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# *Subcommittee Meeting*

of

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCHOOL FACILITIES AND CONSTRUCTION

*"Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Education, Lucille E. Davy, and Scott Weiner, Chief Executive Officer of the Schools Development Authority, will present an overview of the projects in the district; as well as testimony from other invited individuals"*

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**LOCATION:** Camden High School  
Camden, New Jersey

**DATE:** October 8, 2008  
11:00 a.m.

#### **MEMBERS OF SUBCOMMITTEE PRESENT:**

Senator Dana L. Redd, Chair  
Senator Ronald L. Rice, Co-Chair

#### **ALSO PRESENT:**

Melanie Schulz  
*Executive Director*

Sharon M. Benesta  
*Chief of Staff*



*Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by*  
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,  
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**SENATOR DANA L. REDD (Chair):** Good morning, everyone.

At this time I would like to call to order the Joint Committee on the Public Schools' Subcommittee on Facilities and School Construction.

We welcome at this time the Camden High School Color Guard and ROTC. I kindly ask that everyone please stand and also please put your cell phones on vibrate. (Color Guard marches) (audience recites Pledge of Allegiance)

You may be seated. And please give a round of applause to our Camden High ROTC. (applause)

Let me begin by welcoming everyone to this very important public hearing on school construction and facilities across the State of New Jersey. I am Senator Dana Redd, representative of the Fifth Legislative District, and am truly honored to be here in my hometown, Camden City, as we kick off the public hearing process in the State of New Jersey.

I want to take an opportunity to acknowledge our partners in this process. Certainly, one person does not get the job done. It is a collaborative that is from the local level, the county level, on up to the State level. But on the local level, I want to acknowledge and publicly thank our Board President, Ms. Sara Davis; our Vice President of the Board of Education here in Camden, Ms. Susan Dunbar-Bey; our Superintendent, Dr. Bessie LeFra Young; our Principal of the illustrious Castle on the Hill, Camden High School, Principal Marilyn Jamal; the technology department that has worked so hard to allow video teleconferencing so that other schools in the Camden district can participate in this public hearing -- and I

want to acknowledge and thank them, Mr. Waters and also Ms. Joan Cargill for all of their hard work and energy in making sure that our technology is a part of the process; our Executive Director of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools, Ms. Melanie Schulz; and of course, my Chief of Staff, Novella Starks Hinson. Please recognize each and every one of them with a round of applause. (applause)

In terms of a statement of purpose, the reason why we are all assembled is to, again, continue the dialogue and the discussion on school facilities and renovation projects throughout the State of New Jersey, and in particular our SDA districts -- our formerly known Abbott districts -- and why the investment in education is an investment that is well worth it. But I have to say that if it had not been for the leadership in our Legislature -- working along with Senator Ron Rice, who sits to my right, and my colleagues Senator Turner, Senator Girgenti, Senator Ruiz, and Senator Cunningham -- we would not have gotten this legislation through in the first six months of our budget deliberation process: \$3.9 billion dedicated to school construction across the State of New Jersey. And again, with the support of our Governor, Jon Corzine, who said to Senator Rice and myself, "If you guys can get the votes in both houses, I will sign the legislation into law," and our Governor honored his commitment. And I ask that you salute him and recognize him as well. (applause)

For Camden, the Fifth Legislative District specifically, what does this mean to each and every one of you, and to our young people throughout this area? It means \$94 million allocated for the Castle on the Hill, Camden High School; for Lanning Square Elementary School, \$42.4 million; for Pyne Poynt Middle School, \$33.6 million; and for Gloucester

City Middle School, \$53.5 million -- that are being targeted to our SDA districts.

I would like to, at this time, turn the mike over to my colleague who comes to us from North Jersey -- Newark to be specific. He has been someone who I refer to in the State of New Jersey -- the lion of the Senate. He has been in legislative service for well over 26 years. He is the Chair of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. He also is the Chairperson of the Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee, and serves with me on the Senate Committee for Health, Human Services, and Seniors. Please welcome remarks from my friend Senator Ron Rice. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Senator Redd.

Let me just say that it's good to be here. Let me, once again, thank our staff, Melanie and Sharon, for the work they do throughout the state. I know they put a lot of effort into working with Senator Redd and her staff to make the day possible.

I'm here to learn, and to listen, and if necessary to share. I want to commend Senator Redd. She has a lot of energy. For those of you in the 5th District who may not pay a lot of attention to her, she's all over the place. And there's a lot of work to be done here in Camden. Let me just say that, because I'm also Chairman of the Community and Urban Affairs, I know that if we're going to make schools work, we have to make cities work. And if we're going to make cities work, we have to make schools work. We intend to do that collectively, working together.

I want to thank the Commissioner for being here.

I want to thank Scott Weiner for the job he's done with the SDA.



I understand you may be leaving us soon, but hopefully you'll still be in the environment to assist us.

We wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for Scott's leadership in being truthful in his evaluations and analyses of the districts and the districts' needs economically, to make these things happen.

Let me kind of end my conversation by saying to those who are here -- and I'm speaking now to the administrators, I'm speaking to government leaders, and I'm speaking to the parents in particular -- and then I'm going to also draw the line and speak as an African-American leader. And the reason I want to do that is because oftentimes the world doesn't change the way it should change. We would like to think that some of the biases and excuses aren't out there. But as African-American and Latinos leaders, and minorities, and women, we fight hard for what's right for our districts, because we know what's right for struggling people, those who have the least. But yet at the end of the day, when things go wrong, we're being accused of not holding people accountable.

Let me assure you, with Senator Redd and her leadership working with me in Trenton, and the rest of our members-- We fought for the dollars. The issue is not parity anymore, it's accountability. We fought and continue to fight for new schools. The issue won't be money, because we'll get there. It's accountability. And so we're going to, as the Joint Committee who is charged with the responsibility of oversight and monitoring, hold everybody accountable. That's from the administrators, the government leaders, down to the parents and the students.

I expect students to learn. And we know that every child can learn if they want to learn, regardless of the facilities. But we know that facilities are important.

And I want to thank the young man who is the student government leader -- and I forget his name, but he's sitting here -- for the great tour and the history of the school. And if he can do it, it means that all our children can do it.

So, Senator Redd, thank you very much. We will be back, and we will be watching.

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR RICE: Let me also say that I would be remiss if I left here without telling everybody how much I love Mayor Faison. (laughter) That's my lady from way back. We've been working together in the trenches for a long time.

But you have some help here now with Senator Redd, Mayor. Okay?

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Senator Rice.

And Senator Rice certainly helps me to segue into my next introduction.

We have a number of dignitaries and leaders who are, again, part of the process as we move our city forward, as we move urban centers forward as a collective. Many of the issues are not germane to Camden City, but certainly impact places like Jersey City, Newark, Passaic, Paterson. Listen, we're working together because this is a partnership, and we want to make sure that we improve the quality of life for our youth, for our parents,

for our grandparents, and all who would be involved in making a better place in the State of New Jersey.

I know that this young lady that I'm about to introduce is definitely enthusiastic, has a lot of energy -- more than I have on a good day. She has led the city since 2001, and she has a clear vision of where we're going and how we're going to get there. Please welcome the great Mayor of the City of Camden, Mayor Gwendolyn A. Faison, to welcome us all. (applause)

**MAYOR GWENDOLYN A. FAISON:** Thank you so very, very much. I certainly want to welcome all of you here today.

And I'm so glad, Senator Redd, that this hearing is in Camden.

And I want to -- nice welcome to my friends Senator Rice, and to Commissioner Davy, and all the Board members. In fact, all of you.

Today is another wonderful day to have this hearing in Camden. And I think of the saying, but I may want to paraphrase it. You've heard the saying, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. I like to say, a school set on this hill will not be hid. How do you like that? (applause)

I want you to know, as we welcome you, we still take part in our responsibility, whatever it takes. We want you to know that we are ready for a partnership.

And I want you to know, Senator and Commissioner, even though we've had some good times and difficult times -- but we are a city that will stand, and we will not quit. I know that we have had schools-- We know that we have moneys allocated, and things haven't been exactly the way we wanted them to be. But I believe that new change is coming

now, and we're going to see a new day, new schools. Because our youth deserve the very, very best -- not just schools, but facilities, teachers, principals, parents, residents. And we're going to be the best.

And I'd just like to end with this, if you don't mind, because my heart is so happy today that you came. And I think of the saying -- I always have to spread my spirituality -- but blame it on me -- I'm not asking anyone to join my church. But I want you to listen. We've been hard-pressed on every side but not crushed, we've been perplexed but not in despair, we've been persecuted but not abandoned, we've been struck down but not destroyed. And God knows we're going to make it.

Thank you and God bless you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, and God bless you too, Mayor. Thank you so much for encouraging us.

Keeping in line with what I call the *A Team*, when we need to put some muscle into a project and push it uphill and push it to the forefront of a public policy agenda, there is no one who comes to mind better than someone who was retired but saw the importance of continuing to give back to the community, because he still has so much energy and loves this city as much as all of us do.

I will call to the stage and to the podium to give remarks our Chief Operating Officer, Judge Theodore Davis, a graduate of the public school system here in Camden City. He, in my mind, demonstrates that anything is possible and to continue to dream big.

Judge Davis, please come up and give remarks. (applause)

And as the Judge makes his way to the stage, I want to acknowledge that from Distance Learning we have Cooper's Poynt Learning

Lab, that's tuned in and listening to the public hearing with their teacher, Ms. Ebony Hinson, and Principal Foster.

Hello Distance Learning, hi Cooper's Poynt.

So they're observing in the process.

Judge Davis.

**J U D G E   T H E O D O R E   Z.   D A V I S:** Senator, Senator Rice, thank you for the invitation.

Of course, this is my home. This is the school from which I graduated. Of course, that was a few weeks ago (laughter), the class of 1951.

It is very important that the members of the administration of the City of Camden resolve unto ourselves that we're going to do all of our homework to make sure that we get what is needed for the children of our city. What it takes, I think, is a hell of a lot of preparation and resolve, including the abandonment of all egos. There's only one thing we want to accomplish, and that is the erection of our schools for our children. And I'm sure that all of the distinguished members here on the panel will agree. So let's work together with one goal in mind: to revitalize the educational system here in the City of Camden.

Thank you. (applause)

**SENATOR REDD:** I've just been informed that our Congressman has joined us, Congressman Rob Andrews. And I want to thank him for taking time out of his schedule.

And if I could ask you to come and give remarks on this very important issue of education in the 5th District, but also from a national standpoint, Congressman.

**C O N G R E S S M A N   R O B E R T   E .   A N D R E W S:** Good morning.

**SENATOR REDD:** Good morning, Congressman. (applause)

**C O N G R E S S M A N   A N D R E W S:** Good morning.

I wanted to be personally present so I could underscore for my friend Senator Rice, and for Mr. Weiner, for our Commissioner Ms. Davy, members of the School Board, our Mayor, and other leaders how very important -- Judge Davis, good morning -- how very important this investment in the City of Camden is to our community. And Senator Redd, I know, asked that everyone be here today so we could underscore the importance.

The young men and women who walk out of this school each June are prepared to excel in every level, and we're very proud of them. They attend some of the finest colleges and universities in the country. They achieve in science, and business, education, the ministry, and many other fields. But it saddens us that they are achieving this education in a facility that's not nearly as good as they are.

And I want to commend the leadership in the State Legislature, and the Department of Education, and our Governor for doing what Washington should have done a very long time ago, and that is to invest in facilities for our students so they can have science labs, technology, safe and clean places to go to school.

And the comment, Senator Redd, that I wanted to make -- and Senator Rice, and Commissioner -- I wanted to make was that I'm hopeful that as you embark on this very exciting investment in this community that you will have a Federal partner for the first time. And I do not in any way

mean to be partisan in my remarks, but I think the record bears this out. The American taxpayers are paying to build schools with our Federal tax dollars. But the schools are in Baghdad, they're not here. And one of the choices that we are going to make, beginning in January with a new administration, is whether we should reverse that decision. And I don't begrudge the children in Iraq or anywhere else a high-quality education. I think the more educated people are, the better citizens of the world they are. But I have a hard time justifying the fact that we have excellent young men and women going to school in a facility that was born in the year of the Great Depression, if I'm not mistaken.

How old is this building, Ms. Davis?

**SARA T. DAVIS:** Ninety years old.

**CONGRESSMAN ANDREWS:** Ninety years old.

I find it very hard to reconcile that fact with the fact that we're investing the money we are overseas.

So I hope what happens, Commissioner, and Mayor, and others, is that beginning next Winter in Washington we have a new set of priorities that no longer spends \$10 million (*sic*) a month in a country 6,000 miles away, that it looks at our priorities. You know, if you own a shopping mall, your income taxes went down by a huge amount of money the last few years. But if you're looking for funds to build a gleaming new school here, you have to look to Trenton, not to Washington.

So I'm really hopeful. I, again, want to commend the Legislature, the Governor, our Mayor, and the local leaders for having the vision and foresight to make this happen. But I'm troubled by the fact we're doing this alone. And I really do believe the time is long overdue for

us at the Federal level to commit not just with words to education but with dollars and with deeds.

I've had young men and women from Camden High School work in my office, intern in my office. I've watched them rise to serve in public office and in business. And they are as good or better than anybody -- anybody. So kids who are going to school today in the most modern facilities and most modern labs do not out-compete our young men and women. But they are-- Our young men and women are competing at a disadvantage because they don't have the resources that they should.

So thank you, Senator Rice; thank you, Senator Redd, for voting for those resources. Thank you, Scott Weiner, for taking over a very troubled organization and making it work. Thank you, Mayor Faison and Judge Davis, for making sure that the focus in our city is where it should be. And I'm hopeful that we will have a President, and a Senate, and a House that will embark in a joint venture here so that we can replicate the success around our community.

And one final thing: The number one issue that I'm being asked about -- and I'm sure this is true in the West Ward of Newark, and I know it's true in Parkside, and East Camden, and Deptford -- is the lack of jobs in this country. And so this is not just about education, it's about creating jobs for American workers that pay well, that are desperately needed in the context of this economy. So the bricklayers, and the plumbers, and the electricians, and engineers, and others that will go to work in building this new school-- It's not simply an investment in the outstanding young people of our city, it is also an economic recovery that we so desperately need.



So thank you for being in Camden. I wanted to be here personally to tell you how important this is, Ron. Newark's important, the whole state is important to Senator Rice. He is known from one end of the state to the other. But if you walk around the streets in the West Ward in the city of Newark, or in Irvington, or the other areas he represents, he's known by all and respected by all. We just wanted a person of this esteem and respect to understand that we feel about our Senator the way your constituents feel about you. And when she asked us to be here to lend support, we're here.

Thank you, everyone. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you.

Congressman Andrews, without question, makes the case for our national priorities. And our national priorities should certainly be education and should be our youth. And I can attest to you that both Senator Rice, and I, and others are committed to moving forward the agenda of our youth. And our youth are participating in this process, and that's why it's important that we have everyone to the table.

In the audience I want to recognize that we have our Camden High School students who are part of the IPLE course, under the direction of Coach Hanson; IPLE being the Institute of Political and Legal Education. We also have students here from Woodrow Wilson High School's IPLE, under the direction of Mr. Ober. (phonetic spelling)

With our distance learning and those who are tuning in to this public hearing, we have Cooper, Hatch Middle School, we also have our Creative Arts High School, the Dr. Charles Brimm Medical Arts High School, the Riletta Twyne Cream Family School, and MetEast High School

-- again all of our young people participating. And that is to be commended, and I ask that you give our young people a round of applause. (applause)

Continuing to move the agenda, because this is an important issue, I'd like to call my colleague on the local level to the podium, Councilman Angel Fuentes. He serves as our President and is very much supportive of the Camden Board of Education, making sure that educational opportunities are afforded to all within the City of Camden and that our environment is conducive to learning. I know he was here a moment ago. I'm not sure--

Yes, Councilman, please.

**COUNCILMAN ANGEL FUENTES:** Good morning.

SENATOR RICE: Good morning.

SENATOR REDD: Good morning, Councilman.

COUNCILMAN FUENTES: Let me just say, first and foremost, on behalf of my colleagues, thank you, particularly to Senator Dana Redd for your leadership and for underscoring the need to have this hearing in Camden City -- and I'm sure throughout the State of New Jersey.

Let me also thank Senator Rice for really supporting our Senator in the 5th District.

I just want to say good morning to the Mayor; the Superintendent; Ms. Sara Davis, the President of Camden City Board of Education; as well as to the Commissioner and everyone; and Judge Davis.

