COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
PUBLIC HEARING BEFORE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

- - -

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, 3/7/01
4:16 p.m.

- - -

BILL NO.'S 010011, 010012, 010013 - Re School District of Philadelphia FY '02 Budget

PRESENT: COUNCIL President ANNA C. VERNA, Chair
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE BLACKWELL, Vice Chair
COUNCILWOMAN BLONDELL REYNOLDS BROWN
COUNCILMAN DARRELL L. CLARKE
COUNCILWOMAN DAVID COHEN
COUNCILMAN W. WILSON GOODE, JR.
COUNCILWOMAN DONNA REED MILLER
COUNCILMAN MICHAEL A. NUTTER
COUNCILMAN ANGEL L. ORTIZ

- - -

VINCENT VARALLO ASSOCIATES, INC.
Registered Professional Reporters
Eleven Penn Center, Suite 600
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 561-2220

3/7/01 - SCHOOL BUDGET - PUBLIC TESTIMONY

I N D E X

	Page
Parent Cooperative Nursery of Phila. (PCN)	
Norma DeRosa, Parent Representative	4
Danielle Miller, PCN Parent	8
Dawn White, PCN Parent.	12
C.C. Brown, Child Therapist	17
Karen Hudson, Fitzpatrick PCN	19
Andrea Nagle, Spruance PCN.	25
Brian Everly, Concerned Citizen	26
Dr. Robert Palmer	80
School District of Philadelphia	
Deirdre Farmbry, Chief Financial Officer.	38
Cassandra Ruffin, Executive Director. Early Childhood Programs	40
Pedro Ramos, School Board President	52
Debra Kahn, Secretary of Education.	125
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers	
Ted Kirsch, President	68
Greater Philadelphia First	
Sam Katz, CEO	85
Healthy Family Healthy Life	
Vernard Johnson, Executive Director	106
NATIONAL STUDENTS ASSOCIATION	
Eboney Jones.	139
Sherelle Nelson	143
Day Augustine	146
Jeremy Kaplan	148
YOUTH IN CONTROL	
Dr. Mark Kirsner.	153
CITYWIDE YOUTH AGENCY	
Raymond Webb.	157
Jennifer Robinson	158
Sarah Murdoch	160
Shira Kellum.	163
William Mackey.	164
Charlita Hardy.	169

(Index, con'td.) Page

Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth
Shelly Yanoff 171

Comprehensive Day Care (Bach Teen Center)
Angela Hawkins, Concerned Parent. 178
Lawrence Floyd, Concerned Parent. 180
Nicole Hall, Concerned Parent 182
Sonya Iro, Concerned Parent 183

3/7/01 - SCHOOL BUDGET - PUBLIC TESTIMONY

P R O C E E D I N G S

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon. This is a continued public hearing of the Committee of the Whole regarding Bill No.'s 010011, 010012, and 010013.

Our first witness is Norma DeRosa, Danielle Miller, Dawn White, and C.C. Brown.

(Witnesses come forward.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Good afternoon. Kindly identify yourself for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MS. DEROSA: Good afternoon, Madam President and members of Council. My name is Norma DeRosa. I am the Parent Representative for the Parent Cooperative Nursery of Philadelphia.

Since I first received a letter from the Director of the PCNs on July 14, 2000, I, along with other parents, have been fighting for the survival of this program. With the help of City Council and others, we were successful in having the fee and sliding scale proposed with unfair notification over the summer suspended for the year 2000-2001. On September 11th, the School

Board passed a resolution stating that a sliding scale would be in effect for the year 2001-2002, that the School District, in conjunction with the Mayor's Office, City Council, and appropriate City and nongovernmental agencies, shall undertake a comprehensive review of the need, cost, and funding of pre-kindergarten, early childhood programs in the District.

We the parents have asked to be included in this process. We feel that the School District has had six months to have had fair and open dialogue with us. On February 14th, the Board stated that a decision on the sliding scale and actual numbers would be revealed on Monday, March 12th. At no time did they attempt to contact the parents. I and other parents had testified in front of them just a week before. Instead, they call us on Friday February 23rd, an afternoon when schools closed due to snow, and asked us to contact other parent representatives and get them to a meeting Tuesday, February 27th. I did the best that I could with the short notice and called all of the parents and told them what was being requested. Many responded with anger at

the short notification process.

