be the last one,
24 so we're going really fast.

25 DEANN NELSON: I like your smile.

1 You have a nice smile.

2 [Laughter.]

3 DEANN NELSON: Okay, here's, grade 2,
4 fourth module, new step in how we're doing this,
5 "19 plus 32," which would be very simple to add;
6 but, no, we're going to break down the 32 into
7 30 plus 2.

8 And now we add 19 plus 30 -- and now we have
9 a new rigmarole here, a new line -- equals 49, and
10 then we add 2 to that to equal 51.

11 And if you jump down to Number 3, we have a
12 new way of doing that.

13 Off to the side, we do, breaking down the
14 18: 10 plus 8; 25: 20 plus 5; we get 30 plus 13
15 equals 43.

16 We have all of these steps, when we could
17 have learned to use the algorithm.

18 ERIC MIHELBERGEL: I'll be touching on the
19 same things a little bit as well.

20 DEANN NELSON: Oh, good.

21 Okay, go to 14.

22 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay, this is the last
23 one.

24 DEANN NELSON: Is it?

25 Oh, gosh.

1 Oh...

2 Okay, 14: we're learning how to divide
3 54 by 6.

4 What's the answer?

5 SENATOR FLANAGAN: "9."

6 DEANN NELSON: Okay, good.

7 All right, but --

8 SENATOR FLANAGAN: It wasn't on the sheet, by
9 the way.

10 I figured that out myself.

11 [Laughter.]

12 DEANN NELSON: Good for you, you get an "A."

13 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I learned it the
14 old-fashioned way.

15 DEANN NELSON: Okay, but, instead, we break
16 down the 54, to 30 divided by 6.

17 We break down the 6.

18 Then we have, 24 divided by 6.

19 And we've had this whole thing strung out, so
20 we have all of these steps to go through, when we
21 could just learn, 54 divided by 6.

22 Wouldn't that be simple?

23 Just look at page --

24 [Laughter.]

25 DEANN NELSON: I know, one more?

1 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Respectfully, we have --
2 you have colleagues here, and we have a very busy
3 schedule.

4 I will say this --

5 DEANN NELSON: Okay.

6 SENATOR FLANAGAN: -- so I want to be very
7 clear with you:

8 I very much appreciate your passion; we all
9 do.

10 The information that you provided to us is
11 helpful.

12 In my quick review of the pages that you
13 showed me, it's confusing, to say the least.

14 DEANN NELSON: Isn't it?

15 Yes.

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Now, this is valuable, not
17 only for the members of the Committee, but for the
18 people who will be listening, and watching, and who
19 will be seeing what we put together as part of a
20 public record.

21 That's the whole fundamental point of doing
22 this.

23 So, make one last comment, and then we're
24 going to Carrie.

25 DEANN NELSON: Okay, here it is:

1 Repeal Common Core.

2 Return New York State to rule of law and
3 liberty:

4 New York State Constitution, our education
5 laws.

6 Create new rigorous education standards.

7 Use Massachusetts' former standards as the
8 guide, as the model.

9 They were number one in the entire
10 United States.

11 Sandra Stotsky, who was on the committee,
12 created those standards for Massachusetts.

13 School boards serve as our guardians.

14 You have -- their role has practically been
15 eliminated with this Common Core and federal
16 takeover.

17 And my last point is that, it's unethical and
18 immoral to use New York children as guinea pigs on a
19 program that has no research validation.

20 That's it.

21 Thank you.

22 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Are you sure?

23 DEANN NELSON: I'm sure.

24 [Laughter.]

25 SENATOR FLANAGAN: All right, now this is

1 diversity live, okay, right here.

2 I want to just -- before Carrie speaks,
3 I just want to make a public statement, that I've
4 had the privilege of working with her as one of the
5 Governor's Education Reform Commission members.

6 She is dedicated, professional, and a
7 wonderful person to work with.

8 So, Carrie, with that introduction, feel no
9 pressure.

10 CARRIE REMIS: Good afternoon,
11 Senator Flanagan, and members of the
12 Education Committee.

13 Thank you for the opportunity to give
14 testimony today, and to allow me to share the parent
15 perspective as you take stock of the Regents Reform
16 Agenda moving forward.

17 My name is Carrie Remis.

18 I'm the founding director of the Parent Power
19 Project, a Rochester-based organization working to
20 build the capacity of parents in the
21 lowest-performing schools in the state.

22 Our work is a mix of capacity building and
23 advocacy.

24 Our agenda is pretty much exactly what
25 Principal Drmacich opposes:

1 We support teacher evaluations, we support
2 life over form, we support parental choice, Common
3 Core, and parent trigger.

4 On a personal note, I'm the mother of a
5 sophomore in one of state's best high schools;
6 a point I make to say that I understand well the
7 competing pressures that you face, from both the
8 high-performing districts and the lowest-performing
9 districts, because I feel them too.

10 That said, I'm here today to urge you to not
11 lose sight of the agenda, and to offer some parent
12 insight into the parent position as you move forward
13 in most critical and challenging phase of the
14 rollout.

15 First, let me say that parents are not a
16 monolithic group.

17 We come in all shapes and sizes, and we
18 rarely agree about how to educate or raise our
19 children.

20 But that said, I believe very strongly that
21 the parent opposition to the Reform Agenda that has
22 crept into the headlines marks a minority position
23 and does not reflect the majority of parents in this
24 state.

25 I draw this conclusion based on years of

1 direct contact with parents, in our training, and as
2 a former admissions counselor, as well as, because
3 of the polls that overwhelmingly show that the
4 public is in agreement with the goals of standards
5 and accountability, and the need for intervention.

6 In my written testimony, I have included some
7 specifics from the recent polling, and I urge you to
8 read them.

9 I wanted to share some insight.

10 Despite this agreement, there is a disconnect
11 that the Senator Flanagan mentioned, and some
12 parents are loudly voicing concerns, and we cannot
13 reform the public education system without parent
14 buy-in, and I urge you not to dismiss us.

15 But I'd like to discuss some of the
16 underlying factors underlying these parent concerns.

17 First, parents, in general, feel sidelined by
18 their day-to-day interactions with their local
19 educational bureaucracies.

20 We often struggle with schools that are
21 unresponsive, that don't return our phone calls,
22 that create hoop after hoop for us to jump through.

23 And for those of us who want to be involved
24 in the school-improvement effort, we are often
25 relegated to bake sales, and booster clubs, and sort

1 of advisory roles, that really make no impact if
2 we're honest.

3 And these day-to-day experiences are not the
4 region's doing, nor are they within their control to
5 fix, but they are part of the parent experience and
6 part of our context.

7 Under these circumstances, it can be very
8 difficult for some of us to embrace an agenda that
9 feels very disconnected from the day-to-day
10 realities of being a parent.

11 I urge you to read the Public Agenda's
12 report, "Don't Count Us Out," which talks about this
13 disconnect in further detail.

14 The second underlying factor I would like to
15 discuss today is the elephant in the room: special
16 interests; namely, the teachers union and their
17 locals who are strategically taking advantage of
18 parents who feel sidelined, amplifying, and even
19 distorting our concerns.

20 Although it may seem counterintuitive, my
21 recommendation is that the only remedy is true
22 parent empowerment.

23 Specifically, I urge you to consider the
24 following three measures:

25 First, incentivize autonomous parent

1 organizing.

2 Last week's PTA meeting in Poughkeepsie is
3 not unique.

4 In fact, in parent organizations across this
5 state, teachers unions have hijacked our
6 organizations.

7 But more troubling than these disruptive
8 meetings is the fact that these co-opted and
9 highjacked parent organizations are the same
10 organizations charged with electing parent
11 representatives to the school-based planning teams.

12 And if you're not familiar with
13 Commissioner's regs, 100.11, this is where the
14 rubber hits the road; this is where state policy is
15 implemented locally.

16 The teachers union would never tolerate
17 another stakeholder inserting themselves into their
18 organizational meetings or influencing their
19 representation or scripting their policy positions,
20 but this is precisely what happens to parents.

21 And I believe that this is one of the reasons
22 why parents are finding it very difficult to
23 identify the parent interest in these very complex
24 and noisy policy debates.

25 We need to find our voice, and we need your

1 help.

2 My second recommendation is to spur
3 innovation in the parent-development space.

4 Unlike teacher and principal development,
5 parent training is largely controlled by the local
6 administration, leaving parents incredibly dependent
7 on the local administration for information about
8 Regents policy.

9 This is another one of your problems.

10 A recent rash of misinformation coming out of
11 Monroe County school systems really underscores the
12 conflict of interest inherent in this arrangement.

13 It's become clear to us that Common Core has
14 become the new boogeyman in education, blamed for
15 everything, from dismantled accelerated math
16 programs, to denied special-education evaluations,
17 to no recess.

18 While I don't think that it's reasonable to
19 police all of these misinformation campaigns,
20 I think it's important to know they are happening,
21 and I ask you to consider opening up the
22 parent-engagement space to providers outside of the
23 system who don't have the same conflict of interest
24 and who might bring a more neutral and objective
25 perspective to the Regents agenda; namely,

1 Common Core.

2 Community-based organizations, civic groups,
3 and community colleges are among the unbiased voices
4 I believe we need to have in this discussion.

5 The successful implementation of the
6 Regents Reform Agenda will hinge on whether or not
7 we brought in this conversation beyond the internal
8 stakeholders and the idealogues.

9 My third recommendation is to mandate
10 increased transparency around collective bargaining.

11 Conspiracy theories thrive in the dark, as
12 you've seen today.

13 Whether they're about Common Core, APPR, or
14 student data, in our work with parents on these
15 topics, we found that most of these conspiracy
16 theories have one thing in common, and that is that
17 the public doesn't really understand where state
18 mandates and local bargaining begins; and as a
19 result, the Regents and the Commissioner are
20 routinely scapegoated decisions they did not make,
21 but that are made at the local bargaining table.

22 Consider this example from Rochester:

23 The City school districts negotiated an
24 elaborate system of locally-developed pretests for
25 the student-growth measure of APPR.

1 When parent complaints began to surface about
2 the pretests --

3 And these complaints had two parts:

4 One, students were reporting that their
5 teachers were coaching them to bomb the pretests so
6 that they, quote, looked smarter on the state tests;

7 And the second complaint was from some
8 parents who were concerned about this unnecessary
9 and additional battery of tests.

10 -- in response to these very legitimate
11 parent concerns, the districts basically blamed
12 Commissioner King in his testing mania, even though
13 he did not choose to design these pretests, nor did
14 he implement them.

15 The Regents needs the public support of their
16 agenda, and the public needs the full story of, if
17 we are to engage in a meaningful and productive way.

18 Without access to the collective bargaining
19 agreements, which, as you may know, include more
20 than just the contract.

21 It's a -- there's a whole pile of hidden side
22 agreements, addenda, and memos of understanding.

23 Without this full picture, parents,
24 taxpayers, and even members of the media, do not
25 have a full understanding of the issues, and in many

1 cases, are engaging blind.

2 We ask you to consider mandating full
3 disclosure of these collective-bargaining agreements
4 so that we don't have to FOIL them.

5 And we ask you to mandate the public
6 ratification of these documents so that these side
7 agreements that we all know exist are at least aired
8 in public.

9 And changing gears a bit, I wanted to make an
10 appeal on behalf of the parents in failing schools
11 who, as you know, do not have unions, do not have
12 political or economic power.

13 They largely are living in our urban
14 districts, and they face a terrible dilemma that
15 I ask you to keep first and foremost in your mind.

16 They are desperate for reform, but they lack
17 the political power to make it happen.

18 They need your help.

19 For the last 30 years in Rochester, the
20 educational establishment has creatively avoided
21 making any fundamental change.

22 We've had this steady churn of gimmicks and
23 path-of-least-resistance turnaround plans that have
24 garnered a lot of headlines but have produced no
25 student gains.

1 Our only claim to fame is that we have the
2 lowest student-to-teacher ratio in the state, and
3 the second-to-highest spending.

4 Today are -- only 5 percent of Rochester
5 students are proficient, and only 9 percent of our
6 Black males graduate on time.

7 The urgent fundamental change that children
8 in persistently failing schools need and deserve is
9 impossible with many of the local players in our
10 urban districts.

11 On behalf of these parents and their
12 children, I urge you to pursue in earnest aggressive
13 State intervention.

14 Thank you.

15 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Carrier, thank you very
16 much.

17 And last, but by certainly no means least,
18 Eric --

19 Eric, how do you say your last name?

20 ERIC MIHELBERGEL: Last name is pronounced
21 "Mihelbergel," and, it's a Hungarian name.

22 My name is Eric.

23 I am a parent of two daughters; one is in the
24 sixth grade, and the other is in the third grade.

25 About a year ago, both of my children started

1 coming home, telling me that they were taking
2 bubble tests in art, they were filling in
3 bubble tests in gym, and in music class, and that
4 prompted me to ask some questions; it prompted me to
5 do some research.

6 I wrote a long letter to the New York State
7 Board of Regents.

8 Received three phone calls from them; had a
9 meeting with Mr. Bennett; and I really started to
10 do some research.

11 I spent -- I remember one day, back in
12 February, I spent 11 hours in one week on the phone
13 with the New York State Education Department, trying
14 to educate myself.

15 Now, over the last 8 months, I have gotten
16 quite involved with advocacy.

17 And on behalf of thousands of parents in
18 New York, I would like to thank you for taking the
19 time to listen to people's concerns today.

20 That is a huge benefit to parents; parents
21 want to be heard.

22 Since I started my advocacy efforts, I have
23 been receiving approximately 30 to
24 40 communications, personal communications, with
25 parents, each and every day.

1 Over the last 8 months, if you do the
2 multiplication, that's over 8,000 personal
3 communications that I have received from other
4 parents: e-mails, personal phone calls, text
5 messages.

6 And so I'm here today, not necessarily to
7 give my opinions, but to give the concerns of other
8 parents.

9 And I would like to start by saying that I do
10 not think that parent concerns, such as those that
11 have recently come to the news, I do not think those
12 are in the minority.

13 I think there are still a lot of parents out
14 there that have not been educated yet to make a
15 decision one way or another.

16 Through my advocacy efforts, what I have
17 found is that, as parents learn what's going on in
18 education, they realize that they need to start
19 asking questions.

20 The biggest concern that I have come across
21 with parents is the high-stakes nature of testing.

22 That seems to be of greatest concern.

23 Many parents are also concerned about the
24 privacy of their children's data, they're concerned
25 about many other things, but the high-stakes nature

1 is a very large concern.

2 The reasons that I hear, on a regular basis,
3 is because when we introduce the high-stakes nature,
4 not just testing, but the high-stakes nature of
5 testing, the focus shifts; and it shifts from
6 learner-centered learning, it shifts then to
7 teacher-centered teaching and administrator-centered
8 administrating.

9 The pressure is on the teachers, the pressure
10 is on the administrators, to perform on tests, and
11 they have no choice then but to transfer that
12 pressure to our students.

13 And when we transfer that pressure to our
14 students, it creates a tremendous amount of stress
15 for those students.

16 It brings that stress into the home.

17 We all know that stress creates fear, creates
18 anger, it destroys education.

19 My third-grader -- and this dovetails off of
20 what my friend here had mentioned earlier -- comes
21 home with worksheets in math.

22 Now, my third-grader is, she's relatively
23 intelligent.

24 She solves the Rubik's Cube in 3 1/2 minutes.

25 She has a mind that is logical.

1 She and I sat down last week, working on a
2 homework assignment.

3 I have a physics degree.

4 Neither of us could understand and complete
5 the homework assignment.

6 This is not just in my household; this is
7 what I hear from 30 to 40 parents, per day, about
8 what's going on in their homes.

9 The stress that these new standards, that
10 testing has brought into the home, it's changing the
11 dynamic of American homes.

12 The tension between school boards and parents
13 has increased greatly, and the high-stakes nature of
14 testing falls directly between them.

15 Parents and school boards want to be united.

16 The school boards have to follow the law;
17 they must.

18 And parents will do what's right for their
19 children.

20 And we've seen across the state, parents are,
21 in many cases, blatantly refusing to allow their
22 children to participate in these tests.

23 And we have awakened a sleeping giant.

24 A year ago, I was very much closed to what
25 was going on.

1 I started asking questions.

2 A year later, I can't tell you how many more
3 parents are asking questions than they were a year
4 ago.

5 And so to wrap it up, I have a quote that is
6 in my written testimony as well, but this is a quote
7 from William Bruce Cameron.

8 He was a well-known sociologist.

9 And this quote often gets quoted as a quote
10 from Einstein, but, in fact, it is not.

11 It says this:

12 "It would be nice if all the data which
13 sociologists require could be enumerated, because
14 then we could run them through IBM machines and draw
15 charts as the economists do.

16 However, not everything that counts can be
17 counted, and not everything that can be counted
18 counts."

19 We're doing a lot of measuring in our schools
20 today.

21 And I fear that we're measuring too much and
22 we're not focusing on the independent -- individual
23 child enough.

24 This is a quote that I wrote:

25 "When we define the worth of our children

1 solely by that which can be measured, then their
2 worth becomes the measurement itself.

3 Their life is no longer their own, and the
4 owner of the measurement dictates the child's
5 worth."

6 So I will wrap it up by stating, that the
7 New York State Code of Ethics of Educators, under
8 Principle Number 2, says that "Educators know the
9 curriculum, they use a range of strategies and
10 assessments to address differences."

11 And I ask all of us today to think about,
12 How can we claim to be using a range of assessments,
13 when my children's classrooms, and the classrooms
14 all across New York State, the biggest concern of
15 parents is the extreme focus on math and ELA tests?

16 And I thank you once again for listening to
17 me, and I thank you once again for understanding
18 concerns of parents.

19 Thank you.

20 SENATOR FLANAGAN: My colleagues don't have
21 any questions.

22 Eric, I just do have one questions, and it
23 goes back to something that's come up on a number
24 occasions.

25 It's a question, and a request.

1 There are constant comments about the volume
2 of testing, the nature of testing.

3 And in asking this question repeatedly,
4 I still am not getting a uniformity of response by
5 any stretch.

6 In fact, we're not even getting a response,
7 in large part.

8 If you are to look and say, a child comes in
9 to kindergarten this year, and make the assumption
10 that nothing changes during their educational time
11 frame, what are the tests that a child has to take
12 as directed by the State of New York?

13 Now, you and I both know, you obviously pay
14 close attention to the ELA tests.

15 There are certain functions that are put upon
16 us by the federal government.

17 I get that.

18 There are certain things, like the Regents,
19 that I get, as someone who works for the State, but,
20 there is a tremendous amount of comments about the
21 volume of testing.

22 I still have not seen something that says, if
23 there's pre-testing and post-testing and diagnostic
24 testing in first grade or second grade, I haven't
25 seen any Commissioner's regulation, I haven't seen

1 anything, formally, that comes out of SED.

2 It seems to me, and I certainly want the
3 information, if you have something that shows to the
4 contrary, please share it with us, because one of
5 the fundamental questions we ask is, "Well, all
6 right, how many tests?"

7 And once that question gets asked, there's
8 not always a lot of information forthcoming.

9 ERIC MIHELBERGEL: Yes, and we can provide
10 you direct research on that.

11 But to comment on what you've mentioned here,
12 from the New York State Education Department, we
13 have math and ELA tests from grade 3 through 8.

14 We have science in grades 4 and 8.

15 And so the New York State Education
16 Department tells us that that's all they require,
17 but they also require APPR.

18 And as we know, individual school districts
19 have some choice in that.

20 But what's happening across the state is, the
21 New York State Education Department can say,
22 "We only require tests in 3 through 8, in math and
23 ELA"; but, because they require APPR, there's
24 another onslaught of tests.

25 And I can tell you that, my daughter has been

1 presented with tests in playing the recorder, as a
2 pretest.

3 She's been presented with tests in music, in
4 art, in gym class.

5 Not every student is tested, because they're
6 only required to assess 51 percent of the students
7 for these APPR-, SLO-type tests.

8 But I can tell you that, when we include
9 state tests, then when we add into it the required
10 tests that schools are using to support their
11 APPR agreements, it's excessive, and we can provide
12 documentation.

13 The latest number I've heard is, average
14 student is taking 3200 minutes per year of tests,
15 and there's documentation to support that.

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Appreciate that, and this
17 is probably our most -- well, certainly most
18 interesting panel to date.

19 So, come on, we have a wide range of opinions
20 right here.

21 So, thank you very much.

22 Our next panel, New York State United
23 Teachers, Steve Allinger; and, Todd Hathaway from
24 East Aurora High School.

25 TODD HATHAWAY: Thank you, Senators, for

1 having this meeting today; thank you for inviting
2 me; thank you for holding these around the state.

3 I'm gonna talk today both as a parent and as
4 a teacher, I think what Commissioner King labels a
5 "special interest."

6 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Can you move the mic a
7 little closer.

8 TODD HATHAWAY: Oh, sorry.

9 I'm a teacher in East Aurora High School.

10 I've been there for 12 years.

11 I have taught in the city of Buffalo prior to
12 that for three years, and, I also taught in rural
13 Virginia.

14 I'm also a volunteer NYSUT PAC coordinator,
15 and a proud parent of three children.

16 And, my role as a parent really transformed
17 me as a teacher.

18 It really -- it brought me into this issue
19 of -- particularly, of high-stakes testing.

20 And it did so last year as my son Jonah [ph.]
21 entered into kindergarten, and, Jonah is a "boy" in
22 capital letters.