Camden High is up on the hill. And I graduated actually a little bit down the hill, not too far from here, at Woodrow Wilson High School, back in 1980.

Let me just say a couple of comments. And I would hope and pray that everyone who is in this audience, as well as all the students who are watching us -- to say thank you for the courage to support this legislation. Indeed, it is badly needed, not just in Camden City but throughout the State of New Jersey.

Community builds relationships as well as responsibility. But we, at times, need the support and the help of our legislators and, yes, our Governor. And you have undertaken that challenge. To know that yes, there is -- and I dare say -- a crisis, not just in Camden, but particularly educating our youth.

I think the Congressman stated so eloquently that the more educated you are, the more successful you will be. And that is true through life. But at the same time, I think we have a responsibility, not as a community but as elected officials, to assist with these buildings, these facilities. Think about that. Ninety years old -- Camden High School -- 90 years old. And we ought to not just think about it, but do something -- and you did. And we appreciate that. Because it is resounding around the State of New Jersey.

I know that many taxpayers are extremely pleased. And yes, there are those who still have their doubts. But I know that through this oversight, you will look after the taxpayers but at the same time look after our youth. They are our main reason as to why we are here and as to why you, in different positions, care so much about our kids. So children ought to learn, they will learn because of you. You have taken that step.

A couple of months ago, I supported this legislation. So on behalf of my colleagues, I just want to say thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you.

Moving right along, I have to highlight the fact that this would not have been possible -- this public hearing here in the auditorium of Camden High School -- had it not been for this next individual. Since assuming the seat of the Senator in the 5th District, I have been in communication with this young lady, and she has certainly been in communication with me on issues of education, but, more importantly, doing something that is beneficial to the youth. And she is willing to fight the good fight, as am I.

Please welcome our Board President, Ms. Sara Davis, for welcoming remarks. (applause)

MS. DAVIS: Good morning, everyone.

I am extremely excited about us having the opportunity to have a public hearing -- a State public hearing -- here in the City of Camden. And I'm even more so excited that it is in one of our facilities, the great Castle on the Hill. I think that is one of the most exciting things that has happened here in the City of Camden.

And, Mayor, I don't know if we've had a public hearing on anything here in the City of Camden before. But it is certainly something for us to be proud of.

I would like to say thank you to Senator Redd for her tenacity, along with Senator Rice, to push forth this legislation that would include Camden in this first round of school construction funding.

We're pleased to have with us this morning the Mayor of Camden City; Judge Davis, the COO of Camden City; Commissioner Davy -- it's good to see you here this morning; and as I go down the line, Mr.

Weiner, Mr. Hart, and of course the Superintendent. I don't think there is anyone down there that I have missed.

But I would also like to recognize, in the audience, School Board Members. We have our Vice President, who is in the audience, Ms. Dunbar-Bey. We have another School Board Member, Ms. Martha Wilson. And we have another School Board Member, Ms. Nyeema Watson, who has joined us here this morning.

I would also like to thank the students and the schools that are participating by way of teleconferencing. It is great that the students are able to participate and will be able to give some of their ideas about what is happening as far as the schools in Camden.

As I said, I'm excited about it. I think that somewhere along the line I'm supposed to make some testimony. But, those of you who are on the School Board know, when I get talking about education it is sometimes hard to stop talking, especially if I'm talking to you on the phone.

Right, Nyeema? (affirmative response) (laughter)

So hopefully I'm going to try to contain myself, because I am extremely happy about what we're going to be doing here.

The only thing I would ask of the Committee that is sponsoring these hearings is that we get to moving on building the schools. Because with the economic crisis that we have in front of us right now, I hope the money won't dry up. But the value of the dollar is going to decrease. So we need to move fast, I mean like yesterday.

And I would like to say also just one other thing.

Congressman Andrews, I recognize you also. What you have said is true. We do produce some outstanding students. And those of you who have gone through the tour this morning -- this is just one example of the facilities that we have to try to prepare our kids for the 21st century. If we had better facilities, then just imagine the products that we would really be able to send out into the world. If you think we're good now, give us some more technology and better facilities so that we can implement programs that are on the cutting edge of things for the 21st century.

Thank you so much, all of you, for coming out this morning.

And I'm looking forward to hearing some of the things that the children have to say. Because it is children that are going to lead us in the future.

Thank you so much for being here. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: I have been informed that we have a very special guest in the audience. She is not a guest. She's at home. She is someone who has had a profound impact on education and on the lives of many students who refer to her as their mother. I have been privileged to work with her during my lifetime as her chief of staff.

Riletta Cream-- She's not shy, but I think she's a little emotional right now. But I think it's very important that you come forward as the principal of this high school that transformed -- not just walking the halls as the principal here, but really making a difference in the lives of families and youth.

Please welcome the legendary Freeholder Riletta L. Cream.  
(applause)

**FREEHOLDER RILETTA L. CREAM:** (speaking from audience) Good morning, everyone.

As Dana mentioned to you, she invited me here, and that's why I came. I am very emotional about this place.

I graduated, Judge Davis, prior to you. I graduated from this High School in 1944. And our class was the last February graduating class to come out of this wonderful High School. And to come back and be its principal was the joy of my life. This is the first time I've been in this auditorium since 1987. So when I came here, I really -- I just felt very, very emotional. Otherwise, I would be up there with my granddaughter, Dana Redd, who I love very dearly.

And so I want to thank all of you for coming today. And I hope that out of this wonderful meeting will come the things that all of us want -- that this beautiful Castle on the Hill remain standing with all the necessary accoutrements that are needed to make it, once again, a great high school.

Thank you for inviting me, Dana.

And I'm hoping that all of you will have wonderful things to say about what is going to happen.

Thank you very much. (applause)

**SENATOR REDD:** To our State officials who are here with us in this process, and to the youth, you're witnessing history and people coming together for this very important cause. This is really about a movement of doing what is right and restoring places like Camden High, the places that are of historical significance all across the State of New Jersey.

Finally, before we move into our presentations coming from our Commissioner of Education and followed by our Chief Executive Officer from the SDA, we're going to hear from our Superintendent. She is new to the team, about a year and six months on the ground in the City of Camden. And she comes to us from Philadelphia, but certainly comes to us with a lot of enthusiasm and passion for education -- Dr. Bessie LeFra Young. (applause)

**SUPERINTENDENT BESSIE LeFRA YOUNG, Ph.D:**  
I appreciate your acknowledging me, but I first of all want to say that I give honor to all the dignitaries who are seated here. And I don't want to take the time to call each of you individually by name; but I also want to recognize my students, and my teachers, and including the principal, who gave up part of their school day to entertain a large family gathering today. And it takes a lot of work and investment of time to pull off what you're experiencing at this moment.

I am also proud to recognize those members of my administrative team, my assistant superintendents and my deputy, because without them I would probably not have lasted the year-and-a-half that I have served here.

But I want to say that it has been an awesome experience and an exciting experience. Because for those of you who do not know, I am not new to this district. And yes, I may have served some time in Philadelphia, but I have lived in New Jersey all of 50-some years. When I say 50-some years, I go back to the 1950s and wonder, are we still in the age of civil rights enough to understand that with every education act that has been reauthorized -- reauthorized for what purpose, for how long, and



for what purpose -- that we serve now. I say -- because I look at my young people, and just as Ms. Davis has stated and many of you, our students have natural-born talents, and skills, and abilities, and they're able to compete nationally around these United States. And often the recognition doesn't come. But I often wonder what is on their mind on any given day, at any given time, when they have to leave their facility, go somewhere else to compete, and realize that in walking through those doors, they're walking in mansions that others have built for others that feel that they deserve more than what we deserve; only to come back home to have to entertain and open their doors, because home is where the heart is. And they do it without shame, and they do it without apologizing. Because what I do-- And I understand and I realize about them that they have resilience, resilience that many of you have given to them because they have learned to stand, and they were built to last. And this castle will remain on the hill, because it is what it is, it is the castle that shall not be denied. My young people are here because they are born with a purpose that sometimes we don't often understand. Some people will say, "Well, how in the world, why in the world would they continue to do the things that they do?" It is because of folks like you. Every one of you have a responsibility to each of you -- I mean to each of us. And it is because of authority, accountability, and responsibility that we must stand in the gap, we must hold them up, we must lift them up. But I say, with every act of education -- as we authorize -- we have to accept the responsibility. And no longer is it okay for us to think that we have 20, or 30, or 40, or 50 more years to go. And I want to say, with some of the dates that I have seen that some of my schools will be constructed, those dates aren't acceptable either.

But we're going to work together through a cooperation and collaboration to make those things happen that young people deserve, because it is their birthright.

I thank you, and welcome. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Dr. Young.

And since we're in her house -- the Principal of this school -- it is more than fitting to have her come and give remarks about the school, but also about our presence in being here. She has been a wonderful, wonderful person. And I know she cares about the kids in our system.

Ms. Marilyn Jamal. (applause)

**M A R I L Y N   S.   J A M A L:** (speaking away from microphone) Good morning, good morning, good morning. (laughter)

And can you tell from the enthusiasm of my good morning how excited that we've all come to the dais? And I don't want to call names, because I know I would forget one or two. To the dais, thank you.

To our distinguished guests-- And I want to share with you that I was fine until I saw the queen of the Castle, Ms. Riletta Cream. (applause) So if I (indiscernible) a little bit, know that I was overcome with emotion -- that unless you stand in my shoes as the educational leader of this fine building you won't understand. It takes one who stood here to understand what I am going through emotionally. It is a great day. It was a great day with this assembly. But with her voice, God has blessed (indiscernible).

And I just want to say thank you to the staff of Camden High School, to the community, certainly to the fine teachers of our community. And what a beautiful picture, the community. From the White House, to

the State House, to the courthouse, to the boardroom, to civil administration, and down to the children who represent this fine institution. It is with great pride and pleasure to stand before you.

And just to add on to some of the things folks have said, I just want to say welcome. Welcome to the Castle on the Hill, filled with pride and a tradition that we are so honored that you are not going to let be destroyed. Yes, we have fallen, but as the Mayor said, we have not been destroyed. And with that, that is an opportunity to rebuild.

So I thank you for the opportunity. I'm going to get out of your way because you have many, many, many speakers to hear from. But from my staff -- and as I said, they are a great staff. When I forget something, they remind me.

We have guests in the house for the very first time. So on behalf of our parents, Senator, and now our grandparents, Senator -- because we have a Grandparents' Club here in Camden High School.

As I say when I make an announcement: Once you are a visitor, and then you become our friend.

To Senator Dana Redd, to Commissioner Davy (witness gives gifts) (applause). And, of course, our Mayor, who is always welcome. We thank you from the Camden High School staff and student population.

Thank you. (applause)

I need to say something that some students shared with me, if I can. Yesterday we had a writing activity in all of our classes in reference to the things that the students wanted to say. And they shared some things. I just want to pinpoint some things -- they're excited, they're happy, they're (indiscernible) the tradition will be preserved. But they want it to be a

campus that represents the new millennium, the 21st century. We want to restore this -- that's their wish.

But they want a campus where the creative arts, pre-medical, the vocational career technical component, and all those components will be behind the Castle on the Hill.

So on behalf of the students, make it so -- so, as they said, any student in the City of Camden, be they Woodrow Wilson or Camden High-- In fact, they have a name for the school: Camden High Community School. And I'm listening to them. So those are their words. I can't share everything with you. So keep them on board, hear what they have to say. For this is going to be something that we will need from them. So keep them on board, listen to their requests -- okay? -- and maybe you and I can do whatever we can do.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: As we move forward in the agenda, we're going to have two presentations for our officials. And those of you who are in the auditorium, I would ask that the mikes that are the smaller mikes -- that you would please use those to speak into so that we can have that as part of our transcription and part of the testimony that will be embedded in a document and distributed to the public, for those who would like to have it for the record.

I'm going to first introduce our Commissioner of Education, who has a passion for students across the state and has worked very closely not only with Senator Rice, but certainly with myself as a new Senator in this legislative session. She has a presentation that I think we will all find very informative and very engaging.

At this time, Commissioner Davy, we'll now hear from you.

**COMMISSIONER LUCILLE E. DAVY:** Thank you very much. (applause)

I want to thank the members of the Subcommittee on School Construction and the Joint Committee on the Public Schools, certainly, for hosting this very important meeting on school construction. It is one of a series of hearings that will be held throughout the state. And it gives us an opportunity to talk about school construction and the grant process that is underway. And certainly I want to especially thank Senator Redd. I will tell you personally that the children of this community and this district have a very serious advocate working on their behalf, and they're very, very fortunate, indeed. I also want to thank Senator Rice. I've been working with him now for several years on issues of education that matter to all of us.

I want to apologize in advance, because right after my presentation I'm going to have to leave. And I apologize for that. But I will leave you in very good hands with several members of our staff from the Department of Education, including our Chief of Staff, who is sitting to my left, your right, John Hart; as well as Jessica deKoninck, who is our Director of Legislative Services; and three members of our Office of School Facilities staff, Bernie Piaia, Susan Kutner, and Frank LoDolce. So they'll be here not only listening to the testimony that's given, but also here to answer any of the questions that the Senators may have as the hearing progresses.

As you all know, on July 9, 2008, Governor Corzine signed Public Law 2008 Chapter 39 into law, which made three major changes to the existing Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act. First of

all, that Act authorized an additional \$3.9 billion for the State's share of approved school facilities projects. That, of course, was a very significant step in order to allow the State to continue to build schools in our urban districts, and certainly to be able to provide funds for districts throughout the state to help support school construction projects. Of that amount, \$2.9 billion is directed to those districts that are known as the SDA districts. And as Scott Weiner from the School Development Authority will discuss later, the Department of Education is working closely with the SDA and those districts to review those projects, projects just like the one that will take place here at Camden High School, or the Castle on the Hill as we've heard so many refer to it this morning. These are very important priorities throughout the state. And certainly this high school project is an important priority for this community. We are grateful to have the input of not only the community members and the adults in this district, but, even more importantly, the students of this community.

As we develop a project that will serve the needs of the children in order to prepare them for the 21st century, we're also excited about the opportunities that the Department expects to share with this school district going forward to bring some innovative programs -- additional innovative programs in, such as technology-oriented high school programs for the students of this community. And we'll be working with them in the weeks and months to come on those kinds of opportunities.

In addition to the \$2.9 billion for the SDA districts, there's also \$1 billion, including \$50 million for vocational schools, that will be grants that are provided to what are called *regular operating districts*, or ROD districts, for their facilities projects throughout the state.

Secondly, unlike the prior allocation of facilities funds to non-Abbott districts, which in the past were distributed simply on a first-come, first-served basis without regard to the facilities needs or conditions in those communities, this new round of funding includes a prioritization process for the allocation of available funds. This process is based on the determination of critical need and in accordance with priority project categories that are outlined in the law.

And then finally, the law includes a requirement for the establishment of a process for an annual allocation of grant funding. And Susan Kutner, the Director of Planning from the Office of School Facilities at the Department of Education, will speak to you in just a few minutes about the details of that prioritization process.

By letter dated August 22, 2008, the Department of Education notified all school districts in the state that applications for the first round of regular operating district grant funding would begin to be accepted. There are regulations that are currently in development that will be published shortly in the New Jersey Register prior to the application deadline for the first grant allocation. In the meantime, the Department has issued guidance to the districts so that they can very quickly begin the work that is needed to prepare their grant applications. It was our goal to do, as Congressman Andrews talked about earlier -- and that was to get this process underway as quickly as possible, not only because our districts and our children need those facilities as quickly as possible, but also because, from an economic standpoint, the sooner we can begin making those investments the better it will be for our State economy.

Based on the Long-Range Facilities Plans that are approved to date, the Department is aware that there is a very significant accrued demand for school facilities projects, especially those that involve health and safety or capital maintenance, in districts throughout the state. And that, too, is another reason why it is important for us to move this process forward without delay.

It is very important that every district have an up-to-date, complete, and approved Long-Range Facilities Plan. It is our hope and expectation that this new availability of funds will encourage districts to do just that. Because in order for the Department of Education to approve and fund a project, the district must have an approved Long-Range Facilities Plan and that project must be part of their Long-Range Facilities Plan.

The Department of Education remains committed to providing assistance and guidance to all districts in this process, including those who do not have completed Long-Range Facilities Plans but are interested in applying for grants. We will certainly work with them to get that work accomplished.