The District sent out a parent information survey on Monday, February 26th. Many schools did not receive theirs until Tuesday and Wednesday, and then only because in an effort to be counted, they made copies obtained from other schools. These surveys were to be collected originally on Wednesday, March 1st. It was only after I objected to this that they gave us an extra day. My school has yet to have all surveys picked up like other schools have. We must send ours in. These surveys posed three questions and were to be used in the decision-making process.

On February 27th, parents representing the leadership of the parent co-ops met in good faith in an effort to establish fair and open dialogue with the School District. We put forth our proposals; they put forth nothing.

On Friday March 2nd, members of City Council met with Pedro Ramos and Debra Kahn, and the District stated that a fee of $56 a month, plus the 25 that the parents already pay, for a total of $81 a month, would be instituted. This would be a death blow to this program. This fee

is still too high for parents to afford. After polling the current and prospective parents of the PCN, our initial proposal of $45 is what we are willing and able to pay. It is my understanding that thee surveys were not used in the decision-making.

Yesterday, once again, I received a phone call informing me of a meeting to be held this Friday. They want to give us the results of the surveys and let us know where they stand. The nurseries were all asked to send a parent rep without telling them what the meeting was about. Parents have called me again, feeling that these last-minute meetings are a way for the School District is using to keep us off balance and uninformed. They have told us that any new ideas and questions we may have should be directed toward them and not discussed in an open forum specifically mentioned with City Council. Isn't it interesting that dialogue begins before they have to come to City Council.

We are asking for your help. We were under the impression that the School Board and District represents the best interests of our

children. By not making a fair and open attempt to communicate with us, the parents of these very children, they lead us to believe that they have hidden agendas. Is this about children or hidden attempts by some individuals to destroy a tried and proven program, one that Philadelphia should be proud to hold up as a national model.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you, Miss DeRosa. Each person's going to speak?

MS. DEROSA: Yes.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay. And don't forget to state your name for the purpose of stenographer.

MS. MILLER: Okay, my name is Danielle Miller.

Good afternoon, President Verna and Councilmembers. I am here today to state that the parents of the Parent Cooperative Nursery stand united in saying that we do not want a fee imposed on this program. However, in an effort to work with the School District and related parties to come to an equitable solution for the parents,

children, and the School District, I will give you a brief summary of our proposals from the current and prospective parents of the Parent Cooperative Nursery.

At a meeting which took place on February 27th, we, as the leadership of the cooperatives, proposed a $45 flat fee per month. This fee is inclusive of the $25 that is already paid directly to the teacher for use in the classroom. After doing simple math, the overall total amount is $80,000 that goes to the School District. It is our impression that the School District does not want us to carry the full weight of the PCN's budget; only to contribute. We, the parents, feel that this is a fair contribution.

The hours that parents are mandated to work in the program have to be taken into consideration, and the School Board has stated they would do so. If a monetary value -- for example, minimum wage -- is put to the mandated, not volunteer, hours, the parents will contribute an additional $247,200. The grand total is $327,200 contributed by the parents.

Our second proposal was our sliding

scale. The scale is formulated from the Comprehensive Day Care scale the School Board proposed over the summer. We have taken that scale and based it on our mandated three hours weekly and two-hour monthly meetings. The scale is affordable and excludes no one. It was derived by calculating the per-hour cost of Comprehensive Day Care and multiplying it by 15 hours weekly, which is the amount of time the children are in school, then subtract 3 hours for parents' mandated hours per week. Take note, we have not yet included our mandated monthly meetings because we are making an attempt to be as fair and negotiable as possible. We have not received the same from the School Board.

The scale ranges from $1.92 for those making under $7700, up to $9.96 for those making $41,280 and above. This scale is in proportion to our program rather than Comprehensive Day Care.

Our third and most viable proposal suggested during our February 27th meeting is a flat fee of $45 a month, but for those parents who may not be able to afford the additional $35 a week, they can voluntarily and privately submit a

form of proof of income so that they can pay what they can afford, or be excluded from paying. In turn, if they are excluded from paying, they could compensate the program by working an extra day or however the teachers feel they would most benefit the program and the children.

