
Committee Meeting

of

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

“The Committee will receive testimony from invited guests on the issue of interrupted learning, commonly referred to as ‘learning loss,’ as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic”

LOCATION: Committee Room 16
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: October 17, 2022
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Pamela R. Lampitt, Chair
Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey, Vice Chair
Assemblywoman Sadaf F. Jaffer
Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis
Assemblyman Erik K. Simonsen
Assemblyman Brandon E. Umba



ALSO PRESENT:

Abigail G. Chambers
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide*

Nicole Brown
Andrew McAllister
*Assembly Majority
Committee Aides*

Debbie DePiano
*Assembly Republican
Committee Aide*

***Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey***

Pamela R. Lampitt
Chair

Milla M. Jasey
Vice Chair

Ralph R. Caputo
Sadaf F. Jaffer
Michele Matsikoudis
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ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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COMMITTEE NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE
FROM: ASSEMBLYWOMAN PAMELA R. LAMPITT, CHAIRWOMAN
SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING - OCTOBER 17, 2022

The public may address comments and questions to Abigail Chambers, Committee Aide, or make bill status and scheduling inquiries to Larkin Cugnitti, Secretary, at (609)847-3850, fax (609)984-9808, or e-mail: OLSAideAED@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the committee by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Assembly Education Committee will meet on Monday, October 17, 2022 at 10:00 AM in Committee Room 16, 4th Floor, State House Annex, Trenton, New Jersey.

The Committee will receive testimony from invited guests on the issue of interrupted learning, commonly referred to as "learning loss," as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

An individual interested in registering their position with the Committee may fill out the Registration Form located on the New Jersey Legislature Home Page under the applicable Committee heading. For those individuals who wish to testify, please check the box "Do you wish to testify?" on the Registration Form. The Registration Link will close at 3:00 PM, Friday October 14, 2022. An individual is not required to pre-register in order to register their position with the Committee. Witness slips will be available in the Committee Room and written testimony will be accepted at the Committee Meeting.

FOR DISCUSSION ONLY:

*A4496
Coughlin/Lampitt

Revises various provisions of law governing construction of school facilities projects and operations of New Jersey Schools Development Authority.

Issued 10/12/22

*Revised 10/13/22 – A4496 is now for discussion only.

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ASSEMBLYWOMAN PAMELA R. LAMPITT (Chair): Good morning, everybody. I appreciate everybody coming today. It was a beautiful weekend -- go Philadelphia sports, go Phillies, go Eagles, yay! Everybody in my household is happy; it never happens, this is fantastic. Thumbs up from Pam Lampitt, right?

So, let's get started with the Pledge of Allegiance. Thanks.

(Pledge of Allegiance recited)

Thank you. We have two extremely meaningful topics to discuss today. For those in the audience who don't know, they are both up for discussion only. We have invited some guests to talk about our learning loss, or interrupted learning -- whatever anybody really wants to call it. So, we're going to start off with the interrupted learning.

Certainly, we know COVID had really impacted our students, our families. We don't really understand and know the outcomes. It's really great we have the Chair of Higher Education here, because many times when we talked about learning loss, it was felt when a student went off to college, how much remediation did they need to have? Where did we fall short in our learning process here in New Jersey? And, it was there that we always took a really in-depth look to see maybe what areas of the state, where we fell short, and a lot of things were focused there.

Now, with COVID, and learning loss throughout the state, it's very hard to be so targeted into where the support needs to be. I have to tell you, out of all of the reading that I've done, we certainly know that the Federal Government put money towards this. We know the Federal Government hasn't disbursed all of the funding. And, certainly, we know that one-on-one, if a student can get one-on-one attention; one-on-one

support; one-on-one tutoring; that the best outcome can happen for our students. Certainly, we know tutoring can come in many different facets and forms. We're here to learn from the experts, you know, what's really happening -- the boots on the ground -- what's really happening in our schools, and really hear from you some new and novel ideas that you've worked with within your individual scope of work, and the opportunity that we have to work together to really help our young people.

So, with all of that, throughout the period of time I welcome anybody on the membership here to be able to have a few minutes and say a few thoughts about this subject, so feel free, OK? But we're going-- Roll call, she's always going to remind me; roll call, please.

MS. CHAMBERS: Assemblyman Umba.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Present.

MS. CHAMBERS: Assemblywoman Matsikoudis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: Present.

MS. CHAMBERS: Assemblyman Simonsen.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Present.

MS. CHAMBERS: Assemblywoman Jaffer.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFER: Here.

MS. CHAMBERS: Assemblyman Caputo. (no response)
Absent.

Assemblywoman Jasey.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MILA M. JASEY (Co Chair): Here.

MS. CHAMBERS: And, Assemblywoman Lampitt.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Here.

And, actually, before we get started, Assemblyman Simonsen has been such an integrated part of this Committee, and we've missed him for the last few hearings, and, when I asked, he said it was due to some bad luck, but, it was really the loss of his father. So, we offer our condolences to Assemblyman Simonsen for the loss of your father, and the other mishap that had occurred.

So, with all of that, we've had several people that we've invited, so we're going to bring up the Superintendent Tony Trongone with Melanie Schulz.

Tony.

MELANIE SCHULZ: Good morning, Chairwoman Lampitt, and members of the Assembly Education Committee. It is an honor to be here today, to see all of you, and to speak on this very important topic.

I would like to introduce Mr. Tony Trongone. Tony is the current Superintendent of the Millville Public Schools; he is the former Superintendent in Pemberton. He was a math teacher in Northern Burlington Regional High School; a math coach at Gloucester City High School; and he was in the Cherry Hill Public School District as a math supervisor.

He later landed his first superintendency in the Berlin Borough and Gibbsboro Public Schools. He's a good South Jersey boy. He also is very involved in his community. He has a *Coach's Corner*, which is a football show that he stays involved with his community over the weekend, and with the students there, which I think is a very important connection for superintendents to make and school leaders to continue to be the face when they're out of school.

He also is the New Jersey representative to the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission -- which was something, for all of the years that I worked in the Legislature, and for the last almost nine years at the Association of School Administrators, I knew little about. It is a formation of the Council of State Governments, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense, and it addresses educational challenges transitioning children -- for the transitioning of children of military families. It's a very interesting commission, and, later this week, Tony will be in Louisiana representing New Jersey at a conference there.

So, without further ado, I would like to turn it over to Superintendent Trongone.

TONY TRONGONE: Thank you, Melanie.

Good morning, and I am honored to be here, Chairwoman Lampitt. And, also, my home Assemblyperson, Mr. Simonsen, thank you. And, also, I would like to recognize Assemblywoman Jasey and the bill you're pushing for on School-Based Youth Services Programs.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

MR. TRONGONE: That's very -- it's a passion of mine.

I'll get started. I framed my testimony over some questions. The one question is, "As we begin our second school year since schools closed for the pandemic, what are you seeing in terms of the experiences and academic challenges of students as they return to school this fall?" And, I can say that we saw -- in Millville -- again, this is my third year there -- and, so, during COVID it was tough to implement some curriculum programs. But, we did see a 28% increase of students falling behind in their language arts scores on the NJ State Assessment -- NJSLA. In math, we saw a 15% increase in

students falling behind and needing intensive support. And, also, as far as school climate -- it is improving, but it's early in the school year, so it's a hiding period, and it can be attributed to reduction in COVID cases, which leads to higher attendance of students and higher attendance of our staff.

And, also, that's not in my testimony -- we've done extensive work in hiring staff, and that's a whole other lift that affects coming out of the pandemic and having adults in front of children.

Second question is, "How are we assessing the learning loss?" And, it's through -- we do DIBELS, it's nothing new, and Assemblywoman Lampitt said, you know, some of it can be novel; some of it can be tried and true. And, what we've done is, DIBELS is an assessment we use for reading level, and we use that data to meet the needs of the kids, whether they need intensive support, strategic support, or their own level. And, so, instead of doing that in grades pre-K through 3, then the standard is reading on grade level by third grade.

Coming -- starting -- coming back to the pandemic in March 2020. I started in Millville in the summer, but in September we started DIBELING -- we call it DIBELING -- our students in elementary level K-5, not just K-3. And, so, we use that information to meet the needs of the children. Also, we use the LinkIt! assessment system for mathematics. It has a benchmark system that teachers can use that data to place interventions. But, also, what we've done is we've had to shrink the amount of time in between-- We're looking at classroom assessments to look at the data, and then take action.

Our increments of time are too vast, and, so, we're looking at -- we're using classroom assessments; we're not asking them to test again, some

test that's foreign to their learning in that particular learning period. So, we're trying to harvest that information to make decisions on their learning. And, if we do that, we use the response to intervention -- again, nothing new, it's called RTI -- and we use that process to meet the needs of the kids, predicated upon the data we receive from those assessments.

Now, for the larger question, these are the things that we're doing. So, the practices and programs and innovations -- again, nothing really new, it's just doing it correctly and doing it fundamentally well. So, we have revamped our elementary school schedule with one 40-minute period each day where there's no new instruction that takes place. It is called the W.I.N. period, (indiscernible) Cherry Hill. Assemblywoman Lampitt, I put that program in there 12 years ago, so it's nothing new to have this W.I.N. period to meet the needs of the kids when there's no new instruction. Because-- And, when you look at this W.I.N. period, it's because they get pulled out of speech; OTPT; reading intervention, during their core instructional time. So, we had -- we carved out that time to meet the needs of those kids, based on the data.

So, you can identify and you can tell teachers to do X, Y, Z, according to the data in the classroom, but there also needs to be, as you mentioned, more intensive, direct instruction, and that's where that's going to happen in that W.I.N. period. And, so, also, mental health. So, we're also looking at providing mental health during that W.I.N. period. So, again, they're not losing their core instructional time, but they're going to get that during that W.I.N. period.

We've also facilitated summer programs; so, we had it all day from 8:30-3:30, where we used the Federal funding to fund those academic

programs, but Millville was fortunate enough to have a 21st-century learning program, and then, for lack of a better term, it's more fun. And, so, we made a schedule where they had their academic programs in language arts and math, but then they also had a period put in there for 21st-century learning. And it was, you know, a lot of STEM activities, whatever. We also fed them breakfast and lunch and we transported them.

And, another important piece is at the high school level. Nothing impacts our economy more than kids not graduating high school, so, we've had a summer program where we have a credit-recovery remediation for our students over the past two summers to get them on grade level because of whatever happened during the pandemic. And, we want to continue that.

And, then the most important piece is student class size. And, we looked at that so we've hired more teachers using the Federal money, and, so, our class sizes went from 22 to 25 in grades K-2 to 15 -- that's a soft cap, because schools have limitation in capacity, so some schools might have 16 or 17 in a K-2 -- kindergarten to second grade. But, it's a soft cap at 15, but, some classes have 12; some have 13 or 14. In grades 3-5, the cap is 18, where it was 25 and 28 children.

So, again, nothing novel here; very common sense and fundamental about how we're addressing the learning loss, and getting more one-to-one, cutting the ratio down to where teachers can give their students more attention. As far as the practices and programs and innovations they receive by the parents, it's been very positive. I notice more confidence in our surveys to our parents about what's going on with their kids, and, so, they feel -- I think there was a lack of confidence that we were going to meet their needs academically, as well as social and emotionally. As far as the progress,

between 1920 and 2021 -- in '21-22 school years, we've seen a 7-10% increase in proficiency in reading and math. So, it isn't -- it's going to take more than two years, it's going to take four or five years, but we have seen incremental progress in our assessments.

The question was asked, "How can a legislator help you?" In the class-size reduction program -- because I have one more year left of keeping those class sizes lower -- pardon me for saying this, but, stop piling on new mandates. Eliminate the Start Strong, and use only the NJSLA data for gauging longitudinal improvement. There's too much state testing, and it's not only reducing instructional time, it's also scaring our resources away of adults preparing for the administration of these tests early in the year. So, for instance, we're trying to identify kids for help, and yet, our people that give them that support were busy giving a state assessment, or administering it, or setting up the data file to set it up. And, so, I was asking my folks, like, "When are they getting extra help? Why are we behind?" "Well, she's doing this, she's doing that for the Start Strong." So, there's that, like, peripheral distraction that happens when you do this that people don't talk about; not just testing taking away from instruction.

And, then, also, make changes to Chapter IX regarding teacher certification. The one bigger issue I have, and the Department of Ed. will tell you, it's 6A:94C1, which, there's no need for our young people to go through two semesters of student teaching. They can't afford it, but there's no data that says that instruction has improved since we implemented this program back in 2016. So, that would help a lot for kids getting in the pipeline. Obviously, there's other avenues to get people into the vocation, but that's a bigger one to open up that pipeline and get more kids in.

And, the last question is, “How effective are the Federal funds in helping your district?” It’s the class-size reduction, I can tell you. The parents, the teachers -- it helps morale, they feel they have a semblance of what they can do to have those conversations with those kids and meet them not only academically, but also socio-emotionally. And, then, the ability to buy curricular resources, too. So, meeting the learning loss, we were able to buy -- purchase -- reading resources for the kids, a lot, and, so, to meet the needs of the kids. And, actually, the summer programs.

And, that is all I have for you today, and I’m proud to be here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you very much.

We have a lot of people to testify, but does anybody have any questions for Tony? I’ve known Tony for a long time, so, his mindset is in the right place. He’s been extremely effective for our children here in New Jersey.

Anybody have any questions? Assemblyman Simonsen.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Yes, I just wanted to get your opinion on the SGOs -- Student Growth Objectives. Because, as an administrator myself, that’s been kind of a sticking point for a lot of the teachers that are trying to do so many other things. And, like you mentioned, many of the over-assessments-- So, I’d really like to hear your opinion on the SGOs.