Since grant funds will now be awarded on an annual basis, districts whose long-range plans are not yet complete, or who have project plans that are not finalized and still need additional work, will still have an opportunity to get that done before we do the next round of funding.

We are particularly grateful for the opportunity to be here today to speak with all of you, because it gives us yet another chance to provide information to key stakeholders that grant funding will be available and to also encourage districts to apply. Our outreach efforts are ongoing, and we are planning to have to provide an overview of the process for



education stakeholders in the next couple of weeks to help us to continue to get this word out. We have held several meetings throughout the state -- we have held meetings with districts, we have held meetings with legislators and other stakeholders. But we will continue to do that work.

Susan Kutner from our Department's Office of Facilities will now provide an overview of the details of the grant process.

Susan, would you please come forward to the center table and make your presentation?

Thank you.

**S U S A N   K U T N E R:** Good afternoon.

I'm just going to fill in some of the details of the grant program for the regular operating school districts in the state.

As Commissioner Davy said, the grant program has been revamped, and it addressed, really, the greatest needs -- facility needs in this state. And it's also structured so that every district can have the opportunity to apply for grant money.

In the past, as you know, it was first come, first served, and so we've readjusted to address some of the problems. Now there are project eligibility requirements that only certain projects will qualify for grant money. There's a prioritization process. And also, probably most importantly, there's fixed allocations so that a district doesn't have to worry that if they can't mobilize this year, that there will be no money next year.

And some of the details first about the prioritization and what would qualify for grant consideration is, first and foremost, the project has to be 100 percent eligible for State support. And the importance of that is to make sure that the money goes to the greatest needs, that projects that

are critical in a district get funded and not to offset other things that might not be so critical to delivering educational programs.

And then we've developed three prioritization categories with different scopes of work. The first, and most critical -- what we call a *Level 1* -- are the things that you really need to keep your house in order, things to keep your schools operational: mechanical, plumbing, electrical systems, having a tight building skin, a roof that doesn't leak, building code issues, handicap accessibility compliance, security and communication systems; and then also critical program mandates accommodating special-needs students, and also preschool early childhood expansion programs. So these would be projects that fit these -- would be in the very first level, which we would expect to be funded with each allocation.

The second of three levels expands it to pretty much looking at renovation work, what it would take to comprehensively renew an existing school and address program needs. Also, we would be looking at technology infrastructure upgrades. And if a school is overcrowded -- that if you needed to build additional classrooms so that you could maintain class sizes in accordance with your district practices -- would also fall in Level 2.

Finally, the third level. These are the big projects. These are the new schools, major additions, comprehensive renovations. And these projects would be prioritized very similar to the SDA district projects -- that we would look at things in a district, such as educational adequacy of the facilities to deliver programs, overcrowding, building age, code issues, and so forth -- so that these would be prioritized in order.

As I said, it's obviously the expectation that Level 1 projects would be funded. And then, depending upon demand, whether Level 2; and then how far the list of Level 3 projects would be funded.

In terms of the allocation: In order to quickly get this grant program moving, we've scheduled two for this first year, and they're timed to coordinate with the fixed referendum dates, the first being for April 2009 and the second for September 2009. It also accommodates Summer work within these. And districts are welcome to apply for all project types whether they're going for a referendum or debt service -- or to consider debt service. There's \$200 million allocated for the first allocation. Obviously, it's fairly quick. Most districts that already have applied already have been thinking of doing projects. If the \$200 million is not used for this allocation, it would be moved to the next allocation for September. And moving forward past 2009, we anticipate at least two allocations per year.

The districts were notified of the first allocation on August 22. There is detailed information about the guidelines, the criteria for the grant program posted on the Department's Web site. The critical date that we would like to get out to everyone is November 20 -- is the deadline for the first grant application. This is important so that we have time to look at all of them, prioritize them, and let the districts know whether they're eligible for the grant money.

The second allocation, which would be for Summer work and the September 2009, is due January 31, 2009, to the Department. And it really-- The new thing for districts is that they do have submission deadlines for the grants. That's something different. Before, it was a rolling, ongoing process. And they must adhere to these submission

deadlines. But as I said, there's fixed allocations. If you know districts that are concerned that they're not making these first two, there will be a third allocation, there will be a fourth allocation. And we also certainly did not want to create any more work for school districts. The submission requirements to the Department of Ed and the mechanics of what a district needs to do, to do a project, have not changed. So there's no more burden there.

And finally, for districts that wish to pursue projects that don't qualify for a grant, the school facilities funding formulas have not changed. They still would be eligible for debt service funding if they don't pursue grant funding.

Today, we have 75 grant applications from 28 districts right now at the Department. And we look forward to receiving many more, particularly as these applications and allocations roll out.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Yes, we want to thank you for the presentation.

I believe we have questions coming from Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Yes, I was going to send a memo in reference to this. But, Commissioner, you can still get back to the Joint Committee, through the Chair, in writing. It was brought to my attention that the ROD districts, regular operating districts -- that we're implementing the grant program, but we're implementing it without codifying, and we're doing this, I think, according to the memos we have here, by way of memorandums and correspondence. Are we violating the intent and the mandate of the law that we wrote for this? We put a billion dollars into the pot, and our

members argued over and over again that we cannot address problems in the Abbott districts unless we address problems in the non-Abbotts, because they are the same. There may be less of them, but they have those problems.

So could someone tell me why we are in violation, or what we--  
You know--

COMMISSIONER DAVY: Yes. The regulations are drafted and are in the process of being promulgated, Senator. But what we did, in order to begin to get this process moving so that school districts could prepare their grant applications, is we issued guidance that mirrors the regulations. We will have the regulations filed and made effective before the grant application process closes. In fact, they're going to be promulgated shortly. They'll be published in the New Jersey Register, which is what's required before the application deadline is finalized. And it is our understanding that that will meet the legal requirements. We checked with the AG's Office on that.

SENATOR RICE: Can you let us know also in writing how many of these ROD districts have not submitted long-range plans yet, and how many have, and exactly who they are and where they are?

COMMISSIONER DAVY: Yes, we can certainly do that. There is a subset of them that do not have approved Long-Range Facilities Plans. And, again, it was our feeling that instead of making the whole state wait until everybody did a plan -- because some of them, frankly, don't have a lot of incentive. They may not have projects, it may not be a priority. We didn't want all the health and safety, and capital maintenance projects to wait. So because we're doing this in allocations -- yearly allocations --

we're assured that not all the money will be used in the first year. So districts that do not have an approved plan will still have an opportunity, and they won't lose their opportunity to be able to secure funds from the grant process in the future. But we'll provide that information to you as quickly as we can.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. Like 10 days?

COMMISSIONER DAVY: No, tomorrow or Friday. I think we can probably generate a list later today.

SENATOR RICE: Sure.

But one of the issues -- I know you're going to be leaving.

Send us, the Committee -- because we have new members -- the definition of *emergent*. We changed that process. The SCC used to address this, and now emergent is over in your shop. And I want to make certain that we understand *emergent*. See, we toured this building today, and talked to the students, and they're sometimes the best people to talk to. I think there may be some emergent needs here. But I recalled the experience that you and I shared in Irvington, where what was accepted by SDA -- at that time SCC -- as an emergent project-- Once it got over to your shop, it was no longer emergent, even though PEOSHA was fining everybody, every day to the tune of \$40,000.

And so I guess what I want you to do is go back and look at the definition and send it to us. But you may have to, if it does not incorporate certain language, redefine *emergent*, or we'll do it by legislation. I think if PEOSHA, or the health agencies, or certain agencies have actually gone in -- that we can't control -- and actually penalized the school district for those kinds of violations, it means that there are dollars over here that basically

they qualify for. It's not being released. We're creating -- we're compounding our economic problem in that district.

So my point is, I want to make sure *emergent* means that if PEOSHA is fining -- and they're legitimately fining, we can't push them back -- then we have a problem. Do you understand what I'm saying? If it's lead, and the Health Department is shutting them down, that's emergent. Regardless of where we have them in the process, that's emergent, particularly if SDA has already looked at it, came forth and said that we think it qualifies for that.

So would you do that for us?

**J O H N J. H A R T:** We certainly can, Senator.

And not only will we provide you the definition, but we can also provide for you the process. The process has changed a bit. We can do that for you, again, at the same time we give you the other information.

**SENATOR RICE:** Okay.

**SENATOR REDD:** Thank you, Senator Rice.

Thank you, Commissioner Davy.

Do you have any concluding comments before you depart? Again, thank you for coming down to kick off our public hearing. We appreciate your support.

**COMMISSIONER DAVY:** No. I appreciate the opportunity. And, again, you're in very good hands with my capable staff.

Thank you.

**SENATOR REDD:** We look forward to working with you to implement this legislation.

**COMMISSIONER DAVY:** Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Next, we will hear from our Chief Executive Officer of our School Development Authority. Again, he's very knowledgeable about SDAs, but school construction on the whole -- brings that wealth of knowledge to those of us in our legislative districts so that we can advance your priorities and your needs for your young people.

Please welcome Scott Weiner. (applause)

**S C O T T A. W E I N E R:** Thank you, Senator Redd, and thank you, Senator Rice, everyone who is in the audience and on television.

It's an honor to be here today.

I want to take a few minutes today to talk about the School Construction Program as it is now statewide, as we prepare to take the responsibility for managing and deploying the almost \$4 billion worth of resources which the Legislature and the Governor have provided to the State, through us; and in that process, talk a little bit about some specific initiatives here in Camden.

To set a context for the discussion of the School Construction Program, I want to talk a little bit about, from a statewide perspective and also in Camden, some things that have taken place and that are taking place. This September, last month, saw the opening of 16 new facilities statewide that have been managed by the SDA: 12 brand new school facilities and four major additions or renovations. That's on top of 22 similar openings last year. That impacted over 30,000 children in our state; a significant number, but just the beginning of what will be accomplished now with these new authorizations.

We currently have 28 active construction projects in the field, representing over a billion dollars of work in progress. That's a significant



investment statewide. And as Congressman Andrews mentioned, as the Governor has consistently talked about, it provides an opportunity not just for important infrastructure, but an important economic stimulus for our state. All of those projects come on top of almost 500 projects statewide that have been completed since the start of the program itself.

More locally, and importantly here in Camden, of course, we have the demonstration project, the joint venture, if you will, that was done with the Boys & Girls Club, that led to the opening of the Catto Elementary School. We currently have four active projects in Camden.

I know that I may be telling you things that you all know, but I think it's an important context.

These four projects -- the Dudley School, the H.B. Wilson School -- excuse me -- the Early Childhood Development Center, and Morgan Village, which went out to bid just last month -- excuse me, last week -- represent over \$160 million worth of work that will be taking place here in the city and will impact well over 2,000 students. Two of those facilities, the Dudley and the Wilson School, will be open and ready to accept students 11 months from now.

Now, on top of those projects it's with great anticipation that everyone in Camden and all of us at the SDA look forward to three new projects that will be funded with that multi-billion dollar authorization we've all spoken about -- work here in Camden High School, the Pyne Poynt Middle School, the Lanning Square Elementary School. And in a few minutes, I'm going to talk about how we take the collaborative process of the signing of legislation -- the passage and signing of legislation -- that makes money available, to actually getting a school built -- the steps that

will take place, and how everybody in this room and this community will be able to have a participatory role in that.

Senator Rice, in his comments, used the word *accountability*. And I think if there is only one word that we wanted to use for the School Development Authority over the past two-and-a-half years, it's the sense of accountability – on a program sense, on an individual employee sense -- the accountability which we all have to make efficient use of public resources and provide it in a way that achieves all the goals and results, not just the building of buildings, but the enabling of schools and the economic stimulus that we've talked about.

Over the past two-and-a-half years, we have set the foundation for what would be done over the next three or four years. And members of this Committee and Subcommittee have heard me talk about a number of those initiatives over the years. Prior to today, we've been talking about them in terms of things that we are doing or things that we will be doing. I want to talk about them in the context now of how these tools and how these initiatives will, in fact, help make real the expectations of the people of New Jersey.

Importantly, we've established critical fiscal controls. The Authority has an audit committee that meets monthly. And every month, as one of its principal tasks, that audit committee, made up of members of the board, hear a report from management, myself and my colleagues, as to our forecast of spending -- not just for that month or some short period, but we reforecast our entire commitment of the portfolio of projects we have under construction or planned for construction. It's one of the important underpinnings to make sure that what happened three years ago, when

programs and schools had to stop midstream because the program ran out of money, will not happen again.

We also started a system of project charters. This is the important planning building block of how schools will now be developed, designed, and implemented through the School Construction Program. In the past, projects were started without the active participation -- the Board doing what every business does, which is allocating capital.

Now, after a planning process -- I'll describe a little more in a minute -- we as management have to go to our Board with a budget of both money and time. And that has to be approved by the Board before we can start spending money. And we're held accountable, not just by our Board but by the public, and I know certainly this Committee, to meet those budgets and meet those timeframes. And that's our charter process.

We've strengthened the management team. We really have a whole new team. Some are some familiar faces but new responsibilities. Many of them are with me here today: Jerry Murphy, who is our Chief Operating Officer, certainly no stranger to Camden, a former resident of Camden; Andrew Yosha, who heads up as Vice President of Program Planning; Gina Bleck, who many of you have seen at community meetings, who is our Vice President of Project Management. She and her staff are the human beings responsible -- the men and women responsible of making sure the projects actually get built and done on time. And also Jane Kelly, who is our Vice President of Corporate Governance and Compliance. And members of their staff are here also and will be available both during and after the hearing to answer any questions you might have.

We've strengthened our operations. And more important, we've moved away from a model that was implemented at the start of the program with a project management firm, a large construction company that would do everything on behalf of the program. And we learned the lesson that might have been obvious but it was painful for the State, which was: it's often better to bring things in-house.

So we stripped away the many responsibilities of the project management firms and have assumed direct responsibility for some of those functions. Some of that would be the review of designs to make sure the designs, when they're submitted to the DCA, are the designs that we're proud of, that we're willing to be held accountable for. We believe that will expedite the approval process.

Through Gina's leadership and other members of the organization, we have published a design manual that sets forth performance standards and allows for creativity while setting standards that every school will obtain. And, in fact, every school that's built now with this -- in compliance of this manual will be a high-performance, energy-efficient school that would qualify for LEAD certification.

Similarly, we are in the process of developing a real estate manual that will give guidance -- not just to school boards and to our own staff, but to the community as a whole -- in how do we go about the process of selecting real estate -- a very important topic, and I know one that is of concern now in this community and communities around the state.

We have tried to make our operations much more transparent. We are proud of the fact that not only do we post notices of our Board meetings on our Web site, but we were the first agency to, in fact, produce

all of the backup materials that are considered by the Board members. So that is available to the public. And that was recently recognized by the Inspector General in some correspondence to the Governor as a model of best practice that could be followed throughout the state.

Speaking of the Inspector General, one of the other changes is that of oversight, something which Senator Rice and Senator Redd mentioned, and which this Committee exercises. Not only does this Committee exercise it -- I think, Senators, in my two-and-a-half, almost three years in this position, I have appeared before this Committee probably eight to 10 times. So there has been a real dialogue and a collaboration as to what this program should look like, what the expectations of the Legislature are, and our ability to meet them. It's been very collaborative. But now through recent legislation, we also publish a biannual report. And that report, twice a year, has the program coming back to the Legislature saying, "Here's what we said we'd do, and here is how well we succeeded in doing it, and here's what we're going to do during the next six-month period."

And probably one of the most important, if not the most important, thing on top of accountability has been collaboration: collaboration with the Department of Education, as the Commissioner noted before; collaboration with local school boards and governing bodies -- all in an effort to make the school development process, from its conception to the day that that school opens, one that really reflects the goals, and aspirations, and desires of the state as a whole and the particular community.

And now we can talk about all of those activities, not just as initiatives, but how we are going to apply them in the utilization of the \$3.9 billion that's been provided. And as we think about the deployment of those resources, I want everyone to know that we at the SDA are very mindful of the comments the Governor made, of Senator Rice and Senator Redd during the hearings, and their colleagues. They were echoed by Congressman Andrews today. And that is: these funds are an important investment in the greater communities of New Jersey. And they have to be viewed as an investment and, particularly in these days, they have to be viewed as a resource for economic stimulus. And over its history, the State Schools Construction Program has had a significant economic impact on the State since 2002. During that time, up until this recent round of funding, almost 17,000 construction jobs have been created, 33.8 million man hours -- or 5.6 -- I should say person hours, annually, of employment opportunities were established. Of that, almost 27 percent went to minority workers. And of \$3.6 billion in total construction contracts, 39 percent went to SBEs, small business enterprises.