23 He is energetic, he is happy, he is ready to
24 go with the world.

25 And as the year progressed, his principal and

1 his teacher both expressed concern at that energy.

2 And they said to me, you know:

3 There's no academic need right now, your son
4 is doing fantastic in school, but as he progresses
5 into the high-stakes nature of the three days of
6 testing, we have some concerns about where he'll
7 progress.

8 This is in kindergarten.

9 This in, actually, in December of his first
10 year of kindergarten.

11 And they recommended, because of that, to
12 retain him.

13 They said the best place for him to be, was
14 to retain my son into kindergarten.

15 And that was a hard conversation, as a
16 teacher, as a parent.

17 Nobody wants to hear that about their child.

18 And what struck me most over thinking about
19 that, was wondering, "Not right now" they said; it
20 was because of what would happen long term, many
21 years from now.

22 And they said, you know, "As he progresses
23 into this arena, where you're going to be tested
24 constantly."

25 My nephew was born 20 days separately than my

1 son.

2 He progressed on to first grade.

3 He has a test every Friday in math and
4 English.

5 He's in first grade.

6 He cannot write, he can barely read.

7 And it's fantastic that he's able to do that.

8 And so I began to really think about, in my
9 role as a teacher, well, what are these tests that
10 are so concerning to my son's principal and teacher
11 that would make them recommend to retain my son?

12 And, I began to understand that, and I looked
13 at these three days of tests.

14 And, principally, as a high school
15 social studies teacher, I give high-stakes every
16 year.

17 I teach Global Regents, one of the harder
18 Regents exams in New York State; I also teach
19 advanced placement; where both of those are
20 high-stakes tests.

21 One is a high school graduation requirement.

22 The other is the test designed to challenge
23 for college credit.

24 And so I said, well, taking that knowledge,
25 and I said, let's apply that to the three days of

1 tests, and begin to understand where this places
2 them.

3 Do they fit with what we're doing at the end
4 of a child's K-to-12 career?

5 Does it make sense we're doing the same thing
6 at the beginning of a child's K-to-12 career?

7 And, it didn't come out well.

8 I looked at these tests, and said, well,
9 simply, first, what's the diagnostic nature of a
10 3-to-8 test?

11 And there isn't one.

12 As a high school global teacher, we give our
13 exams in the middle of June, they're scored,
14 returned to the students in their form within
15 two weeks.

16 I as a teacher can diagnose the issues of my
17 instruction, the areas I need to improve upon.

18 I can then improve that the next year.

19 Same thing can happen with my students;
20 I understand where they're going.

21 What's the transparency of these three days
22 of tests?

23 There is none.

24 As a Global Regents teacher, I have access to
25 every single Regents exam given since 2003, fully

1 available on the SED website.

2 I use it constantly.

3 I pull off thematic essay questions,
4 [unintelligible] questions, and multiple-choice
5 questions; therefore, I can prepare my students for
6 the high-stakes natures of these tests.

7 Same thing goes for an advanced-placement
8 exam.

9 The exams are available.

10 They're not free, you gotta pay for it, but,
11 they're available.

12 I get an instructional planning report that
13 diagnoses the nature of my teaching and my
14 instruction, and the strengths and weaknesses of my
15 students.

16 That makes them useful.

17 That makes my Global Regents exam scores and
18 tests useful to me as an instructor, and useful to
19 me as parent, potentially, in many years when my
20 children go on the high school, that I know where
21 they stand on these issues by these standards.

22 Same thing in college, for the
23 advanced-placement exams; same thing holds.

24 So having high standards is good.

25 Having standards is fantastic.

1 But having high standards that are not
2 transparent -- or, tests, excuse me, that are not
3 transparent, that are not diagnostic, that are not
4 timely.

5 I give -- three-day tests are administered in
6 early April, but scores are returned to parents in
7 September and October.

8 Schools get them in August.

9 How can that help them inform instruction, or
10 for a parent to understand the strength or weakness
11 of their child, if those scores are not timely?

12 As a teacher, I'm encouraged to return
13 student work as quick as possible to maximize
14 learning.

15 How is SED modeling that same standard?

16 Because what students want, is to perform and
17 receive feedback.

18 Everyone wants the same thing.

19 Three days of tests don't provide that.

20 And, so, the utility of these tests I call
21 into question.

22 How can they help prepare students for
23 college- and-career readiness when we don't receive
24 any meaningful feedback?

25 Oh, you receive feedback.

1 You receive a score of 1, 2, 3, or 4, but
2 that's an empty, meaningless score, because the
3 tests aren't transparent, they're not diagnostic,
4 they're not timely; and, therefore, it makes them
5 useless.

6 If we're gonna give tests, if we're gonna
7 assess our students, we must make sure they meet
8 that simple criteria: that they're timely, they're
9 transparent, they're diagnostic; therefore, useful.

10 Those phrases should be underlying what we do
11 with our high-stakes testing-assessment programs;
12 not just scores for scores' sake.

13 We need to make sure we focus upon that.

14 So, to focus that -- and I'll back up.

15 Regents Bennett spoke about that earlier; he
16 spoke about the need for data to drive instruction.

17 Well, SED does not provide data to drive
18 instruction if it's not returned to district or the
19 student in a timely manner to help inform, and then
20 prescribe better and improved instruction.

21 So we must do that in terms of overall
22 structuring.

23 So, to summarize, because many of our
24 speakers went longer, and I'll be short, and I speak
25 fast, I know -- is, that we must have a three-year

1 moratorium on the consequences of high-stakes
2 testing.

3 We have to understand what we've done here.

4 And I want to -- and I speak as a high school
5 teacher:

6 As we prepare the Common Core ELA exam, and
7 also the ELA Algebra exam -- and the Common Core
8 Algebra exam, going forward this year, to be
9 administered this June, if those scores hold as we
10 progress through the year, will that number of
11 students, therefore, be ineligible to graduate,
12 simply because of the ELA exam, which is -- they're
13 taking it in their junior year;

14 Therefore, schools are now placed under
15 pressure of graduation are plummeting, demands for
16 academic intervention services skyrocket?

17 What are we going to do then if that holds
18 forward, and the consequences then, for school
19 districts, for principals, and teachers remains so
20 severe?

21 The testing regimen isn't helping us; it's
22 punishing us.

23 We need to make sure we focus upon that.

24 The final issue I want to talk to you, the
25 final point is the issue of funding.

1 Today, in 2008, New York State spends
2 \$405 less than it did in 2008.

3 If we simply return to that level of funding,
4 we could improve supports for our students.

5 Each year that we distance from that
6 benchmark year of 2008, those gaps get larger.

7 We close off CTE instructions.

8 Schools are being forced to choose between
9 CTE instruction, and, therefore -- and then turn to
10 supports for ELA and math because, their
11 assessments, their performance reviews, depend upon
12 those scores.

13 And so we want to be college- and
14 career-ready?

15 We're closing off careers because we're so
16 focused on test scores for college preparation
17 [unintelligible].

18 The final thing I want to say, is when I sat
19 in this room, I was amazed.

20 I've never been in the Common Hall Council,
21 and I looked around at the pillars.

22 I thought it was fascinating to do so,
23 because they're all inscribed with words of justice
24 and charity and philosophy, knowledge and prudence,
25 and patriotism.

1 None of those things are testable.

2 None of those things are -- if these are the
3 things we do value, why is it we're so overly
4 focused upon simple test scores?

5 And I'll close with that.

6 Thank you, gentlemen.

7 SENATOR GALLIVAN: I've got one.

8 Give me just a minute here.

9 Two questions:

10 Why are teachers sworn to secrecy regarding
11 the tests?

12 TODD HATHAWAY: That's an SED requirement.

13 If you look in the instruction handbook
14 that's provided to teachers, they are not allowed to
15 talk about it.

16 If they do, their certifications are removed.

17 SED's position is, it's not FOIL-able either.

18 I have seen many FOIL requests from other
19 parents, and it's been denied by SED.

20 I could not speculate as to why.

21 SENATOR GALLIVAN: What's not FOIL-able?

22 The instructions?

23 TODD HATHAWAY: The tests themselves are not
24 FOIL-able.

25 The New York State parents, teachers, and

1 administrators do not have access to those tests.

2 So, for instance, last year's tests that were
3 administered, unless SED chooses to release them,
4 and they've not done so.

5 They've released selections from there, but
6 they have not released the entire test.

7 If you talk about it, you can lose your
8 license.

9 And that's been threatened before.

10 SENATOR GALLIVAN: My other question --

11 STEPHEN ALLINGER: Senator --

12 SENATOR GALLIVAN: -- you may not know the
13 answer --

14 Oh, I'm sorry.

15 STEPHEN ALLINGER: -- yeah, I just wanted to
16 add, that's why we've been pursuing legislation
17 called "Truth About Testing," so that there's
18 accountability for the test manufacturing -- you
19 know, the test companies, that there's an actual
20 arm's-length peer-reviewed study of the effects on
21 teaching and learning, whether there is a narrowing
22 of the curriculum, how much time is diverted from
23 teaching and learning, and the reliability and the
24 validity of the evaluations.

25 Right now, we would -- because of the lack of

1 transparency and accountability, we believe that
2 there is very little faith that these high-stakes
3 testing have reliability and validity, particularly
4 in use for determining what students access to
5 challenging course work, or determining whether a
6 teacher keeps their job.

7 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Has anybody put that
8 legislation forward yet?

9 Anybody sponsored that yet, to your
10 knowledge?

11 STEPHEN ALLINGER: There's been legislation
12 introduced in both the Senate and the Assembly.

13 We also have concerns on the privacy side,
14 and where Senator Grisanti had sponsored
15 legislation.

16 But we would -- you know, we want to work
17 with -- with the Senate as a body, to address the
18 accountability issues.

19 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Understood.

20 The next question you may not know the answer
21 to, I know that the test results are coming back,
22 roughly, in the fall, in the next school year.

23 Is that something just because it's new, or
24 is that going to change, to your knowledge?

25 TODD HATHAWAY: That's a question better

1 addressed to SED.

2 I could speculate, but I do not know why.

3 SENATOR GALLIVAN: You don't know the answer.

4 Okay, thank you.

5 STEPHEN ALLINGER: I think in a prior
6 hearing, Senator, they raised the issue of
7 resources, but we should -- if anything -- students
8 and educators are in such a fragile state, in terms
9 of their vulnerability, that we shouldn't do a
10 cheap, dumbed-down assessment policy.

11 I think the truthful answer that you received
12 at the first hearing, is they didn't have the
13 resources to do this the right way, if I had to
14 summarize what I heard.

15 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Thanks.

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Senator Ranzenhofer.

17 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Thank you.

18 First of all, thank you for your testimony.

19 And this is more a question just out of
20 curiosity, because they're really different.

21 But I would think, as I'm listening, and I've
22 listened to and read a lot about this, that between
23 kindergarten and graduation from high school,
24 there's probably no more high-stakes tests than the
25 SAT.

1 So, again, different type, but we do advocate
2 eliminating the SAT?

3 TODD HATHAWAY: I would not, because I think
4 the issue there is timing.

5 The SAT is administered to high school
6 students who are -- and I'll say this as a
7 high school teacher -- generally more mature than
8 elementary-school students, but, that's not an
9 absolute in any respect whatsoever.

10 [Laughter.]

11 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: I thought you said
12 you're a high school teacher?

13 TODD HATHAWAY: I am a high school teacher,
14 but I --

15 Yeah, I've seen a lot.

16 9-year-olds taking a --

17 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: I just wanted your
18 opinion.

19 You know --

20 TODD HATHAWAY: No, no, not all.

21 If a college requires it, absolutely, but
22 that's the timing of it.

23 You know, and the same thing, as a
24 high school teacher, I teach advanced-placement
25 world history and European history; very difficult

1 courses.

2 But that's, when they're administered,
3 they're in high school.

4 They are nearing -- they can get cars soon.

5 And I think that's a reason for requirement:

6 If you can get a driver's license, you should
7 be able to sit down and take a test, and prepare,
8 because you're now on the road and can endanger all
9 of our lives.

10 I give that same speech to students, by the
11 way.

12 But when you're, nine, ten years old,
13 stressing out, throwing up, not liking school,
14 because you're so concerned about a test and the
15 test score, not necessarily because you want to
16 perform because you understand the intrinsic nature
17 of the test, but because you want to please adults.

18 That's a big difference.

19 That's a maturity issue that high-stakes
20 testing, you know, in 3 through 8 is inappropriate
21 for that reason.

22 STEPHEN ALLINGER: It is also pseudoscience.

23 It's not reliable.

24 There's no research to support high-stakes
25 testing in the early grades.

1 In fact, it's almost universally condemned by
2 researchers in this field and professional
3 associations.

4 So, we urge you to proscribe it so that
5 you're not subjecting kids to this kind of abuse;
6 but, moreover, you're not getting unreliable, lousy
7 results and making bad decisions with that
8 information.

9 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: So should there be a
10 different standard then for high school students
11 versus middle-school and elementary-school students?

12 STEPHEN ALLINGER: It should be
13 developmentally appropriate.

14 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Okay, thank you.

15 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I do have a couple of
16 questions, and, Todd, I appreciate the swiftness of
17 your testimony.

18 But, you made a reference to, a valuable test
19 is, essentially, timely, transparent, and
20 diagnostic.

21 TODD HATHAWAY: Yes.

22 SENATOR FLANAGAN: And then, everyone here
23 keeps using the phrase, "high-stakes testing."

24 Can you have a test that is timely,
25 transparent, diagnostic, and still high-stakes?

1 TODD HATHAWAY: That's the Regents exams.

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Sorry?

3 TODD HATHAWAY: That's the Regents exams.

4 Those are the advanced-placement exams
5 delivered by the college board.

6 You absolutely can, but they must be
7 developmentally appropriate.

8 You know, 15-, 16-, 17-, 18-year-olds can
9 emotionally handle the stress that comes along with
10 taking a high-stakes test.

11 They're preparing to go out into the world.

12 That's acceptable, that's rational, that
13 makes sense; that's developmentally appropriate.

14 SENATOR FLANAGAN: So do you believe that all
15 Regents are high-stakes tests?

16 TODD HATHAWAY: Absolutely.

17 They're college -- they're graduation
18 requirements.

19 You can't get any much higher stakes than
20 that, than by saying it's a graduation requirement.

21 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay, so are there -- just
22 take your district:

23 Now, you have three kids.

24 I'm listening very carefully.

25 TODD HATHAWAY: Yes.

1 SENATOR FLANAGAN: All right?

2 Do you -- are there any tests that are not
3 high-stakes?

4 TODD HATHAWAY: That are not high-stakes?

5 You have formative assessments that we
6 give -- that I give on weekly or daily basis, where
7 I'm looking for students to form my instruction.

8 Then at the end of the year, at the end of a
9 unit, I'll give some of those assessments, to
10 understand, Where are we now?

11 And I can give you a clear example for that.

12 Currently, in my regular Global 2 class,
13 I just completed the Age of Revolutions.

14 We dealt with the French Revolution.

15 And throughout there, I give formative
16 assessments: I give homework assignments, I give
17 vocabulary quizzes.

18 So I do give tests of that nature.

19 At the end of the unit, we culminate with an
20 thematic essay, and it's culminated with a test.

21 Those are summative assessments.

22 At the end of the year, in June, they'll take
23 the --

24 SENATOR FLANAGAN: You don't consider those
25 high-stakes?

1 TODD HATHAWAY: No, not at all, because
2 they're not -- there's no consequence in the nature
3 of -- to student.

4 You may score lower, but you're not going to
5 be placed into a separate program.

6 You will not be labeled something.

7 There's room now to improve, and it helps me
8 to understand, as I go to review for the Regents
9 exam, how to then spiral my review throughout the
10 entire year; and, second, how to structure my review
11 as we approach Memorial Day, into June, how to
12 prepare for that Regents exam.

13 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay, so in your -- so
14 take your district, because, obviously, and you come
15 at this from a couple of different angles --

16 TODD HATHAWAY: Yes, I do.

17 SENATOR FLANAGAN: -- not only as a teacher
18 and a parent, but as a union representative.

19 TODD HATHAWAY: Yes.

20 SENATOR FLANAGAN: In your school, not to
21 pick on them in any way, shape, or form, but do
22 you -- as a matter of collective bargaining, do you
23 collectively bargain, you know, We're going to now
24 make a decision that, as part of whatever deal we
25 come up with, that kids in kindergarten through

1 second grade, no tests?

2 TODD HATHAWAY: Do we collectively bargain
3 that?

4 No, we've not collectively bargain that.

5 SENATOR FLANAGAN: You don't collectively
6 bargain tests at all?

7 TODD HATHAWAY: We bargain the requirements
8 as handed down by SED and the enacting laws.

9 We have -- I know reference was made earlier
10 to side agreements, et cetera.

11 To my knowledge, and as a former union
12 president, that's never happened.

13 I never engaged in that.

14 And the speculation, so I find, just
15 speculation.

16 That's not reality.

17 Teachers in districts are forced by 3012-c to
18 engage in a new APPR regimen that does include test
19 scores; and, therefore, as part of the enacting
20 legislation and regulation, districts and local
21 units must bargain the impact of that and figure out
22 how to make that work for them.

23 I've talked to a lot of good parents and
24 administrators over several years.

25 We had a -- in the first week of October, we

1 had the Summit for Smarter Schools, which I'm a
2 member of the Partnership for Smarter Schools, and
3 we had administrators up there lamenting the fact
4 that we've turned education into data collection;
5 that administrators are turned from helping lead
6 instruction to coach teachers, to become clerks,
7 checking off boxes.

8 So, we've had to bargain the impact of that.

9 And I've met, I -- can't think of anybody
10 that thought it was a very good idea.

11 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay, I want to make sure
12 I'm properly understanding.

13 TODD HATHAWAY: Sure.

14 SENATOR FLANAGAN: So, on the one hand, you
15 don't collectively bargain testing, but you do
16 collectively bargain the effects [unintelligible] of
17 3012-c?

18 TODD HATHAWAY: Correct.

19 So we have to go through and say, the State
20 requires you use local measures of assessment for
21 your 20 percent [unintelligible].

22 And they give you parameters in which you
23 must operate.

24 And, therefore, we have to bargain that.

25 So we have to figure out what's going to be

1 acceptable or not.

2 And for us in my district, we bargain that
3 that has to be, therefore, a curriculum decision
4 determined by the teachers, along with the local
5 administrator -- the building administrator.

6 For the 20 percent that comes from the growth
7 measures, that's, either, if you're a 3-to-8
8 teacher, that comes from SED, so you can -- that's
9 taken out of there;

10 If you are not a 3-to-8 ELA or math teacher,
11 what do you do with those [unintelligible] local
12 20 points?

13 And so you have to then bargain the process
14 of which you're gonna account for that.

15 How are you gonna go about determining what
16 measurement tool you're gonna to use?

17 How are you gonna determine -- who determines
18 what the proper scoring is for that?

19 There are all things, and that's all clear --
20 very clearly delineated in regulation.

21 There's not a whole lot of wiggle room for
22 locals to deal with that.

23 They have to deal with what SED comes down
24 with.

25 And the regulations are very strict, and they

1 are -- they take a fine-tooth and comb to that.

2 So the idea that we have these massive
3 latitude in APPR is a fallacy.

4 We are very constricted, not necessarily by
5 law, but -- in the enacted law, but by, necessarily,
6 the regulation handed down by SED.

7 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay.

8 Gentlemen, thank you very much.

9 Appreciate your time.

10 And we are going to now go to
11 Scott G. Martzloff, superintendent of
12 Williamsville Central Schools.

13 Scott's six-foot-eleven so he gets the whole
14 table to himself.

15 [Laughter.]

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: And he's also a parent.

17 He told us yesterday, second-, fourth-, and
18 fifth-grader, so if he runs out, you know there's a
19 good reason.

20 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: Well, thank you,
21 Senator, and I thank all of you for allowing me to
22 testify today.

23 I do have to say that I was not able to find
24 a seat that I could fit in within this venue, so,
25 perhaps that can be looked at for a future session.

1 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: There's one right there.

2 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: I'm sorry?

3 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: There's one right there.

4 SENATOR GALLIVAN: There's a big chair there.

5 [Laughter.]

6 SENATOR GALLIVAN: It was in the corner.

7 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: Did you steal that from
8 my office?

9 [Laughter.]

10 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: But thank you for
11 allowing me to present information relative to the
12 Regents Reform Agenda and assessing our progress.

13 My name is Scott G. Martzloff.

14 I'm superintendent of schools in the
15 Williamsville Central School District, a suburban
16 district here in the Buffalo area of slightly more
17 than 10,000 students.

18 As Senator Flanagan mentioned, I am also a
19 parent of a second-grader, a fourth-grader, and a
20 fifth-grader, so I have had opportunity to
21 experience this firsthand of what we are doing as it
22 relates to education.

23 The two major ideas about the Regents Reform
24 Agenda is, first of all, it is an unfunded mandate
25 during extremely difficult fiscal times.