MR. TRONGONE: My Assistant Superintendent said, “Stop going around minimizing this,” because I drew a pie chart and I had 15% like the little piece of pie, and we were spending about 50% of our time worrying about SGOs when it’s only 15% of the evaluation. Is it needed? Yes, but if you’re doing your job, it’ll be a part of the evaluation process. But, somehow,

it's become separate and disconnected from it, and, so, we really have to look at -- I don't know how much of an impact it has, because 85% -- because most teachers are in that realm; only grades 4-8 have an MSGP. So, I'm getting long-winded, but what I'm saying is that it's an inordinate amount spent on something that I don't know if it's affecting student achievement.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Tony, thank you for coming today.

Assemblyman Umba?

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Sorry.

Tony, the big item that you talked about was class-size reduction, and focusing on legislation surrounding that. What type of studies have you done on how to continue this? That's the one thing that I like to bring up, is sustainability. We get Federal funds, they last for a couple years, and then the next thing you know, you're hit with S2 reduction in your state aid and now you're trying to figure out how you're going to pay to keep the program going.

So, you know, where do you see that, from a long-term viability of what you would need from the State?

MR. TRONGONE: Again, going back to the theme of things that have happened in the past -- I was a math coach in Gloucester City when we had Federal funding for class-size reduction for schools in need that met certain criteria in regard to free and reduced lunch. And, we know that all the research talks about the high-needs districts need lower class size. The demographics, the language barriers. So, there's a lot of research that's based in having a class-size reduction program, but the funding was Federal, and,

again, when I was at Gloucester City, a former Abbott district, they got that, and we abided by it, and we saw significant results.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: And, then, do you see a benefit for expanding tutoring services, one-on-one services? I know we had a pilot program that went through the summer.

What's your thought process on that? I understand classroom-size reduction, but is there a need for that one-on-one instructional learning right now?

MR. TRONGONE: Yes, I do believe that I didn't mention it in my testimony. We do have it in Millville, we have that. But, again, it's rather difficult to get staff right now. I think, again, I'm -- they talked about boots on the ground, and teachers, they're getting paid, but some of them don't want to work after school, so it's really -- we have a tutoring program. Our issue is getting people to facilitate that program, because it works, and the kids that are receiving those services are benefiting from it. But, I had a cabinet meeting last Monday, and that was the main topic -- how come we're not filling these positions, and teachers are tired?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Thank you; thank you very much, Tony.

And, I think, to Tony's point, and to plug a fellow legislator's bill -- would be Assemblywoman Speight's bill A4458, which would establish that registry of people who are trained and can provide tutoring services so that they would then offer that out to school districts.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, thank you Assemblyman; thank you Tony; thanks, Melanie.

We have Superintendent Rachel Goldberg, Springfield, and we have Elisabeth Ginsburg.

Ladies, thank you for coming. If you can, when you get to the microphone, just state your name, please. And, you just hit it so that the red light shows.

E L I S A B E T H G I N S B U R G: Hi, I'm Betsy Ginsburg from the Garden State Coalition of Schools. I will make my remarks short, because Rachel has some very substantive testimony.

I did bring some written testimony with me today. The questions were provided to us in advance, so I put them out to our trustees. So, you have a compendium of what a segment of our superintendents had to say in response to those questions. So, that's what we bring to the table.

But, more importantly, I have with me Rachel Goldberg, who is the Superintendent in Springfield, and I will let her proceed with her testimony.

R A C H E L G O L D B E R G, Ed.D.: OK, great; thank you, Betsy.

My name is Rachel Goldberg, and I serve as the Superintendent of Springfield Public Schools. I am honored to join you today to offer my testimony regarding the impacts of the COVID pandemic on students.

Before I begin, I would like to express my gratitude for all of you for seeking our voices. I would like to thank Assemblywoman Matsikoudis for her support and commitment to our students, and, specifically, for engaging superintendents in Union County in recent discussions around school security.

I would also like to recognize Assemblywoman Jasey of the Assembly, representative for the district where I live, for her commitment to listening to the experiences of educators.

I began my career as a teacher in Elizabeth Public Schools, later serving as Assistant Superintendent in Passaic Public Schools, and joining the Springfield Public Schools in my first superintendency in July 2020. My perspective will always include my experiences in both urban and suburban districts. I am honored to serve on the Executive Committee of the Garden State Coalition of Schools. And, I am also a parent of three children in public schools, in elementary, middle, and high school this year.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to recognize our district leaders, principals, educators, and support staff who make our schools run. The thoughts that I share with you today are linked to the gratitude I feel for the legions of folks working every day to support students. My answers to the questions are really interwoven, so I'm not going to speak to the questions specifically, but I will move through the discussion.

So, first, I would like to share my perspectives regarding the lived experiences and academic challenges presented by our students this year. COVID significantly affected our students and educators over the past two and a half years. While the '21-22 school year marked the beginning of a slow return to a "new normal," it was far from the normal we expected. The school year was impacted by new variants, managing 10 days of school exclusion for positive cases. Planning schedules and personnel assignments based on social distancing and managing policies related to vaccination eligibility and testing regimens. Some students were out of school for significant amounts of time, and, in many schools, staffing was a daily

challenge. Schools were open, but we were faced with ongoing interrupted learning due to staffing and exclusion protocols.

Please know that this is not meant as a criticism, but rather a recognition that last year represented a first step towards what will be a long recovery period.

As we think of the impact of the pandemic on our systems, I have to start by recognizing that I am certainly a different leader and parent than I was three years ago. And, I have no doubt that you are all different as legislators. This experience will impact the rest of our lives. There is a level of gravity in acknowledging this truth, as we evaluate our current environment and we navigate the learning experiences ahead. We welcomed students back to school this September as close to normal as possible. And from afar, while it bears the hallmarks of a traditional school year, we are all changed. Our students carry their experiences from throughout the pandemic with them as well. Some were able to maintain academic progress, while some dealt with significant hardships -- all of which had been impacted by the economic, social, and emotional challenges in their home environments and the communities that surround them.

With that understanding, we are looking closely at our data to guide our instruction and programming for our students. In Springfield, multiple levels of assessment occurred and determined the level and type of student needs using a wide variety of data sources, from attendance and grades to standards-aligning benchmarks. On a daily basis, our teachers are looking closely at the needs of our students and tailoring their instruction to meet those needs. Our strategies are not based on a single assessment taken

at a single point in time, but, rather, continuous points of analysis around a student's level of understanding and processing of critical skillsets.

Last year, we also added a weekly social-emotional check-in for middle- and high-school students to help gather perspectives on school belonging, social support, and well-being. As I say this, I think it's critical to note that no set of numbers tell a full story. Rather, they are a snapshot in time of a variety of factors. We are not using the data gathered to make judgements -- or, I should say, we *should not* be using the data gathered to make judgements, but to ask relevant questions about our students' learning experiences and to use those questions to guide our steps forward.

Tonight, at our Board of Education meeting, we will present our Spring NJSOA data and set a new baseline for measuring student academic progress moving forward. As a result of the ongoing collection of data, and the feedback from our educators, we've developed programs and adjusted practices to support student learning, and we are thankful for the support and participation of our community.

Federal COVID-related funding provided financial resources that supported some of these critical initiatives. Some of our initiatives are similar to those that Superintendent Trongone mentioned, inasmuch as we've initiated a W.I.N. period for grades 3-5, and we have also started a high school credit-recovery program. We expanded in-school and after-school academic support. We've funded academic interventionists at specific grade levels. We provided social workers to support mental health, and expanded summer academic programs to include social-emotional support.

Springfield parents, students, and the community are participating in these opportunities to support extended learning, but they're

also voicing their desire for their children to enjoy typical student-life experiences that make school communities special places. The work of our schools and our community together have resulted in progress. Academically, our students are learning. Our academic benchmark data has provided clear evidence of ongoing learning over the last two years. At this early point in the year, we still have students struggling with anxiety and mental health, and our school counselors have continued to provide that support. At the same time, our seniors are applying for college, while students in other grades are preparing for the fall high school drama and the middle school musical. They have disagreements over four square, and they participate in (indiscernible). Families have attended back-to-school nights, and first marking period progress reports are being sent out this week.

I would like to conclude my remarks by suggesting some ways the Legislature might support educators as we look forward to continuing the progress we've made to date. My recommendations are based on consultation with the President of the Springfield Education Association and the leader of our Principals Association, as well as conversations with teachers, fellow parents, and fellow district leaders. First, I echo many of Superintendent Trongone's specific recommendations regarding testing, teacher certification, and he listed a great number -- I'm going to reiterate some of them as well.

First, I would respectfully ask our legislators and leaders to balance the messaging related to learning loss. I hope we make this narrative about recovery, not only academic but also the emotional recovery of our families and students. Let's not be sucked into a narrative around failure, but, rather, what schools need to support our students. Before adding any new assessments, changing learning standards, let's give our kids time to

enjoy their learning experiences. Let's not change graduation requirements, shift, or add, or add anything to the evaluation requirements, or add unnecessary assessments. We cannot forget that one of the most important lessons of COVID is that our classrooms are truly critical for the economic and social development of our country. The learning and development that happens in our classrooms is truly sacred, and must be protected.

Second, we need the Legislature to look closely at school funding and recognize that the Federal funds, the Federal care, is in (indiscernible) providing critical support that will no longer be affordable when those funds are depleted. Dramatic inflation in costs such as transportation, healthcare, and infrastructure threaten our budgets. We must ask the Legislature to look closely at future State budgets, recognizing that the Federal investment in our schools was essential to pandemic recovery, but additional support will continue to be critical in the years ahead, to meet the new, changed needs of our students and staff, impacted and exacerbated by the pandemic.

From an immediate and a practical perspective, please look at the impact the current (indiscernible) reporting requirements will have on schools. No school system should be judged by the Department of Education based on the difference in student achievement between the spring of 2019 and the spring of 2022. We should not be using any comparative data to evaluate the quality of our education system at this point in time.

Finally, before the Committee votes on any more education-related bills, we ask that you carefully consider whether or not the policy or bill will actually make the experience of a child in a classroom better. Will it give a teacher more time to spend when a child is struggling with the first sounds of a word? Will it give the counselor any more time to support a

seventh grader struggling with anxiety? Will it give the principal more time to join in a grade-level meeting? Will it give me more time in the schools, or will I spend more time with technical-assistance sessions, or searching for dollars to support another mandate? Will it give school board members more time to listen to productive dialogue that leads to positive changes and policies to strengthen school systems?

While there are no easy answers, educators across the state can provide the critical feedback necessary to help our schools provide our students with the positive, affirming, and challenging learning experiences that will continue to make New Jersey among the best in the country. Please continue to seek their feedback as we work to support our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you to both of you, and, certainly, when one person comes and you haven't really talked to the person who talked before you and you can do agreement after agreement after agreement -- in hearing that in a consistent sort of message, that's where we heightened our level of focus that we need to strengthen, the support for our children and for the schools.

QSAC -- just to end where you ended -- QSAC is something that I have asked for, and this Committee has asked for feedback on what specifically in QSAC we can just get rid of. Why is it repetitive, why do we need to be doing this? Happy to get some feedback from you -- if you'd like to provide it directly to us. We understand the time it takes to be able to do the QSAC report, and, certainly, the information that the DOE gives to you, and all you have to do is give it back to the DOE.

So, we really do appreciate your insight and the work that you do, and, collectively, I think we all work towards many of the things that you, as you were telling your story, that we've lived and we collectively want to work together with the superintendents and the principals and the teachers and the staff, business administrators, to be able to achieve the successes for our kids. So, we're all working towards it, so thank you for coming today.

MS. GOLDBERG: Thank you.

MS. GINSBURG: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Next we're going to have --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: May I make a comment?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Mila wants to make a comment. I apologize.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Just a very brief comment.

First of all, I want to tell you how excited I am to see you here testifying today. I remember back several years to my dining room table where we sat and talked about education issues, and you are exactly the kind of professional that we need more of in this profession.

I have a lot of questions, but I can ask them offline, because I know we have a lot of testimony today. But, I would like to know if you have any suggestions about how we can increase the number of our best and brightest to come into the profession, as teachers, as administrators, because we are asking more and more of our schools, and on behalf of our children. And, yet, we are seeing a real shortage in the teaching profession.

And, if you can't answer it now, you can certainly call me and tell me what your thoughts are. Because this is an issue that I think we have to really focus on. I agree, we don't need any more mandates or requirements,

but we do need to figure out how to lift up the profession and get more of our best and brightest into it.

MS. GOLDBERG: So, I'll answer with my most brief and initial thought.

We talk about learning loss, and we talk about failure, and then we attribute it to the teachers in the classroom, and we've allowed the public narrative to say that it's a teacher's fault that this happened. "Oh, the state test scores went down. That must be our teachers' faults." That's not our teachers' faults. My kids, wherever they fell, they had a mother that was working around the clock trying to figure out what we were doing with school systems. We had them online.

It's not the teachers' faults. It's not, necessarily, the fault of policy or healthcare guidance. Everybody over the last two years -- two and a half years -- has spent an enormous amount of time and energy to try to do the best they could. And, our teachers went above and beyond. We had teachers driving door to door to drop off learning supplies; we had teachers coming up with completely new ways of teaching their classes. This, if we allow for the public narrative to say that the teachers have failed, we will not -- no matter what we do from a policy perspective -- be able to bring more teachers in.

We need to value the work that's happening in those classrooms, and we need to provide that narrative -- whether it's in the newspapers; whether it's during election season; wherever it is. We need to shift the narrative to say this is a place where we trust teachers with kids, and we believe that when kids are in your classroom, you are doing the best.

I'm also going to come back to say there's always accountability for us, and our job as school leaders is to make sure that good instruction is happening. But, we need to provide that support. We *have* to shift the language around the profession of teaching. We have to honor it. We have to honor teachers as deep points of knowledge and deep professionals that bring their heart and their incredible skill to classrooms every day.