The parents feel that the School District should have an open-book policy concerning where the extra fees will be applied. We also fee that it is mandatory that whenever a fair decision is made, it needs to be binding for at least five years. Also, the $25 paid directly to the teacher for the use in the classroom must stay in place.

At no time has the School District appeared to have taken any of these proposals into consideration. Why is it that the citizens of this city have to be put through the emotional, physical, and mental distress over our children's education. Why is it, after fairly approaching the School District numerous times, it may take all of our letters, our phone calls, and appearance in front of this distinguished body of city government to hopefully have this matter

resolved.

This is my first experience with the School District of Philadelphia, and I resent the fact that instead of enjoying this wonderful program that I have already fought for with my only child, that I have spent this entire year to this date struggling to make someone hear me. I hope today my voice is heard along with our children's voices.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. WHITE: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, City Council members. My name is Dawn White, and I am an active parent of the Parent Cooperative Nursery.

I felt very compelled to come here to speak to you today on behalf of the parents and children of Parent Cooperative Nursery, in hopes of gaining your support in our fight against a possible decision made by the Philadelphia Board of Education to operate the PCN by enforcing upon parents either a sliding-scale fee, which is based on income, or by charging to parents any enormous or unreasonably high set fees. If this should

happen, the School Board will successfully terminate this very valuable, worthwhile program, as these unreasonable fees enforced upon parents will be unaffordable to most of us blue-collar, working-class parents involved in the PCN.

The reason I felt so strongly in fighting for the continued existence of PCN is because I believe in the great value that it brings, not only to the children who are enrolled in the program, but also to the parents of the program as well. PCN is an excellent program in which, unlike Comprehensive Day Care and Head Start, which are other early-childhood programs offered by the School District, it mandates and requires involvement of parents in their children's early education. I believe that parental involvement mandated by the PCN program during the child's early school years is what it takes to build a solid foundation for a child's long-term academic success.

PCN embraces the concept that a parent is a child's first teacher. During its monthly meeting and workshops, PCN also educates parents on how to develop more effective parenting

skills. It helps to prepare children for an all-day classroom setting and makes a child's first experience of an outside educational setting a memorable time for them by allowing for their parents to partake actively in their first classroom.

As a second-year parent involved in the PCN program, I have really become more aware of the importance of becoming actively involved in my own children's education. As a result, not only will I remain actively involved in my five-year-old son's educational school life, but I will also now be participating more in my ten-year-old daughter's classroom, assisting her teachers to help her learn and be more productive as well. By becoming more actively involved in my own children's education, I, along with many other patterns like with myself, have learned how to be a better parent to my own children, which was taught to me through the participation in the Parent Cooperative Nursery program.

With this being said, ladies and gentlemen, I feel that the School Board's upcoming proposal to charge parents extra or higher fees is

very unfair to the hard-working parents of this program. Many of us parents have put in many hours of our own time over the amount of time required for participation in this program for no other reason than that we strongly believe in the purpose of this program, which is to help our children receive a good start in early school years. I further feel that enforcing higher fees upon parents of this program should not be used as a means by the School Board to supplement the deficit, as the PCN operates as part of public education.

Last year, I was able to enjoy the benefits and the time I spent actively volunteering in my son's classroom. This year, however, I regret to say that I find myself doing more to save the future of this program than actual volunteering, which is defeating the program's purpose. The School Board has managed to take the pure joy out of being involved in the program because of the amount of time I spend writing letters and making phone calls to gain support for the program instead of spending this precious time with my child in class. I would

really hate to think that this is what prospective parents of parent co-op have to look forward to.

Please note, ladies and gentlemen, this is my last and final year as a parent involved in the PCN program, as I have no other children younger than my son to enroll in the program. Therefore, it is my strong belief in this program, which has brought me here today, in hopes of gaining your support to help save it. Just as my only child has benefitted from this program, I would like to see to it that other children have the same opportunity of benefitting from this program in upcoming school years as well. PCN should be available to all children, and I want to see it continue to exist long after my time with PCN is done.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm appealing to you on behalf of the children and the parents of Parent Cooperative Nursery, please help us support our fight to keep this worthwhile program ongoing.

We need for this program to continue existing under the same terms of $25 per month, as this fee is more affordable to most of us parents.