1 If you talk to any superintendent in the
2 state of New York, they will relay that information
3 to you about what a challenge it is to implement all
4 of this in a very quick time period during a time
5 when we're trying to hold on to our math teachers,
6 our English teachers, our second-grade teachers;
7 whatever it may be.

8 And, overall, I think the second point, is
9 that it's been relatively rushed with somewhat of a
10 dismissiveness, from feedback from educators and
11 feedback from parents.

12 That greatly concerns me, and I'll get to
13 more about that in a moment.

14 However, there are many positives as part of
15 the Regents Reform Agenda.

16 Certainly, more rigor and challenge in the
17 curriculum is a good thing.

18 Wherever you can add that in, and have higher
19 expectations for students, I think that's very
20 positive.

21 Our teachers in our school district have
22 collaborated and planned, with our administrators,
23 for the past three years, and have done some amazing
24 work, as required by the Reform Agenda.

25 I like the greater focus on informational

1 texts, which demands science and social studies are
2 taught at a higher level at a younger age, where
3 students have to find evidence to support a claim.

4 This helps to create better critical-thinkers
5 in our young people.

6 There's, obviously, a focus here on
7 curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and I think
8 that's a good thing.

9 That's where our time and energy, we should
10 be spending it on curriculum, instruction, and
11 assessment.

12 That's what we're here for.

13 There's more instructional conversations
14 taking place now than ever before.

15 Our principals are becoming instructional
16 leaders.

17 They're doing at least two observations of
18 all of our teachers each and every school year.

19 In the past, prior to the Regents Reform
20 Agenda, that would take place once every three years
21 for a tenured teacher.

22 So having that ongoing dialogue has been
23 positive.

24 In addition to that, we have a selected
25 rubric that we use.

1 We use the Thoughtful Classroom rubric, by
2 Silver & Strong, that's approved by the
3 New York State Education Department.

4 That has provided a common language for our
5 teachers and our administrators in discussing
6 instruction and discussing best practice for
7 teaching and learning.

8 I also want to say that the resources from
9 the New York State Education Department have
10 generally been of a good quality.

11 We have -- we're lucky in Williamsville, we
12 have our own network team that attends trainings in
13 Albany, at different times, and those have been
14 found to be positive and helpful as we look to
15 implement the Regents Reform Agenda, as are many of
16 the items on the EngageNY website have also been
17 found to be helpful for our school district as we
18 look to implement this.

19 Some of the areas for concern, this might
20 seem like a petty one, but I think that it points to
21 a bit of the sense of dismissiveness that some
22 school leaders and teachers and parents have; is
23 that, during the last year, NYSED changed their
24 guidance document at least five times.

25 It's about 135 pages.

1 And each time they would change it, they
2 wouldn't annotate it at all to tell you which parts
3 had changed.

4 So, literally, we had to go back through the
5 entire document over again.

6 And I'm not saying this to whine or to
7 complain, but we've brought this small point up to
8 the State Education Department before, with no
9 change.

10 Which to me, if I did that to my school
11 board --

12 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Scott, may I just inquire?

13 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: Sure.

14 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I want to make sure
15 I understood you correctly.

16 Did you say NYSED or NYSUT?

17 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: Excuse me.

18 NYSED.

19 New York State Education Department.

20 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay, I just wanted to
21 clarify.

22 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: It's their -- it's not
23 NYSUT.

24 It's NYSED.

25 SENATOR FLANAGAN: There's a lot of credit

1 and blame going on around here.

2 I just want to make sure we're going to the
3 right players.

4 [Laughter.]

5 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: (Indicating.)

6 So --

7 SENATOR FLANAGAN: SED.

8 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: Yes, SED.

9 I'll leave it at that.

10 So this made it difficult for us to find the
11 changes to, let alone, implement the changes, and
12 took a tremendous amount of hard work by our
13 administrators.

14 The second thing you mentioned about the
15 volume of assessments, it is quite high.

16 It's difficult to calculate from kindergarten
17 to twelfth grade because, when students get to
18 high school, they're taking different courses,
19 different electives.

20 Some students take more Regents exams than
21 other students.

22 But the point is, there's a lot of time being
23 spent on assessment.

24 If you look at just the 3-through-8
25 assessment in third grade, for example, those tests

1 got longer, slightly longer, over a three-day
2 period; and, at the same time, students were given a
3 shorter amount of time to complete them.

4 So it begs the question of:

5 Is this a test on what a student knows and is
6 able to do, or is this a test on how quickly a
7 student can find information in the text, or -- for
8 example, and be able to complete the questions in an
9 accurate manner?

10 We processed over 70,000 bubble sheets in the
11 spring-assessment period last year alone.

12 We also had to create pre- and post-tests for
13 185 different courses or grade levels.

14 This also results in what is my biggest bone
15 of contention with the Regents Reform Agenda, is a
16 loss of quality instructional time with teachers and
17 students.

18 This is also aggravated by the fact that our
19 students miss out on instruction from their teachers
20 due to the fact that, in order to do this right, we
21 have to provide teachers with training during the
22 schoolday.

23 So when we're doing that, we're providing our
24 children with a substitute teacher way too much.

25 We need to prepare these teachers through

1 APPR training, professional-development
2 opportunities related to the Common Core and the
3 Regents Reform Agenda, rubric training, curriculum
4 writing, assessment writing, assessment scoring, and
5 other areas.

6 Our students are best taught by our
7 first-team teachers, our best teachers, not by
8 substitutes, and this is one of my biggest areas of
9 concern, as I've mentioned.

10 The other item is the cost.

11 We've spent in Williamsville over
12 a million dollars so far in implementing the
13 New York State Regents Reform Agenda, with an offset
14 of slightly more than \$74,000 over a three-year
15 period.

16 So some of my recommendations, and I hope
17 that you take them into account:

18 Is for more local control; more flexibility
19 from these mandates, including funding flexibility
20 for how we apply things like textbook-aid,
21 software-aid, hardware, and library-aid categories.

22 The idea to eliminate the gap-elimination
23 adjustment that the Senate put forward, over a
24 three-year period, I think is a very positive thing
25 for all school districts in the state of New York.

1 I would also encourage our Legislature to
2 look to districts to innovate.

3 That's what the twenty-first century is going
4 to demand of our young people.

5 Find ways to encourage districts to innovate
6 through mobile-learning devices that better engage
7 students.

8 Flip classrooms with screen casts.

9 Science, technology, engineering, and math
10 opportunities at a younger age, beginning in
11 elementary school.

12 A greater focus on art, music, and physical
13 education.

14 I know my son, who's in second grade, would
15 really thrive on the ability to attend
16 physical education each and every single day.

17 Foreign-language instruction beginning in
18 kindergarten.

19 This was recommended in 1983 as "A Nation at
20 Risk," and 30 years later, here we are, still
21 talking about, How come we can't make that happen?

22 After all, we do live in a global society,
23 with international competition, where students from
24 other countries graduate, 65 percent of them are
25 bilingual or multilingual.

1 In the United States, it's only 9 percent.

2 Encourage more students to take challenging
3 advanced-placement courses.

4 The U.S. Department of Education study
5 indicated that students who merely take an
6 advanced-placement course have a 50 percent greater
7 likelihood of finishing college in four years, based
8 on their exposure to a more rigorous curriculum and
9 the confidence that that they builds in our young
10 people.

11 I would also encourage you to find ways to
12 provide our high school students with the ability to
13 take a college course on a college campus at no cost
14 to a student or their family.

15 Lastly, let's not forget about the social,
16 emotional well-being, and the physical safety of our
17 students.

18 Our students are walking through our doors
19 with more and more needs, including family
20 breakdowns, loss of employment by a parent, abuse,
21 neglect, et cetera.

22 Our schools need to do a better job helping
23 our students through these kinds of traumas.

24 I've said from the beginning, since this has
25 all started with the Regents Reform Agenda, we are

1 building the plane while we are flying it.

2 I would say, let's take a year to step back,
3 assess progress, look at our needs, and see if the
4 plane can even still fly before making the next
5 ill-advised, instantaneous change to our education
6 system.

7 Thank you for the opportunity to testify
8 today, and I would appreciate any questions you
9 might have.

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Senator Ranzenhofer.

11 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Thank you,
12 Dr. Martzloff.

13 I appreciate your thoughtful comments, both
14 pro and con, on the Reform Agenda.

15 And I guess the first question I have is,
16 I mean, I guess the sense is that, I think the
17 Common Core is good, we need to slow it down a
18 little bit.

19 Are you seeing in your school districts some
20 of the other comments about, kids in third grade and
21 fourth grade, are they stressing out, I guess, for
22 lack of a better term?

23 Do they appreciate the nature of these exams?

24 And are they -- are you seeing and hearing
25 from your teachers and your parents that these kids

1 are stressing out, and it's having -- obviously, if
2 you're stressing out, it's having an adverse effect,
3 but there's a lot of distress associated with that?

4 Are you seeing that in your district?

5 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: We do have some of our
6 young people who are extremely stressed in
7 grades 3 through 8.

8 We've had students that have broken down,
9 crying, upset.

10 I try to take the approach as a parent, with
11 my own children, that it's not that big a deal,
12 because at the end of the day, the 3-through-8
13 testing, it doesn't mean anything to the education
14 of my children.

15 What will mean something to their future, is
16 when they get to eighth grade and start taking
17 credit-bearing courses, such as Algebra and
18 earth science and foreign language, that lead to a
19 transcript for a high school diploma, which will
20 determine where they can go to college, and the rest
21 of their life.

22 So, I try to advise parents, when they
23 contact me about this, to take a more low-key
24 approach; however, sometimes that's very challenging
25 for our children.

1 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Okay.

2 And, obviously, you know, before the agenda
3 was put into place, you know, third-graders were
4 still taking end-of-the-year exams.

5 Has the stress level increased as a result of
6 these new exams, or there's just the same stress
7 over different exams?

8 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: Yeah, I don't know if
9 I could speak to that with any type of accuracy.

10 I mean, anecdotally, you tend to hear more
11 that there's a lot more stress.

12 Whether that means there is more stress, is
13 difficult to measure that.

14 I think there are kids that do get upset with
15 taking any type of assessment or test.

16 And I think the whole notion and the
17 attention of, "These are high-stakes tests, these
18 are very, very important," not only drives their
19 stress level up, but that of their parents as well,
20 and then the parent puts more pressure on the child.

21 And the teacher puts more pressure on the
22 children as well, because they are now connected to
23 the teacher's evaluation.

24 And so, all in all, there's a lot more
25 pressure than there has been in the past.

1 SENATOR RANZENHOFER: Okay, I probably could
2 ask you another 20 questions, but in interest of
3 everyone else who wants to ask questions, and
4 testify, I'll cut it off there.

5 But, thank you very much again.

6 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: Thank you, Senator.

7 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Scott, just one quick
8 question, following un on what I asked
9 Mr. Hathaway.

10 On the testing, do you -- what component of
11 that, if at all, do you collectively bargain with
12 your teachers?

13 SCOTT G. MARTZLOFF: Well, generally, you
14 know, it's the 20 percent.

15 We've tried to go to more of a state-provided
16 growth measure, versus having so many individual
17 SLOs within our school districts.

18 So, to your point, there is parts of this
19 that are collectively bargained, and there are parts
20 of it that are local decisions.

21 However, there does tend to be, in order to
22 have a good APPR plan, a number of different
23 assessments.

24 For example, last year, we did do pre- and
25 post-assessments in physical education; we did pre-

1 and post-assessments in music and in art; so, in
2 those areas.

3 We've tried to get away from that this year,
4 and for the future.

5 We've actually eliminated 19 different
6 pretests at the high school level, for example.

7 So, we are trying to be sensitive to that, to
8 restore more balance, more instructional time for
9 our teachers and our students, but that's going to
10 be an ongoing challenge.

11 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay.

12 Thank you very much.

13 We are going to -- based on technology, we're
14 gonna take a -- roughly, a five-minute break,
15 because we have to change the tape.

16 And, we appreciate everyone's continued
17 patience.

18 [Pause in proceedings.]

19 [The hearing proceeded, as follows:]

20 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay, so we're going to
21 get started again.

22 All right, so our next group,
23 Dr. Paul Vermette from Niagara University, and
24 Preethi --

25 Am I saying it correctly?

1 PREETHI GOVINDARAJ: Yep.

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: -- Govindaraj?

3 PREETHI GOVINDARAJ: Yes.

4 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay.

5 I'm trying.

6 -- from the partnership -- co-founder of

7 Minerva.

8 I apologize.

9 PREETHI GOVINDARAJ: Yes.

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Both affiliated with
11 Partnership for Smarter Schools.

12 We know you had a forum up here a couple of
13 weeks ago, so --

14 PREETHI GOVINDARAJ: We did, thank you.

15 And thank you for having us today.

16 The Partnership of Smarter Schools represents
17 a variety of individuals -- parents, community
18 members, taxpayers -- who actually have no
19 connection or relationship to the schools, other
20 than having a vested interest in seeing the
21 resources allocated in the most productive manner
22 possible.

23 And the summit that organized about
24 2700 people, who came to the Kleinhans Music Hall in
25 the city of Buffalo, was all these different

1 constituents coming together to voice their concern
2 about testing.

3 And the partnership's position with respect
4 to the Regents Reform Agenda is smart reform.

5 The partnership believes very much in having
6 higher standards, evaluations, assessments, but we
7 need to get it right.

8 Consider, for example, just assessments.

9 And in the interest of time, let's just look
10 at ELA assessments, as how they're conducted in
11 college in comparison to K-12.

12 Now, in college, as ELA students, we have an
13 entire semester to study a text, and that's what we
14 are assessed on.

15 In K-12, we have 60 seconds, maybe, to read a
16 text, and then we're suddenly assessed on it.

17 In college, we are assessed on the actual
18 text that we study throughout the semester.

19 In K-12, we are assessed on text we may never
20 have seen before; most likely have never seen
21 before.

22 In college, we read an entire text, from
23 beginning to end, in context, which means we're
24 reading the scholarship, the criticism, everything
25 that surrounds the central text.

1 In K-12, in the assessments, it's one
2 isolated passage from a larger text that we read and
3 we're suddenly assessed on.

4 In college, when we're assessed on text, we
5 study this with our peers, with our professors, we
6 dialogue about it, we have discussions about it,
7 but, in K-12, there's no talking to anybody when
8 we're being assessed on a text, it's all individual.

9 So if we are saying we need assessments in
10 the name of being college- and career-ready, we need
11 to get assessments right so we can actually simulate
12 the work that goes on in college, instead of taking
13 us in a completely different path.

14 And to this point, humanities professors
15 frequently lament that it takes a semester or longer
16 to help young students undo the testing mentality
17 because they're not prepared for college.

18 And so this is a very important issue that is
19 also linked with capturing better data, and
20 capturing better evaluations, as well as capturing
21 professional development that is much more aligned
22 with the kind of work we do in college.

23 For example, in college, when we give an
24 assessment to students, these include various
25 measures; sometimes writing, sometimes

1 presentations, and a combination of these.

2 But when they're given, there -- it's given
3 in a timely manner that allows immediate feedback
4 from practitioner to student, so that the student
5 can assess the work that they have just done, and
6 improve it through the course of a semester or the
7 course of a whole year.

8 In K-12, there is no immediate feedback given
9 from teacher to student, sometimes there's no
10 feedback at all given from practitioner to student,
11 simply because the teachers don't have the data
12 themselves to be able to share with the kids.

13 And, so, there is no opportunity for the
14 student to improve their performance based on what
15 they have just given or created.

16 So this is another important issue.

17 As well as, capturing better evaluations,
18 better professional development, in college, we
19 frequently evaluate college professors based on
20 their analysis of a text, the way they teach the
21 text to the students.

22 It's never based on a standardized test
23 score.

24 But this allows the college practitioner much
25 more high-quality data, as well as immediate data,

1 so that they understand how they are teaching the
2 students at the college level.

3 In K-12, if we're giving teachers data based
4 on the test score, it's actually very disconnected
5 from what the teacher is doing on a daily basis.

6 So this is another area of reform that we
7 believe in.

8 Most importantly, as well, that all of these
9 issues come back to how we support the practitioner
10 at the college level in comparison to the K-12
11 level.

12 At the college level, we give our professors
13 time and resources to study their content areas
14 deeply and effectively.

15 So if you have a college professor who is
16 teaching, for example, a text on
17 Nathaniel Hawthorne, they have the resources to go
18 and attend conferences that discuss
19 Nathaniel Hawthorne or that text.

20 But in K-12, even though we are expecting,
21 with the new standards, teachers to understand their
22 content areas deeply, the professional development
23 is usually test-based.

24 So, we are helping teachers understand how to
25 administer a test and how to collect data; whereas,

1 we are not really supporting their learning needs,
2 even though this is what they are supposed to be
3 evaluated on.

4 And, so, we think that all of this impacts
5 their college-readiness, which it does, but what a
6 lot of us don't realize is that it also impacts
7 their career-readiness.

8 Now, we polled executives from many
9 Fortune 500s -- General Motors, American Airlines,
10 International House of Pancakes, a variety of
11 different multi-national corporations -- asking
12 them, "What are the most useful skills that incoming
13 employees can give to you?"

14 And, the number one response, was the ability
15 to develop an argument, and persuade.

16 And how this is accomplished is through
17 writing, through presentation, through other
18 research-based means.

19 Not one named standardized test scores.

20 In fact, not one said you take standardized
21 tests in one of these professions.

22 And they said the standardized-testing
23 mentality actually undermines the ability of the
24 incoming employee to perform in the most optimal
25 way.

1 So they're echoing what humanities professors
2 in college are echoing, and now we've had decades of
3 research telling us this as well.

4 So, our position, just to reiterate, we
5 believe in a Reform Agenda; we just believe in
6 smarter reform, and so that means aligning
7 assessments much more closely with the work that is
8 actually performed in college, not taking us away
9 from that.

10 We believe in supporting professional
11 development to help the practitioner with the daily
12 needs of the classroom, that is, learning and
13 content; not testing-related.

14 We believe in capturing evaluations based on
15 the work that takes place throughout the year; not a
16 disconnected standardized test that has nothing with
17 what was taught during the year.

18 And we also believe in capturing the data
19 that is aligned with the work that is taking place
20 through the months, so that we use that to inform
21 our instruction and assessment, and that's what we
22 share with the parents.

23 Now, I'm a parent of a 3-year-old and a
24 2-year-old, and, it matters not to me, what my
25 teacher -- how my teacher performed on a

1 standardized testing evaluation, how my students
2 performed, how my kids perform on standardized
3 tests.

4 It matters much more to me what my kids were
5 learning on a week-to-week basis, so that I can help
6 them on a week-to-week basis as well.

7 So we need to support our system to allow for
8 this to happen.

9 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Doctor.

10 DR. PAUL VERMETTE: My role in the
11 partnership comes from two hats:

12 One is, I'm supporter of good schools and
13 getting testing right.

14 The second is my role at Niagara University
15 where I've been preparing secondary teachers for a
16 long, long, long time.

17 My written testimony starts with a semi-fake
18 multiple-choice question for you guys.

19 And it's interesting, because if I gave a
20 multiple-choice question to the people in the
21 gathering here, a quarter would guess right, just
22 statistically.

23 So one-fourth of these people would get it
24 right; and there is no question.

25 So that doesn't make any sense, unless you

1 think, well, if there was a question, then we could
2 see what they did wrong, but it's kept secret 3-8.

3 The testing is kept secret 3-8, so there can
4 be no instructional improvement.

5 Tests have a great value.

6 Testing, the question you asked earlier of
7 Mr. Hathaway, all of those issues, but it depends
8 on how the teacher uses the test to improve the
9 learning.

10 That's absolutely out of the 3-8 system here.

11 It doesn't exist, of course, in 9-12, but
12 it's -- even in 9-12, it's a final evaluation.

13 There is no reteaching of that stuff.

14 So we get a grade, the kid gets a score, and
15 we go on to the next year.

16 My second point mirrors one of Preethi's
17 point.

18 If you ask business what they want, they want
19 teamwork, work ethic, punctuality.

20 "New York State Teaching Standards," which is
21 a great, great document, and I thank anybody, this
22 is the best one on earth, okay, we should use it.

23 And it doesn't say in there, "and will
24 produce great test scores," because the tests could
25 be disconnected.

1 We don't know, we can't see them.

2 Again, 9-12 we can see them; 3-8 we can't.

3 So we have a great document to guide
4 teachers.

5 And my young teachers from Niagara, we know
6 what is good teaching, and we know what the State
7 thinks good teaching is, but there is a tremendous
8 disconnect between those two statements and the
9 testing.

10 Third thing, and then I'll be quiet:

11 I'm a scholar, I apologize, I'm an academic;
12 and I don't look like either.

13 You know, I've been around this a long time.

14 I'm an old football coach.

15 Okay?

16 So you start looking at the research.

17 You would think -- I mean, no offense to the
18 Commissioner, but he thinks of himself as a
19 researcher.

20 And when you start to look at the research on
21 how formal programs of standardized testing have
22 affected graduation rates, dropout rates, success in
23 college;

24 The SAT, question earlier, only predicts fall
25 scores, first year.

1 If you leave high school and you go to
2 college, it will predict your first year.

3 After that, it's not a predictor.

4 But things like work ethic, punctuality,
5 persistence on task, those predict, and we don't
6 test them.

7 So, if indeed what happens is there's a
8 narrowing of the curriculum, because of the testing,
9 and then we get test data that we can't use, I'm not
10 sure why we're spending all that money, to tell you
11 the truth.