And, I think if we can honor that, it will help to address policies; it will address narratives; it will address why people want to become teachers. Right now, I think we have too many teachers that may tell their children, "Don't do this, this is a rough job," and, I think we need to figure out how to shift that for them.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Rachel. Thank you very much for your passion.

You have NJAA nodding their head in the back. (laughter)

It's great to see when superintendents and the NJAA are nodding their head.

We have Dr. Anthony Scotto, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction from the Hamilton School District, with Deb Bradley.

And, while you're coming up, I don't know whether or not -- I haven't had a chance to read the testimony Dr. Scotto left -- hopefully you can talk to us about what is the capacity for a student to learn faster? We're such an impatient society; we want everything now. What is the capacity for our children to get to grade level?

DEBRA BRADLEY, ESQ.: Good morning, everyone, I am Debra Bradley, Director of Government Relations with New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association.

And, I just wanted to take a moment to thank you, Madam Chair, Vice Chair, and this Committee, for looking at this issue the way that you are and seeking to understand it from the ground level in our classrooms and in our school buildings, and not just looking at a standardized test score to see what's happening in the classroom. So, I commend you for that.

And, now, it's my pleasure to introduce Dr. Anthony Scotto, a lifelong educator. He was a member of the PSA board for many years. He has spent 28 years in the Hamilton Township School District as Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the past 18 years. He has served 12,000 students in multiple school buildings, and he lives teaching and learning every day.

So, it's my pleasure to introduce him and have him make loud remarks.

ANTHONY SCOTTO: Thank you, Deb.

Good morning, everyone.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Morning.

MR. SCOTTO: Thank you for allowing me to join you.

I think, as teachers do, we monitor and adjust like that. So, the Chair has asked me to speak to capacity, so I'll speak to that first, and then get to my written notice (indiscernible) time.

We are very capable of addressing capacity for learning every single day, because we are trained to do that as teachers -- as administrators. We were trained to do that, and we were doing that prior to the pandemic. We did it during the pandemic, and hopefully, in the final stages of the pandemic, I am confident that we will do that.

What does capacity look like? Capacity is taking a look at data -- particularly, data that you feel is valuable -- to identify areas where targeted intervention needs to take place, but not lose sight of what targeted acceleration also needs to look like. I try not to use the word “learning loss” either. I try to use “learning acceleration,” and the reason that I use that term is that I am a different person two years later, as all of us in this room and all of us in this world are. So, for me to assume that I will teach and learn exactly the way that things took place in March of 2020 would be wrong of me as a school leader. For me to expect data to look identical to what it did prior to the pandemic would not be responsible for me as a school leader. But, capacity is built when realistically we look at where we are right now and how we will move forward.

The staff in Hamilton know that I often refer to data as bloodwork. And, what is the bloodwork telling you? And, as someone who is close to 50 years old and has to go every couple of months to have my cholesterol checked, and what does the data tell me? What does the bloodwork tell me? Should I do *more* of something, or should I do *less* of something? Have I put things in place that have helped me and my health and my heart? The same approach needs to take place in teaching and learning every single day. We look at data as bloodwork in Hamilton Township Schools to see where our kids are, and where we need to accelerate.

Many of us are very familiar in building capacities by using what is called the data protocol. What is the data telling you? What may be some of the root causes for this data? What are some of the steps that we will take place, that we will put forth together as a team, and individually to help our students?

So, for the Chair, I hope that I (indiscernible) quick definition of how we build capacity, but I'll make sure that I weaved that in as I speak to my notes. As Deb has pointed out, we're a rather large district with 12,000 students that had been impacted by the pandemic, as well as instructional staff of over 1,000. One of our key ingredients of success has been recognizing where that cohort of students was in March of 2020. So, if I'm a sixth grader, where was I -- where was I in my learning? And, we continue to target that and think about that as we do our planning.

I am proud of the work that we do. As a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, it is my job to oversee all of the teaching and learning in the district. I'm responsible for academics; the administrators; the teachers; the paraprofessionals; the curriculum supervisors; the assessments; the selections of instructional platforms, innovations, grants, and development.

So, I live this every day. These are many of the things that we were doing before the pandemic, and I'm proud to say in our district we did that. So, we immediately looked at, what were we doing prior to March of 2020 in helping students accelerate? And, to speak to one-on-one targeted instruction and intervention, we were doing that. Have we ramped it up? Have we looked deeper at data to build that capacity to help kids? Absolutely. We were doing before-school, after-school, and during-the-day interventions prior, with successful and generous allocations of (indiscernible) and (indiscernible) funds, we've been able to increase that. I personally will make sure that a teacher will list on the back of the timesheet what skills have you worked on with your students.

So, to go beyond compliance of just making sure that the teacher does the work they've been Board-approved to do that, I'm looking at the

skills and the concepts that our children are either reviewing, being retaught, or being accelerated. It's my job, as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, to take a look at that and cross-check that against other bloodwork results.

And, what I mean by that is, whether it be standardized assessments from the state or global assessments, we use some of the platforms you've heard today such as LinkIt! and (indiscernible) to sit down. I think it's very important when you analyze data that you look at multiple forms of data, not just one. And if all three and four sets of that data are indicating weakness, you accelerate it; you remediate it; you enrich.

If there's multiple points of data, and they are not indicating weakness, and it's just one area that's low, we have what we call a good old-fashioned conversation about the student. We talk with the teachers; we talk with the faculties; we talk with student support staff to make some informed decisions on what kids need.

So, we're in year two. We are in school. School is busy. School is busy whether I'm wearing this or not. Teaching is vibrant. And, I know that we are improving, because as much as I'm not thrilled to administer state assessments -- I'd be remiss if I didn't sort of state that -- of course I'm going to look at the data, because it's one set of bloodwork that I want to look at. And, to see all that we've been through over the last few years, and to see that, in our district, we are similar to what we were before the pandemic, things are working. I did not know that I was going to see that. Are we off the charts with our data before COVID? No, we were not; we are where we are and I know where our growth is and I know where we need to go.

But, to see how the state did, and to see how Hamilton Township did, and to be very close to that -- which is where we were before COVID -- means things are working. Assessment is important; it's what we do best. Formative assessment is one of the most effective ways to determine where a student is. Think back to if you've ever had a personal trainer. If that personal trainer was to work with you and give you a workout, and see where you are, you would then customize your personalized training based on how you do in that first workout. We have done small group, we have done one on one, we have done virtual, and we have done in-person learning acceleration opportunities during the day, before the day, and after the day.

There were many things that we implemented that COVID (indiscernible), that we have kept in place, so that if our family does not have transportation or people would prefer to learn virtually. We celebrate that. We have moved forward with a balance of in-person and virtual learning acceleration and tutoring opportunities for our students. We have seen success because our kids are, truthfully, I think they're more resilient than we are. And they desire to be successful.

We've also made sure that that ESSER fund -- that we are so appreciative of -- we look at carefully, at how could we make sure it benefits kids in the best way possible? We've done pop-up schoolhouses throughout our community, similar to if you've ever been to a community day in your own town. Where tables are set up, and tents are set up, and members of the community come in and learn how to fill out free- and reduced-lunch applications; meet the staff; engage with the school community directly. These are things that we put in place as a result of COVID that we have kept

in place because we know that it has allowed us to engage our community greater.

Technology. We relied heavily on technology when COVID first hit. The role of that instructional platform, so I can see when I was teaching you from my dining room table so, I felt that you were right there with me. These are instructional platforms that we have renewed, even though we are in-person, such as Edpuzzle and PearDeck. Why? Because we continue to assess our students and see how they're doing. Our one-to-one initiative we wanted to do sooner; COVID allowed us to do it much sooner, and we kept it in place. We allow our students to take their devices home, to continue to accelerate their learning and be involved.

Schooling is much more than academics -- we know that. Kids are excited to be involved in activities again, such as instrumental music and vocal music. The arts took a hit; we want to make sure that we resume those things, and we have. Kids are excited about the important roles that they may have in an upcoming play, or take on leadership roles in clubs.

To close, I want to thank you. I want to thank the State Legislature and our Congressional delegation for all that you have done, also, particularly to fund our schools. Keep that going, please. Help us address the heightened level of student need and the extra cost that school districts will incur. Our work is solidly underway and these costs will continue for some time, and I know that you know that. I urge you to continue to work with the administration and local school districts that advocate, and help us advocate for necessary problems.

You've heard that extra mandate right now would probably put people right over the edge. You've heard that we are getting things in place.

Let's continue to focus and concentrate on what we are trained to do, we are called to do, to help our students. We hold the bar very high, as you do as well, and we know where we are, we know where we were. We pledge to work with you to continue to move our students and schools forward in this brave, new world.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Dr. Scotto, thank you.

I loved the analogy of the bloodwork to assessments and looking at them. It's all the way the data comes up and how we interpret it. And, there's no one solution, you know, the doctor could have put you on the medicine for one reason and if you go off that medicine, maybe your bloodwork will be better, right?

So, we all have to look at it from a different set of lenses. I appreciate the fact that you talked about-- We've learned something, though, that can still be implemented during COVID. And, those are sort of the hidden gems that I believe that, you know, do we need to do anything to ensure the fact that they are going to be continuing throughout our educational process? I think that those are some of the rare finds that we want to be able to continue to discuss. We don't want them to be diminished or looked at just as COVID solutions, right?

So, I think we appreciate very much your perspective. Congratulations on your ability to get your students to the medium of where you were prior to. That's a significant accomplishment, and all of your collective work, you know, has obviously paid off, and, you know, you're on the path to growing our students.

So, thank you very much.

MR. SCOTTO: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: We have Dr. Dwayne Davis, CEO of Philips Academy Charter School of Paterson, with Harry Lee or T.J. Best -- oh, we got Harry. Hi, Harry.

H A R R Y L E E: Good morning, Chairwoman Lampitt, and members of the Assembly Education Committee.

It is an honor to be here. My name is Harry Lee, I lead the New Jersey Public Charter Schools Association.

I am going to speak very briefly and cede the rest of my time to Dr. Davis.

I had the opportunity to visit Dr. Davis' school on Thursday -- it was on Thursday -- and it was a really inspiring visit. I haven't had the opportunity to visit many schools in the last couple years, but it's good to go back instead of just being in my basement on my virtual computer. It's really good to see kids, and families, and teachers at work. So, it was a really amazing visit.

And, public charter schools currently in New Jersey serve 60,000 students across the state. A vast majority of our kids come from low-income backgrounds -- three out of four -- and the pandemic has obviously impacted all of us, but especially urban and rural communities, I would say. It's been exacerbated in those communities.

And, so, our schools had to pivot, adapt, react, to address, really, the deep challenges that they've had to face and that their families have had to face. And, that's what charter schools have been doing. So, whether it's embedding high-dosage tutoring within the school day; going on home visits; doing kindergarten at night, during the beginning of the pandemic; I'm really

proud of the work that our schools are doing, and school leaders like Dr. Davis are doing every single day.

So, I'm going to turn it over to you, sir.

D O W A Y N E D. D A V I S, Ed.D.: Thank you; good morning.

I would like to thank the Committee and Chairwoman Lampitt for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning.

My name is Dr. Dwayne Davis, and I am currently the CEO of Philips Academy Charter School of Paterson. Previously, I served at a very dynamic school -- elite charter school -- in Newark, New Jersey's first public alternative charter high school, serving young people who were over-age and under credit going into high school. I have spent my entire career working with children and young adults who have really had to overcome a tremendous amount of trauma and adversity.

Philips opened in 2016, and currently serves 520 students in grades K-6, and will grow to eighth grade and 700 students by 2024. COVID, as you can imagine, has been extremely disruptive and difficult for our students and families in Paterson and, quite frankly, across the State of New Jersey. At a time where our most urban school districts are losing kids, we continue to add one grade every year, and we have a waiting list of over 300 students that want to come to our school.

True to our mission, Philips serves socio-economically disadvantaged young people that are 89% low income, 13% students with disabilities, 9% English language learners, and 99% (indiscernible). Our school is built on the core belief that love fuels everything; every child has a spark of genius; the right environment unleashes potential; results matter; and we can always find a better way.

Last school year, as we returned to school, our students struggled to re-acclimate to in-person learning after being home in virtual learning due to COVID-19 disruptions. During the return of in-school, in-person learning, students struggled to readjust to the length of a school day, carrying on physical classroom routines like pushing in chairs, and knowing where to place learning materials. Students simply struggled to sit next to each other. Students yearned for the true human experience of being together versus apart, but also struggled emotionally as we all navigated being masked, and had to adapt to communicating through barriers. Student learning was clearly impacted; as prior to the pandemic, two-thirds of our students at Philips were at or above grade level in reading, whereas following the return, two-thirds of our students now required tier-2 interventions in reading.

With the social, emotional, and academic challenges that were exacerbated for our children in Paterson, we were working to adaptively support our students' needs, while combating the personal challenges that our educators face (indiscernible).

One, increasing the number of social workers and special education teachers. We added a behaviorist; we added a director of student support services to build the capacity of our Student Support Services team. Currently, we have three and are working on adding a fourth social worker alone in a K-6 school. We also implemented extended-day tutoring programs that intentionally targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy. We also extended the program year with summer programming, using research-based approaches, and we're continuing to reimagine talent strategies that focus not only on recruitment, but onboarding, development, and retaining qualified and effective teachers.

So far, we've seen positive improvements in our students' attitudes towards in-person instruction. Feedback suggests that our students feel safe in our schools and are eager to learn in person. However, it's not easy. Educators are everything to us. We can only serve our students if we have the resources and talent necessary to attract the right folks to our schools. The reality is that the talent market is barren right now. Especially in our urban districts. The number of qualified applicants that we are receiving for our teaching and our special services support positions are extremely low.

While some good policy work has happened in getting more qualified teachers in a classroom, such as certification (indiscernible), we need more bold action. We need to create more emergency certifications for our special education teachers, bilingual teachers, math and science teachers, and school nurses.