Recently, as part of the research behind the \$3.9 billion authorization, a study was conducted by Rutgers University which estimated that an additional 9,000 jobs could be created annually, and 5,000 of those jobs would be in the construction field. Two-and-a-half billion dollars of income is expected to be generated. All of that -- and I know it's a lot of numbers -- underscores the fact that this investment that we're making could have a critical impact on the quality of lives not just of students, which is the core issue, but all -- everybody in New Jersey.

Now, we -- and the we is the SDA, the DOE, and local school boards -- are challenged with the responsibility of not just expeditiously planning for and dispersing those funds, but doing it prudently and ensuring that the schools that we're building today, the schools that are being launched now in 2008 and 2009, represent the best, the smartest schools for the communities of today and for the future. And while speed is important, so too is ensuring that those schools built are the correct ones. Some of the designs that are literally on the shelf have not been taken off the shelf and are on the table for funding dated back to 2003 and 2004. And while that doesn't sound like a long time ago, they're based on long-range facility planning, demographics, and community needs that were first reported in the year 2000, some eight years ago.

So in order to address that, the SDA, together with the Department of Education, has initiated a series of planning meetings. And we are meeting with every district -- every SDA district in the state to review their Long-Range Facilities Plan, to review the projects that have been funded, and to collaboratively develop a schedule that will result in the most prudent yet expeditious deployment of those resources and, importantly, getting kids behind desks in these new facilities.

We understand the frustrations that accompany this. We understand that communities, when they heard their school was being identified for funding, felt, and wanted, that schools could go into the ground the next day. But as we roll up our sleeves together, we're realizing that we could do it expeditiously, but it has to be done smart.

Now, back in July when the SDA Board adopted its capital plan for the deployment of these resources, we used planning estimates of when

we thought construction would begin on these projects and when that construction would be completed. We used planning estimates and we provide that information because we wanted to give comfort and assurance to everyone in New Jersey that we had a sense of the amount of money that would really be needed to complete these projects. And when we said that 52 projects could be built with the \$2.9 billion of SDA funding, we had a confidence in that we wouldn't run into the problems of July of 2005, where projects had to be suspended. We're now taking those planning estimates to the next level of certainty, working in collaboration with school districts and the Department of Education.

We want to make sure, as I said, that the schools are the right ones. So I know, for example, in Camden there has been a great deal of understanding of local concern about the time horizon that was provided for Lanning Square. One of the issues that was involved there was: How long will it take to acquire the land? Now, our planning estimates, based upon all of our experiences and being conservative said we wanted to estimate that that was going to take between 18 and 24 months. That becomes important in a fiscal planning point of view, because that means we're going to anticipate the impact of inflation for that period. In the past, that wasn't done. Based upon the meetings that were held earlier this week, we now believe that that land acquisition process can be speeded up by at least six months, maybe more. That's the kinds of things that will be happening over time.

And I know, Senators Redd and Rice, that you will be among the first who will be asking us frequently -- not every six months -- how we are doing on those schedules.



So I want to conclude my remarks today at that point. I know that there are probably a lot of specific questions about the projects here in Camden or in the area of Gloucester also. I'll be here for a little bit. I have to apologize also. I have to depart a little after 1:00. But members of our staff will be here to answer questions, both during and after the hearing.

And again, Senators, I thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Mr. Weiner.

Just as a comment from my position -- and I'm not sure if Senator Rice has any follow-up questions.

One, I'm glad to hear you cover the fact that not only does this \$3.9 billion represent an investment in education, but it is certainly an economic stimulus, and the jobs that are slated to be created as a result of school construction moving forward certainly is important in our national economy and our State economy.

Local hires -- I know Senator Rice, and myself, and the small business enterprises -- we want to make sure that those individuals have opportunities to, again, participate in the school construction projects. And I'm not sure that there is anything else you would want to add for our public that is here today about the focus on local hires and the focus on small business enterprises, now that the SDA is overseeing, in a more transparent but also with more accountability mechanisms in place -- how we can move that agenda forward, if you will. I think that's important. We're hearing that across the State of New Jersey.

MR. WEINER: Let me just make a couple of comments for now, in recognition of time.

I want to assure everyone that this is a very important issue for us. It's one we take very seriously. It's one I think we've had a great deal of success on. As we begin to deploy these resources, the SDA, in conjunction with other agencies -- the Department of Labor and others -- will be holding public information sessions to not just inform but also assist local business enterprises so they can become part of the supply chain that builds these schools. We'll be providing information about how you can contract with us. And we also try to help facilitate other relationships with other contractors.

I think it's also important to recognize that because of the nature of the construction industry, it's not always possible to directly link employment opportunities from a community with a school that's being built in the community. That's our goal. But the realistic goal that we've adopted is, we never, ever, ever want anybody to walk in front of a school construction site managed by the SDA and wonder to themselves, "Why can't I or my family take advantage of this economic opportunity?" And they may not be working in Camden, but we're going to help find them a job somewhere in the deployment of these billions of dollars. And we view that as a critical part of our responsibility. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you for your response.

Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Let me say that it's very interesting, the response that we got from Scott. And that's why I hate to see him leave. I didn't even talk to him, and I'm going to just -- on your last remarks -- just read you something that I wrote that I wanted to raise with you.

My statement is based on the children and family members of the unemployed. How can our kids walk past these sites without seeing us and going to them? So you can understand that we've been working with Scott.

My question: The Congressman indicated that this is an economic engine that drives and drives. But the experience has been, Scott, that your numbers appear to be good. Unfortunately, when I go to these sites -- and I intend to visit a lot of these construction sites -- that's why I asked you for a list -- unannounced -- we're not there.

MR. WEINER: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: And I respect the fact that this is project labor agreements; and this is not anti-labor, because my record speaks 99 percent for labor. The problem is that labor unions, under the project labor agreements, get angry with black elected officials and Latinos when we raise the question: "Why aren't we on the job site?" They get angry when we say, "There's not one person there." So rather than working with us, they'd rather run candidates against us. I don't have a problem with that. I'll beat them anyway.

But the bottom line is, what can we do to get more cooperation from the unions? I go past a school every day, and I'm telling you there is one African-American woman there working a couple of hours. So the response from the labor union still was just to run a candidate for council who looked black (indiscernible) union. That's (indiscernible) more people there.

So what can we do legislatively? I mean, I've got bills in. They're not going anywhere. What can Camden do in terms of this

location, Gloucester, etc., with the trades? In some kind of way we have to bring them to the point where the trades can understand that even African-Americans are folks. We can't sit in the union halls and get a couple of hours, maybe work every day. We don't get the highway construction, we don't go to 202, we don't go to Sussex County. So all we have is what is in the community. And if we're going to fight for the dollars, and we're going to fight to pass legislation with our colleagues, then it's not racist to have to argue equal opportunity. We say equal opportunity, and you call us racist. Now, when whites say equal opportunity, they say you're all about diversity. I don't understand the difference, but call us what you want.

How do we get that done?

MR. WEINER: Let me just make two observations for today. One is, the current statute provides us some tools that we're now getting ready to use or learning how to use for the first time. And the awarding of contracts -- the statute enables us to look at price and other factors. And we are working with the Attorney General's Office and others to really understand the reach of those other factors -- what we have to do. And the kind of issues that you're articulating are some of those other factors that we might want to be looking at in order to ensure that there is a motivation of collaboration.

Secondly, I found -- and I don't want to sound unrealistically naïve -- that sometimes the obvious shared interests don't result in the outcomes that you want. And there's a lot of shared interest here in terms of job creation, job development, broken opportunity for union jobs and the like. And so I anticipate you'll see the SDA, along with some of our other governmental colleagues, trying to facilitate those discussions to understand

better why that alignment isn't occurring or what realistically maybe needs to be done in order to help facilitate it.

SENATOR RICE: Scott, through the Chair, you know the numbers of minority and women vendors. And I've always argued that minority is one thing, black is another thing, given the history. We need to take a look at the breakdown of "blacks," "Latinos," "women," other ethnic groups. So if you could get that-- We had it once. I don't know how -- update it.

Also, maybe -- and Melanie and staff can work with this through the Subcommittee Chair -- maybe we can convince the Governor that perhaps since he has so many wonderful occasions at Drumthwacket to meet and greet people, that maybe we can get all the minority and women vendors into Drumthwacket so that those of us on the Joint Committee can actually see them, and see what they look like, and talk to them; and, at that time, also invite the Legislative Black Caucus and the Black and Latino Caucus so we can touch and look. I'd like to see just how many we are talking about, given the number of programs we have throughout the state. And I'd also like to break down where these vendors are located. In other words, if they're doing the job, what schools are they working in? Are all of them in just one county and nobody works in Camden, Essex?

MR. WEINER: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Do you understand what I'm saying?

And for the young people who are listening and watching, this is for your benefit. We can't grow, we can't continue to fight to give you facilities, give you quality education, and then you believe, because you're female, a minority, or other ethnic group that there is no future for you,

you're wasting your time. We're creating a future for you by fighting the battles now against some of the odds. So I just want to be on records with that. Okay? (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Senator Rice.

And just briefly, we're going to hear from Ms. Davis; and then we need to move into our public testimony.

Ms. Davis.

MS. DAVIS: I just want to get some clarity from Mr. Weiner.

SENATOR REDD: Speak into the mike.

MS. DAVIS: I want to get some clarity from Mr. Weiner. The Commissioner did an overview of a grant program. And partway through it, she talks about the \$2.9 billion for SDA.

Now, my question is: I believe in what the Commissioner said and what you're saying now -- actually two divisions of this funding. One is for health and safety, and emergent issues. And then we have the other part for the actual conception or renovation of schools. Is that correct?

MR. WEINER: Partially. Let's start with \$3.9 billion. There are now two divisions of that: a billion for regular operating districts and \$2.9 billion. Of that \$2.9 billion, we have set up three reserve accounts. One of those reserve accounts is for emergent projects. We also, as you may know, have approximately \$90 million that came from our last capital plan that is addressing approximately 135 emergent conditions that were identified collaboratively by identification by school districts, reviewed by the DOE, the SDA, the DCA, and now are in the process of being funded and worked on. So there is money that is available. And John Hart mentioned that there is a new procedure -- and this new procedure is not

new anymore, but it's new compared to a number of years ago -- where school districts can apply to the Department of Education saying, "We are facing an emergent condition." I'm talking about SDA districts now. That's reviewed in the first instance by the Department of Education, sometimes with the assistance or input from us or from the Department of Community Affairs, Department of Health, DEP, as the case may be. Then a determination is made by the Department of Education whether or not a situation is emergent. And if it is, it is then turned over to us to solve the problem, which we sometimes do directly. Sometimes we give a grant to the district.

It may sound very bureaucratic, but it's working now. And compared to what took place during the era that Senator Rice referred to, where there was no process-- And, in fact, the SDA was doing things that it shouldn't be doing, which the old SCC -- which was making educational-based judgments as to what was emergent or what was a priority and what wasn't. That's what DOE does. That's the process as it stands now.

So that's a very long-winded answer, I apologize, to the question. But it sets the context of the fact that, yes, there are separate funds for emergent projects. Ninety million dollars is in deployment currently. Another \$40 million has been set aside for this current round of funding.

MS. DAVIS: I just wanted us to make that clear, because emergent issues was something that wasn't taken care of before. And as I looked at these deadlines that are on the Commissioner's PowerPoint -- as to whether or not -- and I don't know if the Superintendent read them, but we got these deadlines before. But I don't want us to miss the boat.

MR. WEINER: No. But, in fact, those deadlines would not apply to Camden.

MS. DAVIS: Good.

MR. WEINER: Those are deadlines that apply to the billion-dollar program that's been set for regular operating districts. If Camden or any other SDA district believes it has an emergent condition, the first thing to do is to hand a slip of paper to the guy sitting to your right.

MS. DAVIS: I've already told him to look for them already.  
(laughter)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Ms. Davis.

MS. DAVIS: Thank you.

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Mr. Weiner.

We're going to move forward with our public testimony in the interest of time.

And, again, we want to thank Mr. Weiner for coming down from the SDA and definitely giving us an overview of where we are.

SENATOR RICE: Excuse me, Senator.

Can we thank the ROTC (indiscernible). (applause)

Thank you.

SENATOR REDD: Thank you.

We know we have a number of public members who are here to testify on this matter. I just want to state how we're going to run this. This is a public hearing where we receive testimony. And because we have so many speakers who are scheduled to come before this Committee, I would ask that you please abide by the three-minute rule. If you have written testimony and you wish to leave it with the Committee, Ms. Melanie



Schulz would be more than willing to receive that testimony if it's in written form. And it will be incorporated in our transcript and our minutes from today's proceeding.

To start us off with our testimony -- and I'm going to call you in groups of two and ask that you please come to the head table here and adjust the smaller mikes so, again, we can pick up on your statements.

We have, from the city of Gloucester, our Superintendent, Mr. Paul Spaventa. And also, if we could have our Principal from H.B. Wilson School, Ms. Kathleen Avant.

**KATHLEEN AVANT:** Good morning.

**SENATOR REDD:** Good morning.

If you'll state your name and organization or address for the record.

**MS. AVANT:** My name is Kathleen Avant, Principal of H.B. Wilson Elementary School. I'm happy to be here.

**SENATOR REDD:** Kathleen, can you use the smaller mikes as well?

Thank you.

**MS. AVANT:** I'm sorry. Is that better?

**SENATOR RICE:** Both of them.

**SENATOR REDD:** Both of them together.

**MS. AVANT:** How about that?

**SENATOR REDD:** There you go. Perfect.

**MS. AVANT:** Okay.

I bring you greetings from the Jewel of the Village, which is H.B. Wilson Elementary School, where we have deemed ourselves the Jewel. And we are excelling beyond the dream.

And I say beyond the dream, because in my 32 years in Camden, and attending all of the schools in Camden -- I, too, am a graduate from this illustrious school, Camden High. I say to you beyond the dream, because attending all of the schools. And starting with Feters School -- built in 1898 and 1900 -- I was not allowed to attend school. I was put out because of overcrowded conditions. And I sat on my step, and I wondered when I could go back to school. And finally I did get a chance to go back. And in the recess of that, I conducted class in my basement.

And to move on, I went through different schools and into Camden High. And into my adult life, I became teacher, principal, and from the Hatch Middle School for four years, and other schools that I've been through -- all of them -- and I see that we really have some leveling of the field and grounds to do.

And I do thank you for the four schools that are being erected as we speak. But I can say to you from H.B. Wilson, the looks on the students' faces, the parents -- the pride. "When are we moving in? When are we going to do this?" And I can say that I've been there since August, and we have put more leaves, and posters, and different kinds of edifications and aesthetic qualities to the school. But after a while, you can do but so much.

And as I'm at this point, I just want to support and give a shout-out to our hardest working department in the district, and that is our warehouse people. They are asked to do phenomenal things. They're asked

to come in to repair this, to do that. And sometimes you're putting good money to bad. And it's just the tip of the iceberg.

We really need to go on and not just give a few schools -- but find some more moneys to even build more schools. And I say to you, don't stop what you're doing. Our students deserve it. I've been here in Camden-- I've been to five countries, and I look at Camden-- We have some of the brightest students; we have some of the parents-- There's hope in their eyes at H.B. Wilson, and I'm glad to be a part of that.

And I can go on, and on, and on, as you can see. But I just thank you.

And I just want to say, I didn't say hello to you, and I want to thank you so much, Senator Redd.

And I have to speak to my boss.

Good afternoon, Dr. B. LeFra Young.

**SUPERINTENDENT YOUNG:** Good afternoon.

**MS. AVANT:** Ms. Sara Davis and all others.

I do not wish to call names, as Ms. Jamal said. But I do see our honorable Judge Davis there.

And I thank you so much for letting me share my excitement, our excelling beyond a dream. And I look forward to many, many, many schools coming up before I retire, which won't be any time soon.

Thank you. (applause)

**SENATOR REDD:** Thank you.

**SUPERINTENDENT PAUL A. SPAVENTA:** Good afternoon.

**SENATOR REDD:** Good afternoon.

SUPERINTENDENT SPAVENTA: I'm Paul Spaventa, from the Gloucester City School District.

I want to thank you, Senator Rice, and Senator Redd, and the rest of the panel, for inviting our government officials, our School Board, our administration to this historic meeting and panel discussion.