12 And I have to come down on the side of
13 getting testing right, because we don't have it
14 right now.

15 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Doctor, two quick
16 questions.

17 One, in your opinion, was there a point where
18 we had testing right?

19 DR. PAUL VERMETTE: Grew up in New York.

20 Can I tell a story?

21 Is it okay?

22 I'm real old.

23 1971 I started teaching.

24 And I want you to think about that when you
25 look over there.

1 I'm teaching high school in New York in 1971.

2 The only year I left, I defected, I went to
3 New Jersey to be a social-studies supervisor, and
4 I found out later I got hired because New York had
5 its rigor.

6 Isn't that kind of nice.

7 "You guys have those tests, we borrow them."

8 So, I can make a case for my secondary
9 candidates.

10 Mostly, the Regents exams are spot on.

11 They're tough, they're high-stakes.

12 You can look at what Mr. Hathaway said, you
13 can look at the previous years.

14 They align with the objectives.

15 That's a big thing in my world, okay:

16 Here's what we're supposed to be doing;
17 here's what we're measuring.

18 So, yeah, and the 3-8 has just -- it's part
19 of the corporate reform movement to put a number.

20 If we could do away with the 20 percent of
21 the APPRs on the test scores, we still have the
22 80 percent based on this.

23 The other 80 could be expanded.

24 That's a plan.

25 It's kind of interesting, we know, meaning

1 SED, and the Board -- the Board of Regents, put this
2 out.

3 It's a pretty good document.

4 Again, it doesn't align, in my judgment,
5 today.

6 I don't know about forever, but, for today,
7 it doesn't align with the testing.

8 PREETHI GOVINDARAJ: And if I could echo that
9 as well, I know from talking with humanities
10 councils and humanities professors, that when it
11 comes to standardized testing, they almost always
12 advocate for something like the SAT II which is
13 content-based.

14 And, so, you have expectations of what
15 content you will be tested on, and it tests your
16 content knowledge, as well as the skills application
17 along those tests; whereas, the 3-through-8 is
18 purely skills-based.

19 There's no content application at all.

20 And that is a huge disconnect, because we're
21 preparing kids in K-12 to be content learners.

22 And that's what we're doing in college:

23 We're testing them, we're assessing them, on
24 content in college.

25 So a pure skills-based-application approach

1 in 3-8 is actually ill-preparing our young ones to
2 go into college for tomorrow.

3 SENATOR FLANAGAN: All right, thank you very
4 much.

5 Appreciate it.

6 DR. PAUL VERMETTE: Thank you.

7 Thank you for listening.

8 Next, the Empire State Supervisors
9 Administration Association; Mark Beehler and
10 James Spanbauer, Ryan Schoenfeld.

11 MARK BEEHLER: Good afternoon, and thank you.

12 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Good afternoon.

13 MARK BEEHLER: I'm joined, as you mentioned,
14 by Dr. Schoenfeld here, from North Park Junior
15 High School in Lockport, and, Mr. Spanbauer from
16 LaSalle Preparatory School in Niagara Falls.

17 On behalf of our -- the Empire State
18 Supervisor and Administrators Association, we'd like
19 to thank you for this opportunity to provide
20 testimony.

21 Mr. Chairman, when you started out this
22 morning, you mentioned that you had a broad range,
23 or anticipated a broad range, of testimony from a
24 broad cross-section, and I think something
25 interesting is going to happen, or has happened in

1 the past hour, which is that you're going to hear
2 testimony from the administrators association, which
3 is very similar to that from the teachers
4 association, and very similar to what you heard from
5 a superintendent.

6 And I think that that's very interesting
7 because, typically, we don't always have the same
8 views on things, to say the least.

9 But I would like to take a moment, and in the
10 sake of time -- or, for the sake of time in the
11 testimony, simply abbreviate some of my messages to
12 reinforce what Mr. Hathaway had mentioned.

13 Assessments, they need to be produced timely,
14 they need to be diagnostic and useful.

15 We are not opposed to high-stakes testing,
16 but they're high-stakes, as your question referred
17 to, occurs within a continuum.

18 And we understand that, in some cases,
19 students must be taking high-stakes tests.

20 Regents exams, SATs, those are high-stakes
21 tests.

22 Sometimes they're developmentally
23 appropriate, but we need to be administering these
24 at an appropriate level.

25 And I think what's happening is, that we have

1 exceeded the threshold of appropriateness in some
2 cases.

3 And we're seeing that.

4 We're seeing that with my own children; as
5 Dr. Martzloff stated, with his children; and we're
6 seeing that in our schools, where kids are coming in
7 exceptionally anxious.

8 Dr. Martzloff would probably not want to be
9 quoted as saying to his daughter, "The tests don't
10 mean anything," but I said those exact same words to
11 my fifth-grader who was, quite literally, sick on
12 the day of her fourth-grade ELA, and I had to sit
13 down because she's a 95 percent student.

14 She wants to be a 100 percent student.

15 And when she came back after the first day of
16 the ELAs, I, quite literally, had to say to her,
17 "Look it, honey, I just need you to relax.

18 This test isn't that" -- "isn't" -- excuse
19 me, it's even hard for me to say an as educator --
20 "it isn't that important."

21 In addition, you have some very positive
22 things that have come about.

23 You're not going to hear us say, throw out
24 the Common Core.

25 You're not going hear us say, that all of the

1 components of the APPR are ineffective.

2 As a matter of fact, one of the components,
3 which we haven't really talked about, but have been
4 used sometimes as -- in what I would suggest is an
5 inappropriate manner, are the growth scores.

6 Teachers in New York State are used to
7 working under No Child Left Behind.

8 We have an assessment, we -- our goal is to
9 have our students achieve a level of proficiency.

10 Typically that's a Level 3, it's passing the
11 exam.

12 It realistically goes back to the beginning
13 of time when teachers taught and students took
14 tests, and the goal was for the student to pass the
15 test.

16 Growth scores are a brand new metric, and
17 their usefulness is being sort of polluted in the
18 fact that they are being assigned to teachers as a
19 measurement of their effectiveness.

20 A growth score doesn't necessarily measure
21 achievement.

22 It measures learning.

23 And those are two different metrics.

24 We're not used to that in education, to be
25 honest with you.

1 As a matter of fact, in the testimony, you'll
2 hear me give the example of the difference.

3 If I were to ask the three of the Senators to
4 arrange themselves according to height, I may come
5 to the conclusion that Mr. Chairman is taller than
6 Senator Grisanti, but that does not in any way tell
7 me how tall Mr. Chairman is.

8 Our system, with the APPR and the use of
9 growth scores, is designed to -- no matter what the
10 level of achievement; in other words, how well the
11 students do, we will always have teachers who are
12 going to be developing and ineffective.

13 That growth measurement, which we're saying
14 measures teachers' effectiveness, in fact, does not.

15 It simply ranks the teachers.

16 And while that seems like it's a trivial
17 difference, it's exceptionally important.

18 The other component of my written testimony
19 that I would like to touch base on, is simply the
20 loss of local control that local education agencies
21 and school boards are beginning to experience.

22 As a part of the network team for West Seneca
23 schools, in Albany, we've been told, that in the
24 past, we have always had tests that held students to
25 high expectations, and that State Ed has high

1 expectations.

2 And now, with the development of the modules
3 which meet the expectations, or they'll tell us
4 that, of the Common Core, they're also high support.

5 But what we're finding is that, this level of
6 high expectations and high support, is, in fact,
7 causing districts, especially districts who are
8 tight on resources, to simply say:

9 I need to have something that's aligned to
10 the Common Core.

11 I'm taking this module, and I no longer have
12 the control that I used to have over the
13 instruction, because the modules not only tell us
14 what to teach, but also, specifically, how to teach
15 it, and we're losing control.

16 They are not required, we will acknowledge
17 that, but, they are -- they are one of the only
18 resources at this point in time that are aligned.

19 And in the process, operationally, we are
20 beginning to lose control over, not only what we're
21 teaching, but also how we're teaching it.

22 One other component that I just wanted to
23 touch base on with regard to the APPR, is the use of
24 those growth scores -- and my testimony speaks to
25 this a little bit more -- with regard to the

1 disparity between teachers who are assigned a growth
2 score by New York State, and those teachers who can
3 create an SLO.

4 This is a significant inequity in the
5 existing APPR.

6 If I have students who take the
7 3-through-8 -- or I should say, 4-through-8
8 assessments, because I have to be in fourth grade to
9 get a growth score and the teacher gets an assigned
10 growth score then, that is significantly more
11 rigorous, typically, and I do not have any influence
12 over that score.

13 For teachers who can develop locally a
14 student learning objective which essentially
15 replaces that growth score, I can establish my own
16 metrics for determining student growth, I have input
17 likely into the assessments which are created.

18 And we're starting to see this -- or, we have
19 seen this throughout the state, where teachers who
20 have growth scores assigned by the State are being
21 measured by a different metric than those who can
22 create things locally.

23 And, honestly, we knew that.

24 Our model, which is developed based on the
25 Tennessee model for value-added or growth, the

1 Tennessee value -- or, the Tennessee value-added
2 assessment system, the governor of Tennessee,
3 two years ago, commissioned a study to determine
4 what the effects were.

5 And that is one of the effects that we saw in
6 Tennessee, and we're seeing that now.

7 And what's happening is, it's invalidating
8 some of the APPR results and causing, essentially, a
9 significant degree of mistrust, and, like I said
10 before, an inequity between the measurements by
11 which our teachers are being measured.

12 The other piece that --

13 SENATOR FLANAGAN: You know what?

14 Let me interrupt you on that point.

15 Who's coming out ahead: the people who are
16 getting measured on the growth scores or the people
17 who are getting measured based on the SLOs?

18 MARK BEEHLER: Typically, the people measure
19 on SLOs, because they have input into the
20 development of their own assessments which are being
21 created.

22 You know, one of the questions that we
23 talked about -- or, that came up with regard to
24 3012-c and the APPR, is all of the tests.

25 And you've had a difficult time,

1 I understand, getting an answer to that question,
2 "How many tests are actually being administered?"

3 And that's difficult because, 3012-c
4 requires -- or, up until last year, it required a
5 pretest and a posttest for every single teacher,
6 who -- every single teacher, and then those tests
7 were administered to at least 50 percent of that
8 teacher's work -- student load.

9 So, in other words, if I'm a
10 physical-education-teacher, I had to have pretests
11 and posttests that were administered to at least
12 50 percent of my students, likely in September, and
13 then again in June.

14 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Let me just, on that
15 point, because I think I had part of this dialogue
16 with Mr. Hathaway:

17 Are you talking about the statute, or are you
18 talking about a regulation promulgated by SED?

19 MARK BEEHLER: I'm talking about an SED
20 regulation.

21 SENATOR FLANAGAN: That says it requires you
22 to do pre- and post-testing?

23 MARK BEEHLER: Yeah, up until this year, it
24 did.

25 And I will acknowledge this fact:

1 This year, in August, a new regulation -- or,
2 guidance document came out, that stated we no longer
3 have to give pretests, but we do have to establish
4 targets.

5 And in some subjects, while it states that we
6 don't have to administer a pretest, we need to have
7 a benchmark.

8 In other words, we need to set a target for
9 the students' growth.

10 Well, it doesn't tell us that we have to
11 create a pretest, but I need to have some form of
12 measurement to set that target.

13 So, if I'm a phys-ed teacher, if I'm a music
14 teacher, if I'm a health teacher, especially if I'm
15 a kindergarten, first-, or second-grade teacher who
16 doesn't have much data on my students, I need to
17 administer some type of an assessment so I know
18 where they are when they're walking in.

19 So it doesn't -- this year, it does not
20 specifically say that it does, but, operationally,
21 we need to begin to administer pretests.

22 So, in West Seneca, 46,000 pre- and
23 post-tests that we administered last year to about
24 7700 students.

25 Those are created in the district at an

1 exceptional cost.

2 They cannot be created or corrected by
3 someone who had a vested interest, so, the teachers
4 could not actually correct them themselves, nor
5 could they create them.

6 So, logistically, and, obviously, for the --
7 you know, that sounds great on paper, that we don't
8 want the test creating them -- or the teachers
9 creating their own tests or correcting them, but,
10 operationally, that becomes an administrative
11 nightmare when that happens in every single subject
12 for virtually every teacher.

13 Senator Grisanti had mentioned earlier about
14 the collection of data.

15 And one of the points with regard to loss of
16 local control, especially being the
17 chief information officer, that I would like to
18 bring up, is that we have inBloom.

19 We've heard about inBloom.

20 There's been a relatively significant amount
21 of discussion amongst some of the data folks in the
22 state about inBloom.

23 We see it on some of the blogs.

24 I'm not going to speak, one way or the other,
25 but I do just want to bring up some interesting

1 facts about what's happening.

2 The information from schools transfers from
3 local schools, it works its way to regional
4 information centers.

5 This is a process that has been going on for
6 years.

7 Let's see, 11 years ago, I was the
8 chief information officer for West Seneca schools.

9 At that point in time, I had a simple
10 database that I needed to send for elementary and
11 secondary reports.

12 Right now, it has become significantly more
13 sophisticated.

14 Our student management system, which houses
15 everything from student demographic information,
16 attendance, discipline, schedules, that's referred
17 to as our "student management system."

18 Periodically, usually once a month, data from
19 there goes up to our regional information center,
20 which is a -- well, they refer to it as a "RIC."

21 How many are there?

22 It's a -- well, and then it will transfer
23 from there, up to what's called the
24 "data warehouse."

25 And this gets kinds of technical, but it's

1 kind of important, because the question about where
2 inBloom and, essentially, 5 to 15 million dollars
3 goes, is key in understanding of where this
4 information is coming from, and the fact that we
5 already have it.

6 So we take our information from the student
7 management system, it goes up to the regional
8 information center into a collection port called
9 "level zero."

10 At that point, we reconcile all sorts of
11 other data.

12 Special-ed data comes in.

13 Family -- or, food-service data comes in so
14 we can identify students who have free and reduced
15 lunch.

16 I know this is boring, but this is actually
17 what I have to do every day, so, to me, it's kind of
18 exciting.

19 [Laughter.]

20 MARK BEEHLER: All right, it all comes in,
21 I have to reconcile this data, as do CIOs and
22 district data coordinators in every single district.

23 From that point, it goes on to a data
24 warehouse.

25 These are regionally controlled in a regional

1 information center, that then pulls in assessment
2 data.

3 So I have the ability to take those
4 assessments that you've heard that we have issues
5 with, in many cases, and take and be able to pull
6 out reports that are instructionally illuminating,
7 is what I like to say.

8 It helps me guide instruction in the
9 classroom, and it helps me make curriculum changes
10 at a district level.

11 All of the information that I need is already
12 there.

13 Several times throughout the year, though,
14 the State requires reports.

15 Tomorrow is a big one.

16 All of the staff evaluation data for our
17 teachers are required to be submitted to the State.

18 So they're gonna come in, data from Level 1
19 goes up to Level 2, our state reporting system.

20 InBloom, which is a -- I understand it's a
21 501(c)(3) organization -- has -- or it has been
22 collecting data from this Level 2.

23 So all of this data fills up, filters up;
24 it's coordinated in a line throughout the entire
25 states.

1 It filters up, inBloom takes this data.

2 Now, part of the Race to the Top agenda
3 items, is that we are going to be getting a data
4 dashboard.

5 We've heard about that.

6 Many districts already have data dashboards.

7 It's paid for, and it's promised to be paid
8 for out, of the Race to the Top grant for the next
9 two years -- well, one year, one year conditional --

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Mark, you know what?

11 MARK BEEHLER: Yep?

12 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Are your colleagues going
13 to testify?

14 Because you need to --

15 MARK BEEHLER: Wrap it up?

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: -- wrap it up.

17 MARK BEEHLER: Got it.

18 Okay, so here's the point:

19 We're being forced to pay, the Race to the
20 Top funds are being expended at a range of between
21 2 and 5 dollars per pupil for inBloom to give back
22 the data that we as a district already have.

23 I have already taken the data, accumulated
24 it, cleaned it -- cleaned it up.

25 The same information that a data dashboard

1 can present to me at a district level from my Data 1
2 warehouse, now has to go up through inBloom, we have
3 to pay inBloom to get that money -- or, that
4 information back, it's already my information, and
5 then have it be presented to me.

6 The other piece of this is, that information
7 was never -- we as a district, and I as a parent,
8 have never provided consent, nor have we been
9 disclosed, that that information is going to be
10 leaving our district or the state, to be going to
11 another entity.

12 So those are two relatively significant
13 issues that people like myself, who take data
14 stewardship and data custodianship, look at as
15 relatively significant.

16 It's also another example of our loss of
17 local control.

18 All right.

19 JAMES SPANBAUER: I'll speak briefly on a --
20 a little bit about the high school level.

21 I spent --

22 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Just a question on that
23 point, though.

24 But -- so -- but the testing data that we
25 just had with the Common Core tests, and it was just

1 done, you didn't receive any data back?

2 MARK BEEHLER: No.

3 SENATOR GRISTANTI: And you don't have the
4 ability -- you don't have the ability under Race to
5 the Top, where you're collecting data as you were
6 before, you couldn't do anything?

7 MARK BEEHLER: Right.

8 So -- and to answer Senator Gallivan's
9 question from earlier, this year we received the
10 information later than in the previous years, but we
11 were required to have a much shorter turnaround
12 time, from the time it was actually scored to the
13 time that it was submitted to the State.

14 So the length of time that the State had that
15 data before they gave it back to us was longer.

16 The parent reports actually took longer.

17 And if you've seen a parent report, it says,
18 "This is the student level achievement level," and
19 that's about it.

20 It is not diagnostic, it's not prescriptive,
21 it's not instructionally illuminating.

22 Regional information centers, though, take
23 that information that's provided at the data -- in
24 the data warehouse, and then they develop reports.

25 So at a regional level, we have the

1 mechanisms in place, we have the framework in place,
2 to be providing, and have been receiving from them,
3 instructionally significant data reports back.

4 But what we're lacking is that information
5 from the State.

6 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Gotcha.

7 Okay, thank you.

8 JAMES SPANBAUER: From the high school
9 level -- and this is in no disrespect to the
10 4-to-8 teachers and parents, we hear about
11 high-stakes testing quite often, and I think the
12 point was made by -- well by him as a parent, and
13 Dr. Martzloff, that it's high-stake if you think
14 it's high-stake, but there's only one person it's
15 high-stake for at the elementary and the
16 middle level, and that's the teacher, because that
17 test that student takes has no significance whether
18 they're moving on to the next grade level.

19 Alls it does is place them in AIS services
20 and provides an evaluation of the teacher.

21 At the high school level, where the
22 Common Core is just beginning to be implemented this
23 year in testing, is when we'll really see what the
24 high-stakes effect is on students.

25 What's going to happen is, you're gonna have

1 students who take the first Common Core exam this
2 June, so we're going see the reaction of those
3 students.

4 And I think, Senator Gallivan, you mentioned
5 it earlier about college- and career-ready.

6 One of things I don't know if we've
7 accommodated completely, is multiple pathways and
8 alternative pathways.

9 No matter who goes through the high schools
10 now, every student has to take the -- pass the same
11 five Core Regents exams to earn that diploma;
12 whether it be special education, whether it be the
13 highest achiever in that building.

14 We have students who have different
15 aptitudes.

16 We talked earlier about someone who might be
17 the best electrician in the world.

18 We, unfortunately, at the high school level,
19 are forced to pull students out of BOCES programs to
20 provide them with technical training -- or,
21 AIS services instead of their technical training in
22 their senior year of high school; therefore, the
23 career that they might have found after high school
24 has been put on hold so we can try to get them
25 through a testing system that we're forced to

1 implement.

2 So I think those are some of the things.

3 We're going to see high-stakes testing at the
4 high school level as we move forward, so I think
5 it's important that we consider a look at multiple
6 pathways, not only with the vocational system, but
7 with special-education students, which I don't know
8 if we've accommodated fully with this program.

9 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Okay, thank you.

10 RYAN SCHOENFELD, Ed.D: I just want to share
11 a couple points, and I appreciate the opportunity.

12 I'm from a small city school district,
13 Lockport.

14 I've been there for 20 years.

15 I've been a practitioner.

16 I've been an assistant principal of an
17 elementary building.

18 I'm the coordinator of kindergarten through
19 sixth-grade mathematics for the teachers within our
20 large school district.

21 So part of this Common Core, and any of the
22 work and efforts we're carrying out for State Ed and
23 for the best interests of the children, I'm helping
24 to lead that; and it started off by Regent Bennett
25 talking about administrators being important to

1 students' success.

2 We're carrying that.

3 We are doing what we need to do.

4 In a small city school, and others around,
5 administrators are stepping up to do the types of
6 things they can do to carry this out in the best
7 interests of children, based on what we know about
8 what we're doing.

9 So these things are rolling out.

10 And we appreciate the assistance, because
11 what we were doing, when you compare us on a global
12 market, and I've attended national, international,
13 conferences, it's true, we don't compete at that
14 higher level.