I thank you and the for your future

support of PCN and for listening to our concerns regarding the future of this program. Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. BROWN: Good afternoon, Madam President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Good afternoon.

MS. BROWN: My name is C.C. Brown. I'm a family therapist, and I have been working with the School District for the last nine years in and around child-abuse prevention, staff development training, parenting workshops, and class management. I have had the privilege of working with parent co-op nurseries for the last 15 years.

I have been extremely impressed with the diversity of the programs and the parents in the program and the involvement of the parents in the program, the children, and what they basically receive. I have been privileged to be invited back every year to run a parenting program for each and every PCN program in the City of Philadelphia. I've also run programs for Head Start, Comprehensive Day Care, and Get Set. It is

very important that our children are first and that this program continues as it is.

One of the things that we state in our society is that we are parent- and child-oriented, but everything that we do is contradictory to that factor. Dealing with this program and starting a sliding-scale fee is the perfect example of what we do to families and children. We must understand that every parent cannot afford to put their children in an $80-a-month program.

If you collect the $80,000, you will spend more money doing the bookkeeping, upkeep, and the monitoring of the program, and what will be left to go to the budget will be like a pea dropped in the Schuylkill, and we know we would not hear it. If it's not broken, why then do we try to continue to fix it.

This program has been extremely successful. I have talked to the parents continually. They put in a great deal of time and effort. They do the snacks, they do the planning, they help the teacher with programs and putting together activities. We must continue to give our children a quality education, a diverse, quality

education. And this is what PCN has offered in the 15 years that I have been involved.

I can guarantee to every parent meeting that I go to, if there's a classroom of 20, there are at least 18 parents at every single meeting, and this is a across board, across the City, from Southwest Philly to Germantown to Logan to the Northeast. So we have parents who are extremely involved, extremely care, our children who need to learn and need this program.

I appeal to City Council to please continue this program without any kind of fee to the parents. Let's not dismantle a program that has worked for the last 50 years.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you. I believe you have four more people. Karen Hudson, Frieda Grant, Andrea Nagle and Ryan Everly.

(Witnesses come forward.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: This is the continuation of the Parent Cooperative Nursery program. Please pull the mic close to you, state your name for the record, and proceed with your

testimony.

MS. HUDSON: My name is Karen Hudson. I'm from the Fitzpatrick Parent Cooperative Nursery.

Dear Councilmembers-at-large, I am writing you this letter in regards to the Parent Cooperative Nursery. The parents who have their children in these programs are now paying what they can afford. This program is to get the children ready for school and the parents involved in the child's education in the schools that they attend. This is not a day care, where the children are here eight hours a day or more and being fed two meals a day.

Parents being involved in the education is what is lacking in the School District today. Most of us are barely able to make ends meet as it is. This is a fantastic program, which is only a half a day. The money that we are charged now pays for trips --

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Excuse me, could you excuse me for a second.

Could we lower the noise in here, please. It's very difficult to hear our speaker.

Thank you.

MS. HUDSON: Okay, I'm going to start over.

My name is Karen Hudson. I am from the Fitzpatrick Parent Cooperative Nursery. You'll have to bear with me because I am new at this.

I am writing this letter in regards to the Parent Cooperative Nursery. The parents who have their children in this program are paying now what they can afford. This is not a day care, where the children are here for eight hours a day and being fed two meals a day. This is a program to get the children ready for school and to get the parents involved in their children's education and the schools that they attend. Parents being involved in the children's education is what is lacking in the public school district today.

For the School Board's members to assume that we live in the Northeast, that we can afford to pay more is unfair. Most of us are barely making ends meet as it's. This is a fantastic program that is only a half a day. The money that we are charged now pays for trips, snacks, supplies, and anything that the kids need.

We also donate items such as toys and our time at the school. Not only the time at school, but when we are at home, we are still donating our time -- shopping, getting projects ready for the following day.

We feel we pay higher taxes in the Northeast, and where not asking for a handout. This program is not free. We pay $25 a month, and sometimes that amount is hard to pay. By raising the amount higher, it will make it that these children will be losing out, for the parents will not be able to afford and put their children through a pre-K program at all and keep their children home, leading to not being prepared for kindergarten. Excuse me.