Gloucester City School District is very pleased and appreciative that the new middle school project has been included in the Schools Development Authority allocation and capital plan. This project brings hope to the efforts of the governing body to continue with the revitalization of Gloucester City. The new middle school will provide the needed facility that will allow the children of Gloucester to flourish in their educational endeavors. New construction will alleviate facility constraints and allow the programs needed to deliver a thorough and efficient education for the 21st century.

Gloucester City schools are also very appreciative of the funding for our emergent projects: the playground at Cold Springs School, the classroom lighting fixtures at Gloucester City High School, and the roofing project at the Mary Ethel Costello School.

Our gratitude is extended to the Department of Education and its Commissioner, Lucille Davy. We are especially appreciative of the legislative support that has assisted the children and the community in Gloucester City.

A special thanks and acknowledgement to Congressman Rob Andrews and Speaker Joe Roberts, who have worked tirelessly for the past 10 years to overcome the many obstacles and make this project a reality.

Alongside of those government officials were the past and present School Board members, led by President Ms. Louisa Llewellyn; Director of Facilities, Mr. John Kenney; and my predecessor, Dr. Mary Stansky.

Thank you, once again, to Senator Dana Redd, Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz Perez, Senator Rice, Congressman Rob Andrews, and Speaker Joe Roberts. Your constant support for our community and schools has brought us to this happy day. We could not have done it without you. And we invite you to come to Gloucester City at any time and see our wonderful school system and our wonderful children.

Thank you for this opportunity. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Superintendent.

We have our students that have, through the IPLE coursework -- which is an elective course -- have prepared their public testimony. And I'm going to ask if they would also join us at the head table.

From Woodrow Wilson High School, I believe we have Victor Martinez, and we have Taycha Garcia.

We're going to have Ms. Garcia speak on behalf of Woodrow Wilson High School, if you'll come to the head table.

And then I would also like to call upon our Class President for the 2009 student body here at Camden High, Mr. Khalid Ways, if you'll also come to the head table.

Ms. Garcia.

**TAYCHA GARCIA:** Hi to everybody.

My name is Taycha Garcia. I attend Woodrow Wilson High School as a senior.

Thanks for having us here today.

I came here today to ask you for your help, not for your pity -- to have pity on us. I came to ask you for help to make our school a healthier, more peaceful, and better place for learning, not only for us but for future generations in Camden.

We are the economic future of New Jersey, but we cannot do this by ourselves. Woodrow Wilson High School is a good school with a new principal who is making it a great school. But now we need your help to make it a better learning environment.

We need better technology because this century is filled with new technology that we need to learn to prepare for the future. Just last week I had to bring my own computer to school because there are not enough computers for all the students. Not having enough computers limits our learning process. How can we learn how the world works in this new technology century if we don't learn it in the school?

We need air conditioners for those hot days when we can't concentrate on learning because it's too hot. In my personal experience, I don't like to work on a hot Summer day.

In the Winter, it's too cold. We have to be with our coats and gloves on in the classrooms. Last year, I remember when we had to go to the library to learn because it was too cold in our classrooms. Having to go to the library to have a class disrupts us from learning. There's not only one class in there, but like four. And we don't have enough materials for all the students.

We need water fountains. Water is a necessity that we don't have in our school.

All we're asking for is your help to make our school a better learning environment with new materials and a healthier place for future generations.

I understand that this hearing is to give money to Camden High. But I hope that this speech has told you that Woodrow Wilson High School also needs money to make our school a better learning environment.

On behalf of my class and I, I thank you for your time.  
(applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Ms. Garcia.

And let me say that we will not forget about Woodrow Wilson High School. We will be working with you and your classmates as well.

Mr. Ways.

**KHALID WAYS:** Good morning.

My name is Khalid Ways. I'm Senior Class President of Camden High School, the Castle on the Hill.

Just to be a part of the Castle for four years-- Being a part of the many luxurious clubs that we have, I pretty much get an idea of what students feel like in this school. And when you ask the students how they feel, you get the question: What do you think about education when you come to the Castle on the Hill? And being in this environment, you think about -- what are you supposed to do? How are you supposed to succeed? And basically, if you put your mind to it, you should succeed. But it's kind of hard being in this society in this time in life and not have the resources -- that we don't have -- is really, really hard.

As far as classrooms and being in this environment; as far as the cafeteria, eating the same lunch; being the athlete that I am, not having the resources that we need as far as athletics -- it's really, really hard.

And money, yes, is a matter, but it shouldn't be. The matter should be: What are you prepared to do, to sacrifice for a better education and to better the student?

That's basically what I have. And I thank you, the panel, for your time and cooperation.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, both.

I just want to mention to the Committee that Mr. Ways led us on a school tour today and, again, spoke to the historical significance of the Castle, but also pointed out many, many issues within this facility that certainly touch and impact upon facilities that are older, and antiquated, and overcrowded across the State of New Jersey. So I want to thank them both.

And also, in working with the IPLE course and the classes-- We posed a question to them: What should the school of the future look like? And I certainly believe that our young people, again, should be at the table in defining not only our new schools but being involved, as our leaders, in cities like Camden and cities like Newark.

So, again, thank you.

I'd like to call the Committee--

Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: I'm always cognizant of the fact that we have students -- when I turn over here I see the students from Cooper's



Poynt and others looking. And I always have to give the students a message. We love our children.

We love you to death. But don't let adults tell you that you don't have responsibilities, and don't let your peers tell you that you don't have responsibilities. We're going to build the schools. We're going to fight, and we're going to do the political thing, and the right kinds of things, and the spiritual things to hold adults accountable. Your job is to learn, and all of you can learn. (applause)

The problem is that sometimes there are folks who want to defy adults' thinking. And I, for one, in my community, let young people know that we're going to push them through the process, but there are some things that we expect of you too.

When I go into a school, and I go into a classroom, and I see students on cell phones, I have a problem with that. I have a problem when students aren't paying attention. Now, we can't legislate that. That is something that you pick up in your environment and your home. There is nothing wrong with a cell phone, but in class it should be off. Now, if we pass a law and say we're going to take them, your parents are going to take us to court and sue us. It does not make any sense. And so you do have responsibilities.

Take this conversation as love. And as a group, do Senator Redd, do me, and others a favor and say, "You know what? When we go to school, we're going to do what others have done who have come before us. We're going to learn. We're going to pay attention to the teachers. If they are wrong, then we will try to find another way to talk to other adults about them. But we're here to learn, regardless of conditions." It makes our job a

lot easier in Trenton. Because people in Trenton, and particularly some of those who don't look like you, oftentimes say that you don't care. I'm being honest about that. Oftentimes, those of us who look like you get confused about whether you care or not, when we walk through the hood and we see Crips, and Bloods, and gun violence, and we see people in school who are not paying attention. So do that for us. You owe it to yourselves. But to be quite frank, you owe it to all of us in Trenton fighting on your behalf too. I just wanted to say that. Okay? (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Senator Rice.

And it actually is a great segue into Cooper's Poynt and the Distance Learning Lab.

We now turn the attention of the Committee to Cooper's Poynt.

Welcome.

**EBONY HINSON:** Good morning.

My name is Ebony Hinson, and I am a teacher at Cooper's Poynt, in North Camden. I'm here with some of our wonderful eighth grade students and with my distinguished colleagues Mr. Wallace, the Social Studies teacher, and our head teacher Ms. Robinson.

We would like to thank Senator Redd for bringing this most important school construction forum to our Distance Learning Lab. We would also like to thank our Superintendent for holding this special event.

I've been a teacher in Camden for 15 years, and I'm so excited about the innovation of new school construction in Camden. I recently attended a meeting at Catto School, and I have to say, the school construction was dynamic there. And I firmly believe that providing our

students with a cleaner, safer, environmentally friendly learning environment is going to impact student learning. We believe that it will impact our attendance and also make it a better place to learn. Our environments will be more conducive to learning. And our students here are excited to share with you just a few things that they believe would help them if they were selected to get a new school in the future.

Go ahead.

(student's name is indiscernible): My name is (indiscernible), and I want more treats for the schoolroom, and better attendance.

**J A L I L M U H A M M A D:** My name is Jalil Muhammad, and I would like a basketball court outside of our school and a bigger gym.

(student's name is indiscernible): My name is (indiscernible). If we were to see a new school, I would like a football field and larger locker rooms for our school.

(student's name is indiscernible): Hi, my name is (indiscernible), and one thing I would like for our new school is a larger (indiscernible), and a larger (indiscernible).

(student's name is indiscernible): My name is (indiscernible). I would like bigger, cleaner, and better bathrooms, because some of the things are broken and doors -- like none of the doors will close.

(student's name is indiscernible): My name is (indiscernible), and for our school I would -- we need more elevators and ramps for the children with disabilities. And I believe that this will help them a lot.

(student's name is indiscernible): My name is April (indiscernible), and I would like working water fountains, because some

people need water (indiscernible) water fountains. And we need more parking spaces for the teachers' cars.

MS. HINSON: Again, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to hear our voices about this issue. And we believe that this will help us compete in our ever-changing global environment.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Cooper's Poynt.

Again, I echo the comments of my colleague, Senator Rice. We're anticipating that you're going to do exceptionally well from an educational and academic standpoint. And we are glad that you added your voice to this public hearing.

Again, thank you and congratulations on a job well done.  
(applause)

Zakia Boone.

**ZAKIA BOONE:** Hi, my name is Zakia Boone, and I am a senior here at Camden High School.

I have a vision. Some of you have been supplied with my vision. Some of you have been given a sketch of what I think the new Camden High should look like. My vision is to have an entire educational center of Camden that reaches from Broom Medical Arts to Forest Hill, which would include a new comprehensive high school.

Allow me to ask one question. If we are intent on building behind Camden High for two to three years, where will the students who are attending this school go? Now, my vision is to have two new high schools: a vocational high school and a comprehensive high school. A vocational high school would be located where the D Building is, which is

the vocational section of this building. The comprehensive high school would be across the street in the Camden High park. Since the D Building has only been around since the '70s, it could very easily be turned into the vocational high school of Camden City. The new Camden High would be a comprehensive high school preparing students for college. The original Castle on the Hill would be reserved for administrative offices and other activities, also known as the Board of Education.

I am not going to go into graphic details of what I would like to see in this new high school. I am going to leave that up to my fellow classmates. But in this new high school, as shown in my sketch, I would like to see an English wing; a math wing broken up into different areas of math; I would like to see a science wing with bigger and better science labs, broken down into different areas of science; bigger gymnasiums and locker rooms; cafeterias with food courts; a school store; a swimming pool, an indoor and outdoor track, a football field with better turf; bathrooms where the stalls are better equipped for people of all sizes; libraries and computer rooms -- a library and computer room open to the public for students who need to stay to finish a report, etc. I would like to see a transportation center where buses provide transportation for all and not just students who live in certain areas of the city.

I know some of you may say this seems like a little too much, but I say this is not even half of what I would like to see done to the school and for the students who attend it.

Even though this project will not have much effect on me since this is my last year, I am only active because this will affect my children. I

am a proud Samaritan of my city, and I plan to come back to the city to raise my family.

I really hope that I am heard and that the Board and city do take my ideas and our ideas into consideration.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Ms. Boone.

Ms. Boone, let me just say in response to your testimony, one, if you would please hand your written testimony into Ms. Melanie Schulz. And yes we will -- as a leader for the 5th District, and my colleague here, in working with the Board of Education and having Mr. Hart here, the Chief of Staff of the DOE -- we will take your matters and your vision and dream into consideration.

Thank you so much. (applause)

Ms. Tory Bush.

**T O R Y   B U S H:** My name is Tory Bush, and I'm also a senior at Camden High School.

SENATOR REDD: Tory, could you adjust the mike so we can capture your testimony?

SENATOR RICE: The other one.

MS. SCHULZ (Executive Director): And the big one.

MS. BUSH: My name is Tory Bush, and I'm also a senior at Camden High School.

I believe that the Castle on the Hill should also stand and become a board of education so it could be here, and whatever, and used for a historical site. And the new school -- I believe that it also should have a pool with a track, and that all the high schools should be joined together as

one high school with a new library that can stay open for the public. And more -- what a new school -- I believe that we also need more security guards and people that will be able to fix the computers when they're broken, or other things like that.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Ms. Bush.

Again, if you could please hand in your testimony so that we'll have that as a matter of public record.

Mr. Louis Mason, Principal of Morgan Village.

Mr. Eric Valentino, Principal of Pyne Poynt School, if you're still here, we ask that you come forward for testimony.

If not, I will move on in the list. Ms. Katrina McCombs, Vice Principal of Lanning Square, along with the former Principal of Lanning Square School, Dr. Elsa Suarez.

And some of our individuals may have left because I know it's been a long, deliberative process. But if you are here -- or if they're in the hallway, they'll come forward.

**LOUIS W. MASON:** Good morning.

My name is Louis Mason. I'm the Principal at Morgan Village Middle School, where our theme is, "Tell them we are rising."

We're excited. We're extremely excited about the real possibilities of this building going up. We've been meeting with the contractors, and the architects, and designers of the buildings for about four or five years now. And at Morgan Village, we're just excited. I think -- I know that this building will be a welcome change to Morgan Village.

As you may know, Morgan Village is a round or circular-design school. And that's great, I guess, in theory or thought. But the reality is, a round building is difficult to educate young people in, especially at the middle school level. The new building design -- it would be a traditional square building with a courtyard in the middle. And we're excited about that, because it has a big effect on small learning communities. We have three small learning communities in Morgan Village, and one of the issues is that we have a circular building, and we can't designate which community is which because everybody is in a circle and kind of always moving.

I think a couple of the areas for us -- or concerns that would really be lifted by this building-- One would be, we don't have adequate field space right now. Morgan Village is -- the fields we use are across the street, so our students have to cross Morgan Boulevard just to go across for baseball, or basketball, or whatever activities you're doing outside or for phys ed classes. And it really is dangerous crossing Morgan Boulevard at times.

I said it would be wonderful for the learning communities, which I think it would be -- proper ventilation. I think our building has suffered through the years -- it's about 39 or 40 years old -- it's suffered as far as the proper ventilation, as far as air conditioning and heating that is consistent in our buildings. That has been an issue for us.

Uniform sizing in classes: When you have a round building, the inside -- if your class has to be located on the inside of the circle, you have a different size classroom than you have on the outside of the circle. And that creates a problem, as far as scheduling is concerned.



One of the areas that we really are concerned about also is the drop-off area for students. Our school, because of the way it's designed in three circles -- there's not a clear front of the building. You have to walk from a parking lot quite a ways to get to the front of the building. So most people tend to come in from the side or the back. In the new building design, as we understand it, there would be a great front area to drop students off, with kind of a horseshoe effect so buses could actually drop students off, parents could drop them off. There would be no danger to students or parents as they drop them off, because they're right at the front of the building on the sidewalk, which would be tremendous for us. Also, the front of the building would be clearly designated. Right now, you can't really tell where the front of the building is in the evening. It's kind of hard. People always say, "Where's the front of your building?" So this would give us a -- we're excited about an attractive, well-lit, safe front of the building at Morgan Village.

And the other piece for me, finally, would just be that in this building, we would have an auditorium that seats approximately 520 students. In that, we would also have, centrally located in the front of the building, an auditorium, a cafeteria, a gymnasium, a library, and a main office. So people don't have to go all around the building to find the services that they need. They can come right to the front of the building.

So we're very excited at Morgan Village. We're happy about this endeavor. And we think our school will be an even bigger beacon in the community. We're doing a lot of great things at Morgan Village, and we think that this school would be an uplift for everybody.

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Mr. Mason.

MR. MASON: Thank you.

SENATOR REDD: Ms. McCombs.

**K A T R I N A   T .   M c C O M B S:** Good afternoon to everyone who is here, has been (indiscernible), and those persons who had to leave.

I bring you greetings from Lanning Square School, which is now located in two buildings -- two of the oldest buildings in the district.

I want to say first -- let me back up -- I am so glad to be at Camden High School, the Castle on the Hill. I graduated from this building in 1987, which was Ms. Riletta Cream's last year as Principal. So sometimes we save the best for last.

And in the case of Lanning Square School, we have been waiting for a very, very, very long time. And I don't come before you with complaints, but I come before you just representing and trying to culminate and express to you the urgency with which a new Lanning Square facility needs to be constructed. It's not a desire, it's not a luxury, it's a necessity.