15 So what we're doing doesn't exactly work.

16 People might not fully agree with it, but we
17 need to do something that's going to help our kids
18 prepare for this global network.

19 The one thing I've learned through my
20 research, and I see it today within you up there, as
21 well as our contingent here, it's about
22 relationships; it's about working with people.

23 We appreciate you taking the time to be with
24 us, to listen to us.

25 Again, you facilitated and worked through

1 masterfully, with different contingents sharing
2 their things, but that's important.

3 Trust is important.

4 And we're trusting that the direction we're
5 going will do better for our children.

6 Bryk and Schneider did a study in Chicago,
7 looking at 200 schools, this was in the late 1990s,
8 for 5 years.

9 The schools that had relational trust between
10 teacher and teacher, teacher to student, student to
11 teacher, principal to teacher, principal to parent;
12 in all those different manners, the 100 schools that
13 showed higher performance on test scores were the
14 ones that had relational trust built into those
15 environments, and that I think is important to note.

16 We've talked about all these different
17 things.

18 It really comes down to the local
19 establishments and the districts working with their
20 people, building upon that trust, so that we can
21 help our students to be successful.

22 We're going to carry it out and do what we
23 need to do, but, for sure, trust is important, and,
24 obviously, people care.

25 You know, we don't say it enough in

1 education, but as politicians, educators, parents,
2 we all care, so this conversation is great.

3 It's trying to come together to do better
4 things.

5 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Senator Maziarz would, I'm
6 sure, associate himself with your comments, and he
7 is an ardent advocate for Lockport.

8 MARK BEEHLER: I'm sure.

9 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Trust me.

10 MARK BEEHLER: I know he is.

11 So if there's any Q&A?

12 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Senator Gallivan.

13 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Mark, going back to the
14 data flow, is this the same process throughout the
15 state --

16 MARK BEEHLER: Yes, it is.

17 SENATOR GALLIVAN: -- as it moves up?

18 MARK BEEHLER: Yes.

19 SENATOR GALLIVAN: So there's nobody lacking
20 those --

21 MARK BEEHLER: Nope.

22 SENATOR GALLIVAN: -- I guess, those
23 technology resources?

24 MARK BEEHLER: Exactly.

25 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Okay.

1 MARK BEEHLER: So -- and that's -- you know,
2 that goes to the heart of one of the questions,
3 "Why is it that we're required to have a statewide
4 selection process for information that we all, every
5 single district, already has access to?"

6 SENATOR GALLIVAN: I get the question.

7 MARK BEEHLER: Right.

8 SENATOR GALLIVAN: But I just wanted to make
9 sure that --

10 MARK BEEHLER: Absolutely.

11 SENATOR GALLIVAN: -- this was similar across
12 the state, and not just some -- something that
13 you're doing in West --

14 MARK BEEHLER: No, it is the same -- it is
15 the process by which we file reports to
16 New York State Ed.

17 SENATOR GALLIVAN: All right, thank you.

18 MARK BEEHLER: Certainly.

19 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Gentlemen, thank you very
20 much.

21 SENATOR GRISTANTI: I've got a quick --

22 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Oh, I'm sorry.

23 Senator Grisanti.

24 I apologize.

25 SENATOR GRISTANTI: That's okay.

1 And speaking about Senator Maziarz, he's
2 actually taken World War II veterans to the monument
3 in Washington today, and you may have saw that, but
4 he told me to say, you know, thank you for being
5 here and testifying, and wish he -- he can't be in
6 two places at once, but that's a trip that he had
7 planned, and, thank God they crashed the gates and
8 they were able to get in to see the monument.

9 That's a good thing.

10 SENATOR GALLIVAN: It was open?

11 SENATOR GRISTANTI: It is.

12 You had mentioned, Ryan, about, you know --
13 when did you get the instructions on the
14 Common Core?

15 Was it in the 2011-12 year, and then you were
16 given the materials in 2012?

17 Is that when that happened?

18 RYAN SCHOENFELD, Ed.D: I think New York's
19 ahead of the game by a year.

20 We're looking to implement the Common Core
21 before we need to.

22 But, two years ago, we were first with
23 Race to the Top, understanding that we have the
24 Common Core, and that first phase was where you did
25 get an allocation, and that's where the substitutes

1 and training teachers, and the financial burden
2 associated with the Common Core to train the
3 teachers on the deconstruction, to understand each
4 specific piece of the standard, standards in English
5 or math.

6 So that happened two years ago.

7 This year, within our district and others,
8 they're deciding to roll them out.

9 And with ELA, in my particular district,
10 we're doing kindergarten through eighth grade,
11 Common Core English.

12 We still have to obtain the resources, the
13 textbooks, again, printing, and everything else.

14 The mathematics we have rolled out.

15 And tomorrow morning, actually, I'm meeting
16 with the rest of our teachers that are not doing the
17 math yet, but, we're planning on, in the second
18 quarter of this year, meaning, coming up in five
19 weeks, to roll out the mathematics for the
20 Common Core for K through 6, so that everyone will
21 be, again, setting our kids up to know the
22 foundational skills for the concepts of mathematics.

23 If we don't start doing this, when we send a
24 third-grader to fourth grade, they won't learn that
25 skill, and it will be more difficult to teach that

1 child the increased rigor of mathematics.

2 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Now, you had said that
3 there were resources available to your district or
4 to your school to get this rolling.

5 Was it done on a voluntary basis, or was it
6 just -- was it something that your district
7 implemented that has to be done?

8 RYAN SCHOENFELD, Ed.D: We had to decide how
9 within our district we would do that, so we brought
10 our Core teachers in and started it with
11 mathematics.

12 We did training in ELA over the summer with
13 all of our teachers.

14 So we had about 120 teachers trained, with a
15 consultant that works specifically on how to work
16 through these, and it's a work in progress.

17 It's not perfect, but it is a program that
18 we're using.

19 You have to make the copies, you have to
20 filter through.

21 We're trying to withhold the integrity, which
22 I say, of the Common Core, but there is professional
23 judgment.

24 And I agree with some colleagues, that, yes,
25 we do need to interact and engage with kindergarten

1 children; that I do have parents that are saying "My
2 kids are crying about," you know, "some of this
3 stuff."

4 We need to work through that, and we're
5 working through that together.

6 But, you do have to purchase textbooks for
7 ELA.

8 You have to purchase certain manipulatives,
9 like the Unifix Blocks, or a certain type of style
10 scale.

11 So we're obtaining that through our district
12 funds.

13 And then we're printing out modules.

14 Or, we bought iPads to utilize, so you can
15 just pull up Module 2 and use that as your teacher
16 edition.

17 So not all districts can do that.

18 We've been able to invest some of our money
19 into that, instead of making a pile of modules for
20 teachers to use as their curriculum guide.

21 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Thanks, Ryan.

22 Appreciate it.

23 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Gentlemen, thank you very
24 much.

25

1 Patiently waiting in the on-deck circle is
2 the ever-present but assertive Bruce Fraser.

3 DR. BRUCE FRASER: I'm very pleased I have an
4 opportunity to be able to provide testimony on
5 behalf of the rural school members.

6 We represent about 280 school districts and
7 30 BOCES.

8 They're from all over the state: the tip of
9 Long Island to the furthest, West Point, of the
10 state, the Quebec border to the Pennsylvania border.

11 Our districts represent 40 percent of the
12 state's school districts, and we represent about
13 1 out of every 8 students educated in
14 New York State.

15 And I point out one fact that's sometimes
16 overlooked:

17 New York educates the eighth-largest number
18 of rural students of any of our 50 states.

19 We are a diverse and large state, and we have
20 that big a population of people considered rural.

21 Again, the opportunity to testify here,
22 I feel very comfortable, because we have
23 two gentlemen, Senators, who were recognized last
24 year as "Friends of the Rural Schools Association,"
25 and we do appreciate the role that they played on --

1 working on behalf of rural schools.

2 The overview I would give is, we're a
3 member-driven organization, and we have the
4 advantage of following on two other hearings.

5 And I really asked members, before they
6 provided me any input, to try to read some of the
7 testimony from the first hearing.

8 And I'm going to try to avoid that, but the
9 one thing that came out in our testimony, smaller
10 schools sometimes have an advantage in implementing
11 change.

12 We didn't hear all the pushback about,
13 "We can't do this, this is difficult."

14 We heard testimony expressing regrets that
15 communications from State Ed had been unclear, and
16 at times, not timely, but we also know that, again,
17 in smaller organizations, we're a little more nimble
18 and can make some of the changes.

19 The concerns we kept hearing, were that this
20 is an unfunded mandate, and it's beyond what we can
21 afford, and that implementing these two major
22 changes, APPR and conversion to the Core curriculum
23 simultaneously in the face of very difficult
24 economic circumstances, have really pushed our
25 districts to the limit.

1 Again, their reservations about the way the
2 reforms have been rolled out and handled, but,
3 people are pretty much on board, to the extent that
4 I'd to have say, we can't go back.

5 We are in the midst of things.

6 And I'll give you an example.

7 We have begun the purchase of materials that
8 support the Common Core in small districts, and, you
9 know, that -- those are major commitments that are
10 going to be difficult to back away from.

11 So I think we have to move ahead from here.

12 I think what happened last Thursday is very
13 unfortunate, but I think it calls upon us to make a
14 commitment to move forward, and to do so with the
15 understanding, the only way we have a chance to be
16 successful is if all the parties involved in
17 education put their head down, vow to work together,
18 and forge ahead.

19 The concerns I hear from our members, they're
20 about funding, and many of these districts received
21 less than \$20,000 of Race to the Top money.

22 And the current status of our districts is
23 that, we are funded by the State \$184.4 million
24 below what our districts received in 2008-2009.

25 That's 7.1 percent below where we were

1 5 years ago in terms of State support.

2 And the other thing we constantly point out,
3 is our cumulative multi-year GEA adjustments have
4 been over \$1.175 billion.

5 That's taken the toll out of the ability of
6 rural school districts to maintain programs.

7 And we point out, disparities exist.

8 There are disparities in student performance
9 across this state that are wider than they should
10 be.

11 There are disparities in resource
12 availability, partly because we have 700 school
13 districts with very different tax bases.

14 And there are disparities in tax burden.

15 And for our communities to remain viable, it
16 really requires that we have a good, solid level of
17 State support.

18 Our school districts have been hurt
19 tremendously as State aid has been pulled back
20 during the difficult economic times.

21 The prospect for rural schools right now, and
22 rural communities, do we have a chance for economic
23 development under the current circumstances?

24 And I'd turn that around and say, What
25 business, large or small, would relocate to, or even

1 remain, in areas of the state where the education
2 system has been taken from a relatively healthy one
3 to a bare-bones one, and, second, where there's a
4 very high tax burden being borne by the local
5 taxpayers?

6 So those are concerns that we have.

7 And the concerns we have, I think
8 understanding the school funding, and
9 Senator Flanagan, I've particularly seen it from
10 your perspective, a person who has to try to deal
11 with your colleagues in the Senate, and take a
12 big-picture perspective, while still representing
13 some very demanding constituents.

14 We don't believe the changes that need to be
15 made in the school-aid formula can be made under the
16 guise of -- under the direction of the Senate.

17 And that is, with the greatest respect for
18 the job that you do, we just believe that the
19 current formulas, if you look at the current GEA
20 adjustments for this year, we went from four tiers
21 to ten tiers.

22 Beyond that, we have bullet money that's only
23 available to people in the majority caucus, that is
24 handed out.

25 And all those things make us skeptical that

1 things can be changed and improved under the current
2 environment.

3 What we propose is something along the lines
4 of the hospital reforms, where, literally, you
5 turned it over to the hands of experts, and we would
6 say out-of-state experts, would come in and study
7 the diverse districts that exist in New York, and
8 come up with a plan for how schools should be funded
9 in this situation.

10 We would not minimize the important role of
11 the Legislature in terms of school funding.

12 You still would be involved, to the extent
13 that you look at the entire state picture, the
14 fiscal condition of the state, the other demands
15 placed upon you as legislators by the State, but,
16 literally, how money is allocated is critical.

17 In my testimony, I refer to Dr. Baker's
18 study.

19 We're 4th in the nation in adequacy when you
20 look at the 50 states.

21 We're 44th in terms of regressivity and
22 progressivity.

23 To give out large amounts of money based on
24 flawed formulas is, in our eyes, nothing more than
25 folly.

1 And, when we talk about the system, we've
2 seen political changes of the majority.

3 We'll say this, rural schools certainly
4 didn't fare well when there was a different party
5 running the Senate.

6 But we are also aware that, that in a system
7 where every legislator is virtually called upon to
8 go back home and campaign, "I did a good job taking
9 care of my constituents in my districts," that's not
10 going to get us to where we need to be in terms of a
11 fair and equitable funding system.

12 So we really ask that the consideration be
13 given by the Senate Committee, and effort be made,
14 working with the colleagues in the Assembly, to move
15 in a different direction: to depoliticize allocation
16 of school funding.

17 We feel like, again, the tremendous diversity
18 of our state demands that reform be looked at in
19 that light, and we understand the pressures placed
20 upon you as senators, to advocate, and bring home
21 the bacon on behalf of your constituents, but that
22 leads to kids elsewhere in the state having less
23 opportunity, and citizens elsewhere in the state
24 having higher tax burdens.

25 There are better ways to operate, and I think

1 it is a technical enough subject that I'd ask you to
2 consider giving up one of your major
3 responsibilities.

4 As I conclude my written testimony, I ask you
5 this to think about:

6 Wouldn't your time be spent better in other
7 ways than meeting with the superintendents and
8 members of interest groups who come in and visit you
9 on "Tin-Can Tuesday," with their hands out, saying,
10 You need to do better on our behalf?

11 And wouldn't education be served better if
12 those superintendents and leaders were back in their
13 district working to implement the reforms that have
14 been initiated?

15 Now, again, as a member organization, that's
16 one message that was transmitted to me loud and
17 clear.

18 There were two or three other things that
19 I mentioned in the testimony.

20 One of them is, that our rural schools, under
21 the tax cap, we have 38 member districts whose tax
22 levy is under \$3 million.

23 Very small allocation for growth under a
24 2 percent tax-cap limit, lower at a 1.5 that we're
25 anticipating this year.

1 I give the example of a district with a
2 1.5 million levy.

3 They had \$20,000 of costs negotiating their
4 APPR agreement.

5 That's almost -- that's over 65 percent of
6 their allowable growth in their budget under the
7 2 percent tax levy.

8 With small districts, small budgets, and
9 small levies, our districts are particularly
10 sensitive to any mandate that's instituted or any
11 new costs related to these -- the series of reforms.

12 The second thing I'd ask you to think about
13 that troubles us a little bit:

14 When districts have experienced turnover,
15 either as a superintendent, or a building-level
16 principal moves on to another job, has a health
17 issue, we've always been able to bring in
18 experienced administrators and put them into the
19 circumstances.

20 In small school districts, that no longer
21 works.

22 The use of interims, even very experienced
23 and capable administrators, the models that have
24 been written for APPR require very specific
25 training.

1 And if an administrator has not been really
2 brought up to speed on that district's model, it's
3 very difficult for our district to bring someone in
4 for a month or two while they complete a search.

5 So those are things that I think come to us,
6 through our members, that we'd like to point out
7 that are particularly troublesome for small rural
8 districts.

9 But, again, the biggest amount of feedback we
10 had dealt with the concerns about funding.

11 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Bruce, thank you very
12 much.

13 SENATOR GRISTANTI: Thank you.

14 I've got to take off, gentlemen.

15 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Thanks, Bruce.

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Appreciate the time and
17 the energy.

18 DR. BRUCE FRASER: Thank you.

19 SENATOR FLANAGAN: All right.

20 Next, Cheryl Oldham from the U.S. Chamber of
21 Commerce.

22 Cheryl, you came from Washington; right?

23 CHERYL OLDHAM: Thank you.

24 Thank you so much for inviting me to be here,
25 and for allowing me to share with you our support

1 for the Reform Agenda, and specifically speak a bit
2 about Common Core.

3 As you mentioned, I'm from the U.S. Chamber
4 of Commerce.

5 The U.S. Chamber is the largest federation
6 organization representing the interests of the
7 business community in the country.

8 We represent 3 million businesses of all
9 size, sector, and region, and we have been in this
10 business of education reform and engaged in these
11 issues for some time because our membership asked us
12 to be.

13 The most important asset they have is their
14 human capital, and what they're telling us, almost
15 daily, is they're having difficulty hiring
16 individuals with the skills and the education
17 required for the jobs of today.

18 And, so, I'll just be really brief, and talk
19 sort of about three big things:

20 Frame a little bit for you some of the data
21 points that I think are important, and talk about
22 why we support Common Core, and talk a little bit
23 about what Common Core is not, in our opinion.

24 So, framing a few data points for you:

25 Of 34 industrialized countries, the

1 U.S. ranks 14th in this literacy, 17th in science,
2 and 25th in math.

3 Half of all undergrads, 70 percent of
4 community-college students will take at least one
5 remedial course.

6 If we think about that, and these are the
7 students that have actually graduated.

8 They've come out of school with either a
9 diploma or the equivalent, and they're going on to
10 some level of post-secondary education, and they
11 have to take non-credit-bearing remedial courses
12 that costs us money as taxpayers, it costs them
13 money, obviously.

14 And, oftentimes, those who do take those --
15 have to take those remedial courses will have more
16 difficulty, actually, getting that end credential.

17 We know that jobs are more specialized and
18 technical today than ever before.

19 We're seeing now, 3.9, up from 3.1 million,
20 jobs going unfilled right now in this still
21 difficult economic time.

22 And 90 percent of the fastest-growing
23 professions will require some
24 post-secondary-education training, and by 2020,
25 120 million high-skilled, high-wage jobs we'll have

1 in this country.

2 And by all indications, we will fall short of
3 the skilled and educated workers to fill those jobs.

4 We can't afford to only focus on the elite.

5 What is great about the Common Core, and I'll
6 talk a little bit about this, is that it's high
7 rigorous standards for all students.

8 We can't afford to focus on the elite, and we
9 can't afford to wait until high school for that
10 high-stakes exam to say that you're ready, or you're
11 not.

12 That we can't -- 70 percent of
13 African-American males in Buffalo who are dropping
14 out of high school and not graduating, that's too
15 late for them.

16 We have to start early.

17 It's clear that the current system, based on
18 all of those sort of alarming statistics I just
19 talked about, is not preparing students to succeed
20 in college or the modern workforce.

21 And from our perspective, we really feel like
22 the Common Core state standards are a key -- key
23 component to sort of addressing that challenge.

24 And so I'll talk about three things, very
25 briefly, that are key to Common Core, and why the

1 business community supports it.

2 Number one, as I said, elevated set of
3 standards rigorous for all students.

4 Second, nationwide clarity and consistency.

5 Shockingly, I mean, as mobile as our economy
6 is, as mobile as our businesses are, as our families
7 are, standards vary across the state.

8 Some are very low, some are very high, some
9 in the middle.

10 And then, third, internationally benchmarked.

11 These standards will rise to a level that
12 will be comparable with our competitors overseas,
13 most of whom are outperforming our students today.

14 What is critical, though, to Common Core,
15 I think, as important as these high standards, is
16 without rigorous, quality assessments aligned to
17 those standards, they're really meaningless.

18 How do you know where your deficiencies are
19 if you don't measure outcomes?

20 And I think that's what's important to think
21 about.

22 I know, as you're considering sort of the
23 consortia PARCC, the consortia assessment that's
24 being developed, I would encourage you to spend some
25 time looking at that.

1 I think what they really are trying to do, is
2 make that very quality, quality assessment that
3 anyone -- I've heard a teacher say, "I would be
4 proud to teach to that assessment."

5 It's not just fill in a bunch of bubbles.

6 It is very, very, a quality piece.

7 And what is unique about it, is that you do
8 have a number of states coming together, and experts
9 from across all of those states that are
10 participating, that are helping to develop the
11 assessment.

12 It's not just, Oh, here's the testing
13 company.

14 Go develop an assessment on [unintelligible]
15 standards.

16 These are professionals that are spending
17 every day, going back to the testing company saying:

18 Is this aligned to the standard?

19 Is this rigorous?

20 Does this really meet the --

21 And so I think that's what is unique about
22 that.

23 Just briefly, as some of these things have
24 been said already today, or raised with you today,
25 some of the myths I think about Common Core:

1 One, that it's centralized authority over our
2 schools.

3 That it's somehow a federal --
4 federally-driven prospect.

5 And that's just not the case.

6 Governors, state chiefs, came together to
7 developed this.

8 The federal government really doesn't have
9 anything to do with it, although I would say, I can
10 see where people would make that connection.

11 And the more that, you know, folks in
12 Washington talk about it, in terms of the secretary
13 or the President, it's actually not helpful.

14 It is a state-driven process.

15 States are not required to participate.

16 And, so, I think that's key.

17 Secondly, that it dumbs-down existing
18 standards.

19 Someone here mentioned that you all ought to
20 scrap the Common Core and look to Massachusetts
21 because they're number one in the country.

22 Well, Massachusetts went through a very
23 rigorous process to decide whether to adopt
24 Common Core, because they did have really high
25 standards.

1 And we've studied this, and the business
2 community was actually key to coming forth and
3 saying, We're not gonna -- we're not gonna just to
4 go Common Core.