Why is it so much easier to get certified teachers in New York and Pennsylvania, but not New Jersey? We need to even the playing field, and make it competitive here in New Jersey. We also need to reduce certification fees to get educators -- particularly teachers of color into the classroom, and also make it easier for paraprofessionals to get certified as well. Not only do we need talented educators in our classrooms, we need to keep them in a hypercompetitive market. The reality is that teachers are leaving the field.

As a charter school leader, we also receive less per-pupil funding for serving the same students our close districts serve, and do not receive dedicated facilities funding, which further takes money out of the classroom and adversely impacts teacher salaries. With motivated and quality certified

educators, we can do this challenging yet deeply rewarding work, so that our students will recover academically, socially, emotionally.

I thank you for listening, and I am happy to take any questions you might have.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you very much for your compelling testimony and the information that you continue to solidify with the previous speakers.

We're good. Assemblyman Umba.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Doctor, thank you for your testimony.

From the perspective of trying to find teachers, do you see the impediment of living in New Jersey and being a resident of New Jersey being one of those items, being that your academy is so close to New York City?

DR. DAVIS: Yes. So, we typically see quite a bit of applicants that are actually moving into New Jersey. There seems to be somewhat of an exodus happening.

The certification and reciprocity process, though, has created, you know, uncertainty. "Should I apply? Should I *not* apply? If I do apply and I'm going through reciprocity, there's been a tremendous amount of latency as it relates to feeling confident that this is a place where I should stay." And, so, I think from that standpoint, speeding up the reciprocity process and making it a more feasible place for talent to move into that will be helpful. There definitely is a mass exodus; we see that in places like Hackensack, in Paterson. So, the more that we can speed up the reciprocity process and make it easier for folks that are in New York City and Pennsylvania, etc., to become certified, I think that'll be helpful.

So, I hope that answers the question.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you very much, Dr. Davis.

Thank you very much for coming to testify today. Thank you, Harry, good to see you out of the basement and probably with regular pants on, too, I don't know.

MR. LEE: No shorts today.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: No shorts today.

Next, we have the NJEA. We have Fran Pfeffer with a teacher, Dawn Howlen.

Welcome, Dawn.

D A W N H O W L E N: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: And, Fran, your testimony is well crafted. You know, if you could figure out a way to highlight some of the -- or reiterate some of the fine points that have been made, because it's good to hear it, but if there's anything new and different as well.

Thanks.

F R A N C I N E P F E F F E R: Sure.

First of all, I am Francine Pfeffer, and this is Dawn Howlen. She is actually a colleague of mine in our Professional Development Division who just left the Trenton School District after 17 years working there.

And, I would like to thank Superintendent Trongone and Superintendent Goldberg and Dr. Scotto and Dr. Davis. You said -- Assemblywoman Lampitt is saying that she's looking over my testimony, and

a lot of it is a repeat of exactly what you said, which is, “Oh, here’s a nice thing to hear, that we’re all in the same place.”

I just want you all to know I spent the last several days reaching out to an unscientific sampling of teachers, and I go around the state in urban districts, suburban districts -- even charter schools, we represent them -- to add their feedback. So, the elementary school teachers that I spoke to, they were the most hopeful about student progress, and they feel that their students, as you heard, ended the school year about the same place, and they think that they’re really going to get there. The high school teachers were a little less rosy in their feelings. They found that their students lacked this kind of critical-thinking skills that they used to have, that they’re doing a lot more summarizing instead of in-depth thinking about the material that they’re working with. They lack the stamina and even the interest in doing that, and they don’t really know how to have those deep conversations because they went for two years without doing it, really, that it was not the same.

So, I really found that our elementary school teachers are more hopeful about where their students are going to be than the high school teachers. I spoke to middle school teachers, too; my survey was a little short on middle school teachers, to be honest. Everybody was really concerned about behavior. Some said to me, “My ninth graders are still tattling, that’s like sixth-grade behavior, and they never got out of it because they weren’t in school, they don’t know how to do that.” A second-grade teacher told me his kids don’t know what to do with rug time. He normally has his room in pods, and in groups, and on the rug, and for two years -- the last two years when they were in school, they were in rows, and so they just don’t even know what

to do. In kindergarten and first grade, they didn't have that experience, and so they're teaching them all kinds of things that they would have gotten but they didn't because they weren't in school.

I'm a high school teacher, so--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Fran, quick intervention there.

So, the fact that you talked about tattletale-ing. So, one of my thoughts, you know, was thinking about whether or not has HIB, has harassment and bullying, increased over the last year?

I got a nod of the head, so maybe if you could speak to that just a little bit.

MS. PFEFFER: I don't know the answer--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: You don't know the answer?

MS. PFEFFER: I'd have to get back to you on that, I would have to talk to people.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Maybe Dawn knows anecdotally.

MS. HOWLEN: Hello; thank you.

So, I know that within my school environment, because I stopped teaching at the end of March this year, there was an increase in those incidents. And, it wasn't necessarily just behavior. It was because the students struggle with social environments, because they were so used to being isolated and being at home. So, coming back together and congregating with kids who were friends with them prior to, it was just a difficult transition for a lot of students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you.

MS. PFEFFER: So, to jump on that one, the students need a lot of social-emotional support; they don't know how to regulate themselves. But, something that Dawn and I talked about is staff -- we don't want to leave out the fact that staff needs that same social-emotional support. They're beyond tired, as Superintendent Trongone said. They're frustrated and exhausted. Their jobs have become a lot more difficult, and they lived through the same trauma that students and that all of us did, and they're helping the students recover it at the same time that they're recovering themselves.

And, anybody who studies psychology knows that that's not the best way to be. And, so, they have all these academic pressures on them; they have their own psychological trauma; and they're helping kids recover from that. And, so, let's not leave out whether you're a teacher, a bus driver, an educational paraprofessional in a classroom, a cafeteria worker -- no matter what your job is in the school, a custodian -- everybody needs that support. Our members *all* need that support. The principals and superintendents do, too. So, let's remember that everybody is suffering and everybody needs help.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Fran, I've been meaning to ask this question, specifically to you -- or the teachers -- because you're the ones who realize whether or not you have a deficit of resources.

So, we know that COVID, the problems getting technology, the problems of getting books, or whatever. Have the teachers talked about not having some physical -- other than another teacher, other than a student teacher -- have they missed some sort of physical resource that have not come back up to production and availability?

MS. PFEFFER: I think that might be different from district to district. Dawn would know better than me.

MS. HOWLEN: That's definitely different from district to district.

I think the one thing -- and it really just goes back to what Fran said -- the one thing that teachers miss is being felt like they are being seen. Because a lot of teachers don't feel that way anymore. Prior to COVID, teachers struggled, but once COVID started, you know, there was a lot of like, "Yeah, rah-rah, go teachers," and then that kind of just faded into the background.

So, teachers, what they really need more than anything is just support. For someone to ask, "Are you OK?" Because--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Yes, but what Tony was saying, and what some of the other individuals prior to you were talking about is that you've taken some of the learned resources that you've had to adapt to during COVID, and you've had to implement them. And, so much of that had to do with physical resources -- be it an iPad, be it virtual learning of some sort, be it something else.

Are we still facing that?

MS. HOWLEN: So, in my district, in Trenton, all of the students were definitely afforded the opportunity to have their own personal Chromebooks, and in the middle school they also had iPads.

So, while I'm no longer there, I do of course still speak to my former colleagues, and what I'm hearing is that, in Trenton specifically, some of those devices have been removed. So, they are no longer having the one-on-one access that they had during COVID. Which is a step backwards,

because how do we continue to enhance instruction using all of these wonderful programs when they no longer have access to something as necessary as a Chromebook? I mean, it's 2022.

So, that physical resource within itself limits access to some of the resources that we had as far as our curriculum. Most of the curriculum is online, so the students can access those materials while they're in the school building.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Interesting.

MS. HOWLEN: Which puts them at a deficit compared to other districts like Hamilton, where they have one-on-one access to that resource.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you.

MS. PFEFFER: And, I didn't have anyone tell me that, but I did hear from someone that, "During COVID we had all these supplies," and, I'm not going to name districts, but someone said, "Our district spent a lot of money on putting glass doors, glass in the doors, and money on other things, and I would love to have a box of tissues and wipes for my students. Because I used to have plenty of them, and now I don't have them."

So, it's a different-in-every-district type of situation, but maybe in lieu of reading what we wrote, which represents what everybody else has said, every district is doing a lot of things differently and, you know, you heard it. A lot of it is the things that we were doing before the pandemic, and people just kept doing it.

Do you want to elaborate a little bit on that, Dawn? Or no?

MS. HOWLEN: I mean, like, one of the things that the social-emotional aspect -- and, I think we wrote about that in here -- for the students

was really key for last year and for this year; just getting students to be acclimated to being around each other.

But one of the things that I found that was really interesting was that parents were more active once we came back into the school building, as opposed to prior to COVID. And, I think it's because they saw the struggles of their students and the educators during the time when they were home remotely, and, so, our parents were just so excited to have a conversation, you know, about their child, and they were interested in receiving information about the school community, the community as a whole. And, that was something that, for me, was very -- it was just heartwarming to see that, because we need more of that, because I think parents are also left off the table sometimes when we have these discussions.

MS. PFEFFER: And, I would like to highlight, I spoke to some special ed. teachers and some teachers of students who are English language learners. They said hybrid and remote learning was particularly hard on those two groups of students, and remote learning didn't work well for a lot of them, so, they feel that some of their students are even further behind the students without those problems.

And, I guess I'll just kind of wrap up with my final thing, which is, you asked what you could do to help, and I -- it's going to repeat what you just heard, but I really need to reiterate this, and be my members' voice. More staff, more support staff. Teachers are busy covering classes; paraprofessionals who have substitute licenses are covering classes. Staff is so exhausted that they don't have the time they need to recharge, and they really need that time. I already said more mental health staff. I know

everybody is concerned about mental health staff; no matter how much you have in the school right now, it's not enough.

Less pressure to get kids where they were pre-pandemic, repeating what Superintendent Goldberg said. It's draining to hear that, it's demoralizing, and if you give us time to get them there, we will do it. And, resources and support and training to make sure that we're most effectively helping students.

But, the most important thing that educators need right now -- it came with expletives and strong language, which I will not repeat, but I want to say that so you can understand how deeply-- I spoke to about 20 people, and the number, probably half of them were saying various things as they repeated this one: "Leave us alone to do our jobs. We know how to do our jobs; leave us alone and let us do them. Teachers right now are under such pressure between the hubbub around sex ed. standards and all of that -- leave us alone; we're the professionals. We don't need all these extra state assessments. Start Strong, why bother? We have better assessments built into the curriculum that we do--" Everybody mentioned LinkIt! STAR, Redbird, whatever -- Dibbles. "We already use those, why do we need Start Strong?"

And, to Assemblyman Simonsen's point: Stop requiring student growth objectives. In many cases, they end up being paperwork compliance exercises, which provide little actionable data, and add yet another assessment for students. I started teaching back in 1994, and every time I went to be evaluated, I had to bring indicators of student growth, right, it's always been part of the evaluation regulations. They sound good in theory, but they don't work in practice for most people. One teacher pointed out to

me that her district had its diagnostic assessment to assess student levels, the Benchmark Assessment -- which tests student knowledge of the sixth-grade standards -- Start Strong, and the assessments that students are given for SGOs and she's 25 days into the school year. When you have all of those assessments going on in the first 25 days of school, where is the time to build those connections and relationships with students, right?

And, a principal I spoke to said to me, "We just gave NJSLA in April, right, what data could I possibly get from April to September that I can actually use with students? What am I learning from that that I didn't really already know?" And, one teacher said to me, "If we're moving to a culture of testing, we're doing the wrong thing. You can't fix three years of behavior and social-emotional needs in six months. Testing kids is the wrong direction." At the risk-- I've known most of you for a long time, I said recently to somebody -- and I'm going to repeat it to all of you -- I said to someone who is a lawyer, "I watched a lot of legal thrillers and legal shows on TV and I read so many books. Do you really want me representing you in court, or writing your will? I don't think so." Everybody thinks that because they went to school, or they have a child in school, they understand how schools work and what should be done. That is not true. Educators are the experts; they have expertise; they are professionals. Please listen to them; let them decide the course; listen to your superintendents and your principals. We're experts for a reason, and right now society doesn't really seem to be respecting that expertise. And, maybe, if that expertise were more respected, more people would want to go into the professional and we wouldn't be seeing these shortages. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Congratulations, that really sums it up. You're really honest and passionate in representing the teachers, Fran, and my applause goes with heartfelt appreciation. What you do, what the superintendents do. Mila is shaking her head, others are shaking their heads--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Nodding.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Yes, nodding, sorry. Nodding, nodding. I've got to go back to school. No.

But, in all honesty, you are, you're professionals. And, we're here to listen, so this is the opportunity.

So, thank you. Thank you, Dawn, very much for coming today.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Chairwoman -- Dawn, Fran, I just want to thank you for your testimony and, also, kind of put it on the record, another shameless plug for our Chairwoman's bill.

You talked about getting tissues and wipes and everything else. We have a bill that's passed this Committee and this House to audit the ARP funds. I would hope that our Senate colleagues would take that up as fast as possible so that we can get to that, so we know where those funds are being spent, so that we make sure that teachers are getting those critical cleaning supplies and health supplies to help keep the kids safe.

So, thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, everybody.

MS. PFEFFER: Thank you.

MS. HOWLEN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: We have New Jersey Tutoring Corps' Ashley Bencan and Katherine Bassett.

And, whoever would like to go first, state your name.

A S H L E Y B E N C A N: Hi.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Hi.

MS. BENCAN: Ashley Bencan, nice to meet you all.

Thank you for having me. Katherine Bassett, the CEO of the Tutoring Corps wasn't able to make it today. She's actually meeting with one of our districts, Somerville -- Somers Point -- so, please, we're happy to connect you later.