As I stated, six year ago this very same month in October, the students of Lanning Square School, along with it's very committed and dedicated staff members, were displaced from our building because of some structural damages that were very, very -- there were some impending concerns about things that could happen. The building could fall, whatever it was. There was a lot of structural damage. But six years ago, we left the buildings and were sent to two older buildings. Our pre-K through second grade students were sent to the Broadway building, which is the oldest continuously used school in the State of New Jersey. Our third through sixth grade students were sent to the Feters building, which was constructed in 1875. So we are in two very old buildings with elementary

school age children who need the most nurturing and guidance. And the facilities need to reflect brightness, sunshine to give them the hope that we want them to have.

So I come before you again not out of necessity but out of urgency. I don't want to have any impatience in my voice, but I must express to you that it is necessary and critical that a new Lanning Square facility be built.

I am so pleased with all of the other construction that has occurred and is in progress. But I say to you, please do not forget the students, and the children, and the staff members at Lanning Square School who have waited for six years and who deserve a new facility.

Some of the things that have happened are implications of the fact that we are in the situation we're in. One of them is that our parents are very much inconvenienced. Our students who are in third through sixth grade have to be bused from the Fetters (*sic*) facility at 7:15 in the morning -- from the Broadway building to the Fetters facility, where our third through sixth grade is housed. So therefore, those parents who have children -- older children who help out with taking care of younger siblings have to be split into two separate facilities. It makes it very difficult for us to engage our parents at the levels that we wish to. However, that has not been a deterrent to us continuing on the path towards excellence. But it just poses a great obstacle, greater barriers that have to be overcome in order to deliver quality, and sound, effective instruction to our children.

So again I say--

I thank you, Ms. Davis; I thank you Dr. Young. I'm sorry I'm so excited. I didn't do it all in order. But I thank you for the opportunity

to serve as principal of this building. I just have to express to you, from the voices of the children, and the parents, and the family members, and the community members at Lanning Square that a new school needs to be built.

As an educator, it is alarming that we are still at this state. But as a resident, a native of the City of Camden, it is of double concern for me because I know what greatness exists and lies within our city. And I'm so glad to see this collaborative effort today, because that represents the very heart and essence of what keeps our city moving forward.

So again, if you don't remember anything else, my name is Katrina. You can remember it for many reasons. But I need you to remember Lanning Square School, remember the children, and remember Katrina Wilson. She's a student who is a sixth grader at Lanning Square. She's an avid reader. She is an honor roll student, perfect attendance. I asked her, "What would you want in a building," and it is a library. Because we are engaged in the 100 Book Challenge. And we are at-- Our goal for this week is at Step 22, because we just had our kickoff two weeks ago. Katrina has far-exceeded that, reading 80, 15-minute steps of reading already. So she's well on her way to reaching her goals. But she needs to be in a facility that can help to facilitate her being able to go as far as she can.

So again, I thank you for this opportunity. And if you don't -- please remember Lanning Square. Many who are last will be first. And we look forward to that day. But I just want you to remember Lanning Square School.

Thank you, again, for your attention. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you to both of our Principals.

Let me just say, message sent and message received.

Mr. Roy Jones and Mr. John Klug, if you're still here -- Mr. Klug, Superintendent from Fairfield Township; and Mr. Roy Jones -- we have a presentation from him, as well, that's been submitted to the members of this Committee from the New Jersey Environmental Justice Commission.

**SUPERINTENDENT JOHN KLUG:** Good afternoon.

**SENATOR REDD:** Good afternoon.

**SUPERINTENDENT KLUG:** I am Superintendent of Fairfield Township School District.

I want to thank you, Senators Redd and Rice, distinguished members, for coming, inviting us, and listening.

**SENATOR REDD:** Superintendent, can I ask you to pull in the mike? Thank you.

**SUPERINTENDENT KLUG:** Is that good.

**SENATOR REDD:** It's good. Thank you.

**SUPERINTENDENT KLUG:** I applaud you leaders for making this commitment to education. This took political courage, as well as wisdom, especially to set so much aside for the Abbotts. We appreciate that.

But I'm concerned for the Bacon districts: A group of small, desperately poor, overwhelmingly minority districts that filed suit in 1997 to join the Abbotts or special needs districts. And despite repeatedly winning in court, I'm afraid the Bacons are going to fall through the cracks again. My district, Fairfield, is typical of the Bacons. We're 86 percent minority, we're poorer than any of the Abbotts, our per capita income is less than half the Abbott average, our tax ratables per pupil are the lowest in the

state, lower than any of the Abbotts. For the past 11 years, various administrative law judges have ruled that the Bacons deserve extra State help, but for 11 years, we've fallen through the cracks or have been ignored. The youngest students for whom we filed suit 11 years ago are now seniors in high school, if they haven't dropped out. Justice delayed is truly justice denied.

I'm pleading with you. Don't forget the Bacons districts in this round of school construction. Don't forget the children of Fairfield, and Woodbine, and Commercial. Please set some of the funding aside for the Bacons the way it's been set aside for the Abbotts.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Superintendent.

Mr. Jones -- and if you'll adjust the mikes as well for us so we can capture your testimony.

**ROY JONES:** Good afternoon.

SENATOR REDD: Good afternoon, sir.

MR. JONES: My name is Roy Jones. I'm the Co-Chair and Coordinator for the South Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance.

And by way of background, I think you should know that the new water dispensers that you see throughout the schools in the City of Camden are the result of the work that our group was involved in, letting school officials know, as well as teachers and parents, that the City of Camden, and particularly the school district, had water contamination issues in the Camden School District. So the water dispensers that you see are the result of our work.

And the other thing that -- just in terms of background before I go into my formal testimony -- our group also alerted Camden residents, several years ago, that after 27 years -- Camden City residents had been drinking contaminated water for 27 years. And at this point, there's a class action lawsuit to address some of those issues. And in terms of background, that's some of the work that I'm doing with other folks who are involved with me that will speak today.

But one of the things that I want to caution-- First, I do want to say we do support spending money in Abbott districts to build new schools and to rehabilitate new schools. We absolutely support that. But I do want to caution everyone and sort of piggyback on some things that Senator Rice said. I think we need to be cautious, because in the last round of money that was dedicated to Abbott districts -- \$8.6 billion -- that money was mismanaged. And the New Jersey Attorney General documented the abuses of that program. And specifically as it relates to the City of Camden and the school district, Camden School District was allocated, several years ago, \$500 million to build new schools -- \$500 million. Camden actually got somewhere in the vicinity of \$150 million.

So what happened to the balance of that \$500 million that should have come to the City of Camden? This is an issue that the Legislature should take up. What happened to all of those schools that were supposed to be built under the first \$8.6 billion and were not built? No one was indicted, no one went to jail, and there has been no formal, real investigation of the Schools Construction Corporation. So I just wanted to put that on the table and put this out there to both school district officials and parents -- that we need to partner together to go deal with this issue of

what happened to nearly \$350 million that was allocated or dedicated to the Camden School District that we actually never got. What happened to it? And why should we not be entitled to that \$350 million? We should be entitled to it, because it was dedicated for this district. By not getting that \$350 million, schools in this city have continued to deteriorate. That's the result of that. And that's what you see today.

So one of the things that are clear is, Camden schools have been shortchanged, as well as other urban district schools in the State of New Jersey. Eight-point-six billion dollars was mismanaged. There have been no indictments and no outcry about why that money cannot be rededicated to districts like Camden, and Newark, and Trenton, and other districts. So we need to address that.

But the other thing that I submitted to you guys was a 334-page report that talks about the crisis of toxic schools in the State of New Jersey. And there's a section in there, several pages long, that deals with the Camden School District.

But I do want to read something to you before I just discuss briefly some of the findings that we uncovered. In the Abbott ruling, the judges said this: "It's the majority opinion of the New Jersey Supreme Court that it is undisputed that school buildings in Abbott districts are crumbling and obsolescent, and that this grave state of disrepair not only prevents children from receiving a thorough and efficient education, but it also threatens their health and safety." This is the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1998. Here we are, 44 years later after *Brown vs. Board of Education*, dealing with the issue of separate, and unequal schools, and inadequate schools. We are now still dealing with the issue of poorly



constructed, poorly ventilated -- and schools that are now -- that their water systems have lead poisoning in the water, and kids are drinking this water. So this is something that I'm asking not only the Legislature to deal with, but also the Board of Education to take up.

Now, there's a reason why we should be concerned about toxic schools. And as you know, and as we all know who are parents, children's bodies are different. And whenever children are exposed to poisons and toxins, their bodies do not absorb those toxins or get rid of those toxins the same way adults do. So if a child is exposed to lead poisoning, that poison potentially stays in the body of that child for the rest of their life. And what it does, Senator Redd, is that it impairs that child's ability to learn, it impairs that child's ability to grow, and it has an effect on that child's academic outcome in the school.

I just want to talk, if you will allow me, just a moment to tell you about the Camden schools, just so you know that this a grave issue. The several million dollars that we're going to get to build these new schools under the \$3.9 billion is totally inadequate. Because, (a) we don't have the \$350 million that was dedicated. And now you have to split up \$3.9 billion with 31 other Abbott school districts. So what do you think the Camden allocation is going to be, if you follow me?

So what do we find about the Camden schools? Well, I talked about -- that we found lead poisoning in the Camden schools drinking water. At the ECDC school, before it was torn down, Senator Redd, the highest level of lead poisoning in the water was 380 parts-per-billion. The national standard is 15 parts-per-billion. The kids who are going to that school are already developing -- developmentally delayed. They had

educational problems from the door the day that they went into that school. Yet they were exposed to the lead poisoning in the Camden schools' drinking water. And that issue was addressed by giving kids bottled water, and now new canisters of spring water. But there is the issue of those kids who were exposed to lead poisoning in the water. What are we doing to test those kids and to address some of the health issues that they may be experiencing at this point?

The other thing that I wanted to say is Camden has 32 schools.

SENATOR REDD: I need you to summarize your testimony.

MR. JONES: I'm going to bring it to a close.

SENATOR REDD: Your time is up, and we have a number of other speakers.

MR. JONES: Camden has 32 schools. All of Camden's schools are listed on the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's contaminated site list, which means that every school has either a water contamination issue, or an underground tank storage issue, or an issue with oil spills in the ground underneath schools that eventually poses a health threat to kids and the teachers in these districts.

Now, what do we recommend?

SENATOR REDD: I need a final statement.

MR. JONES: I want to make--

SENATOR REDD: Let me say this, because we're really trying to abide by the three-minute rule because folks have other commitments. And the testimony in the public hearing is running into overtime.

MR. JONES: Okay.

SENATOR REDD: However, the issues which you have expressed here today are very important, whether it is having adequate funding-- We would both agree, I know -- we both argued the point that \$3.9 billion is not enough to address all the various needs in Abbott districts across this state.

MR. JONES: Right.

SENATOR REDD: However, while we have the dollars that we do at this point in time, and while I am a State Senator in the 5th District, I intend, and I pledge to you and many others, to work very closely with the Board of Education on these matters and moving our issues forward to the forefront.

MR. JONES: Right.

SENATOR REDD: We're not going to walk away. I'm not going to walk away from any environmental concerns that are brought to my attention. And I will fully investigate them working with you, reaching out to the New Jersey DEP, and also all other relevant parties. Because our children need to be in environmentally safe learning environments. So we will find consensus in that respect.

MR. JONES: Yes.

SENATOR REDD: So, again, we thank you for coming. I know we have your testimony.

MR. JONES: Senator, I just wanted to make one recommendation, and that is, what we need -- and Senator Rice alluded to it -- is this, a set of laws that govern how and where schools should be built in the State of New Jersey. And at this point, there are no enforceable laws that govern how.

The last--

SENATOR REDD: Well, I'm willing to meet with you and other environmentalists to explore opportunities to either draft bills or introduce them into legislation. And I'm sure that my partner here and I will also-- You know, if it makes sense, and if it's the right thing to do, we don't mind fighting the good fight.

MR. JONES: Right.

And Senator Rice--

SENATOR RICE: Let me say something for the record.

MR. JONES: There was a school district -- a school built--

SENATOR REDD: Mr. Jones, please.

MR. JONES: --for \$187 million.

SENATOR RICE: Mr. Jones.

MR. JONES: One school built in the State of New Jersey--

SENATOR REDD: Mr. Jones.

SENATOR RICE: Mr. Jones, you know me.

MR. JONES: --for \$187 million.

SENATOR RICE: You know who I am.

Mr. Jones, the Senator has to stay with protocol, in terms of--

MR. JONES: I apologize.

SENATOR RICE: Let me say this to you, Mr. Jones -- and I need to say it publicly, because I know there's the media here.

Senator Redd, to me, is a newcomer but a great Senator. She cannot answer for the moneys that were mismanaged. We do have answers to that, not that we will accept them -- but we have answers. Our fight has been -- as a priority, is that whatever is missing, the administration, the

Attorney General looked into that. The Inspector General and other agencies looked into it. They came back with their findings. My position has been: priorities that -- we didn't abuse it. We don't know what happened to it. We have to do a better job of oversight, so we tightened up everything. But in the meanwhile, we're not going to deny additional dollars, etc., because it wasn't the kids. So what we did was put \$3.9 billion, with the help of our colleagues, to move forward. And I believe that we need to go this way and stay focused on the prize while we address it over here. And I'm never going to go up there to the State and have any new member of the Legislature -- and to be quite frank, the Legislative Black Caucus -- try to answer questions rhetorically. Because they were not there. But we are going to work together.

You know how I am about this and how I feel. I just wanted to say that for the record. Okay?

MR. JONES: Very good. Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Senator Rice.

Thank you, Mr. Jones.

We're going to, once again, call your attention to the screen to my right. We have Hatch Middle School, again, who have been very patient in watching this process.

**FAITH E. HARTIE, Ed.D.:** (problems with video conferencing) (indiscernible) Good afternoon. How is everyone? It seems like we've been getting a lot done this afternoon, dealing with new construction in the Camden City Schools. I'd like to say to all of you, we are excited.

I am Faith Hartie, Acting Principal at the Cooper B. Hatch Middle School, a community of high expectations. And with me I have

some of our illustrious Hatch students. I have Ms. Emma Warring, Vice Principal; Ms. Ellen Smith, our Technology Coordinator; and Dr. Deirdre (indiscernible) from CEB (phonetic spelling). And we listened to all that you have said over the last two-and-a-half hours, and it sounds like Camden is truly on the upswing as far as school construction is concerned.

I am so happy that on this historic moment -- this historic day that you allowed so many of the Camden City students -- who represent our future State representatives, our future congressmen, our future mayors and superintendents, and possibly our future presidential candidates -- to listen and see how the legislative process works firsthand. I thank you for that.

And to Dr. Young, I say, good afternoon from Hatch. To Mayor Faison, and to State representative Dana Redd, and to her A-Team -- she brought her A-Team to Camden today -- to help us bring positive, progressive movement so that our students will be exposed to a state-of-the-art education in state-of-the-art facilities.

So at this time, if you don't mind, I want to let each one of our students introduce themselves and just say one thing that they would like to see at Hatch Middle School in the near future.

(student's name is indiscernible): Hi, my name is (indiscernible), and I would like to see more and better bathrooms.

(student's name is indiscernible): Hi, my name is (indiscernible), and I think our school needs brand new computers.

**HECTOR ALVAREZ:** My name is Hector Alvarez, and I think we need more water fountains.

(student's name is indiscernible): Hello, my name is (indiscernible), and I think our school needs more electives.

(student's name is indiscernible): Hi, my name is John (indiscernible), and I think our school needs new lunches instead of the same ones. (laughter)

(student's name is indiscernible): Hi, my name is (indiscernible), and I think our school needs better bathrooms.

(student's name is indiscernible): Hi, my name is (indiscernible), and I think we need new gym uniforms.

DR. HARTIE: Okay.

(student's name is indiscernible): My name is (indiscernible), and I think we need to have a bigger gym.

(student's name is indiscernible): My name is Felicia Craig (phonetic spelling), and I believe we need more working computers in our classrooms.

DR. HARTIE: So from the Hatch family, the community of high expectations, we thank you for your time, we thank you for allowing us to share in this historical moment. And we look forward, as the little sister school to Camden High School, to all of the wonderful things that are going to go on in the brand new facility. Because our children, on the most count, will move on to new Camden High School.

Senator Redd and your A-Team, we salute you.

And Dr. Bessie LeFra Young and her team, we thank you for the collaboration you have shared between the State, the New Jersey Department of Ed, and the Camden City Schools.

And of course to Ms. Sara Davis, our illustrious Board President, thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Hatch Middle School. Great job.

We have--

SENATOR RICE: Bathrooms are a big thing around here, huh?