5 We know we're really good, we know we've got
6 high standards.

7 We're going to study this.

8 We're gonna ask an independent evaluation to
9 come and look at it.

10 And what they found was, it's pretty much a
11 toss-up.

12 You could go with your current assessments --
13 your current standards or you could go with
14 Common Core.

15 But the business community ultimately decided
16 to throw their weight behind Common Core
17 Massachusetts because there was a few things that
18 they -- that Common Core stressed that the current
19 Massachusetts standards did not, and that was
20 critical-thinking, reading complex text, and
21 persuasive writing; all of the things that the
22 business community said, Those are important to us.

23 And then I guess -- what's the third thing?

24 Oh, the data piece.

25 So, sort of, the big government snooping on

1 our children and collecting data, it's just not
2 true.

3 There's nothing about Common Core that
4 requires some sort of additional data.

5 There's actually a federal prohibition on
6 identify -- uh, collecting -- uh, identifiable --
7 student-identifiable data.

8 And so I think, you know, if there's issues
9 about data that you all are considering, I think
10 it's important to make sure that they are -- that
11 it's very clear that one is not connected to the
12 other.

13 And in conclusion, I think I'll just say
14 that, you know, for years and years and years we've
15 been telling our students and our parents and
16 everyone, "You're on track."

17 You're on track, you're doing fine.

18 And it's clearly not the case.

19 I mean, you can look at the NAEP scores and
20 how students do on the national report card, versus
21 how they do on state assessments, and the gap is
22 huge.

23 The remedial data points that I mentioned
24 earlier, those that are having to go on and take
25 remedial courses before they're prepared, we're

1 just -- I think Common Core injects a level of
2 honesty into all of this.

3 And so I would -- I know that you all are
4 struggling, obviously, with a lot of this, and want
5 to do the right thing.

6 I would just urge you to sort of stay the
7 course on this.

8 And, I would be happy to answer any
9 questions.

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I just have one question
11 on -- in the beginning of your testimony, you cite
12 some facts.

13 CHERYL OLDHAM: Yep.

14 SENATOR FLANAGAN: 14th in literacy,
15 17th in science, 25 in math.

16 Would you just forward to us the sourcing on
17 that?

18 CHERYL OLDHAM: OECD.

19 I'll be happy to.

20 SENATOR FLANAGAN: And [unintelligible]
21 something else, quickly.

22 Your members, you, obviously, it's the
23 U.S. Chamber.

24 CHERYL OLDHAM: Uh-huh.

25 SENATOR FLANAGAN: General assessment, how

1 are they viewing New York?

2 Are we considered a leader?

3 Are we considered a laggard?

4 Are we, you know, just going through the
5 process?

6 What would you say is the general assessment?

7 CHERYL OLDHAM: I think you're probably --
8 I think you all have a reputation of being pretty
9 good, and I think that was -- I think that's
10 evidenced by sort of research and analysis of your
11 standards before you adopted the Common Core, which
12 were, you know, I think on math, like, right in the
13 middle, and, reading, a little bit higher, or maybe
14 it was reversed.

15 I can't -- I have it here somewhere.

16 But I think, when you -- I mean, I just
17 think, generally, across the board, we're not
18 meeting the grade in terms of what employers need.

19 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay.

20 Thank you very much.

21 Appreciate it.

22 CHERYL OLDHAM: Thanks.

23 Next, the Niagara Region PTA,
24 Dr. John McKenna.

25 DR. JOHN McKENNA: Thank you very much for

1 having me here today and representing the
2 Niagara Region PTA.

3 On behalf of the 33 school districts that the
4 Niagara Region represents, I thank you.

5 Today what I'll do is, I'll just share a
6 little introduction, and then what I'll do is, what
7 we had the opportunity to do this year was, we wrote
8 three statements of concern, as a region, and we
9 presented these this past year.

10 And we feel that it's more relevant now than
11 ever that you hear the message from our region again
12 regarding the high-stakes testing.

13 So, again, at the opening:

14 My name is John McKenna.

15 I've been an elementary principal in the
16 Tonawanda City School District for the past
17 19 years.

18 During that time, I've had the privilege of
19 being actively involved in Niagara Region PTA.

20 First and foremost, I'm a parent of three
21 boys.

22 In addition, I have served in the Region
23 executive board as the educational chairman and as a
24 legislative chairman.

25 I've also received the honorary lifetime

1 member for over 25 years of service in the PTA, so,
2 I'm no rookie in the PTA.

3 We've worked together for many, many, many
4 years.

5 In my various experiences, I have never
6 witnessed so much parental frustration, confusion,
7 and anger over the current high-stakes-testing
8 policies being implemented across New York State.

9 Due to the outpouring of parental concerns,
10 the Niagara Region PTA adopted a resolution against
11 high-stakes testing, and developed three statements
12 of concern that we read at the New York State
13 PTA Convention in November of 2012.

14 Since then, our concerns have only multiplied
15 and our fears have come true, as thousands of
16 students have failed and have been considered
17 ineffective in the last round of testing.

18 We are thankful now to be given this
19 opportunity to testify and share our statements
20 again, in the hope that someone will listen to the
21 voices of our parents across the region.

22 These statements were put together by,
23 probably, two or three dozen parents that got
24 together and wrote these.

25 We are all here today because we care deeply

1 about our children and want to ensure that they
2 receive the best possible educational experiences.

3 Based on research and direct evidence from
4 our membership, we, the Niagara Region PTA, believe
5 the State Education Department's high-stakes testing
6 of our students and teachers is harming our students
7 and our schools.

8 More than two decades of scientific research
9 demonstrates that the current testing regimes yield
10 unreliable measures of student learning and have a
11 negative effect on both students and teachers.

12 SENATOR FLANAGAN: John, if I may, I'm not
13 sure if you were here all long, but, I would prefer
14 if you would just summarize your testimony.

15 It's pretty straightforward, and you're a pro
16 at doing this.

17 So, just hit the high points, because we
18 have -- all this is made part of the written record
19 already.

20 DR. JOHN McKENNA: Sure, absolutely.

21 Well, I think the thing that worries us most
22 is what we've seen with our children.

23 And there have just been so much angst about
24 what we've seen with our students: the stress, the
25 anxiety, tears. Students that don't want to go to

1 school.

2 And, it's welled up to be quite a crisis.

3 A lot of parents now even have decided that
4 they want to opt out, which we as -- in public
5 school, we don't believe in that, but, that's how
6 serious it's gotten with some parents.

7 So something, we really believe, needs to be
8 done, and it has to stop, because students deserve
9 the right to have an education based on their own
10 individual needs.

11 And what we're seeing right now is, for
12 example, with the new testing, it's at such rigorous
13 high levels that it's causing frustration in
14 students, and they're written in such a way that's
15 going to cause that.

16 For example, if you're familiar with some of
17 the new modules and work, I'll give a fifth-grade
18 example to you:

19 Right now, students, for example, in
20 fifth grade are working on an exam, a UDHR.

21 Are you familiar with what that is?

22 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Yes, sir.

23 DR. JOHN McKENNA: "Universal Declaration of
24 Human Rights."

25 It's written at a 1,650 Lexile level.

1 I know that probably doesn't mean that much
2 to you, but the average fifth-grader --

3 SENATOR FLANAGAN: That part I don't know.

4 DR. JOHN McKENNA: Well, I'll try to explain,
5 because, hopefully, this will bring this to you.

6 You see, the average fifth-grader reads at
7 about an 800 to 900 Lexile level, so that's at a
8 level almost twice as much.

9 So that's not rigorous, that's frustrational.

10 And that's why when you see kids becoming
11 upset, not wanting to come to school, it's not
12 because they don't want to come to school or be
13 successful; it's because the work is at such
14 frustrational levels that it's very difficult for
15 them.

16 The tests also have been written at very
17 frustrational levels.

18 There are distracters built right into the
19 questions, which are designed to have kids
20 multiple -- to give multiple answers.

21 There's also field-test questions embedded in
22 these tests as well, which are very confusing.

23 So a lot of times, we have some of our
24 smartest children who have come across these
25 questions, that are not proven, and what happens is,

1 they get so stuck on these questions that they can't
2 get through the test.

3 Time runs out.

4 And some kids that we know, that got 4s
5 before now, got 1s and 2s, not because they're not
6 smart or intelligent, but because of test design.

7 And that's caused a lot of serious stress in
8 our students, and with our parents.

9 Because parents just got the letters home
10 within the -- all the districts across the state
11 over the last, you know, few weeks, and opened up
12 those envelopes, and parents were very shocked when
13 they saw students who, at one time, were getting 3s
14 and 4s, now getting 1s and 2s; and so trying to
15 explain it to parents, like, why, and what happened.

16 And then when you see part of construct of
17 the test that we're allowed to see, well, we saw
18 pineapples and hares, and things like that, and some
19 of those inappropriate questions, but those are the
20 types of things that are prevalent on these tests.

21 And another thing that came up in some of the
22 previous testimony is, so now the school officials
23 and folks, we're not allowed to look at these tests,
24 we're not allowed to dissect or do item analysis
25 with these tests, so that we can really see what

1 exactly what happened and where the breakdown was,
2 so that we can fix it, because, supposedly, I don't
3 know, they're secretive questions.

4 So, it's hard for us to even prepare in
5 schools, and even help parents prepare, because
6 we're not sure of all the content.

7 All we're given is the Common Core and the
8 modules, which is, we can see, are at incredibly
9 frustrational levels that's causing this
10 frustration.

11 It's very simple:

12 If you look at -- we talked a lot today about
13 learning theory.

14 If you individualize and differentiate
15 instruction, what you do then, is you meet the child
16 at their needs.

17 Right?

18 That's called a "zone of proximal
19 development."

20 So if you can develop instruction to meet
21 their needs, which we know how to do, given running
22 records, qualitative reading inventories, there's
23 ways that we can assess students at those levels,
24 and then what we can do is, scaffold students to
25 success.

1 So if we keep going to their instructional
2 levels with smart assessments, we then can scaffold
3 students to all kinds of high levels of achievement.

4 If we teach and test at seriously high levels
5 of instruction and testing, what it does is, it
6 causes that big gap, where kids feel they can't make
7 it.

8 That's what perpetuates dropouts.

9 That's what perpetuates kids feeling not
10 successful.

11 And, it's those things that cause our parents
12 to have such angst, because kids go home, that's how
13 those -- the kitchen tables turn into places of
14 frustration and anger, because people don't know and
15 understand this work, and why their children are so
16 frustrated with it.

17 And you saw what happened in Poughkeepsie.

18 And, it's very disheartening to us in the
19 Niagara region that the other forums have been
20 canceled, because we have a lot of parents that
21 really want to voice concerns, that want to hear
22 themselves -- they need to be heard in this because
23 they have legitimate concerns.

24 And I hope that you will -- I know we're
25 looking, in some ways, in Niagara region, to

1 continue to have, even though, if the Commissioner
2 can't come, we're trying to work with state PTA to
3 still offer forums, even if the Commissioner can't
4 come, because we feel there's a real need; that
5 people need to be able to express their concerns, in
6 a democratic fashion, which we feel they're not
7 given that opportunity to do so.

8 So that's it in a nutshell, some of the
9 concerns that we have.

10 I guess that summarizes my --

11 SENATOR FLANAGAN: No, it does.

12 And, obviously, we have -- we've heard a lot
13 of comments relative to the event, and the scheduled
14 events.

15 And one of the things that I will reiterate
16 is, that's why we're doing -- that's one of the
17 primary reasons we're doing these hearings.

18 And we had -- you know, I consider you to be
19 a representative of parents and educators,
20 obviously, in conjunction with the PTA.

21 DR. JOHN McKENNA: Well, I'd also like to
22 say, too, about special interests, I know the one
23 person from Rochester mentioned, you know, special
24 interests, and that's another thing that parents,
25 teachers, work together, and administrators.

1 They're not special.

2 Principals and teachers work with parents,
3 and we have for years.

4 And the fact that -- I think that when people
5 make claims that there's groups that might be
6 special interests, I think that's misleading and
7 disingenuous, because, see, I've been a PTA -- I'm a
8 principal, but I've been a PTA member for 26 years.

9 I have not missed one PTA event in 26 years.

10 And I was at a PTA meeting last night, and
11 will continue to always work cooperatively and
12 collegially with my PTA, as do the teachers I work
13 with.

14 I'd always say, we were a team, a united
15 front.

16 And some of the things that are going on out
17 there are very divisive and starting to pit people
18 against each other, which I think we really have to
19 be careful of.

20 SENATOR GALLIVAN: No questions.

21 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you very much, sir.

22 DR. JOHN McKENNA: Thank you.

23 All right, now I think we've got the "A" team
24 coming.

25 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Now we've got everyone

1 else.

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Lady, and gentlemen.

3 A rose between two thorns, perhaps.

4 WILLIAM BOATWRIGHT: Well, good afternoon.

5 On behalf of the Buffalo Council of
6 Supervisors and Administrators, we'd like to welcome
7 you to Buffalo.

8 Thank you for taking the time to hear our
9 perspective today.

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I just want to make sure,
11 we had several names. I just be want to make sure
12 who is here, please.

13 WILLIAM BOATWRIGHT: So I'm
14 William Boatwright, elementary principal.

15 GENELLE MORRIS: I'm Genelle Morris. I'm
16 assistant superintendent of Shared Accountability,
17 and the chief information officer for Buffalo.

18 KEVEN EBERLE: I'm Kevin Eberle, a building
19 principal.

20 Actually on the list, represented as
21 secondary principal, as I've just recently acquired,
22 we're the only one in the state that took over a
23 charter school back to the Buffalo schools, a
24 pinnacle closure to, now, PS 115.

25 SENATOR FLANAGAN: And, Mr. Boatwright, do

1 you work in the Buffalo School District as well?

2 WILLIAM BOATWRIGHT: Correct.

3 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Okay.

4 WILLIAM BOATWRIGHT: So given the lateness of
5 the hour, and the fact that there's about ten people
6 left in the room, I don't think there's a danger of
7 what happened in Poughkeepsie happening this
8 afternoon, but I thought what we would try to do is,
9 try to frame the conversation a little bit and pick
10 up a thread of the discussion heard today.

11 One of the things that you've heard a lot
12 about are a set of unintended consequences as a
13 result of the Regents reform movement.

14 I wanted to start with an unintended benefit.

15 What you see right now across the state, and
16 I see it as a unifying concept, whether urban,
17 rural, suburban, that, for the first time in a long
18 time, we're having some very serious and deep
19 conversations about standards, about reform; so that
20 is a very good thing.

21 But as you know, with any change process,
22 this is an uncomfortable time.

23 What we're hoping is a result of forums
24 today, is that through all the confusion and
25 ambiguity, that we'll reach a place of clarity.

1 So, it's important that you gather all the
2 feedback and you listen, and you take it back and,
3 hopefully, put it to good use.

4 Where I'd like to pick up is also by stating
5 that, as a school leader and teacher who's worked
6 for the past 15 years in urban settings, we're a
7 believer in standards and the importance of
8 assessment.

9 And, standards and rigor certainly have their
10 place, but nothing -- nothing beats having great
11 teachers and great leaders in schools.

12 That's definitely the case there.

13 So one of the places that I want to start in
14 my comments today is talking about capacity, but in
15 order to talk about capacity, I need to go back to a
16 metaphor that Dr. Martzloff referred to earlier,
17 this concept of changing the plane, or refueling the
18 plane, as it's flying in the air, because that's
19 what we're being asked to do right now.

20 But, I want to extrapolate that metaphor a
21 little bit further.

22 We're not only being asked to refuel the
23 plane right now, we're being asked to maintain the
24 altitude and also make the plane fly higher.

25 Let me further complicate that.

1 The pilots that we currently have flying the
2 planes right now have been trained to be bus drivers
3 their whole career.

4 So, we have to address the capacity issue at
5 the teacher and school-leader level as well, so this
6 means that it has to be replicated at what's
7 happening at the preservice level and at the
8 professional-development level.

9 For years, we've been asking teachers to
10 operate like bus drivers.

11 Now we want them to be pilots, and not just
12 any pilots, but G4 pilots, if you will.

13 So we have to go back and take a look at what
14 we're doing to train teachers, and understand that,
15 heretofore, they're utilizing skills that they never
16 have had to use before.

17 We're asking teachers to not only know the
18 standards, but be familiar with them in an intimate
19 and deep way.

20 We're asking them to be able to identify data
21 sources, and once they've done that, to be able to
22 accurately analyze those data sources to actually
23 make good instructional decisions that align the
24 standards, and to correctly identify the appropriate
25 strategy to remediate student-learning deficiencies.

1 These are all new skills that we're asking
2 teachers and school leaders to take on in a very
3 constrictive period of time.

4 So, as much as we're addressing the standards
5 component and the assessment component of the
6 Regents reform, we can't lose sight of what's
7 happening at the capacity level.

8 Talking about unintended consequences again,
9 this has unintended consequences in terms of how
10 these high-stakes tests are used, because,
11 unfortunately, for teachers that are working hard,
12 they have been the recipient of unintended
13 consequences as a result of how their scores are
14 calculated.

15 And we've also seen situations where teachers
16 who aren't working hard have been able to benefit,
17 because, already, anytime you have a new system,
18 there's always people that are able to game it
19 somehow.

20 So these are the things that we need to take
21 a closer look at, knowing that there's an important
22 place that we need to get to as part of this
23 important reform movement, but we need to sort
24 through all of these unintended consequences and
25 make sure that we're addressing all components of

1 the plane if we want to fly straight and we want to
2 fly high.

3 Thank you.

4 GENELLE MORRIS: I'm going address the data
5 and the assessment issue, and I say "issue," because
6 you've already heard lots of information about how
7 we move data along the chain to meet the state
8 reporting requirements.

9 But one of the things that are very important
10 to understand, is that we have this evaluation
11 system that's been established for teachers and
12 principals, to evaluate their effectiveness, and
13 it's linked directly to their performance on state
14 assessments, as measured by the Regents and the
15 state assessments at 3 through 8; but, also, there
16 are plenty of state assessments that have been
17 created at the local levels.

18 In 697 districts, that's very difficult to
19 measure the validity and the rigor of each one of
20 those assessments that are then being used for
21 high-stakes decisions.

22 So one of the things that our organization is
23 asking for is an independent review of the
24 evaluation system, a meta-evaluation, if you will,
25 where we're going to -- you would actually able to

1 evaluate how well that system is working.

2 If some people are being evaluated using a
3 reasoned sort of state assessment for 3 through 8,
4 and then some others are being evaluated with a
5 locally-developed assessment, how well are we able
6 to determine a teacher or a principal's
7 effectiveness based on those data that are generated
8 via that system?

9 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Can I ask you a question
10 on that, though, because you get to the heart of
11 something that is a legitimate and real issue, but
12 one that's quite controversial as well.

13 You heard a lot of speakers before you talk
14 about the concept of local control, and the loss of
15 local control.

16 Part of what it sounds like you're
17 advocating, is the State basically coming in and
18 saying, Here's going to be the standard. Whether
19 it's a local assessment or it's a state test, in
20 essence, we're not going to have this whole
21 patchwork. We're going to have maybe two or three.

22 And, you know what would happen; not only
23 would the principals and the administrators be
24 unhappy, but the teachers would be very unhappy,
25 because that would take away their ability to

1 negotiate these things locally.

2 So are you advocating a broad statewide
3 approach with no local input?

4 GENELLE MORRIS: No, actually, I'm not. I'm
5 not actually advocating that at all.

6 What I'm seeing is, is that we've designed a
7 system. The system, it works with a percentage of
8 state assessments that are used to determine a
9 teacher's effectiveness, and a percentage that's
10 based on an observation of a teacher's practice or a
11 principal's practice.

12 What we're saying is, that an independent
13 evaluation, as to the effectiveness of that actual
14 system, did we design it right?

15 Is 20/20/60 the right way to measure
16 teacher's effectiveness, using a certain percentage
17 of teacher's scores based on their students'
18 performance on the assessments?

19 And what you also have to remember are, the
20 state assessments are measuring something entirely
21 different from what would be measured on a
22 locally-developed assessment.

23 So, you have two different ways of
24 determining student performance.

25 You have one that's developed locally based

1 on local educator input, and then you have one
2 that's developed nationally from an independent
3 vendor.

4 How are we able to compare those methods of
5 evaluation and then come up with a score at the end
6 that says, that this teacher is effective, and this
7 one isn't?

8 So what we're saying is, an independent
9 evaluation of the actual system itself is probably
10 needed to make sure that we're doing this properly.

11 If we're supposed to be evaluating the
12 effectiveness of educators, we need to be able to
13 say that we're doing it right.

14 If you use a state assessment to come up with
15 an evaluation score, it's just as valid and reliable
16 as a score that's generated based on an assessment
17 that was drawn based on student performance on
18 locally-developed assessments.

19 SENATOR FLANAGAN: So if you -- which one
20 would you choose?

21 GENELLE MORRIS: Well, I would want to
22 know -- I'm thinking right now, with the state
23 assessments, you have lots of test data that allows
24 to you see how the tests behave, and how students
25 are taking each assessment, and you're able to see

1 lots of data to say, this particular test behaves
2 this way when students take them.