I know myself that being a part of this program has made me a better parent and a better person. It is a great feeling to see these children learning new things, growing with these children as they learn to share, sing, make projects, learn their ABCs, kite, numbers, and how to follow directions, clean up, make snacks, and how to care for other people, and how to be kind to others.

Unless you have been a part of this program, you have no idea how great this Parent Cooperative Nursery is for the parents and the kids. Please do not deprive our children and our parents of this experience, and keep it the way it is. I cannot stress enough how important this program is. For if the fee was higher than what it is now, most of us will be able to not afford it. That is why the enrollment is down this year. It was thought that the fee was going to be so high that the parents and the children went elsewhere.

The parents and the children that are still in the program are there because we cannot afford another place and would have kept our children home, and we are willing to fight for our children to share this experience that every child and parent should experience together. I am both angry and upset that the administrative raises last year, yet we were told that there was no money for this program.

We will not go quietly. We are also angry and upset that the School Board meeting was scheduled at a time of day that most of us are

unable to attend. Surely, this was an oversight. We were sent a parent survey asking what documents we suggested families to require to provide to the School District for a weekly determination fee. A biweekly basis, weekly, W2, see other. Well, our answer is "none of the above."

In order for a sliding scale, you must take into consideration how much is left after our expenses -- gas, electric, mortgage, food, clothes. Second, you must take into consideration that we are required to work one day a week for each child, attend meetings and trips. I work every day. As for the parents of Head Start and Comprehensive Day Care, are they required to work one day a week in their programs and meetings and school trips also?

Please, this program is good for the children and the parents. Please keep the Parent Cooperative Nursery the way it is. I'm sure you can find your cuts elsewhere. We truly cannot afford to lose this program and we cannot afford to pay any more. You just have no idea.

Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. NAGLE: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and City Council members. My name is Andrea Nagle, and I represent Spruance PCN.

I am writing you this letter because I am one of the parents that will be directly affected by the School Board's decision to charge a sliding-scale fee per child for enrollment in the Parent Cooperative Nursery school program. I live in a working-class, racially diverse neighborhood. I will not be able to afford the proposed amount of money. I am asking you please to reconsider this decision.

Unfortunately, there are not many Head Start programs in my area. Therefore, I am forced to look locally at our recreational tot programs. These programs are just as costly and couldn't possibly offer the learning experience my children would receive in the Parent Cooperative Program.

The parent co-op is a wonderful program that not only enriches the educational life of our children, it also educates the parents. Those of us who have attended this program have become involved in our children's school life. Through

the co-op, my children and I are building a learning bond that will be a strong foundation for our future years in school. This program is giving us and has established a solid learning structure. I can't stress enough the importance of the co-op.

If you impose this fee upon us, you may possibly shut down this program, thus killing one of the best programs the School District has had in years. The Parent Cooperative Nursery school program should serve as a role model for other programs, and maybe then there would be the necessary parent involvement in our children's education.

Again, I ask that you reconsider the decision, thank you very much.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. EVERLY: Yes, my name's Brian Everly, and I represent the taxpayers of the City of Philadelphia. I have no speech or nothing written down. I'm going to shoot from the hip.

I want to thank first of all everyone who came out to support us today. I think you all

need a round of applause.

(Applause.)

MR. EVERLY: I'd like to start off by a little article I picked up in the Daily News yesterday, and I can understand the plight of the school system because after I read this article, I was totally amazed myself, especially if you don't know what's going on within your school system.

It said in the paper here -- and I'm not sure if this is right, but it said the court mandated full-day kindergarten from 1995 to 2000, its cost increase from 21 million to 46 million. English as a Second Language class, it used to cost 10 million, now it's up to $23 million. Charter schools, which increased, from none in 1995 to 35 today, covers 14,000 students. That increased at a cost to the School District of $74.6 million to send our kids to, I say, voucher schools, or you can call it "charter schools." The safety and the security has also gone up in our schools, from 13 million to $25 million.