I am happy to be here today. Like Fran was saying, I was a middle school teacher 10 years ago and left, like many people in the room that weren't getting what I needed in the classroom or for the students that I was working with, and, ultimately, also wanted to be able to sit and share my perspectives with the people that I then understood finally had an ability to make some of those changes.

So, I'm excited to be representing The Tutoring Corps today, because after the lots of experience that I've had in education now, I wanted to get back to working very closely with students and making sure that, especially because of the pandemic, anybody that has that ability to inform and improve whatever supports we can get to our schools, we're going to make sure we're a part of that.

So, I shared some of our data and an overview of our programs, so, I'm going to very quickly talk through that overview, and then I want to focus on the student growth that you can see, that we've been able to see, and then, lastly, kind of tie it together with what I've heard some of my colleagues say. Because, you know, funding, elevating the workforce at large, and, ultimately, making sure we're supporting our students, is what we're all

about, so, we really see the tutoring part as being that conduit that can tie everything together.

We were started in the summer of '21, through philanthropy. We had a very great friend in the College of New Jersey that allowed us to operate for that first summer. We partnered with Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs to get into their summer camps. Katherine had three weeks to get into their summer camps because she was hired and, poof, we needed to hit the ground running. At the time, we were focusing primarily on math and it was K-5, and, so, that's where our focus has been. We learned a lot that first summer, we've actually changed our curriculum since that first summer, and, also, to have the need to be able to get and see information very quickly and, have much more individualized instruction from our tutors, so, a lot of changes since that first pilot.

We managed our budget well; we got to save a bunch of funds and our philanthropist partner said, "Great, now go pilot a school-year program." So, last year, we piloted an after-school program. Not the best to do after-school tutoring -- not because kids aren't there and aren't ready, because they are -- they're exhausted. We struggled to find teachers, like many of my colleagues have shared, for after school. But, during that school year is why we struggled. That school year in particular was exhausting for so many, and, so, not many hands were raised that were like, "Yes, please sign me up for an extra two hours."

But, regardless, we were still able to partner with the Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCAs and, so, the students that were there, we saw tremendous growth for them, and that was great. And, then, this past summer, the data that you have here that I'll speak to in a second, we were

at 20 sites across the state. We tried to particularly focus on the locations that Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs had shared with us that their students need to the most.

So, it's not as scientific as we'd like, but, honestly, if the most under-resourced places, they have students that could be inferred as maybe being eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, but we haven't collected any of that data because we were relying on our partners to kind of make sure we're targeting the students.

So, last summer -- we're really excited about this. So, we used i-Ready because, like I was sharing with our first summer, when we didn't have a curriculum -- I'm sorry, a tool, a diagnostic, to immediately find out what this student or scholar needed from us for our tutors and then project a roadmap for that person, it was really evident that there is no curriculum online that can just kind of plug-and-play and be used for high-dosage tutoring. Even though there's high-quality curriculums everywhere. So, what i-Ready afforded us was a baseline number, a line to the New Jersey standards that says, you know, this is where Ashley is in fourth-grade math. And, they have five domains -- so, that's a fancy word for just, like, subcategories. So, her numbers and operations are two years behind where she should be. But, her geometry skills are on grade level. And, so, it broke it down very easily to understand exactly where I then need prioritized instruction, because we only have them for 14 tutoring sessions over the summer. That's, like, five to seven weeks.

So, it was incredibly important that we made sure that any time they had with our staff, it was exactly what they needed, not a guessing game

or just following a scope and sequence of a curriculum that worked for most, but not necessarily them.

So, this past summer, what -- I'm going to read this off so I don't mess it up -- but about 186 of our students were two-plus grade levels behind. So -- and that, again, is based on that baseline data. There's tons of things we can say about that. But, for us, that worked, and that's what we needed as just a starting point. By the end of the summer -- so after 14 tutoring sessions -- 93 of those students made, essentially, an approximate a third of the year of growth. So, where they started in any of those math domains, they were able to catch up and grow, and, so, by the end of that second diagnostic that they took, they were either on grade level or maybe only a year behind. And, so, now they're better set up for their teachers to be able to take them the rest of the way, right, during the school year and hopefully by the end of fourth grade for following my little Ashley's story. They're exiting fourth grade 100% on grade level, ready for fifth grade.

And, then, of those 186, 46 actually made 100% growth. So, i-Ready is typically built for a school year, not for a tutoring program, so, all of these numbers and information that they give back to us, we have to roughly approximate for 14 sessions of time. So, it was very exciting; you can see this is just a little story from our scholars in Asbury Park. They were in fourth grade, they started in kindergarten in competencies, and, by the end, were up on grade three. So, that student in particular is going to have, hopefully, a much more successful year than they might have.

We also talk to our scholars and make sure that -- especially if they're in grades three to five -- we're meeting their needs. We are extremely mindful of SCL needs right now, so these zones of regulation is a part of our

tutoring sessions. Our staff are -- well, I'll get to that, they're highly trained to make sure that they are also meeting students where their needs are. But, you can see in the testimony, our scholars love working with us and, often, we were pulling them from swimming, hockey, basketball, arts and crafts -- you name it, all of these things that they also enjoy, and many of them were begging for more time. So, that was very exciting for us to know that we were, like, from their voices, they wanted more and wanted our help.

So, lastly, a part of our overview -- like I said, we see this as part of the educational workforce at large, and, so, we are intentionally working with pre-service educators from all across -- all EPPs across the state: paraprofessionals; substitutes; retired educators; we have some retired superintendents who have been some of our best instructional coaches. They also told us that it's been some of their best learning experiences, working with our groups, so that feels great.

And, we intentionally made sure that every location, since it is statewide, has two leaders on the ground -- so, that instructional coach and a state coordinator. And, I went really fast, I want to make sure I covered all I want to say.

But, that is the big kind of overview. But, ultimately, moving forward this year, we are no longer under TCNJ; we are our own nonprofit. We are in partnerships with districts and trying to learn from last year's school-year pilot and actually embed tutoring during the school day, so, as you heard some of my colleagues say, they've been in many tutoring and many of our districts have created W.I.N. blocks; they've created different intervention blocks. That's what we're doing: We're partnering with those districts to then push into that intervention block time.

So, you can't partner with all districts right now, because not all districts have created an intervention time kind of schedule. We don't want to pull kids out of any instruction, and, so, that's how we're going in. We're going to target tier 2 students. When they talk with districts, they're confirming the same exact things. Their interventionists are already maxed out, and, so, we're there to kind of add more capacity and make sure those tier 2 students can be getting the support they need from us, and then the tier 3 kids should absolutely, you know, be getting to those interventionists.

In some districts that we're talking with, the middle school, three to five, up to six, is where they're seeing the greatest deficits. And, so, we're going to have different models happening, right, based on school schedules. So, we're excited to learn and see how that goes; and, today, one of our first districts is getting board approval. So, happy to continue kind of keeping you abreast of it, because we just left the College of New Jersey -- well, we're leaving on October 31, so it's pretty hairy right now. The school-year program is going to start in January and run until May, and then -- but we have plenty of time for our summer, so, we're excited to try to just to be able to reach as many kids as possible.

So, I'll pause there.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Ashley.

MS. BENCAN: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you for the great news.

Implementing a pilot program during such a tenuous time, to hear some of the positive outcomes, has just been, you know, very positive to be able to hear that.

MS. BENCAN: Some long nights.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: I think the two terms I just walked away with from our session already this morning has been “learning acceleration,” is the term we maybe should be using, and “scholars.”

MS. BENCAN: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: So, I really appreciated that. Assemblywoman Jasey.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: So, maybe I missed something. How did this come about; what was the genesis? I wasn’t aware of the New Jersey Tutoring Corps.

MS. BENCAN: No problem. So--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: And the funding.

MS. BENCAN: Yes.

What I believe -- I wasn’t at that first table -- but it essentially, I think, rose from seeing Tennessee and North Carolina and some other states standing up statewide tutoring efforts, and there wasn’t really anything at that time in 2021 happening in New Jersey. And, so, I believe the Pandemic Relief Help Fund partnered with a few other large entities, pooling their money together, and said, “Can we find a college that would be the umbrella for this group to kind of start under?” They got in touch with President Foster at TCNJ, kind of moved as quickly as you can within state systems, and then hired Katherine with about three weeks to spare before the program was supposed to run.

And, she hired (indiscernible) training, so I was jumping in, and there we went. But, that was-- This, I think they raised, or had, \$2.4 million

at the onset, and we ended up, I think we're just wrapping up spending it all now.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: And, there was money in the budget this year.

MS. BENCAN: We did, yes; successfully in partnership with Senator Gopal slid that in, it was a blessing.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Purposely put it in.

MS. BENCAN: Thank you, thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: I just want to make sure that's clear.

MS. BENCAN: (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JAFFER: Transparently and publicly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Exactly. Exactly. We got you covered, Senator Gopal; we got you covered.

MS. BENCAN: You can see my lack of experience in that process.

But, yes, and so that's our goal, as we partner with districts to help them spend -- especially some of the learning acceleration you know that \$45,000 that each of them received. If they can bring those dollars in to match some of the State monies that we received, then we can make it stretch and go farther. It's still not enough; we're still about a million short to run a school year and a summer program, but it's OK. We're chipping it away.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: But, we'd like to be able to invite you back, and for Katherine to come and explore further and give us additional updates.

MS. BENCAN: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: So, we really appreciate you coming today. Today was really heartfelt good news, so, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Assemblyman Umba.

MS. BENCAN: Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Coming from someone that did the Rowan tutoring program when I was a kid, and the help that it gave me during the summer, I think this is a program that we really need to focus on and provide additional funding to support. I mean, in this time, we need to make sure that we have -- and, I would love to see this program be able to assist during the school year and not just on the summer basis.

But, I did it for four summers during middle school--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: And, look at how well.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: (laughter) It helps, it helps; yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: You set me up for that one, sorry. That was the softball.

So, thank you very much for coming.

MS. BENCAN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Final speaker -- invited speaker today -- is JerseyCAN. We've got Paula White, the Executive Director.

You're batter -- you're doing cleanup, that's it; cleanup. And, we thank you for coming, and, sorry, you're last; it's a hard position to be put in.

Enlighten us.

PAULA WHITE: Thank you ever so much.

JANELLEN DUFFY: Good morning, thank you.

I am Janellen Duffy, I am a Senior Advisor at JerseyCAN, and then I served as the founding Executive Director of JerseyCAN.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Put your mic on.

MS. DUFFY: Thank you.

I'm Janellen Duffy, I am a Senior Advisor at JerseyCAN, and I served as the founding Executive Director at JerseyCAN.

I just wanted to introduce you -- or, in some cases, reintroduce you -- to Paula White, who is our new Executive Director at JerseyCAN.

Paula has spent her career as an educator, and it spans more than two decades from her start as a classroom teacher to sitting on the editorial board of a journal published by the National Council of Teachers of English. And, she's also run a public school in New Jersey, and served as an acquainted member of the New Jersey Council of Young Children, and she led school improvement for public schools in our state at the Department of Education.

Paula is now serving as the Executive Director of JerseyCAN, which is a bipartisan education research and advocacy organization. We're entering our 10th year of operation, and all throughout this time we've really tried to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to ensuring that all students across the state have access to high quality schools.

MS. WHITE: I am really grateful for the time this morning, and so, good morning to Committee Chair, as well as to all the Committee members here today.

JerseyCAN's 2021 report, "A Time to Act: A Framework to Accelerate Learning," really speaks to the promise and the possibility of accelerating student learning. And, it's really built around five core areas,

upon which I will sort of very succinctly -- I promise -- expand. And, this framework has really proven to be fertile ground for accelerating student learning prior to the pandemic, and I think it's even more relevant now than ever before.

So, I want to start with student and family engagement. So, we know that during the earliest days of the pandemic we had families and educators who were thrust into these really close bidirectional relationships, which entailed educators entering students' homes every day, quite frankly, and parents and caregivers watching teachers teach in virtual classrooms. And, I think this unprecedented access to homes and to the culture and the curriculum of schools made it clear that students need to feel safe and seen in order to learn, and, also, that the realities of home life add a layer-- Is that me?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Maybe use the other one.

MS. WHITE: Turn this off?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes, turn that off; turn hers on.

MS. WHITE: I'm a teacher, we pivot. OK.

And, so, really getting attuned to the realities of what students need as well as to home life and how social-emotional needs can be impacted by that. And, so, in the world of real estate, we all know the mantra is *location, location, location*. And, in the world of schools -- and when we're talking about children -- in order for us to accelerate student learning, the focus must be *connection, connection, connection*. And, so, schools have to connect with families to hear their concerns and needs and to ensure that parents fully understand school success benchmarks, and to also know where their children stand, quite frankly.

And, so, we know that digital literacy and digital access can enable that. That's one of the things that we know from the pandemic, so that parents can meet with the teacher from the kitchen table at home and not just from, you know, in the classroom with the teacher.

And, I think also, students must learn in classrooms that are conducive to protecting their mental health. That's really important for accelerating student learning. And, schools must clear the pathways to services for students with identified mental-health needs and coordinate the delivery of such services as needed with parents.

The second piece is high-quality, inclusive curriculum, instruction, and training. And, this is my jam; I care about this so much, because evidence-based curricular strategies and programs must be vetted through disciplined guidance provided by the New Jersey Department of Education. This is really important. Strategies outside of the regular school day hold great potential -- and not just potential, but tangible outcomes, as our previous speaker just spoke to with the New Jersey Tutoring Corps. But, you know, as a career educator, I have to also say that they don't replace and they can never replace quality core instruction. And, so, that's why we need to have really good instructional programs during the school day and we have to have accommodations for the professional learning that teachers must receive in order to make sure that they are prepared to deliver on such instruction.