3 With locally-developed assessments, you don't
4 have that type of information.

5 You have no data that tells you about the
6 performance of a student's behavior on a test.

7 So when you have those two different types of
8 tests, the types of comparison of rigor, it's not
9 comparable.

10 I develop a test based on a conversation with
11 my fourth-grade teachers, we're gonna develop a test
12 that we feel best reflects our curriculum; versus,
13 we have another test that's developed by a vendor,
14 they're coming up with a test that's totally
15 different, but their test items have been tested.

16 So that's the difference.

17 If I'm going to develop a test item with a
18 group of educators, versus, one that's been actually
19 field-tested, then you have comparability issues.

20 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Thank you.

21 GENELLE MORRIS: That was that one.

22 So then, also, you've heard a lot of
23 information about resources in the system, and how
24 we are asked to create multiple pre- and post-tests
25 that will be able to provide the data for this APPR

1 system.

2 So, we had to create over 300 pre-imposed
3 tests to make sure that we were able to assess all
4 areas, including career and technical education.

5 We had varied areas that we needed to make
6 sure that we had pre- and/or post-tests, so that we
7 were able to generate these types of data for the
8 system so that we could accurately give information
9 about a teacher or principal's evaluation score.

10 So, even though we complied with that,
11 there's questions about the validity.

12 If you're creating such tests in such volume
13 to meet a mandate, how reliable and how rigorous are
14 those tests?

15 So once again, an outside evaluation of the
16 system itself, and how it's being used, and the
17 components within it, the research still needs to be
18 collected to develop whether -- I mean, to determine
19 whether this data are actually supporting what we're
20 actually trying to ask the system to do.

21 And then, lastly, I wanted to speak to the
22 inBloom system.

23 The inBloom system has been mentioned before
24 as a method that we're collecting data on students
25 around the state.

1 And, yes, in small districts where there is
2 little transiency and there's little movement, then
3 this may seem to be a burden.

4 But for a district such as Buffalo where we
5 have a lot of students moving in and out of the
6 district from other districts, it's a method for us
7 to be able to get data from our other districts;
8 whereas, before, we had to wait, hopefully, we got a
9 transcript from another district.

10 So this allows our educators to get that
11 information quickly, when it's up and running, and
12 we're actually looking at it as a benefit; that it
13 will allow us to get that type of information that
14 we're looking for.

15 So, that's my humble opinion from the
16 assessment side of the room.

17 KEVEN EBERLE: I'll be brief. It's been a
18 long day for all of us.

19 So I appreciate, we all appreciate, you being
20 here, Senators, and I just wanted to give a little
21 background of myself.

22 I'm probably one of the veteran
23 administrators in the room.

24 I'm 20 years as a building principal in
25 5 school districts, from Ellicottville, all the way

1 to the city of Buffalo.

2 So, Mr. Grisanti, if he was here, out in
3 Hamburg, and all the things, and part of his
4 district.

5 And you guys, I've seen.

6 Actually, I actually had you speak at our
7 Lakeshore Breakfast of Champions when you were
8 sheriff, Senator.

9 So, I've been around, and I've seen a lot.

10 And you alluded to something,
11 Senator Flanagan, earlier, what was working back
12 when?

13 And I go back to from the frameworks first
14 started in 1989-1990, turning into the
15 New York State Standards, and we had teachers
16 sitting down in Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES, sitting
17 there saying, Okay, this will be fully implemented
18 by 2005, then, 2012, or something.

19 Then one guy sitting next to him saying, My
20 God, and not only will I be retired, but I'll
21 probably be dead by then.

22 From 1990 to -- and here we are, 20 years
23 later, going into --

24 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Yeah, but we're still
25 here.

1 KEVEN EBERLE: It's amazing.

2 SENATOR FLANAGAN: The good part is, we're
3 still here.

4 KEVEN EBERLE: Yeah.

5 So, basically where we are in the city of
6 Buffalo, a lot of things I'm going to allude, what
7 William was talking about, about building capacity.

8 And where we really are, especially in the
9 Big Five, is that we have populations in the
10 Big Five, and I'm not an excuse person.

11 I was, as Naomi Cerre, the principal of at
12 Lafayette, was talking, I was actually with her when
13 Grover Cleveland was the International High School.

14 Our population here in Buffalo has grown,
15 literally, leaps and bounds in the ELL population.

16 We have over 4500 ELL students
17 (English-language learners) in the city of Buffalo
18 right now.

19 That's doubled in the last six years alone.
20 We're one of the highest relocation cities probably in
21 the country because we have four relocation centers.

22 A lot of people ask that, why so many
23 immigrants come to Buffalo?

24 It's because of the capacity we have here for
25 International Institute and Journey's End, Catholic

1 charities.

2 We have many.

3 Many states only have one; we have many.

4 So the growth of that is huge, but we really
5 haven't gotten an answer from State Ed, or anyone,
6 to say, How do we actually account for these
7 students?

8 And they've been built right into the
9 four-year cohort with everyone else.

10 I'm a product of one of the principals.

11 Being a 20-year principal, of being under of
12 the federal regulation, No Child Left Behind, of
13 actually being moved because of the actual
14 non-movement of an international school.

15 You're in a catch-22 of actually having
16 30 percent of your population that can't speak
17 English, and they're absolutely not going to pass
18 the five Regents exams and all the assessments
19 necessary to graduates in a four-year cohort, even
20 with a fifth year for the ninth-graders.

21 Impossible; it's just not there.

22 What we have to do, as Naomi was speaking of
23 earlier, build more capacity, and more knowledge,
24 where we get in front of the legislative group to
25 sit there and talk about this dilemma in New York.

1 New York City's been fighting this for
2 20 years.

3 We are one, you know, of the Big Five that
4 it's been a difficult piece to that.

5 So what we're really asking is to say,
6 where -- and, again, it comes back to funding.

7 I'm not talking about funding; I'm saying
8 more money.

9 How do we really look at sustainability of
10 the funding we have and the money that we're using
11 right now?

12 Right now, we're built, and the Big Five are
13 built off, a good portion of it is grant money.

14 Many people alluded to it earlier, about
15 using grant money to have the SIG grants continue.

16 That should be part of the General Fund.
17 I mean, that should be, actually, something that's
18 going on all the time.

19 We should have teacher aides, we should have
20 assistant principals, we should have all of those
21 forces to continue.

22 Terry Schuda has changed
23 South Park High School around, from 40 percent
24 graduation rate, over 62 percent graduation rate.

25 Now, that sounds low, 62 percent, but when

1 you've been under 50 percent all those years, that
2 was huge over 4 years.

3 Well, now that the SIG grant's gone, where is
4 the sustainability of that?

5 We have to figure a way to look at
6 sustainability, and I think it's through
7 transparency, and actually building that local
8 capacity with who we have.

9 We have brilliant administrators and teachers
10 in this district.

11 It's just because of the scores and the
12 federal regulation trickling down to the state,
13 saying, Wow, we have some ineffective administrators
14 and teachers in this district. -- because of
15 assessments, and the outcomes of these assessments.

16 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Let me ask you, though,
17 you just used the word "transparency."

18 KEVEN EBERLE: I'm sorry? "Transparency"?

19 SENATOR FLANAGAN: How do you -- I mean,
20 conceptually, it's easy to figure out, but what does
21 that mean in practical terms?

22 Because I'll just tell you, as someone who
23 I'd like to think pays attention, "transparent";
24 okay, I want to have access to information, and
25 I want to make sure that whatever's going on in the

1 district, as a parent or as a taxpayer, that I can
2 find that out.

3 I'm not sure your point.

4 KEVEN EBERLE: You're in the world of
5 non-transparency between Democrats and Republicans.

6 I mean, we're in the world of
7 non-transparency.

8 We don't talk to each other in any way,
9 shape, or form.

10 There's very few people that really
11 understand what's going on in the Big Five in
12 New York State.

13 You can go to Pennsylvania right now, there's
14 one assessment that has to be given, and it's not
15 about graduation rates; it's about school
16 performance.

17 Now, they're catching up with the
18 Common Core, but it's still only one assessment for
19 them to graduate.

20 Those students can still to go
21 Penn State Baron, Altoona, Penn State. They can go
22 to Pittsburgh.

23 They're all citizens, they're kids from
24 Pennsylvania.

25 New York State, you have an African-American

1 male that, basically, has a 25 to 30 percent chance
2 in Buffalo to graduate.

3 They say, Well, why is that?

4 Well, a lot of them are 16 years old starting
5 in ninth grade.

6 We're taking chunks of time, and as William
7 was alluding to, trying to build a plane as we're
8 flying it, instead of starting from a starting
9 point.

10 And each year, we're going along with these
11 assessments and saying, Look, it, you have
12 four years to turn this school around, you have
13 three years to turn this school around, in a
14 four-year cohort, when you have a percentages of
15 your students that are already 16 years old.

16 I've lived that for ten years in the city.

17 I've seen it out there with the
18 Native Americans in Lakeshore. They're coming off
19 the reservation, brilliant kids, but they're 16
20 years old.

21 Building transparency is being honest with it
22 and saying, Hey, who are we? where are we? -- and
23 let's really start talking, get in front of the
24 whole legislative body.

25 We don't have that.

1 We'll have things on corruption.

2 We'll have things about, you know, really
3 talking about the things that are out there.

4 There are lobbying -- there's lobbyists out
5 there right now dealing with Pearson right now, and
6 they're, basically, making billions of dollars on
7 textbooks.

8 We can't even go that way and talk about
9 money, when you talk about what curriculum is,
10 because, now, what is everybody doing?

11 They're getting to the bandwagon, talking
12 about, Let's write books that say "Common Core" on
13 it. There's another billion dollars.

14 When you really want to be transparent, let's
15 talk about the stuff that's really out there.

16 She's our data person; she's our girl for
17 data.

18 We have all the data there. We know what it
19 is.

20 We don't need testing three-quarters of the
21 year to talk about a kid being at a reading level
22 three grades below.

23 We need to them get in the classroom, get the
24 right instruction going, and we're spending too much
25 time on the testing.

1 I'm not saying that we shouldn't have the
2 Common Core, we shouldn't have testing.

3 But not the amount that it's -- where we're
4 at right now.

5 And that's not being transparent.

6 SENATOR FLANAGAN: So within reason, and
7 I would pose this question to each of you, if you
8 could direct State Ed, say, I've got one shot, we're
9 each going to get one bite at the apple here --

10 William, I'll start with you.

11 -- what would you say, "Here's what I would
12 like to see changed"?

13 WILLIAM BOATWRIGHT: I really think it's
14 about the practitioner.

15 I think we have to ensure that every teacher
16 that's coming out of college with a teaching degree
17 goes in with the understanding that their role, as
18 an educator, is completely different. There's a
19 completely different set of skills, a different
20 knowledge base, that's required.

21 Regardless of testing, regardless of
22 standards, we have to have a teaching core that is
23 at the level of the twenty-first-century standards
24 and skills that we want to introduce and produce in
25 our students so that they can compete again

1 internationally.

2 So, to me, that's the key leverage point.

3 GENELLE MORRIS: For me, I would be in
4 support of a phased-in Common Core initiative.

5 So, I think Colorado did it best, where they
6 phase it in over a five-year period.

7 So as a parent, I have a student who's now,
8 she just entered in fifth grade, I received her
9 parent report just like every other parent across
10 the state.

11 If I had seen that this is how she performed
12 on the Common Core assessment, but when we
13 transition, here's where she will be, then that
14 prepares me as a parent.

15 I see, year one, here's where she is, and
16 then next year I can have a conversation with her
17 teacher, How can we best prepare her?

18 And then as we work together, year two, we
19 can see, okay, now, this is the type of progress, so
20 that when it finally gets fully implemented, as a
21 parent, it's not a shell-shock for me, it's not a
22 shell-shock for my daughter, it's not a shell-shock
23 for students.

24 And, also, when you look at the systems, the
25 systems are buckling under the capacity that we're

1 asking them to assume.

2 So, we're creating 300 tests because we're
3 told to do that.

4 Are they good tests? We don't know.

5 Are they reliable tests? Who knows?

6 And, yet, we're using them to make
7 high-stakes decisions.

8 So if I were in charge of the world and
9 everything in it, I would just say I would want to
10 phase this in so that we can do it, and do it right.

11 Why do it if we're not going to do it right?

12 KEVEN EBERLE: There's 697 school districts
13 in the state of New York, and one governing body
14 controls them all, and I'm an advocate of small
15 learning communities.

16 My dissertation was on small learning
17 communities.

18 We need to make it smaller, and we need to
19 bring it back to local capacity.

20 Right now you have basic exams and tests that
21 are out there in sort of cyberspace that no one
22 knows about, and they can't really -- and, again, we
23 heard it earlier: Don't teach to the test; teach
24 rigor.

25 People don't know what "rigor" is.

1 But if you bring it back to the local, like
2 it was back in the '70s, '80, '90s, I mean, there's
3 a whole bunch of doctors and lawyers and senators,
4 State Senators sitting here, that were educated back
5 in the '70s, that did not have the assessments that
6 we have today.

7 And I just want to make it clear, that
8 there's a lot of stuff that did go well, and right
9 now it's going to the extreme.

10 And I think local capacity was where it was,
11 and it was local control.

12 Right now, with the state control of one
13 system, brings a lot of lobbyists and a lot of
14 control to book companies into the picture.

15 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Questions?

16 Thank you very much.

17 Really do appreciate your patience.

18 And we are coming up to our last group, and
19 our sheet has on there, David Hursh, who's a
20 professor from the University of Rochester, but
21 we're going to have him joined by Mr. Radford.

22 Mr. Radford, I know there's a proper title
23 for the council you're involved in, and I am going
24 to have you say it so I don't mess it up.

25 SAMUEL RADFORD: Okay.

1 SENATOR FLANAGAN: But we're going to let
2 Professor Hursh go first; all right?

3 So what's the name of the -- it's the
4 Parent...?

5 DAVID HURSH: District Parent Coordinating
6 Council.

7 SENATOR FLANAGAN: "Coordinating Council"?

8 SAMUEL RADFORD: Yeah, DPCC.

9 Yeah, District Parent Coordinating Council.

10 DAVID HURSH: Hi.

11 So, first of all, we are the last group, so
12 I want to thank everyone who's still here, for being
13 here, and especially the two folks who are giving me
14 a ride back to Rochester.

15 And I want to thank you for holding these
16 hearings, because I think it's really important that
17 we return education to the state and local level.

18 One of my concerns is that the federal
19 government, and also wealthy foundations,
20 particularly, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,
21 are the foundations that are funding the
22 Common Core, and other organizations that are
23 supporting it, and that we really need to look into
24 how -- what kind of education we want, and have the
25 discussion about what we want schools to do, and not

1 leave it up to those people who are wealthy
2 determining what we should be doing.

3 I will try to be very brief.

4 So, I've been in education for over 40 years.

5 I've been studying, as a professor of
6 education, the consequences of standardized testing
7 in New York for -- as I said, for 25 years.

8 And in my testimony that I sent you, which
9 I'm not going to go into in any depth, but I just
10 want to give a hint of it for the rest of the people
11 that are here, is the one thing that I was trying to
12 persuade you about, is that we cannot believe -- or
13 the standardized test scores that we receive are not
14 objective, and they are not valid.

15 They have -- in fact, when I have talked to
16 the State Education Department and tried to get
17 results from them, they say they run no tests of
18 validity on their exams.

19 So I wanted to call into question the exams
20 themselves and the test scores, and that we should
21 not be driven by those test-score results.

22 I gave some examples of how the test scores
23 are manipulated.

24 And at the secondary level, we've seen the
25 Physics and Living Environments exams, the scores go

1 up and down, basically, dependent on the cut score
2 that's been set by the commissioner, so that we
3 have -- in order to pass the Living Environments
4 exam, you only need to get 39 percent of the
5 questions right.

6 Then the commissioner changed his mind and
7 wanted to have a rigorous exam, and gave a physics
8 exam in which -- in fact, 39 percent of the students
9 who took the physics exam failed.

10 And then after declaring that, and this was
11 Commissioner Mills, he said that that was objective,
12 and he stood by it.

13 Eventually then pressured, actually by state
14 superintendents, to rescale the score so that more
15 students would pass.

16 And so we've seen that.

17 We've also seen that the scores on the
18 elementary tests have gone up.

19 I've talked to superintendents who tell me
20 that, in fact, they know that the scores are going
21 up unrealistically, and that they really don't
22 represent what's going on in schools.

23 And just to -- at least one thing I agree
24 with Chancellor Tisch about, is that, last year, she
25 said, in fact, the test scores were ridiculously

1 inflated and not believable, and she rescaled the
2 scores and they came down to about two-thirds of
3 where they were.

4 So test scores are something that we should
5 not be setting policy by, we need to question those.

6 So now we have the Common Core exam, and we
7 find out that 31 percent of our students are
8 proficient, and one of the questions I want to ask
9 is, What does that mean?

10 On one hand, I know that students often
11 weren't getting -- the teachers weren't getting the
12 curriculum that they're gonna be tested on, the
13 teachers didn't have time to implement the
14 curriculum that they're gonna be tested on, and the
15 teachers didn't know what the tests would be
16 covering.

17 So maybe 31 percent is pretty good, or, maybe
18 it's not. We really have no way of knowing.

19 Commissioner King decided that -- or declared
20 that, in fact, 31 percent was a good thing, and that
21 this would provide us, and I'm quoting, a baseline.

22 And one of the questions I want to have is,
23 In what way is it a good thing?

24 And, we've had 20 years of standardized
25 tests.

1 We've always had standardized tests, but
2 high-stakes tests in New York.

3 And I want to question that we've had, in
4 fact, a Reform Agenda based on standardized testing,
5 and if, after 20 years of standardized testing, it
6 really is the case that only 31 percent of our
7 students are proficient, then maybe that reform
8 movement is not really working.

9 Secondly, I know that Commissioner King and
10 Merryl Tisch said that they guaranteed test scores
11 would improve next year, and not to worry.

12 And the concern that I have is, well, we know
13 that they can manipulate the test scores -- the
14 cut scores, and, in fact, I would give you
15 100 to 1 odds that, in fact, their test scores will
16 be going up next year, because they're gonna make
17 sure they do go up and they look good.

18 And we've seen this, historically, that
19 test scores have gone up and down, often to make
20 commissioners and others look good.

21 Let me cut to the last half of this:

22 I'm concerned about, then, how tests drive
23 curriculum.

24 I've worked in schools doing many interesting
25 things over the years.

1 I had a grant from the National Institute of
2 Environmental Health Sciences, where I was working
3 with students in a school district on issues of
4 environmental health: air and water pollution.

5 Students were doing research on herbicides
6 and pesticides.

7 They also decided to do research on pet
8 waste, which was, at first, a research topic that
9 I originally pooh-pooed. I didn't think pet waste
10 was really that important, but, in fact, it was.

11 And students were doing -- creating websites,
12 doing research, finding alternatives.

13 And then, when I came back the next year to
14 do that with students, this was about the third or
15 fourth year, told that I -- that this was before we
16 had as many tests as we do now, that the school
17 could no longer support having anybody else come in
18 because they have to prepare students for
19 English-language arts exam, and then a math exam,
20 and then social studies.

21 Lastly, I've been in this business for
22 40 years.

23 I've never been as pessimistic as I am now,
24 because the tests are really driving out of schools
25 really excellent teachers.

1 The best teachers that I know of have been
2 leaving schools in droves.

3 And student teachers, while we know -- I did
4 research about, "What was the enrollment in the
5 teacher education programs in the Rochester area?"
6 and it's down about 50 percent from 3 years ago,
7 because people are no longer seeing teaching as a
8 profession that they should enter, and when they go
9 in and they do student teaching, and they go into
10 the schools, the cooperating teachers tell them:

11 Don't come here. Change your mind, go do
12 something else as a profession. Don't become a
13 teacher, because it's not something that you'll be
14 respected for, and it's not something where you'll
15 be able to use your mind and intelligence.

16 So people are not entering, and people are
17 leaving it, and we're losing the best minds of a
18 generation.

19 Lastly, my recommendations would be:

20 That we try figure out, and I agree with much
21 of what's been said in the previous presentation, we
22 need to develop schools, not based on test scores,
23 but on trust.

24 We trust teachers and we work with teachers
25 to make sure that they're good. We work with

1 schools to ensure that they're good.

2 We should follow -- and this would take a
3 long time to get to -- I would recommend the book
4 "Finnish Lessons," which talks about the education
5 program in the nation of Finland.

6 It took them 20 years to do this -- and I'm
7 planning to be here for 20 years to help you do
8 this -- but what they've done is, they do not
9 have -- they have one standardized test: the SAT.

10 They have a standardized test that's similar
11 to our NAEP exam, which they give to a cross-section
12 of students, just to get a sense of how the
13 country's doing.

14 And, they have no other standardized tests
15 throughout the history of the students' career in
16 education.

17 And what they focused on, is having teachers
18 develop curriculum, develop pedagogy, develop
19 reports, and really just learn what's going on, and
20 support teachers to do their best.

21 The last one is, Dan -- I know Dan Drmacich
22 was here earlier.

23 He was the principal at School Without Walls
24 in New York City, part of the Performance Consortium
25 of Schools, and they, for years, only gave one test,

1 and had 90 percent of their students going on to
2 college, where 50 percent of the students in the
3 districts in which they're located, most of them are
4 New York City, only graduated from high school.