Now, the School District is in the business of educating kids, all kids, supporting that we have these kids grow up to be human

beings, intelligent people. And this co-op program is a very good program for these little kids because the parents are there, they cooperate with the teachers. I have two daughters who are in this program, and I can thank Mrs. (indiscernible) and all of these other teachers that help these kids out that are honor students in the school today. My kids go to Catholic school, but if I had to use a school once in my lifetime for my child and I paid my taxes in this City of Philadelphia for 16 years, then my kids should be able to go to the public school one time in his life without paying a dime.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. EVERLY: One more thing. I got papers here for all Councilmembers.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Say that again. I couldn't hear you.

MR. EVERLY: I got papers here for all the City Councilmembers to read.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay, one of the Sergeant-at-Arms will get that and circulate it..

MR. EVERLY: All right.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Councilman Nutter is next, but Councilman Rizzo and also Councilman Cohen wants to know if you would like to yield to them. I can't see you too well over there.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I understand, Madam Chair.

If the Councilmembers have a particular point of information or some issue, which -- I mean, I don't know what it may be, but I do have a series of questions that I need to ask in this particular area, so I want to be as accommodating to my colleagues as possible, but I don't want to get lost.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay. I think probably everybody wants to talk about this particular issue.

Do you want anybody in particular up here, Councilman Nutter --

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Yes, I'd like --

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: -- from the parent cooperative panel?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Yes, Madam Chair, I appreciate that. I'd like to have Miss DeRosa and Miss Miller. Those are two individuals that I do

know. They may have others that they may want to bring. And then I have a series of questions for the School District.

(Witnesses return to witness table.)

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Could we have the microphones on at the witness table, please.

Miss DeRosa or Miss Miller, can you -- I need you to clarify one thing for me very quickly. It's been reported to me that there was testimony yesterday with regard to Parent Cooperative Nursery program that there had been some level of either agreement or a settlement of this matter between the PCN parents and the School District, and I'd like to understand what the current status of the situation is.

MS. DEROSA: I will take that answer, sir.

As far as I am concerned, representing the leadership of this program, there has been no negotiations between the School Board and us parents. Yes, we have met with them on one occasion, on February 27th, where representatives of the District basically listened to our proposals; they put forth nothing. I know that

some figures have been brought forth; they were not given to me because I was not a member of that meeting, I was not at that meeting. The School Board itself has not contacted me, and they know who I am, they know that I represent this group of parents.

And no. To be very simple, no. We have made no arrangements and have reached no agreement.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: And your testimony earlier today was, in essence, proposals from PCN about the kinds of things that you might be willing either to look at or that you've had discussion with the parents about, the distinction between a sliding-scale fee versus a flat fee. There is already, to some extent, a flat fee or a flat amount that you currently pay. And I think to your credit, in terms of working with issue, at least for the time that I've been involved since last year, you've tried to responsibly respond to the issue as it relates to the District. We went through an entire process last year, a Board resolution resulted from that.

Could you give me, I guess, a little

more information on what has happened since that time and any of the things that the District has done relative to the discussions from last year, information-gathering, meetings, and where things stand on any of those items.

MS. DEROSA: If you're referring to the resolution that was passed on September 11th, where the School Board had decided to put together some kind of group, comprehensive group, that would be reflective of City Council, the Mayor, and the School Board -- and I think you remember 'cause I think you put forth, sir, the fact that we parents wanted to be involved as well. But I believe that in the resolution, the parents are not included.

Have I heard anything? No. Have I addressed that issue? Yes. I brought it forth at a School Board meeting to Mr. Pedro Ramos. I have asked him and I have asked Miss Jennifer Plummer-Davis, who is the Director of this program, and I believe that she may have taken it back to Cassandra Ruffin, who's the Executive Director of the program, as to when this open discussion would take place, why hasn't it taken

place, and will we parents be included.

The only thing that has been asked of myself and Danielle Miller is that we become a part of an early-childhood coalition in which -- I believe that it is Comprehensive Day Care. And Head Start has sat with us at the Stevens Administration Building in the hopes of coming to some kind of agreement that we are here together representing the children of this city. And in that aspect, I do agree with them. We are parents and we care for all of the children of this city.

But have we conclusively made any strides forward toward deciding what is best for this program? No, nothing has happened. No, the School Board has not contacted me. This coalition -- the first meeting, basically we addressed who we were, what our programs were about. The second two meetings, basically I took over and let them know that I felt that my program was in danger and that I needed their help. They listened to me; nothing was done.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Okay. A couple of other questions.