SENATOR REDD: And lunches. (laughter) Better lunches -- we need better lunches in Trenton, too.

Mr. Mangaliso Davis and Ms. Dolores Rozeer (phonetic spelling).

Ms. Delia Brown.

Mr. Davis, I'm sorry to impose on you, if you'll pull in the smaller mike so you have both.

There you go. Wonderful. Thank you so much.

**R. MANGALISO DAVIS:** I'd like to thank you, Senator Redd, for bringing the Committee to Camden so the people in Camden can see who works for them. A lot of time people don't think that legislators and politicians work for the people. They work for the people.

And, Senator Rice, I'd like to welcome you to Camden. Your reputation precedes you.

I'm only going to touch on two areas.

I'm also Vice Chair of the South Jersey Environmental Alliance.

The issue that I'm concerned about and didn't hear mentioned -- upgrades of the existing schools. There has not been a lot of emphasis put on that. Upgrades for filterization of water in all the schools-- I hope that we will not have to wait until the money runs out before we get these filters in the school right now. The water in the City of Camden is horrible, nasty.



Our effort is the result (*sic*) of the bottled water that you all are drinking. The bottled water that you all have right there -- that's the result of the work that we have been doing. There were water coolers in the principal's office long before they had water coolers in the school. And the money to pay for the water in the principal's office and the teachers' lounges was the children's money. And they deserve clean water too. Somebody knew something that the children and their parents did not know.

Upgrades are very important. I'm hearing some conversation that the purification systems will not be in all the schools, because one part of the city -- this part of the city is on a different water system than the other part. I would say I differ with that. There should be purification systems in all the schools. The Puchack drinking water wells -- and Roy Jones talked about it -- they had shipped it down and allowed us to drink that water. That's been shut down. They moved to the Morris-Delair drinking water wells. They have a report two years ago that proves that they are detecting -- in the existing water wells that we are on right now. And this school is on that water system. Everything on this side of Cooper River is on the Morris-Delair water wells. So we need purification systems in all the schools.

Now, healthy schools not only require getting all of the toxic cleaning problems out -- products out of the schools, which-- I've been giving the school districts, for two years, cleaning products -- alternatives to the products that they use. I'm not getting any feedback as to what extent they're expanding that. It may be one or two schools.

New schools -- and take this into account. Healthy schools and new schools mean--

SENATOR REDD: I need you to summarize, if you will, Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS: Yes?

SENATOR REDD: I need you to summarize.

SENATOR RICE: The buzzer went off.

SENATOR REDD: Your buzzer went off. It's three minutes.

MR. DAVIS: Oh, all right. I didn't hear that.

SENATOR REDD: And if you want to submit--

MR. DAVIS: I guess I'm going overtime.

SENATOR REDD: Let me also make this statement: If you want to submit additional testimony, we have up until one week. Melanie Schulz will receive the testimony. And after this hearing, you can get the address from her. Again, if you want to put your comments in written form so that we capture everything that you want to say that cannot be captured in three minutes -- can be done up to one week.

So I need you to summarize it in three statements.

MR. DAVIS: Huh?

SENATOR REDD: I need to you to summarize in three statements so that I can move to the next speaker.

MR. DAVIS: Okay.

Let me just focus on this short point about the Catto new school. It's a new school, but they used inferior products -- formaldehyde products. So new schools are not healthy either. So we need to take into account the material that we're using in the schools too. Do you know

what I mean? There is a serious list on those products. And the new school has those inferior products in there.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to voice our concerns. We will be very vigil on the monitoring and the clean-up for Lanning Square School. And they do not have a dollar amount on what it's going to take to clean that school up because they're still finding additional contamination. The oil tanks in the rest of the schools -- closing out--

SENATOR REDD: This is closeout.

MR. DAVIS: They leak into the soil, and some of the schools are landlocked by residents. So the fumes are sneaking in the house.

SENATOR REDD: Mr. Davis, I look forward to working with you. And I know you're going to be vigilant. And I live here with you, so I know I can't hide. In any event, I look forward, sir.

Thank you so much.

MR. DAVIS: Thanks for the opportunity, Madam Chair.

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, sir.

**DELIA FORD BROWN:** Good afternoon.

SENATOR REDD: Good afternoon.

MS. FORD BROWN: My name is Delia Ford Brown, and I'm happy to be here this afternoon representing the Alumni Association of Camden High School and also as a retired educator in Camden. And I'm proud to say that I graduated from this high school in 1960. And because of the education that I received in the school system here in Camden, and because of the education I received at Camden High School, I was able to go on to college and become a teacher. And in 1975, I came back to the

district to teach, came back to my wonderful Camden High in '85 and was thrilled to be teaching here under the leadership of Ms. Cream.

Now, as a representative of the Alumni, we are concerned about keeping the tradition of the education that we had here in Camden -- that we hope it will come up to that tradition of having enough classrooms for our students, having enough supplies, being able to take books home.

And we have a problem in urban districts with our students dropping out. I envision and hope that, when the plans are made and followed through for Camden High School, that we will keep the tradition of Camden High with our façade in the front; and then move out to make a beautiful, wonderful campus where children of all levels -- not just those going to college -- but we'll have something for all of our children to participate in. And children will want to come to school -- to have a pool, to be able to go and to use computers.

And as was mentioned before, many, many great people have graduated from this high school. And many of our students graduating today, even with the limitations, have gone on to do wonderful things. And I see them out in the streets all the time, in the hospitals here in this city, and just all over doing great and wonderful things.

So it is my hope that with the renovations, with the new building that we will build -- bring our school -- our Camden High School, the Castle on the Hill -- that is also featured in a book about Camden, if you haven't seen that. But I hope that we will bring those things to our school that will take our children into the 21st century so that they can compete with children anywhere. We have wonderful, bright, intelligent children here, and they deserve the best that we can give them.

So I want to thank you for the opportunity. And we have many alumni here. But others have left. But anyone who is an alumni from Camden High, could you just stand and wave your hand? (applause)

And as was said, Judge Davis, the Mayor I believe, Ms. Cream, Leon Huff – Gamble and Huff. So we have a wonderful legacy.

So thank you for the opportunity. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Ms. Brown.

Ms. Susan Dunbar-Bey.

**S U S A N D U N B A R - B E Y:** Good afternoon.

It's with great excitement and pleasure that I'm here today.

And I'd also like to speak on behalf of the alumni. And I wrote something so I could just stick within the time. And this is what I wrote.

“Greatness is acquired, not invented. So it is with Camden High School. Many great and glorious years have elapsed since its founding. It has been conspicuous in untold accomplishments. Thousands of graduates have departed from their alma mater to make their mark upon the world. We boast of their outstanding contributions in medicine, law, teaching, engineering, government, and many other fields.”

These are some of the words that were written in the forward of our yearbook in 1966. The alumni of the Class of 1966 salutes our great school every five years with a reunion. For the past 32 years, we have also contributed a cash award to two students furthering their education.

When we graduated from Camden High School, we dedicated our 75th year diamond yearbook to its past, with the firm hope that future underclassmen would consider it both an honor and obligation to continue its motto, “A great school with a great tradition”

Camden High School has a glorious past and promising future. Our school means many things to many people. And this individual pride of a student is difficult to describe. But throughout our lives, no matter where we go or what we do, the memory of our Castle on the Hill has always served as a common bond. Some things cannot be replaced. There's a legacy attached to the Castle focal point for the children and citizens of Camden. Traditions in creativity are the roots of those who attended the Castle on the Hill, as it has been affectionately called.

Our future requires our students to have state-of-the-art schools to be able to compete in the 21st century. We have an opportunity to have the best of both worlds by preserving our Castle façade and refurbishing or replacing the other buildings. We have a unique opportunity to preserve our past while moving forward into the future.

Our Camden High School theme of excellence has prevailed over the years, and we expect nothing less for the future of our alma mater.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Ms. Dunbar-Bey.

There are several individuals who have checked off the box to make a presentation. Again, I'm not sure if you're here, but I'm going to call your name.

Radesha Beatty. (phonetic spelling)

**N A N C Y S M A L L S:** That's my daughter. She's not here, but I can speak for her.

SENATOR REDD: If you'd like to come to the table and present on her behalf.

And Mr. Colandus "Kelly" Francis, from the NAACP.

MS. SMALLS: How are you doing?

My name is Nancy Smalls. I'm Radesha Beatty's mom. She's an honor student at Woodrow Wilson High School. And if she was here, she would want to speak on how the children have no lockers, how the food is not suitable for the children to eat, where a lot of them get sick.

Some of the other things-- They do have some good programs there where they help the children -- educate. They have a program where she's involved in where they learn about the law and go to Trenton, and stuff like that.

But me, as a parent, I would like to speak for myself now. I've been involved with the New Jersey Environmental Alliance. I've been a great supporter of theirs. I've been active when they were working with the ECDC school project, trying to get parents involved and let them know what the situation was. I also have been a strong community activist in the City of Camden -- which I work outside of the schools voluntarily helping out, doing what I can do.

And I found that we-- Last year, me and another woman, Gwen Watson (phonetic spelling) -- we took a group of children from Camden High School to the sewer plant over there on 4th and Ferry. We found out that our children -- the water that is coming into our buildings is recycled toilet water. And everything that goes into the river comes right back into the sewer drain. And so if you use sink water, you're receiving recycled toilet water -- where people put vitamins and all kinds of drugs, you know. That alone is a problem, because a lot of people are allergic to a lot of things.

Also, I would like to stress the fact that the transportation-- If our children only live like two -- X amount of miles -- they're not entitled to free transportation. And they have to walk past all kinds of negative forces to get to school, which is sometimes very overwhelming to our children, and discourages them from even coming to school -- because they have to walk all the way from 4th and Ferry to Camden High, or all the way from 33rd and River Road to Woodrow Wilson, walking across there-- Sometimes they don't have time to eat breakfast because they have to get up so early to get to school by 8:20.

So I would like them to consider the transportation problem, consider the food that they give our children once they get to school.

Because we live in this low-income -- and because of a lot of parents need to be woken up to what's going on in the City of Camden, we as people in the higher places in the state, even the people who are in higher places in the city-- We all need to come together as a community and work for the sake of our children and our community.

That's what I have to say. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you so much.

Mr. Francis.

**COLANDUS "KELLY" FRANCIS:** Good afternoon.

SENATOR REDD: Good afternoon.

MR. FRANCIS: Senator Redd, Senator Rice, Superintendent, President of the Board, and staff members of the Department of Education and School Development Agency, my name is -- probably better known as Kelly Francis here in this area. I serve as President of the Camden County Branch of the NAACP for the past 10 years. I've been a member for about



50 years of this branch. I also-- We founded the Camden City Taxpayers Association about 15 years ago. I'm Vice President of that. And also I serve on the Fair Share Housing Center on the Board of Directors. And I serve with the department of environmental protection -- the Environmental Justice Advisory Council for the past five or six years. So I have a lot of concerns about things that impact particularly on the children in the City of Camden. I'm also a proud graduate of Camden High School. Back in the days when Judge Davis and I were students here -- those were the days when dinosaurs roamed in Farnham Park. But (indiscernible). I also have two sons who graduated from Camden High School. And they were blessed because they graduated during the days of our esteemed -- she's now Freeholder -- Riletta Cream. She was Principal during their tenure here at Camden High. So they really have received a blessing and have gone on and become productive citizens.

So I know the history of the school, the city. I also graduated from Hatch junior high school. But my concerns since my retirement -- and even before, because when my children were here, I was active with the PTA. My son was in the band. I used to travel with him all over the country performing. So after my retirement, I was able to get more involved in the city. And one of the first things I did when I retired 19 years ago -- I took an early retirement -- I started attending school board meetings, and I've been attending ever since -- city council meetings, and every other agency that has any kind of power and authority in the City of Camden.

But my concern today is, of course, about the schools that are not being--

SENATOR RICE: That's your buzzer. Go ahead. You have a minute. Your buzzer just went off. Just wrap up.

MR. FRANCIS: Okay. And also, the problem with the housing that's overburdening the schools. They're continuing to build more and more affordable housing, low- and moderate-income housing even though schools have been discontinued or not being built in those areas where they continue to build more and more. And the thing that's troubling to me is that all of these developments, new developments, affordable housing developments have been given 30-year tax abatements, during which time they do not contribute one dime. The developers, the operators of these housing developments do not contribute one dime to the school district during that 30-year period. Their pilot payment only goes to the municipal operating budget. So this is very troubling to me, because all of those developments -- they're low-income predominantly, and they have multiple households -- children in those households. And most of the schools in Camden -- it has been mentioned here today -- but most of the elementary schools in Camden have trailers -- multiple trailers in the courtyards. That's how overcrowded our school district is. And schools have been discontinued.

But what needs to happen in Trenton is, these various agencies need to talk to one another. You have DCA on the one hand authorizing and funding additional housing, and the Department of Education is not funding to build the schools to accommodate the additional students in those housing developments. So that's a problem.

SENATOR RICE: In fairness, let me just cut you off there.

But as the Senator said, submit a statement. But you did make a point. We look-- DCA and the Department of Education are supposed to be communicating. We've had those conversations with them before. We need to look into just what communication is taking place. Because you can't really build schools without doing a census, knowing where your population is going to be now and in the future.

But just make sure, when you send the comments from this testimony -- went on record -- just make that note to remind us that we should be talking to DCA as well. And maybe that's another hearing we should be having.

Let me thank you for your testimony.

MR. FRANCIS: And I want to thank you for coming down and listening to us. I know you have a myriad of problems in your own district, but thank you very much for coming down.

And I also invite you to take a tour with me so you can see some of the environmental conditions that our children are exposed to.

SENATOR RICE: We're going to see what time I have. I thought I would have an opportunity, but I have about a two-and-a-half hour drive to get back. I have a 6:00 meeting. But I'm trying to hang around. Maybe I can get a tour. I may have to come back.

MR. FRANCIS: I would appreciate that very much.

SENATOR RICE: Sure. (applause)

Next we have-- We're going to call some names. I'm going to have Senator Redd's staff call a couple of names.

**NOVELLA STARKS HINSON:** Carmen Ubarry, LEAP Academy.

Jessani Gordon, New Jersey Charter Public Schools.

Carmen Ubarry?

**CARMEN UBARRY-RIVERA:** Good afternoon.

Is it afternoon already? Yes.

Good afternoon.

My name is Carmen Ubarry-Rivera. I am the Parent Coordinator of the LEAP Academy University Charter School. We are the largest and one of the first charter schools in the State of New Jersey. We're very proud of that. We opened in 1997. We are kindergarten to 12th grade. We have two buildings that we operate out of. Okay? When we first opened, we were in modules. And I just want to give you a brief description of what we went through because of the facilities that we have.

We started off in modules. We were there for two years. We got a grant from the DRPA, or rather a loan from the DRPA to remodel a beautiful building -- a Camden Diocese building over there on 639 Cooper Street. DRPA then forgave half of the loan. We still owe some money for that. And then we opened up, a few years ago, a \$10 million state-of-the-art facility right on Cooper Street, as well, for our high school. We got a \$2 million grant for that, and we financed the other \$8 million. I'm giving you all these figures because I want you to know that that building was the first building built in Camden, New Jersey, as a school in over 30 years. And it was built without one penny from the State. Because charter schools do not qualify for charter school funding -- for funding -- facilities funding. And that's a big problem for us. Why? Because the moneys that we could be using for that we could be using in hiring more teachers, in streamlining our curriculum, and getting the things that we need to get for our children.

But instead, we're spending our money -- right -- on paying for these buildings that are very, very expensive.

So of course when I hear Commissioner Davy say that there is \$3.9 billion given out -- right -- and \$2.9 billion -- 50 of that is going to vocational schools, the other is going to SDA, some of it is going to grants, some of it is going to non-Abbott districts -- I'm astounded because I don't hear charter schools in there anywhere.

And when I just asked one of the Commissioner's staff members-- I said, "Can we get at least some of the allocating grants? Can we apply for that grant? We're charter schools." And he said no, and I said why? And he said, "They're not a part of the legislation." And so my question to you this morning is, why? What is the problem? Where is the disconnect? I don't understand. We are charter schools, we're public schools, we take care of and service the same children that live in the city, we do an excellent job in what we're doing, we're growing every day, our waiting list is very long, and we're delivering the services, and we have the same children. We don't apply, we don't qualify for Abbott. We have to fight for our tariff funding. We don't get per-pupil costs because we only get maybe -- and I'm sure Jessani can tell you -- we're maybe down to 72 percent of that. So what I'm saying is, we're not getting equal funding. There's a lot of inequity here. And my concern is, what's the problem? Where's the disconnect here?