5 So we have examples of schools that don't use
6 a lot of -- that don't use, in fact, any
7 standardized testing, and have been very successful.

8 So thank you for your time, and I hope you
9 still have energy to ask a question or two.

10 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Mr. Radford.

11 SAMUEL RADFORD: Sam Radford, president,
12 District Parent Coordinating Council.

13 First of all, Senator Flanagan, and Senators,
14 thank you very much for this opportunity.

15 I've been here all day, and with the
16 exception of Carrie Remis, I don't know that anybody
17 has represented the parents that I represent.

18 I'm the president for the District Parent
19 Coordinating Council.

20 We have representatives from all 60 schools
21 in Buffalo public schools, most of which are failing
22 schools. 45 of them are failing schools.

23 And I've heard a lot of people's vested
24 interests talked about here, but I didn't hear it
25 from the urban schools' context that affect the

1 parents that I represent.

2 I'm also a parent. I have three children in
3 Buffalo public schools.

4 And, you know, there -- right now, I think is
5 the greatest time in the history of Buffalo public
6 schools to be a parent in Buffalo public schools.

7 I've been a parent in Buffalo public schools
8 for 20 years, and right now is the best time in the
9 history of it, and there's two reasons why it's the
10 best time.

11 The first reason why is, because of the
12 Say Yes to Education opportunity.

13 Right now, every child that graduates from a
14 Buffalo public or charter school has a guaranteed
15 college education paid for.

16 That's an opportunity that we have to seize
17 the moment on and take advantage of, because that
18 opportunity is not one that we've had, and it can --
19 and it's a game-changer, it can make the difference
20 for all of our children.

21 The second reason why it's the best time for
22 education, for children and for parents in Buffalo
23 public schools, is the Regents Reform Agenda; and
24 the reason why the Regents Reform Agenda is so
25 important to urban school districts is because it

1 challenges the status quo.

2 Almost -- a lot of this testimony here we
3 heard today, basically, all it's talking about is
4 how we maintain the status quo.

5 And the reality, as far as I'm concerned,
6 everybody's right.

7 Everybody's subjectively right. They're
8 right from their perspective.

9 Right?

10 But the reality is, people who have a -- who
11 have an education system that's working for them
12 now, they're not interested in all this change.

13 They're saying, Slow down, slow down. You
14 know, don't do so much. You know, give us more
15 time.

16 They don't want a lot of change, right,
17 because they don't have to have a sense of urgency.

18 By and large, most of the teachers and
19 administrators that came down here and presented,
20 their children go to great schools. Their children
21 go to suburban schools where they have 70, 80,
22 90 percent graduation rates.

23 That's not what's going on in the urban
24 school districts. We have 30, 40, 50 percent
25 graduation rates, and we need the sense of urgency.

1 We need what the Regents -- the Board of
2 Regents is doing, we need what the Commissioner is
3 doing.

4 And, so, we support the Regents Reform Agenda
5 100 percent.

6 We're asking that the -- that their goal of
7 graduating all students become what we as a whole
8 state buy into.

9 Not buy into the fact that some of our
10 children are getting by right now, and let's slow
11 down, let's keep getting them through, but let's all
12 of us all sit back and say, Wait a minute. We have
13 a very good employment system. We provide job
14 security for a lot of people, you know, within this
15 educational system.

16 But if we are measuring objectively our
17 capacity to educate all children, especially in
18 light of the fact that we spend more money than any
19 other state in the country, objectively, how are we
20 doing?

21 Objectively, should we be moving slow?

22 Objectively, what is going on?

23 Objectively, we need to be doing way better,
24 particularly in urban school districts.

25 As far as I'm concerned, the Regents Reform

1 Agenda, where it says, "Graduate all students, and
2 turn around the lowest-achieving schools," all of us
3 have a collective responsibility to support that, to
4 invest in that.

5 There is a fundamental difference, as far as
6 I'm concerned, to the extent, between suburban and
7 urban school districts.

8 And to the extent that they want to us slow
9 down in the suburban school districts, we're asking
10 you to double the pace in the urban school district.

11 People say we're ignoring the research.

12 What I suggest is, that we're ignoring the
13 results.

14 I mean, at the end of the day, to talk to me
15 about research, when the reality is, you judge a
16 tree by the fruit that it bears, the fruit that
17 we're bearing is not a good -- we're not getting the
18 best bang for our buck.

19 So what do you want us to research?

20 The reality is, let's look at the results.

21 If you were doing such a great job, we
22 wouldn't even be having this conversation.

23 You're only vulnerable to people being
24 critical of what you're doing because you're not
25 doing such a good job.

1 So the question is: Stop defending a bad
2 job.

3 So why don't we all come together and say,
4 Listen, we can all do better.

5 I'm not saying that somebody's at fault.

6 I'm saying, collectively, we can do better,
7 we should do better, and we should not make excuses
8 for the fact that we have not done better.

9 So what ultimately we're supporting at the
10 end of the day -- well, let me just make this point:

11 Earlier it was said that poverty is the
12 issue.

13 And I just want to make that clear: I don't
14 see that poverty is the issue at all.

15 People who try to justify our failure, based
16 on poverty, I think is an insult.

17 I was a detention-center director.

18 We had a teacher that came in there, her name
19 was Mrs. Holmes [ph.].

20 And I don't want to take up a lot of time
21 with this point, but, Mrs. Holmes came into the
22 detention center after three teachers had been run
23 out of this place.

24 Right?

25 Mrs. Holmes came in, for two days she didn't

1 teach at all.

2 For two days, she sat down and she asked
3 these children --

4 Now, you understand, that this is a detention
5 center, so these are the children that are
6 challenged, they're in trouble, behavioral
7 issues...all the stuff that we talking about.

8 Mrs. Holmes sat there for two days and she
9 just listened to kids.

10 She said, "What do you like to do?"

11 "What do you like to do?"

12 One liked cooking.

13 One liked to do race cars.

14 One liked sports.

15 And she went through the process of finding
16 out what they liked to do.

17 And after two days, she came in with an
18 individualized education plan for each one of those
19 students, and she -- basically, she found -- she got
20 one reading the comic books, she got one reading the
21 sports page, she got one reading cookbooks.

22 And what I'm telling you is that, before
23 that, I would go -- I would get called on a regular
24 basis over to the school.

25 Then the third day, when Mrs. Holmes was

1 there, we had kids sitting down, quiet, waiting to
2 go school.

3 I said, "What's going on here?"

4 They said, "We got to do our report for
5 Mrs. Holmes."

6 They were excited about learning again.

7 They would come back from the detention
8 program and they would be doing homework.

9 I'm like, "What happened to those children?"

10 What happened was, somebody knew what they
11 was doing.

12 She cared.

13 She didn't make no excuses about their
14 behavior, about their race, about their poverty; she
15 didn't make none of them.

16 She found out -- she said, If the child can
17 learn anything; they can learn to play the game,
18 they can learn to read the comic books, they can
19 learn to play the sports, they can learn anything.

20 And she committed to teaching those children.

21 So what I'm saying is, that I'm tired of
22 hearing all excuses.

23 If the teachers that don't want to do it,
24 don't want do it, let them not do it.

25 Let the ones who are passionate about

1 teaching, who ain't making excuses about people's
2 poverty, who ain't making excuses about where people
3 come from; who are saying, "We can do it," let them
4 teach.

5 If you let us all get to it, we'll get a
6 better out.

7 And let me just make this the closing
8 statement: That there is -- there was a
9 conversation earlier, talked about the rule of law.

10 You know, and I thought that was a very
11 interesting conversation, especially in light of the
12 fact that we, as the parents of the Buffalo public
13 schools right now are facing the fact that we had
14 2,219 parents.

15 And, now, you know, the demographic of our
16 parent, we talk about, 70 percent of our parents
17 are single parents. We're talking about 50 percent
18 of them don't have transportation. We talk about
19 the vast majority of our parents have an hourly job.

20 2,219, over -- almost 10 percent of the
21 eligible parents had the option to transfer their
22 children out of failing schools into schools in
23 good-standing, based on the law.

24 The local school district told us, when we
25 went and asked them to be comply -- to be compliant

1 with the law, you know what they said?

2 They said, "No, we won't comply with the
3 law."

4 If it had not been for the State Education
5 Department coming in and ruling that, No, you can't
6 violate the law. You are out of compliance with the
7 law. You, by law, must move all 2,219 of those
8 children.

9 After State Education Department came in and
10 told them we must move them, you know what they
11 said?

12 They said, "We can't move them."

13 It went from "we won't move them" to
14 "we can't move them."

15 So now, here we are -- and that ruling came
16 out on May 29th.

17 We, in October -- mid-October, all -- 200 of
18 the 2,219 parents have been moved.

19 So when you got over 2,000 families who have
20 made a decision that they want better for their
21 children, who have been denied the right to move
22 their children, against the law.

23 We have a law that says you're supposed to
24 have 120 hours of physical education in this
25 district.

1 We get 80 to 90 -- I mean, 120 minutes of
2 physical education.

3 We get 80 to 90.

4 So laws are being broken as it relates to
5 parents, all day, every day.

6 The 100.11 say, you're supposed to have
7 school-based planning, shared decision-making.
8 Parents are supposed to be at the table, part of the
9 decision-making.

10 We had to go to the State Education
11 Department to force the local school district to
12 give us the right to be at the table to be part of
13 decision-making.

14 And they had to send them back three times to
15 have them consult with us.

16 So this stuff about some kind of way the rule
17 of law should be governing what we do is, as far as
18 I'm concerned, disingenuous by the people who's
19 sharing it, because that's not -- it's not happening
20 for the people among us who need it the most.

21 In summary, I'm asking you to -- we support
22 charters;

23 We support APPR;

24 We support the Common Core;

25 We support John King;

1 We support the Regents Reform Agenda.

2 We're asking to add to this conversation,
3 vouchers.

4 We -- at the end of the day, if you ask for
5 one thing that will make the difference, put the
6 power in the hands of the parent to make the choice.

7 Don't impose, don't require us.

8 We literally have, right now what's going on,
9 the BTF is looking to repeal the law that gives us
10 the right to move our kids out of failing schools.

11 Don't worry about repealing the law.

12 Just give us the right to send our children
13 where we want to send our children.

14 Put the money in our hands and let us send
15 the children, wherever.

16 Don't condemn them to be in failing schools,
17 against their will, because that's what's going on
18 right now.

19 We are condemning children to being in
20 failing schools, against their will, and listen to
21 the people rationalize that.

22 They got a rational justification why we
23 should keep these children in failing schools.

24 So we're asking for the LPO [ph.] reform,
25 we're asking for parent trigger; all these things we

1 think will go a long way in resolving the problem.

2 And the last point is, that money cannot be
3 the issue.

4 Money cannot be the issue.

5 The whole idea -- the superintendent of
6 Buffalo public schools sat here today and said, For
7 those schools who we gave the additional \$2 million
8 to for a year to three years, that we need to
9 continue to give them the money?

10 Do you know what the intention of that money
11 was?

12 The intention of the funds were to say, that,
13 Listen, this was already a failing school.

14 What we are trying to do is give you
15 additional money so you can turn the school around,
16 so to see if money is the issue.

17 Three out of the four of them schools didn't
18 hit the AYP, even when we gave them additional
19 money.

20 So don't keep giving them more and more
21 money.

22 I don't think giving more money is the
23 solution.

24 At the end of the day, what should have
25 happened, according to the rules, according to the

1 law, was that we should have shut the school down.

2 Give them the money for three years, and then
3 shut the school down if they cannot turn it around.

4 We got to stop making excuses for failure.

5 I think we as a state can do better.

6 We as the parents want to be part of a
7 process of doing better.

8 We thank you for giving us this opportunity
9 to put our position on the record, because we don't
10 often get this opportunity.

11 So, thank you again.

12 SENATOR FLANAGAN: All righty then.

13 SENATOR GALLIVAN: That was a good way to
14 end.

15 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Sam, you certainly did not
16 lack clarity.

17 Senator Gallivan.

18 SENATOR GALLIVAN: A couple questions.

19 The first has to do, we heard from a number
20 of different people who testified today, and then,
21 of course, the public accounts of it.

22 The language barriers; I mean, we've seen the
23 demographic of Buffalo change, different populations
24 come in.

25 What are your comments or thoughts about the

1 challenges provided, in the short term, with these
2 language barriers?

3 SAMUEL RADFORD: Yeah, we actually went to
4 Washington and we looked at models all across the
5 country where people are not making excuses about
6 the language barrier.

7 Part of the reason why we struggle with the
8 language-barrier issue, is because we're trying to
9 protect the teacher who is not prepared to teach
10 that child with the language -- that has a language
11 barrier.

12 If we start taking people from those
13 countries and those communities and we make them
14 teachers and teacher's aide, you don't necessarily
15 have to have a certified teacher, who may be
16 certified to teach, and she may be -- he or she may
17 be certified, but they're not necessarily qualified
18 to teach this person with this English-language
19 learner.

20 So you have to get English-language learners,
21 people who have experience, people who can speak the
22 language, who can get that child through, because
23 that certified teacher who has no relationship to
24 the language is not the best person to be teaching
25 that child.

1 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Second question, not to --
2 and this is not asking for your comment or opinion
3 about any one individual, current or former:

4 I have seen different people in Buffalo put
5 the idea of mayoral-control forward.

6 We see in it New York, we see in it Yonkers,
7 out of the Big Five.

8 While the results are not great, the tests --
9 the results of the tests -- I guess -- how do I say
10 it -- they have better scores, better results, in
11 New York and Yonkers than the --

12 SAMUEL RADFORD: Right, I think --

13 SENATOR GALLIVAN: -- the cities without
14 mayoral control.

15 SAMUEL RADFORD: Yeah, I think the issue
16 raises the governance model.

17 Right now, the evidence shows us the
18 governance model that we have don't work.

19 Look at, historically, has Buffalo's
20 graduation rate ever been over 60 percent?

21 We're talking about a state average of
22 80 percent.

23 Tell me, in the history of Buffalo public
24 schools, has it ever been over 60 percent?

25 And the answer is "no."

1 So the governance model we have don't work.

2 So I agree with you, whether it's mayoral
3 control, whether it's some combination of mayoral
4 control/elected school board, I mean, whatever it
5 is, the important thing is, we can't do -- we can't
6 continue what we're doing right now.

7 As a matter of fact, the very design that we
8 have now, right now, we elect -- I live in the
9 east district.

10 My children go to school in the west district
11 and in the north district.

12 Right?

13 So if I have an issue, the person who
14 I elected to office is not the person who I go talk
15 to.

16 So we -- so even the system is not aligned
17 with the process by which we elect the people to the
18 position. It's based on the old district model.

19 Now we have a school-choice model.

20 Now you can go -- supposedly, you're able to
21 go anywhere in the district for school.

22 So I think the governance model is outdated.

23 I think the evidence shows that it don't
24 work.

25 And I think that anything that moves us

1 forward is better than doing what we know for sure
2 don't work.

3 And I think mayoral control should be
4 considered seriously.

5 SENATOR GALLIVAN: And the other leads into
6 the -- the question is really connected.

7 The model that you see in the suburban
8 schools, the central school district, where the
9 budget is put forward before the citizens, the
10 citizens vote. It's laid out there for everybody to
11 see.

12 SAMUEL RADFORD: Yeah, on two levels.

13 I mean, I think that is a great question,
14 because part of our problem right now in Buffalo, is
15 that we actually -- when we're talking about
16 statewide, actually, Buffalo is a microcosm of that.

17 Some of our children in Buffalo get a great
18 education.

19 You know, we have 45 failing schools, we got
20 12 schools in good-standing.

21 Some of them get a great education.

22 I mean, when it's all said and done, if we
23 set up more of a suburban model, which is that, if
24 you live in a suburban community, there's no way you
25 gonna to take my tax dollars and give some of my

1 children a high-quality education and the rest of
2 them get a crappy education.

3 There's no way you're gonna do that.

4 You do that in Buffalo because we don't get
5 to vote on our budget. We don't even get to see our
6 budget as parents, being real frank about it.

7 So we need the right as a -- and I know --
8 I -- we've researched this, we know this wall is
9 over 120,000, all that stuff, we get that.

10 But at the end of the day, we need the right
11 to be able to see the budget and vote on the budget.

12 I mean, if you've been following the news,
13 you know better than most, that we get this whole
14 appearance that we're saving money, when we're
15 actually spending more money.

16 And there's no way to vet that, except to
17 believe the people who, you know, are on the school
18 board.

19 So I think that (a) we should, you know, get
20 the right to vote our school budget, (b) that we
21 should change our school system from this
22 criteria-based system where some kids get a great
23 education, and we have this two-tiered education
24 system, to a school system more like the suburban
25 model where you have advanced placement,

1 vocational ed, art, music, all that, in every
2 building, and every child gets a great education.

3 SENATOR GALLIVAN: Thank you.

4 Thank you, Chairman.

5 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Two quick things.

6 Dr. Hursh, I do think that we should have
7 more focus on the NAEP test.

8 There is a -- I think one of the challenges
9 with that is, it's hard enough to get people to
10 understand all the other things.

11 But I just, at some point, maybe we can have
12 some more focus on that.

13 And, Mr. Radford, we appreciate you showing
14 up.

15 And, in retrospect, I probably would have had
16 a couple of other questions for people who testified
17 earlier had you testified sooner.

18 So --

19 DAVID HURSH: Well, the issue with the NAEP
20 test, in fact, is that -- which is a standardized
21 test that's given to samples of population across --
22 in states, and across the country, and in cities.

23 And, in fact, our NAEP scores have been
24 improving for years leading up to this -- to the
25 rise of standardized testing.

1 And, in fact, they've been going down.

2 And New York City has been going down
3 substantially, with the increased emphasis on
4 testing.

5 And I think the one place we might agree, the
6 two of us, is you mentioned an example of a teacher
7 who was able to build on what the students were
8 interested in.

9 And one of the things that I'm concerned
10 about is, under the more standardized tests and the
11 standardized curriculum, is, do teachers have the
12 ability to actually respond to students' interests,
13 build on those, and build unique curriculum for
14 their districts?

15 So I think we need to think about more
16 creative ways that we can do that.

17 Thank you.

18 SENATOR FLANAGAN: You know what? I'll just
19 close on a couple of very basic things.

20 First of all, I really want to thank
21 Senator Gallivan for joining us for the entire day.

22 And, thank the people in Buffalo for their
23 hospitality.

24 And I think I failed to say this earlier
25 today:

1 There is nothing -- going back to your
2 example -- there is nothing more effective and more
3 important than having a good-quality teacher in
4 front of the classroom.

5 As a parallel, and a very close second, there
6 is nothing equally as important than parental
7 involvement, and parental support, and parental
8 leadership, even when things aren't always going so
9 well.

10 So, those two things alone make a huge
11 difference.

12 We can come up with money, and that's one of
13 our primary functions.

14 But, this is going to conclude our third
15 hearing.

16 We have two more, as you all heard.

17 We have one in New York City on the 29th of
18 October, and then we have one in Albany on
19 November 13th.

20 We will be -- just for everyone's
21 edification, we will receive written comments
22 through November 15th.

23 So, if people want to comment after the last
24 hearing, we want to make sure that those who want to
25 be heard have that opportunity.

1 And, I hope everyone has an enjoyable --

2 SAMUEL RADFORD: Can I make one more point,
3 just about the last thing you said?

4 I mean, it's real short.

5 SENATOR FLANAGAN: Go ahead.

6 SAMUEL RADFORD: Okay, real short.

7 Because I know Carrie Remis brought it up
8 earlier, and people before said it wasn't really
9 special interests, but we really have no way to have
10 a unfettered parent voice in this conversation,
11 because, obviously, the teachers have a union, the
12 administrators have a union, superintendents, you
13 know, have their own representation, school boards
14 have their representation.

15 Generally, when we hear from parents, we hear
16 from parent-teacher associations, which means that
17 you can get down what you had down in Poughkeepsie,
18 you can get that, because the teachers can highjack
19 the part of the parent-teacher association.

20 You don't have a protected parent voice that
21 reflects, especially in it's -- especially important
22 in urban school district, where the vast majority of
23 teachers don't live in the community.

24 So in a suburban school district where they
25 live, and teachers and parents are the same people;

1 but, in an urban school district, where the parent's
2 voice may be very different from the teacher's
3 voice, there's no -- there's no process.

4 We have something close in Buffalo, because
5 our District Parent Coordinating Council does not
6 have teacher votes on it. We -- only parents vote
7 in that.

8 You know what I'm saying?

9 But that doesn't necessarily happen at the
10 building level. That's just our district process.

11 So in the state, thinking about that, if we
12 could come up with a process that protects the
13 parent interests as an independent body, separate
14 from the parent-teacher association, so that we
15 don't get the clouded voice of the teachers mixed in
16 with what may be specific parent interests, because
17 teacher interests, in this particular case, is very
18 different than what parent interests are, as far as
19 I'm concerned.

20 SENATOR FLANAGAN: I would say this in
21 response, and take this with a measure of affection:

22 I am fairly confident that whether you live
23 in Buffalo or you live in Huntington where I live,
24 your voice would be heard. You're not shy.

25 [Laughter.]