With regard to the various programs,

whether it's PCN, Comprehensive Day Care, or Head Start, could you maybe highlight for us two or three differences. There may be some similarities between and among these various programs. Kind of in a highlight fashion. But I get the impression that there are some differences between them, not of a negative sense, but they were created, I assume, for different purposes.

MS. DEROSA: Yes.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Could you tell us a little about PCN, CDC, and Head Start from your perspective.

MS. DEROSA: I want go on the record as saying that I am not an authority in these areas, but my understanding of these are, these basically -- Head Start is federally subsidized, and it is a program that -- I'm not sure of the ages of the children, but I believe they start at a very early age, up to school age, and I believe their program ends at 3 o'clock. I do know that there is some parent participation at a voluntary basis; whether or not it's mandated, sir, I don't know.

I do know also that Comprehensive Day Care is basically, I believe, a 12-hour program in

which children go from infancy to school-age. They receive two meals a day, they receive snacks. They are taught, with my understanding, by teachers that are not necessarily board certified. They may have -- and I'm not sure if I'm correct at this, so please forgive me. They may have associate's degrees, but they may not necessarily have master's degree or have continued their studies.

I also understand that these teachers primarily do the administrative work in the CDC and that an aide, a teacher's aide or whatever, are the ones that are involved with the children.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Okay.

MS. DEROSA: They are not mandated to work for their children to be able to attend the program. I do believe the Comprehensive Day Care does go on a sliding scale because basically -- and it is my understanding this is child care.

Now, when it comes to the Parent Cooperative Nursery, the main difference that I must emphasize is that we are not a day care. We are a program that is taught by board-certified teachers. These children have a curriculum, they

are being prepared for kindergarten. They have a -- they have a set program from the day they come into that classroom to the day they leave.

Parents are mandated, and I emphasize mandated. You do not work; your child does not go to school, okay? Therefore, it makes it impossible because we work one day a week, one monthly meeting, which may take place either at night or during the day. And on top of that, there will be Fridays that we must also cover because, you know, the way we break it down, we cover the first four days of the week and then we need the parents to cover the fifth day. We alternate taking that. So we basically put in two extra days a month.

Now, the main thing is that our time is valuable, okay, as parents. We are educated. This program educates us, the parents. You heard C.C. Brown's testimony. She is one of the people that has come forth in several workshops that educates the parents. I'm not aware if this is also what happens in Comprehensive Day Care; it may very well, you know be something that happens, I'm not aware of that, okay?

One last thing I do want to say about our program. This -- I must emphasize, sir, this is not day care. This is education run by the School Board and funded by the School Board. I ask you, sir, if you have a child in another grade, do you feel that you should have to pay for him to go to a program that the School Board is running? Because basically, we feel, we parents feel that this is public education. We voluntarily pay the $25 to the program because it enriches what we are giving our children. But when you ask us for more, then you are putting a price tag on public education.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I understand.

Madam Chair --

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Excuse me, excuse me for a second.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Madam Chair, may I ask a question of the Chair.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Yes. Hold on a second Councilman Nutter.

We have to lower the noise level. We understand the younger children, but the chambers

is too loud, and our stenographer is having a very difficult hearing the testimony. So please keep the noise down.

Thank you.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I'd ask if the Chair can make any determination as to whether or not the following individuals are present with us this afternoon. That would be Cassandra Ruffin, Jennifer Plummer-Davis, and Bunny Verbit (ph.).

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Any of those individuals present?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: These are School District personnel, Madam Chair.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: School District?

Would you like them to come up, just acknowledge their presence and come up to the front?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I have some questions for them.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay.

(Witnesses come forward.)

DR. FARMBRY: Good afternoon. My name

is Deirdre Farmbry. I am the Chief Financial Officer for the School District of Philadelphia.

I am here just to reiterate the fact that my first introduction to the Parent Cooperative Nursery discussion occurred at a Board meeting earlier this year when there were several elected officials who came to the Board meeting at the urging of some parents to request that the School District rescind its decision to have a sliding scale this year and to revisit the whole area of Parent Cooperative Nursery. At that time, the Board of Education did do that, so this year, the program is running without a fee.