And, so, we cannot have instructional choices be haphazard. And, so, *NewJersey.com* -- you know, the *New Jersey Star-Ledger's* platform. Actually, yesterday, they just published an essay that I wrote discussing the science of reading legislations and/or policies that have been passed in more

than two dozen states and the District of Columbia. And, as in the case of Mississippi, which has moved up several rankings in education since their science of reading legislation was adopted -- the benefits of such legislation is clear. And, so, I am making the case in that essay, and I am also making the case today before this Committee that New Jersey should follow suit to create parameters around literacy instruction to amplify the most fundamental skill of all, which is learning to read.

Third is effective resource allocation for equitable systems. So, I don't need to tell you all of the monies -- the \$2,776,525,933 in American Rescue Plan ESSER funds that were awarded to our State. And, obviously, the influx of these funds -- while they are not renewable, but they do provide an unprecedented opportunity for our school districts to make bold investments in the future of our children.

So, to accelerate learning, we've got to have proper funding oversight, and given the staggered nature of disbursement of these funds, we have to just make sure -- and, I think, perhaps, as Assemblymember Umba mentioned -- just making sure that they're regularly audited, right? So, for example, we know that ESSER funding, ESSER 1 funding, ended September 30, 2022. So, now that that window of use is closed, we should -- in fairly short order -- be able to evaluate if there are residual funds and identify reasons that they were not spent, if so. And, in the case where funds were spent, where were they used? And, we have to really interrogate that sort of usage aligned with the goals of learning acceleration.

And, for ESSER 2 funding, we've had a lot of conversation here today about mental health. A \$30 million mental-health services grant was set aside expressly for that purpose. And, so, we know that the pandemic has

taken a quantifiable toll on students' mental health. So, as long as New Jersey students stand to benefit from mental-health services, no available dollars should be left unspent.

And, similarly, a learning-acceleration grant sets aside funding for programs with demonstrated records of success as well as for the related professional learning. And, so, we have to monitor this closely, because without that proper review to ensure that programs meet an evidence-based bar, and, so, these are not just programs; they are programs that meet an evidence-based bar. And, if we don't monitor for that, then these funds will have been effectively squandered.

Fourth, I want to talk very quickly about educator support in innovative staffing. And, I know that that's the bane of superintendents', and schools' existence in this moment. It's a challenge across every district, north or south; urban or rural; district; charter. And, we have to address the fact that teacher attrition is a driver of this problem. So, part of the reason we're constantly having to hire is because we're bleeding out the other end, right? And, so, one way to address this is for the State to build strong teacher-residency programs. Also, I have to shout out our state: We pioneered alternate teacher cert. programs in 1983 in this country, so we are no stranger to innovation here in New Jersey. And, so, we have to build strong teacher-residency programs. We're preparing incoming teachers with master teachers for coaching and support, and it's really a clinical model akin to, you know, clerkship for attorneys or residence in the case of physicians. Because we know that substitute teachers, no matter how well-intentioned, they cannot provide the continuity of learning that students need to optimally advance.

And, also, I think we need to also think about other programs, investing in educator-preparation programs in minority service institutions. I am a graduate of one of those myself, Spellman College, and to create a teacher-residency pipeline. And, I would say that, you know, in the case of hard-to-staff certification areas, we recommend temporary certification for current teachers who want to add another endorsement to their license.

And, finally, data. Data for understanding student learning. So, we really have to continue to focus on timely, formative, and summative student-assessment data, which are vital for accelerating student learning. Because, data tracks success, and it also defines the scope of lingering challenges. Data identifies bright spots across our state to facilitate learning and strategy replication. I know when I was a classroom teacher for the better part of a decade, when I saw the data, and I saw that the teacher in the classroom next to me did a better job on certain questions, even on the test, I'm like, "What did you do?" I talk, you know. The same thing. And, they said, "Well, how about you do it this way?" And, that's the power of that data.

And, you know, state and national polling shows that parents support data use as a means of understanding student needs. And, national polling also shows that teachers favor the use of data as part -- as a part -- of a more comprehensive approach to identifying the learning needs of students. So, immediate recommendation here is to make sure that we're investing in data systems that allow for statewide conversations about student learning and, also, quite frankly, to challenge our institutions; our departments of education; and everyone involved, to shorten the feedback loop from data collection to data sharing, so that teachers and students and the general

public can gather information about learning trends as quickly as possible and address them accordingly.

So, yes, these recommendations are not exhaustive, but they do represent some of the best thinking about how to accelerate the learning of our students.

And, so, I really appreciate the opportunity to testify, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Paula.

I don't believe you submitted your testimony, did you?

MS. WHITE: No, but I've got it right here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: OK. If you can submit it, there was a lot of really good things in there--

MS. WHITE: Certainly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: --and, so, it's good to go back and recall.

So, we very much appreciate you coming today and your insight and your perspective. It helps to actually put a good synopsis to everything that we've heard today.

And, to everybody that came to testify today, we could spend, I think, days talking about this, and really in-depth talking about some of the specific areas that each one of you brought up. And, obviously, I think that you found the Committee to be extremely attentive, asking really good questions, and, certainly, really have the buy-in and the support to be a partner with all of you on doing what we need to do, collectively, to have the outcomes that we all want, which is to have our scholars be successful.

So, we thank you very much.

We're going to move on to our other good subject, which is the School Development Authority. Because, if we don't have safe and good buildings for everybody to learn in, then this is all for naught.

So, thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Madam Chair, if I could just -- before we get off this subject.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Sure.

Assemblyman Umba.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: I would just like to make a statement.

I kind of wish that some of our regulars were still here. At the last Committee meeting, I respectfully asked the Chairwoman to focus on learning loss and she did that here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Learning acceleration.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Yes, and I think that has to be shown to our colleagues. There is bipartisan cooperation here in the Education Committee. We move things along.

And, I thank the Chairwoman; she's always gracious with members on both sides of the aisle and ideas that we have. So, I would be remiss in allowing this hearing to end without stating, you know, for her leadership and bringing this topic to the forefront.

So, thank you Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Assemblyman Umba.

And, thank you all very much.

We are going to-- Even though we're not voting on the piece of legislation, this is for discussion only, I'm going to have some of it just read into record in reference to what this SDA bill does.

MS. CHAMBERS: Assembly Bill 4496 makes various changes to the laws governing the construction of school-facilities projects and the operations of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority, or SDA, including the provision that school-facilities projects in SDA districts would be subject to prior authorization by the Legislature.

The requirement that the SDA establish three model school designs for the construction of elementary, middle, and high school projects. The provision that the SDA cannot be responsible for any remediation costs associated with the brownfield site under certain projects. The provision of State funding mechanisms for school-facilities projects undertaken by charter schools and renaissance school projects located in SDA districts, and the provision that bonds issued by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority for the state share of school-facilities projects, the proceeds of which are transferred to the SDA, will not support the cost of either agency related to the issuance of bonds.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: There are several people who have asked to testify, but I am going to run through those who just want to have it read into record.

We have Colleen Eskow of New Jersey Foundation for Children -- in favor, no need to testify. I believe all the rest are opposed -- no need to testify. We have New Jersey State Council of Sheetmetal workers, Matt McDermott. We have John Capo, the Brickmans, and Allied Craftworkers. We have Advocates for Children of New Jersey -- no need to testify. AJ

Sabath, New Jersey Building and Construction Trade. Mark Longo, ELEC-825, the Operating Engineers -- seeking amendments. We have (indiscernible), the Way LLC. We have Gregory Stankiewicz, New Jersey Community Schools Coalition. We have Dawn Nichol-Manning, East Orange Education Association. We have Melanie (indiscernible), we have Theodore Graham, and we have Edward Fedorko, New Jersey Mechanical & Allied Craft Council.

We have people who would like to testify. We have Ciro Scalera, New Jersey Laborers Union -- seeking amendments.

Ciro, I see you. Come on up.

C I R O A. S C A L E R A: Thank you.

Good morning -- or, soon, afternoon. My name is Ciro Scalera, and I am Director of Government Relations for the Laborers International Union of North America, the Labor Management Fund, New Jersey LECET.

I have submitted a statement to you, so I will not be reading my statement; spare you all of that. The Laborers are one of the 15 building trades -- in a few minutes, you'll hear from a representative from the building trades that we participate with.

I am here today to make two basic points on this bill. The first point is that-- And, we have a long history, the Laborers, of involvement and support for the School Development Authority. My predecessor was on the board for many, many years, Joe McNamara. It's an entity that we, in all of its prior iterations, have worked with and supported. But, everything can and should be improved and taken a look at, and we have some specific concerns about how labor is being handled on many -- too many -- school projects. We have issues.

And, in part, that lies -- because over the years, the SDA has delegated out a lot of its authority, and the theme that, if you read our testimony, the theme of our testimony is we'd like to see a consolidation and strengthening of the functions of the SDA -- and, particularly, around consistency and uniformity around labor provisions, but in other areas, too.

My first point is on the labor aspects of this, and the first two bullets in my statement really sum up the gist of -- we made maybe nine points about labor provisions that we want to see. We'd like to see an effort to amend to strengthen SDA's contractor pre-qualification procedures to ensure that only the most responsible contractors can bid on school construction projects. That's an overarching theme of our labor suggestions.

The second suggestion is that the SDA strengthen its project review and closeout procedures on the tail end of an effort to identify contractors that failed to deliver projects in a timely manner and within contract budgetary specifications. And, in between those two, we make recommendations for and put in other ideas for amendments that would basically strengthen, in our view, you know-- There is a prevailing wage-law requirement already in this area, and we'd like to see some further strengthening of labor provisions.

The second point on the bill is -- and you'll hear from others on this -- clearly, if we think things should be tightened and incorporated more strongly in the SDA, we would have an issue of delegation to local redevelopment authority; to county improvement authorities; and the bill does that, and we have some concerns about that. We all have worked long and hard -- and you'll hear Mike Travostino from our contractor association speak to this -- we've worked long and hard through the years, with you,

legislators, to ensure that bidding and other procedures are consistent, fair, and applicable to public bidding in the context of lots of clients of state, county, and local work, but particular school work.

So, those are our two basic sets of amendment. We have shared those with the speaker, and Assemblywoman, as a co-sponsor, we will get them to you ASAP. And, we look forward, and we're glad this is for discussion. We look forward to participating as a stakeholder as this process on the bill and the discussion goes forward.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Ciro.

If you're prepared to -- if not, that's fine, we can talk about it offline or another time -- can you talk to us specifically, a little bit further, about the county improvement authorities and your apprehension about working with them?

MR. SCALERA: Well, I'm not an expert on that, and Mike is.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: All right, we'll ask the same question to Mike.

MR. SCALERA: I'll defer to him, but I can tell you that, conceptually, we're concerned that if too many other entities get involved, they have their own rules and regs; they have their own standards; they have their own bidding and practice and procedures. And, we are finding that labor is often disadvantaged because there is not enough consistency.

So, it's not that we have anything against the county improvement authorities per se -- they do wonderful work in New Jersey. It's simply that our view of this is that there needs to be more control centralized

so that there is more of a consistent implementation of huge amounts of, you know, State aid.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: So, I guess the follow-up question would be -- maybe this is for Mike, that's fine if you want to defer -- but are the laborers working with the county improvement authorities now?

MR. SCALERA: Yes, we do. When they do-- For example, we're working with them on a -- there's going to be new courthouses; they'll (indiscernible). We did a huge amount of work in replacing lead service lines in Newark, financed through the Essex County Improvement Authority.

So, yes, we work with county improvement authorities on all variety of kinds of work. So, that's not the issue, per se.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: All right.

Thank you, Ciro.

MR. SCALERA: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: And, Mike Travostino is following you; the Associated Construction Contractors -- opposed.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Chairwoman, wouldn't the improvement authority still be subject to the same regulations as the local and county governments?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Yes, so the county improvement authorities are still subjected to the \$5 million cap. What the laborers are concerned about is that, with 15 different county improvement authorities, each one doing things slightly differently, it's a landscape that currently, with school construction being so definitive, it's a landscape that's not familiar to them in terms of how -- and the county improvement

authorities, too -- how they would actually respond to having this mandated guidelines about building model schools, hopefully, being model schools.

And, so, now it's working with 15 different entities as opposed to the one entity of the School Development Authority.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: I just find it fascinating, after having that it's mandated if it's over \$5 million, it has to have a PLA.

So, I wouldn't think that they would be doing things differently, but--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Yes, I don't think that that's their concern. Michael can probably--

MICHAEL TRAVOSTINO: Thank you, Chairwoman.

A lot of promotion there from my colleague *Ciro Scalera* to the Chairwoman, I appreciate that.

Again, thank you Chairwoman Lampitt; Vice Chairwoman Jasey; members of the Committee.

Again, it's Mike Travostino for the record. I'm the Government Affairs Director here on behalf of the Associated Construction Contractors of New Jersey. We're a trade association that, all of you know, represents union general building contractors; construction managers; heavy highway site development; utility contractors here in our state are members. All are responsible for billions of dollars in commercial, industrial heavy, highway, utility, institutional construction projects annually, and we employ tens of thousands, if not more, of skilled union craft workers. Statewide, our Association is committed -- again, as most of you know -- to raising the standards of construction through quality, integrity, and skill.

We are here this morning strongly opposed to A4496 in its current form, and, specifically, A4496 explicitly removes public bidding protections that our organizations and our labor partners, most of them behind me, have fought for for decades to protect.

I do want to say at the top that we strongly believe reforming SDA is necessary, and we've engaged in this spirited debate in a very collegiate way, brought forward with legislative leadership; individuals on this Committee; certainly, the Governor's Office; the Authorities Unit; School Development Authority themselves; throughout the past four years, if not longer.

I just want to be clear that the bill before you this morning is not necessarily a byproduct of those discussions. Our organization works -- and, as I referenced -- works with various public agencies here on a regular basis to raise industry standards within all these different construction sectors and occupational sectors in our great state. And, we are committed to protecting these standards responsibly. And, one of *the* most important standards in our industry is the actability and related enforcement of New Jersey's bidding and procurement laws on publicly funded projects.