SENATOR RICE: Since the buzzer went off -- I know there are a couple other speakers. And we've had these conversations before.

Let me be honest with you and the public, because some of my colleagues don't want to be honest. The problem is, your right, the charter

schools are entities that came about by legislation over the years. We can be grateful for your work, but statistics constantly show that most don't work. But we have some real good ones that do work. And you're probably one of those that work, so we need to support that.

But there's also legislation that was passed that almost any fly-by-nights that come in there-- We have no control at the State -- just throwing applications in. They've never run a school. Most of them don't even get opened. They don't have locations.

If, in fact, we were to try to fund charter schools, then we'll never have enough funding to get this Camden school right. And we've debated that over and over. The money follows the kids, in terms of curriculum or structurally. So technically, the public school system -- even though charters are "quasi-public," really, for a lot of reasons even though they get public school money-- That whole movement was started out to be kind of an example of what can happen in the system, then implement it. But it got off track between the voucher people, the charter schools mix, because voucher and charter are a little different. But out there in Milwaukee you've got mixed, which is a movement we'll get into another time. As a result of that, what we have is a movement, under the auspices of doing these good things and that do good things in the schools, at the expense of public schools. You can't (indiscernible).

In fact, initially, the charter schools and the voucher movement wasn't about the public. They wanted to take the public money to put into the "catholic schools." That was the initial intent. You couldn't do it because of separation. So it became more or less, "We'll build our own building."

Let me end on this note: 300 kids were coming to United Hospital, which was abandoned. It should have never been abandoned -- not 300 kids -- 300 mental health patients, the most critical in Essex County. The community didn't want it to happen, but it was coming. All of a sudden, New York moved funds to charter schools, came into New Jersey, into Newark, and wanted to get the site for children on a campus with 300 of the most chronic, mental health-- We said no as a community. They insisted, we said no, and I stopped it. In fact, the daughter was the former Governor's daughter -- part of the movement. It had nothing to do with education. They insisted.

Meanwhile, we said, "No, but we'll help you get space." We got them space with Marion Bolden in the Newark Public School system. They didn't want it. They moved down to a church. So it wasn't even about education.

So we have these horror stories, and we have the good stories. And so I don't suspect right now -- I'm being honest, legislatively -- that you're going to see legislation moved to fund the "capital" aspect of the structure for the charter schools. What you will see -- those of us who are committed to education, regardless of how that education comes about -- continuously support the equity, and fairness, and the public dollars the students are getting. For example, when they cut you back from 90 percent to about 85, we fought for restoration.

So I don't want to be -- stay on this, because we can debate it. But I wanted to at least give you some history and be honest about it. And I can have more conversations with you in terms of that structural piece.

Next speaker.

MS. UBARRY-RIVERA: Thank you.

**JESSANI GORDON:** My name is Jessani Gordon.

Good afternoon, Chairman Rice, and Senator Redd, and members of the panel. Thank you very much for this opportunity to present today.

I have some prepared remarks, but I decided that I'd just like to address some of the comments that were made about charter schools. And I think it's very important for people to understand that charter schools are public school. They are not part of a voucher system at all. They were-- There was legislation that created charter schools about 12 years ago. And the reason why that legislation was created was to provide a choice for parents to decide if their child could go to a different school than the school that was available in the district.

And it was also to provide an opportunity for educational reform. And so they were developed as independent schools that were separate from the school district in terms of the governance. But they still have to abide by all of the regulations that the district schools do in terms of certification of teachers, in terms of the test scores. The only way that they're excluded is in their facilities. They can exist in smaller facilities, in church basements and those types of structures, as long as they're safe and they meet the building codes.

But otherwise, the Department of Education is the sole authorizer of charter schools, and they go through a very rigorous application process. And the point of that very rigorous application process is, if there are entities that are not going to do a good job, they are weeded out. And we have a very small percentage of applicants that actually make



it to opening a school. There were six applicants that were just approved just two weeks ago out of 25 applicants. And many of those had already tried to -- had already submitted the prior year, and they had some issues. And they went back, and they fixed those issues.

So one of the -- the other reasons why charter schools were created was because they wanted them to be accountable at the individual school level. So the accountability rests with every single, individual charter school. And if they don't meet the requirements or the promises that they put forward in their charter, they can be closed down. And, in fact, there have been charter schools that have been closed down.

I have some statistics here that say that the Department of Education has revoked 11 school charters and declined to renew three others since 1996, when the law was authorized.

I wanted to leave that with you.

SENATOR REDD: If you weren't able to conclude your testimony, once again, I invite you to submit your written testimony to Melanie.

MS. GORDON: Okay. I will do that.

SENATOR REDD: And we will incorporate it.

Thank you so much.

SENATOR RICE: While you're exiting, let me say this, because we have these conversations. I don't get a chance to come and get heard in Camden. It's not whether people agree or disagree. I can give you the history of charter. I can give you the movement, etc. But I can also tell you that we support what is in place. And you said there was *X* number that passed. The State Department gives applications out like water. I told

them that, “A should come before B. Don’t tell me you’re going to give someone an application and don’t have a site or resources.” If you talk to most people, particularly in the urban areas, and they talk about charter schools -- and I can name some of these people. I know them, I grew up with them, my kids were educated by them. They think they can make money. There are those who want to do it for the “real” intent of trying to have an alternative to education. That’s what private school is about. We don’t have a problem with private schools. We don’t have a problem with choice. But you can’t do it at the expense of what the Constitution actually requires and mandates, and that’s a quality education. And we can debate the thin line -- how to get the quality education. We’ve always had public schools. We’re going to always have public schools. And those of us who come from a different persuasion can appreciate public school. Had it not been for the education -- and we’ve been denied that for many years -- people like myself and Senator Redd wouldn’t be here talking to you right now. There wouldn’t be an Obama running for President. And I’m being quite frank about this. And we support--

By the same token, I have about five bills in to slow the process down. I have one in to make sure that the administrators have accountability, that there are record checks just like our teachers. I have one to say put a moratorium on them. Let’s take the charter schools we have and see how they’re doing. Let’s measure them out, to some degree longitudinal. I have a bill that says that if you have a charter school that’s not really working -- let’s just say it’s a grade school -- that before we have some other person come in to do a high school, we should give you the opportunity first, since we know yours works versus this one.

But charter school people have been fighting that. And voucher people, who are not basically charter school people, have been running around -- the E3's -- and they're promulgating you. And so it's almost like mixing apples and oranges and confusing people. That shows a real problem. Not yours personally, but that's the problem. And I've told you before -- not you, but others -- I said, "First of all, charter schools need to make it clear to the whole world that they're not voucher people." The movement started back in the 1950s with Milton Friedman, and (indiscernible), and the far right wing. Make that clear. But they're afraid to do that because vouchers started to put money into charters now.

And so we won't get into that here. But I at least -- because when something is public, I want to at least make sure that I lay the foundation for the debate so people don't attack us as legislators and say we don't care about public education. We do. And we've been very kind, living with the legislation, and very kind supporting what it is. But we're not going to keep giving out these applications, if I had my way, just like they're water, without doing *A* before we do *B* -- and get some accountability from the process. Because we can always get it from what happens after. I know North Star and Robert Treat. I admire them -- they work. We know that. Most of them don't open, and most of them don't work.

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Senator Rice. (applause)

I believe we have two final members to give public testimony to be incorporated in the record. And we will be closing out -- or we have one member that is going to close us out.

We're going to call on Dr. LeFra Young to please give her testimony. It's important.

We're in your house.

And I know that also Ms. Wendy Kunz will be submitting her testimony, in the interest of time, in written format.

But we will hear from Dr. Young.

And then finally, completing public comments, Ms. Sara Davis.

DR. YOUNG: Good afternoon, again, to all of our community members, parents, and students who are remaining, and our guests.

As we close out, I do want to thank you, first of all, for attending. And we heard a number of issues that we know we have to tackle. I think one of the greatest things we have going for us is, we're not only talking about building new schools but also renovations. I think one of my concerns that you've heard is that often I think even in talking to the Department of Education, and to members in the Governor's Office, that folks don't understand the impact of having particularly-- When you have a name of a school, but there are so many other buildings tied to that name, they don't even understand, sometimes, the extra staffing and other things that are required to support, first of all, providing services to students and staff.

But I am proud to hear that the members who are seated here on this Committee -- that they're listening and that they're posed and ready to do something with purpose. We are excited and we are grateful for the efforts that this Committee has made in making inroads. And I say inroads because I would like to believe that this is only the beginning of the process. There is so much to do. And again, as I said earlier, how long-- And I think

we're really ready now to do those great things that students deserve; and not only for the students and parents, but also for this community. And I say community -- the community of New Jersey -- but in particular I say South Jersey. And as I stated before, I have lived here for 50 years in South Jersey -- the very tip of South Jersey. And I know the differences that exist from school district to school district -- only for me to end up at this point in my career in Camden City.

But this was a great discourse today to be able to have those conversations and to listen critically about those things that not only are part of Camden as a school district but throughout this great state. I think sometimes when I listen and hear that folks, on one hand -- when they're dealing with their politics -- they're talking about -- that this Garden State is a very wealthy state. And depending on what it is that you're speaking about, sometimes it's true. But then when you look at the other side of the equation, how do you address that -- and when it comes to issues of equity.

We are very, very proud, first of all, to be part of this conversation. And as Ms. Davis stated earlier, it is a historical moment, a moment that I know I shall not forget. But certainly we need to make sure that we stay focused on the efforts that we need to make to ensure that these things happen, not just on paper, not just in writing as part of a black and white document, but certainly, because of those things that we know, we have to be committed to doing. And it is about accountability.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Dr. Young.

Ms. Sara Davis.

MS. DAVIS: Well, I would like to, first of all, once again thank you, Senator Redd and Senator Rice, and the rest of the Committee for having your first hearing -- State hearing on school funding -- construction funding here in the City of Camden. I was all right until just a few minutes ago. And I know, Senator, that you all have your piece that you have to do with your legislation and so forth.

And I'm just going to say this: I know Ms. Ubbary. I support her and the things that she has done. I have another friend that is sitting here in the audience that's also a charter school executive. I think those of you who know me know that I'm strictly public school education. I have seen -- and there are some issues going on right now in this city wherein people have taken advantage of the charter school legislation -- right here in this city. There are allegations of discrimination as far as students as well as for staff. And I am appalled that that is happening here in the city. But there must be something else. Because everybody seems to want to apply to Camden City with charter schools. We have more charter schools than any other city in the State of New Jersey. And that impacts upon public education.

So to my friends, there will be times that we will be on the same side of the aisle, and there will be times that we will be battling. Because I'm am strongly for public education and that the moneys that we put forth in tax relief comes to public education.

With that being said, thank you so very much, all of you who have come out. There are some of you who have mentioned some things that-- Once again, some parts of it I agree with, some I don't. So there is a need for coalitions. Mr. Jones may have some points. Mr. Francis

definitely may have some points. So somewhere along the line there should be a coalition of folks talking about public education in the City of Camden, and the redevelopment of Camden, and the need for more public schools here in the City of Camden.

Thank you so much again.

And to all of the rest of you, thank you for coming out and being a part of this very historic event. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Ms. Davis.

I asked Senator Rice if he wanted to have any concluding comments, and I'm not going to let him get off the hook. Again, I appreciate him taking time to come down here to South Jersey. A phenomenal individual, and you have seen for yourself. For those of you who have not had an opportunity to meet him up close and personal, he's a real person. He keeps his feet on the ground, and he champions the issues that mean the most to our communities.

So, Senator Rice, you have to say a few things.

And then I will give my closing remarks, and gratitude, and thanks. And then we will adjourn this meeting.

Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

Let me also thank Camden for receiving me so well.

Members of our Committee are all over the place today. And we respect that. And for those of us who participate at the New Jersey Black Issues Convention -- that starts this week. And we have just come on in from the NAACP.

Let me say that you are in great shape because of Senator Redd. I have been in the Legislature for the last 26 years. I'm the fourth senior tenure-ranking member in the Senate. Let me say that again, tenure -- in terms of sitting, not age. (laughter)

And I do understand the issues raised here -- whether it is the real concern of those who want choice. Choice is what we make it. It's a very sexy word. So naturally, if I say you have a choice of a red suit versus a black, that sounds well.

In public education we have choices. One choice is that we can make sure that we do what we have to do -- a school that's built in the 1800s. That's the choice -- or we can make it the same. We have a choice to make sure that these students learn. You know, I can put a school across the street today -- and I've witnessed this -- brand new school. People said, "Well, I'm not going to Camden High because of where it's located." And if I have 50 million reasons-- Then I put a new high school across the street -- charter for example -- and everybody forgot they said where the school is located -- they go marching in, wanting to get in. And the principal says, "Well, one thing I need from you as a parent -- every Wednesday you have to show up here." "No problem." But yet you come back across the street to the school that's been here since the 1800s and ask the parents to come in, and they don't show up. You tell me the difference. It's the same student, same location. And so we have choices. We have the choice to do what is right and give some tough love.

And the Legislature-- As a Senator, my job is to give tough love. I don't have to have friends. I have to do what's right for people. The human cry of this county, and the human cry of the 5th District is to



get these kids educated and get them off the street; and to make sure our teachers are some of the best in the country, and our administrators have the tools they need to get the job done; and hold parents accountable in the process, let parents know that we are parents too and we're not buying some of the excuses you lay on our children. It's not single head of household; it's not because you're unemployed. These barriers should not stop you from helping these kids get through a system of education. Because we come from the same conditions of unemployment, and working the assembly lines, and having misfortunes. But we pull ourselves up as a people because we are strong by nature.

So, Senator, I'm going to always be there fighting for you. There will be times that you and I may disagree on something. That's the way politics works, not so much the substance of it (indiscernible) disagree on.

But I'm going to fight for Camden. I did it before she got there, I'm going to do it with her. And you're in good hands with Senator Redd. (applause)

SENATOR REDD: Thank you, Senator Rice.

Let me just once again close out by thanking everyone from our Superintendent, our Board President, our Mayor, and others that were here today.

Again, I could not have imagined a better public dialogue than what has occurred here today. Obviously, many challenges have been identified, visions shared, our young people-- I've always said, growing up in the city, that our young people know exactly what they want, and they

know exactly what it takes, even for their education and for those who are to come.

And I have to say that I was also very much impressed. One of my best legislative days as a State Senator was last Wednesday, spending time in the classroom and just listening to the dialogue, listening to tremendous, wonderful ideas -- one, just to link transportation to a place like Camden High, or to make this a comprehensive high school where students could come from all over the city. They mentioned the problem, "Many of us have to walk from places like Fairview, or across town -- Lanning Square -- just to get to high school." I can't imagine-- And then also to provide safe corridors. We need to do the right thing.

I'm a person that-- I'm going to keep it real. In my opinion, regardless of wherever I sit, my children and families are not political pawns in any process. I'm always going to fight to make sure that the resources get to the places for which they were intended. I know that we have to do all that we can, not only to restore and to preserve the Castle on the Hill, but also to redefine our campuses -- whether it's a math building, or a science building, a business building -- in getting our children prepared to go to college or to go into the workforce. We have to do this as a collect. It is not any individual who will stand and take credit. It is us working together in partnership. And the community is the most important partner in this process. Your voice, your ideas, your issues are what helps both Senator Rice and myself to be effective as legislators and to fight in Trenton. But not only do we fight in Trenton, we're involved on a local level in our districts. We put our hands in it because we know what it takes to get it done. And if we have to pick up a phone to call DOE, or SDA, or NJDEP,

we will do whatever it takes to make sure that State government is responsive to our districts.

Again, I want to thank everyone who came out today.

And I also want to make mention of Mr. Bartlett, for all the hard work that he put into this to get the message out to our community. This is just the beginning of a dialogue that will continue not just here in the City of Camden, but across the State of New Jersey.

I believe next week we have another public hearing on October 14. That is being chaired by Senator Sandra Cunningham, dealing with the Abbott districts, and in particular the Preschool Expansion Program.

Again, great thanks to Senator Rice, because he had the idea to appoint me as Chair of School Facilities and Construction; Senator Cunningham with the Abbott districts. And we're working in partnership, as the Black Legislative Caucus, to make sure that we take care of our communities.

Again, thank you.

This meeting is hereby adjourned. (applause)

**(MEETING CONCLUDED)**