Throughout the past several years, ACCNJ, our building trade partners, have monitored public contracting activities, which several county improvement authorities have engaged in, on very hyper-regional construction projects outside of this K-12 space. We have seen this increased trend throughout time: These same public bodies attempt to subvert public bidding laws by utilizing other areas of law -- and, I'll get into that in one second -- we feel that lack transparency. We remain extremely concerned about the procurement process used on certain public projects awarded under

a statute that has to do, technically, with housing; Housing and Redevelopment Law; and the County Improvement Authority law.

And, there's a goofy gray area connection between the two of them, and I'll explain further. Both of these problematic statutes are explicitly referenced in A4496, being discussed this morning. The County Improvement Authority Law, the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law -- they lack conventional safeguards for soliciting and actually awarding the project itself. Each law contains very broad grants of authority when it comes to contract procurement. And, neither law, at this month and time, provide clear selection criteria, again, in the contractor world.

There was active litigation some of us watched from the sidelines regarding these procurement processes, and it was recently reconciled out and the uncertainty was taken out of much of the interplay there. It's clear judicial rulings have made it clear, to your point, Assemblyman, and to the follow up. I'm sure local public contract law applies, just when there's this murky nexus between the two statutes, right, things have gone awry, and we stand at the ready to not only correct them but to work with you and sponsorship and legislative leadership on some of the miscomings in this bill.

Several sections-- Just specifically, to point out on the record, section 34N, section 35C, and all of new section 5 -- that would be A, B, C, and D -- would allow for a municipal redevelopment agency, a county improvement authority, to enter into an agreement with a regular operating district to construct some of these K-12 school projects.

Section 5 of A4496 is *extremely* problematic for ACCNJ, our organization, which states that public school contracts law -- time tested for three-plus decades -- and local public contracts law, around even longer, shall

not apply. It's explicit in those provisions of A4496. These sections reference the (indiscernible) and the subversion of public bidding protections, attempt to solidify some of the same flawed contracting practices that we've watched and our labor partners have been actively policing.

Much of our time in meetings over the past year -- if not longer -- with various public officials and public agencies have been about discussing ways to improve the bidding process, not outright remove these critical transparent protections. Time-tested bidding statutes are the backbone of our industry, and they're equally important to the taxpayers of the great State of New Jersey.

I would like to go on record with some real technical concerns, but I recognize you guys have had an extremely long hearing on learning loss -- which is vital, important; I learned some things there, and I'm sure there's some of my colleagues behind me that would like to speak as well. I'll just point out that there are some definitions that need to be tweaked and/or explicitly referenced. There was discussion about the use of a construction manager, and rightly so; there needs to be. There are some terms that come in and around that area of the bill that need to be reconciled out.

And, I just want to point out that it's been about a decade-plus of our organization working hand in glove with our labor partners to deliver public bodies and give public contracting officials tools. Its sharpest number, right, lowest responsible bidder, does not ultimately work. We went to bat for public-private partnerships, which was another way to deliver projects. Everyone here on this dais supported those efforts. We recently, through the work of the Majority Leader and Chairwoman Lampitt, passed the Design

Bill Procurement Act. It's another form of procurement; it is another procurement tool.

So, there are a myriad of ways to advance a K-12 school project including what currently is law. And, we stand here at the ready to work with the Speaker, and certainly the Chairwoman, and all interested stakeholders on this issue. But, it would be a dereliction to duty if we didn't point out the severe miscomings of this bill as introduced.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thanks, Michael, and having had a long conversation with the Speaker Saturday afternoon on the top of the eighth inning when the Phillies were still winning, right-- So, you know, no kidding aside, he is really obviously willing to, after the hearing -- it was really important that we had the hearing for discussion only.

You know, here are some of the technical points; I know you only shared some of them, there are more technical points that need to have some refinement in this legislation. He is putting a lot of responsibility on me to get back to him on a lot of these issues, so I'm sure that we'll be talking some more, all right.

MR. TRAVOSTINO: Thank you, Chairwoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: All right.

Next, we have Mike Flynn from NJEA, who has concerns.

M I C H A E L F L Y N N: Madam Chair, do you mind if Nikki Baker from WEC comes up as well?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Sure.

Did you put in a slip?

N I K K I B A K E R: Yes. under Healthy Schools Now.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Under Healthy Schools?

MR. FLYNN: Sorry about that.

Thank you, Chairwoman, and members of the Committee.

It's good to be here today, and I've submitted written testimony on this, so I don't want to read the entire thing, and I just want to touch on some of the highlights that NJEA has concerns about.

We appreciate the Speaker and the Education Chair in their motives to strengthen the programs to build healthy and modern schools in our state. We know that over the course of the SDA, its many iterations, it's had struggles and it has also had successes and there is always room for improvement.

What we hear now, in our observations, is that the SDA is working as well as it ever has with careful selection of sites, efficient construction, and successful opening of schools. But, to highlight some of our concerns about the bill, the legislative approval of projects requiring legislative approval of SDA projects is a -- something that we are concerned about.

The process of the long-standing prioritization of construction based on seats is what is needed. While there are other criterias that enter into consideration, it is not clear why we would want to have the Legislature potentially overriding a set of priorities-- I had to take off my broken glasses; my apologies for that. They just broke this morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: I feel your pain.

MR. FLYNN: I feel like I should break off the other end. But, yes, I can't see.

So, we have concerns about the charter and the renaissance schools, which would be prioritized and the basis for deciding the construction priorities of traditional schools has been the overcrowding of schools and the amount of seats that can be easily determined in the traditional schools. However, we don't know how that is going to be determined in a charter and renaissance school. And, since we cannot always verify the waitlists.

Second, the funding for the construction cannot come from the already insufficient funds to address traditional public-school needs in SDA districts. Districts would have had some of the oldest -- which are some of the oldest in the state, and have been around for years. The SDA and its predecessors and their funding were required and authorized by our Supreme Court as part of the remnants of the *Abbott v. Burke* case. Those funds are to be allocated to traditional schools -- public schools -- in the SDA districts covered by the former Abbott districts. The court did not include nontraditional schools and facilities in its orders and (indiscernible).

The bill allows for outside construction-management services to oversee entire projects. We agree with previous testimony that this will create confusion and bring too many government agencies in to oversee the outside construction management. In an attempt to streamline, we think that this would create more bureaucracy. The SDA already has the capacity and expertise to manage construction projects.

And, finally, we do agree with the ending of the process of voter approval for projects, because this will allow for less political interference in many (indiscernible) projects.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: I'm sorry, Mike, you said you agree with--

MR. FLYNN: We do agree with it, yes.

Thank you.

MS. BAKER: Thank you for allowing Healthy Schools Now to sit and join NJEA.

My name is Nikki Baker, I actually took this position on April 1. I'm a former paraprofessional in a special-education classroom from Paterson Public Schools; 20-plus years I served as a parent volunteer, substitute, and then an instructional assistant.

Paterson, being one of the many SDA school districts, I am personally familiar with the needs of safe school buildings. Healthy Schools Now is a coalition of over 80 advocates, organizations, community leaders, parents, who also agree on with all the Education Committee members here that part of the role of efficient education is having a safe space to learn in. And, I know that the bill is brought up because of the need to facilitate and make it more efficient to get these buildings built, facilities ready and modernized for our student scholars.

The concerns that we have at Healthy Schools Now with our coalition is that the process is in place, and we don't have a problem with the process. The main deficiency part has been funding. Funding has always run out; schools are on the waitlist throughout the district, and many times they don't see their names put up.

The 2022 budget only allowed for projects that were listed prior to the pandemic. There are 31 school districts in the SDA, so, that number is an overview, but it doesn't say exactly how many seats, how many students.

The SDA likes to say, “Well, we’re trying to see this amount of students.” Well, each seat represents someone’s child; someone’s student. It represents all of you as adults; it represented us, when we were in school. All education facilities should be equal, and, unfortunately, the SDA districts -- former Abbott districts -- haven’t been. They were behind, underfunded, for many years, and it’s finally catching up slowly.

So, yes, there is a need to implement more efficient means. However problematic, we think sharing the funding that’s already lacking with non-traditional public schools, and it also conflicts with our Abbott ruling that was originally intended.

So, I guess, our ask is to reconsider some of the points, and, also, a consideration is to have a funding source that is standard for SDA instead of your having us come as advocates begging for money to support our students. Let’s have this standing funding source so that non-traditional schools and the SDA district schools don’t have to compete. Education is a priority for all of us, we’d like to see that in the money as well.

And one thing final in closing I’d like to state how, as educators, we say that our working environment are our students’ learning environments, and that is so true. I would like to also add that I’m an advocate for each of us walking through buildings in all of our districts to compare and seeing what needs to be done.

Lastly, I brought a pamphlet that was created prior to my arrival in Healthy Schools Now, but it’s still relevant. It’s a tale of two schools. And, in this district, we had a model school district that had a building that was built in the 1800s, beautiful architecture, but it was modernized so that schools and the students in the schools were able to learn efficiently without

leaks or heat concerns. The second school -- not so much. And, that's still relevant today, because it still goes on. So, the need is there for the SDA; concerns are about the implementations.

Thank you all for having me.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Nikki, very much, for coming today.

One follow-up. So, you know, speaking as a legislator who just voted a referendum for \$360 million in Cherry Hill because the schools that I walk through -- that I continue to walk through -- are crumbling. The lockers that are in the locker rooms are literally falling off.

Not to be specific just about lockers, but, you know, the classrooms are leaking; the windows aren't sustainable; the HVAC systems; \$360 million the residents of Cherry Hill now are going to be responsible for. So, we're all looking for equitable. We're all looking for, you know, the safe environment for our children to learn. We're all just trying to figure out how we can look at the SDA differently and approach it differently so that there are -- there is some really positive aspects in here, in terms of the municipalities being able to use them as a resource to be able to take the taxes for a pilot program, working in collaboration with the school district to take those taxes from a pilot program and really put it towards the implementation of regenerating some of their schools, so that it doesn't have to go to a bond referendum.

So, there are some really good things in here. We're going to continue to tweak it, and we appreciate you coming.

Assemblywoman Jasey has a comment or a question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes.

I am so happy to see you here, but, also, at the same time, I am so angry, because when I started 15 years ago, Orange was part of my district. I have been in the school more than once. I thought SDA was going to address that way back then. I got redistricted; West Orange became part of my new district. So, I know both of these schools very well, and I am outraged that the Cleveland Street School in Orange is still in this condition. I couldn't believe it when I walked through it 15 years ago and children were in a musty, stinky, leaky basement. And that's where the bathrooms -- the only bathrooms in a three-story building -- were, and that's where they had lunch.

And, we made such a stink about it at the time, and, you know, I just-- This was supposed to have been fixed. This is, like, totally outrageous and I feel sick about it that I didn't know that the work had not been done by the SDA. I *know* it was on their list, so we have got to have legislation that really tightens this up. Because people should probably go to jail for not having fixed that school; that is unconscionable.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you-- I'm sorry. I'm cold, and I'm tired, and I'm really angry about that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: I think we're all very passionate and, yes-- So, thank you very much for coming.

We're going to bring up Jesse Young from the New Jersey School Board Association who didn't denote in favor or opposed.

I'd like to be able to say, though, you know, look at me. There's the SDA from 15 years ago; there's the SDA now. The wheels of justice take

a while to turn, and, if you were to -- unfortunately, the SDA is not here to represent themselves, and I encourage everybody to reach out to them to have a discussion with them as well.

Jesse, thank you for coming.

JESSE YOUNG: Good afternoon, Madam Chair; Madam Vice Chair; Committee members and staff.

My name is Jesse Young, Legislative Advocate with the New Jersey School Boards Association. And, we really appreciate this opportunity to have this important discussion.

It's incredibly timely, for all the reasons that the Chairwoman and the Vice Chairwoman just discussed. That \$363 million bond referendum in Cherry Hill is the single largest bond referendum for a school facilities project in at least a decade. And, the Vice Chairwoman mentioned that the facility projects on this (indiscernible) with the Fiscal Year '23 budget providing them a kind of -- the most significant investment, about \$2 billion in funds to keep working through that list. It's just a really welcome opportunity to discuss this timely topic.

So, we submitted written testimony; so, for the sake of everyone's time, I don't want to go word for word through that, so, I'm just going to spotlight a few of the concerns that are detailed in the testimony that we submitted.

First, I'll highlight the provisions that would require the Legislature to authorize school-facilities projects. That provision does raise some concerns about the project-approval process being politicized or being delayed, and (indiscernible) at that time. Delaying the project approval could

increase the cost of the project given inflation and interest rates, so that time could cast some uncertainty on the cost of the project.

The provision that would require SDA districts and incentivize (indiscernible) to conform to the model school designs does raise some questions about whether the three model designs per grade band could accommodate kind of the broad variety of circumstances and needs that might influence the design of a school-facilities project. There are provisions that would include charter schools for public facilities financing, including charter schools would be a pretty complex endeavor that raises a lot of logistical concerns about how those projects would be carried out, such as charters operating on a renewal cycle and whether that facility that's the subject of the project would still be being used as part of the charter school in the long term. So, concerns like that will have to be addressed in the bill, just going through the process.

And, one other thing I'll spotlight: There's a provision that would require a school-level capital-improvement plan as part of a district's LRFP, and that does raise some concerns, along (indiscernible) plan, processes already pretty time consuming and pretty labor intensive. So, requiring a significant amount of new data in those school-level plans without additional support or time for the districts does raise concerns for the burdening of (indiscernible) staff.

So, I'll stop the spotlight there, and you have more information in my written testimony.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Jesse, can you just expand upon the last comment that you made? Just expand upon that timeframe and the real larger concern.

MR. YOUNG: Sure. So, as part of the long-range facilities plans have to be reviewed at least once every five years. And, that process could be pretty time and labor intensive for the districts. As part of that process, districts are providing enrollment projections that have to be certified by a qualified (indiscernible). They are providing inventories of various building systems like the plumbing systems and the maintenance systems. They are providing the capacity of every facility in the school district.

So, it's a really -- there's a lot of data that goes into that LRFP process. It's a very time-consuming process. And, what this bill would add on top of all those current requirements that go into the long-range facilities plan, they would have to have a school-level data for health and safety conditions in each building, and the enrollment projections of each building and that could add a significant amount of more information that has to be included as part of the LRFP process.

So, without additional time or resources or support for the district meeting those requirements, it could add to an already kind of time- and labor-intensive process.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you. Thanks very much. We appreciate you coming. We appreciate your testimony, and being as succinct as you are. Thank you.

We have Harry Lee, New Jersey Charter School Association -- in favor.

Harry. And, Paula White, why don't you come up if you want to testify again; from New JerseyCAN.

MR. LEE: We also have one of our school leaders and our board chair, Danielle West from the Association.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Sure.

Danielle, why don't you come up. She's from Queen City?

MR. LEE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: OK; all right.

MR. LEE: Thank you, Chairwoman Lampitt, it's good to be up here again. And, the rest of the members of the Committee: Thank you to Speaker Coughlin, as well as the Chairwoman, for sponsoring this important legislation, A4496.

And, this measure is really an important first step in creating healthier and safer schools for all public school students in New Jersey. And, one of the most critical points and components of this landmark legislation is the inclusion of charter and renaissance schools in school construction funding.

There are 60,000 students -- public charter school students -- in New Jersey, and we serve one in five students currently in SDA districts. Fifty percent of our students are Black; 37% are Latino; three out of four come from low-income households. And, so, without a doubt, charter schools are meeting the needs of students who have been traditionally underserved and underresourced.

In education, we talk about the word equity often, and the inclusion of public charter and renaissance schools is really about equity and fairness. We have many families that have children in both district schools and charter schools. Why do we preference one child over another? And, we need to make sure every child in the State of New Jersey is in a safe, clean, healthy, monitored school building.

Previously, charter schools have never received facilities funding to construct new schools, and because charter schools do not receive per-pupil funding, or funding to build new schools, a vast majority of our schools are renting old buildings. They're renting aging facilities and old Catholic school buildings, or they are retrofitting different spaces to make it work for their students. And, on average, charter schools are spending about 10% of their operating dollars on facilities, rent -- mortgage, if they own their building. And, this could be better spent on teacher salaries and classroom resources.

And, across the country, more than 30 states with charter school laws have recognized the need to provide safe and healthy schools for students in charter schools. In New York, they give charter schools a building -- a free building to use -- or they provide up to \$4,500 per pupil for facilities. In Washington, D.C., charter schools receive more than \$3,400 per pupil for facilities for rent, or to save up to buy a new building.

Since 2001, New Jersey has spent billions -- about \$13 billion -- and given that to districts for school construction, and charter schools have not been part of that equation. And, like other schools in the state, overcrowding is one of the biggest challenges facing charter and renaissance schools, along with the need for building safety improvements.

A recent survey of charter school leaders indicated that our schools are in need of about \$900 million in construction, renovation, or capital improvement funds over the next decade to provide safe and secure school buildings for our kids. And, the inclusion of charter schools in this legislation is really about equity. Back in '97, '98, there were not many charter-school students, but now we have one in five, so the landscape has changed dramatically. So, this is a really important piece of legislation for

us. It's about treating public charter-school students like other students in the state. Three out of four live in low-income households. We need to make sure everybody gets in a safe and healthy building.

And, we applaud Speaker Coughlin and Assemblywoman Lampitt again for sponsoring this critical legislation, and we commend all of your efforts to provide equity and education through a more fair and effective school construction program, and we look forward to working with you all to ensure that all children have a safe and secure building to learn in so that they can all reach their God-given potential.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Harry.

DANIELLE WEST - AUGUSTIN: Good morning, everyone.

Before I begin to read my testimony, I would like to just share with you a text that I just received as well from our high school principal. It merely said, "The girls' bathroom is flooded again." So, how appropriate before I get into my testimony.

Thank you, Chairwoman Lampitt, and the Education Committee, for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I am here to testify in favor of A4496.

I want to thank Speaker Coughlin and Assembly Chairwoman Lampitt for championing this important legislation.

My name is Danielle West-Augustin, and I am the CEO of a tier-1 independent NJEA unionized charter school located in Plainfield, New Jersey, that serves 404 students in grades K-10 currently, with expanding to grade 12 over the next two years.

Our school has been around for the past 22 years as we opened our doors in 2000. We currently serve more than 80% low-income students, 14% special education students, 16% ELL students, and 100% people of color. Here in New Jersey, charter schools are public schools, and are serving students all across New Jersey well.

The public charter school sector has given tens of thousands of families, many in New Jersey's most vulnerable communities -- which are also the communities hardest hit by the pandemic -- the opportunity to decide what's best for their children. There are several streams of funding public charter schools do not receive. One being the lack of funding for school facilities. During the pandemic, the need to provide healthy and safe learning environments has only become more evident. Now, more than ever, public charter schools need access to facilities to ensure that we have a safe and secure building for our scholars.

As we continue to recover from the pandemic, it is important that our scholars have facilities that enable the conditions for learning. Public charter and renaissance schools educate one in five students who attend a school in an SDA district. The State has a responsibility to ensure all scholars have an opportunity to learn in a school that is safe, secure, and a modern facility as schools work hard to get back on track academically.

Queen City Academy Charter School is housed in a former synagogue that is more than 60 years old. Our building is always kept clean, and we continually strive to beautify our schools. However, it is aging. Our facility was not originally a traditional school; therefore, the classrooms are tight and smaller than most classrooms. The windows are hard to open; air conditioning and HVC units continue to break; and the plumbing is aging.

QCACS currently needs to replace all of our windows in our K-8 building, as many cannot open and close properly. Due to the pandemic, the ability to open windows is crucial. Replacing all windows in the school is estimated to cost more than \$600,000.

Our high school is housed in a leased facility, and we are busting at the seams, and it is impossible for that facility to house us all. Having access to facilities funding would ensure that our scholars are provided the opportunity to learn in spaces that provide an environment conducive to learning.

I thank Chairwoman Lampitt and Speaker Coughlin for continuing to champion A4496, and I encourage the Committee on behalf of our school community and the other 84 charter schools throughout the state to please support the bill. Our scholars cannot wait another day to be in classrooms that cultivate and allow learning to not just survive, but to thrive.

I would be happy to take any questions if you so should have.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Danielle.

Seeing no questions. We appreciate you coming today, and we're all talking about students who are in our public schools, and I think we need to continue that sort of mantra. And Harry knows my mantra.

So, thank you very much for coming.

MS. WEST-AUGUSTIN: Thank you; thank you for having me.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Paula, can you value add to this conversation?

MS. WHITE: Yes, yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: All right. (laughter)

If you have testimony, if you cannot read it, you can just do highlights, we'd appreciate it.

Thank you, Paula.

MS. WHITE: Yes, yes; I know I'm competing with lunch.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Actually, another meeting.

MS. WHITE: So, you know, I think-- I just want to say, top line for us is that it certainly matters with regard to charter and renaissance schools, but it matters with regard to all public schools. And, certainly, myself -- I founded a public charter school, and I remember what that process was like, trying to find adequate facilities. But, I also ran school improvement for the State, and I've been inside of over 200 public schools -- traditional public schools -- in the State of New Jersey, so I recognize that there's a need.

I would say providing just long-overdue updates just to school-facilities law would really allow for a broader array of public school options to be supported. And, I would say here -- I'm just trying to see what hasn't already been mentioned.

I think a new process, proposed in this bill, will help to ensure that legislators will have an opportunity to advocate for and approve critically needed school-facilities projects. So, I think that puts the ball more so in your court, and it will allow for greater public and constituent participation into the approval process from what I saw as legislators gather input from their districts that can help to prioritize project (indiscernible) according to need.

Is there anything I didn't mention?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: I think Assemblywoman Jasey would probably agree, because if the legislator was to approve, then she might have known whether or not the project had moved along.

MS. WHITE: That's exactly right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Right; you're right.

MS. DUFFY: No, the only thing that I would just add quickly is that we sort of implied before that charters were getting prioritized in this bill. As you very well know, many of you know -- just for the record -- they're not. They're just getting a seat at the table and getting access to these funds that they have never had access to, as has been already testified. So, that's just an important clarification.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: I appreciate that.

All right, thank you all very much. Thanks, Paula.

We have Drew Tompkins from New Jersey Work Environment Council -- opposed, no need to testify. We have Marcella Zemadaris -- opposed.

MARCELLA SIMADIRIS: Simadiris.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Marcella.

Please state your name, and where you're from.

MS. SIMADIRIS: Marcella Simadiris, Montclair, New Jersey. I am a teacher and a parent. My children are 25, 22, and 20.

Before I begin, I just want to say praise the Lord to everyone, and then I want to go into a little bit of a history of the SDA which was formally known as School Construction Corporation, founded in 2000, created to bring forth equity through facilities in Abbott districts.

When it was first created, \$6 billion were put aside for Abbott districts; \$2.5 billion for regular districts, (indiscernible) districts, and \$100 million for vocational. And, my experience, and what I've seen, is that money put towards vocational actually compromised equity where vocational schools were someplace that a lot of children that did not survive academically kind of went to pick up trades. That no longer exists. And, in vocational schools now, what we have are a means of segregation in addition to charter schools, because I don't know, I haven't done studies in recent years, but as far as I know, there was always huge attrition rates in charter schools, and they kicked out Black boys. And, all the friends that I know that have Black boys in charter schools always had a real difficult time and always were getting threatened with getting their kids kicked out.

On top of the fact that we all know that charter schools have a huge opportunity for rich white men who live in Montclair to make off of real estate. And, then, not to mention how they used to co-share buildings in Newark, and kids would, that were in Newark Public Schools, had the most horrible conditions, but then would go upstairs to the second floor where a charter school was housed, and lo and behold, everything was nice and beautiful.

So, I can't sit here and allow anybody to ignore the fact that there was that going on. And, I'm sure it still does go on, and it behooves you all to look into it. Because, Assemblywoman Jasey, while you weren't following up with Orange, legislators who had benefited from projects that were to be completed, they were following up. So, what we're dealing here is with a lot of cronyism and nepotism that still goes on, because we saw it happen when (indiscernible) Delgado was--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Marcella, I'm going to bring you back to the bill. If you want to talk about the bill, if you want to talk about the--

MS. SIMADIRIS: (indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: No, you're talking about the political parts of it. We're talking about the bill.

MS. SIMADIRIS: Well, one of the parts of it is that you want to give more power to the legislators. So, those are facts that need to be contemplated.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Sure. If you want to talk about the process of the legislators--

MS. SIMADIRIS: Yes, that's (indiscernible), and then I believe, just -- I really believe that it was (indiscernible) district that benefited more from the SDA than Abbott districts, in that they have more control in the projects; who they hire. Abbott districts had none. I know districts in Paterson, they're crumbling schools that were created by SDA. They're already crumbling. Schools in Union City are already crumbling.

So, while I don't really know the nuances on how to make sure there's better overseeing, I really know that it really lies in all of us being brave and courageous and calling out corruption when we see it, and putting--

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ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Again, we're here to talk about the future of SDA.

MS. SIMADIRIS: And, you're putting a model -- having models for--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Are you in favor?

MS. SIMADIRIS: --Abbott districts.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Are you in favor of the model schools?

MS. SIMADIRIS: No, I'm talking, the three models, (indiscernible) with this new legislation.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Right, that's what I'm talking about.

MS. SIMADIRIS: You're going to further eliminate opportunities and access for the most vulnerable kids.

So, I wanted to say that, but everything that I--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: The model schools-- Marcella, the model schools are there so that there's not additional monies being spent for modeling what should a school have -- how many classrooms; where should the bathrooms be; where should the nurse's office be. And, the model schools are just that: To be able to build efficiencies that we just don't have to keep going back to the table with architects starting from the ground up.

There is a provision within the bill so that modifications, as needed, can be made specific to the locations. So, model schools are a way for us to be more financially efficient.

MS. SIMADIRIS: Well, (indiscernible) you may be right. I only found out about this bill on Friday, so I did not get to research it enough, but I know the issue with the SDA; I know the issue with legislators being unresponsive; so, I don't know how that-- When people in power gets incorporated in when legislators have more power.

I don't know what the answer is. I just know there's a lot of cronyism, nepotism, and corruption, and I'm asking you all to help make it stop.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you, Marcella.

Last, we have Keith Benson from Camden Education Association -- opposed.

Is Keith still here? (no response)

Keith is not still here. He did not submit any testimony.

Members, did you have any final comments or things that you wanted to say?

Assemblyman Umba.

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: Just one final comment, Madam Chair, is as we look at this, and looking at revitalizing, the only thing that I would be remiss in not pointing out is that I do think this also brings up the topic of S2 legislation, and funding sources to certain districts.

We heard about the Cherry Hill School District. They, fortunately, have received \$24 million more over this S2 legislation, but half of my school districts have been losing money, and they can't--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: I am not trying to go back and forth on my \$24 million. I could go back to Governor Christie's years when he raided their funds, so--

ASSEMBLYMAN UMBA: I am not trying to rehash the past. I am just stating that we need the past legislation where we can open up S2 and understand how it is functioning, understand how it is allocating funds, because those school districts are putting off these construction projects

because they have to put those dollars in the classroom, and, you know, we really need to take a holistic approach to that.

So, that is my comment.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN LAMPITT: Thank you.

Any other members? Only a few left. (no response)

Thank you all very much for hanging in there with us, I appreciate it.

And, this concludes.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)