Currently, the Board of Education is reviewing a fee for September 2001, which will be determined by March 12th, which is this Monday.

In the interim, there have been discussions. There was a meeting, as some of the presenters said this afternoon, there was a meeting with parents. There were the surveys. There is another meeting scheduled for this Friday. And also in the interim, the District took the position that we are looking at the whole area of Parent Cooperative Nurseries in the

broader context of early childhood in general throughout the City.

Some of you may be aware that the United Way is spearheading a campaign to look at early childhood education. And we, as a district, are cooperating with that, looking at PCNs, CDC, the Head Start programs, everything we have in the name of early childhood education.

To my right is Cassandra Ruffin, the Executive Director for Early Childhood Programs, who could differentiate between the various programs, as one of the speakers just tried to do a few minutes ago, and maybe she can shed some light on the difference between PCN, CDC, and Head Start.

MS. RUFFIN: As Dr. Farmbry has said, my name is Cassandra Ruffin. I'm the Executive Director for Early Childhood Programs for the School District of Philadelphia.

I'll start with PCN. Parents Cooperative Nursery is a half-day program that has a two-pronged educational approach. We have designed the program so that we have an educational component for children and one for

parents as well. There is a requirement that parents participate in the classroom three hours a week, which generally gets translated into one morning a week. This program has been free to parents. It services four-year-olds. It is a one-year program because the children come to us in the Parent Cooperative Nursery at 4, and then they are ready for kindergarten the following September. Registration for next year's program, the September 2001 class of Parent Cooperative Nursery, has not yet registered.

I'll move on to Comprehensive Day Care. Comprehensive Day Care is a program that services children 8 weeks through 8 years of age. Some of the children are with us all day, some of them are with us only for part day. The requirement for parents in this program is that they are working or are in training 20 hours a week or more. Parents in this program all pay to be part of this program, and we have in this program a focus on nutrition education, parent involvement. Parents are encouraged to become involved in this program because parents are required to work. It is difficult for many of them to come into the

classrooms during the day to participate, but many of them do. We have parent volunteer hours, we add them up, and the hours number well into the thousands for a year.

I'll move on to Head Start. The Head Start program is a federally-funded program, and the children in Head Start are primarily 3, 4, and 5 years of age. Parents in this program generally fall in a very low-income level, and for them, it is free. In order to be in the Head Start program, you must meet the income requirement. Some of these parents work, some of them do not, but they all meet the income requirement.

I also would like to say that the teachers in the Head Start program and the PCN program are fully certified in early childhood education. In the Comprehensive Day Care program, most of our heads of class are not fully certified.

DR. FARMBRY: Thank you.

With that backdrop, you see that we have three very different programs, with very different sets of requirements, and, therefore, we are analyzing all of the programs through a lens

of equity and finances, given the financial reality of the District at this time.

We are taking very seriously the input of the parents. We know that there's a whole concern around income verification versus no income verification, sliding scale versus no sliding scale, fee versus no fee. And as we did state earlier, we will have a determination by Monday, March 12th.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Madam Chair, just two questions. I know my colleagues have questions as well.

First, Dr. Farmbry, you and I have been friends for longer than either of us would like to acknowledge. I was a mere teenager at the time.

DR. FARMBRY: So was I.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: So were you, exactly.

(Laughter.)

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: With every due respect to what you laid out, I guess knowing a little bit of what I know about the current situation, and you were kind enough to acknowledge that you haven't been that involved in this one

for an extreme length of time. The testimony today is that there has not been an agreement with regard to either sliding scale or a flat fee. Today is Wednesday.

DR. FARMBRY: Mm-hmm.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: And you expect that by Monday, this entire issue will be resolved. And I am left with the impression that there hasn't been a tremendous amount of contact, conversation, and involvement on this particular issue between the District and the PCN parents. Most of the activity, it's my understanding, has come over the past few weeks as opposed to going back to September.

How can we legitimately say that we have followed the various items and the resolve of clause of the B1 resolution from September of 2000 and legitimately evaluated not only what is going on with these programs, but clearly understand the distinctions and differences between them that lead to an amicable resolution of this particular issue by Monday? How is that going to happen?

DR. FARMBRY: Well, I would have to submit that we do have the input from the meeting

that many of the parents referred to, that was held earlier.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Is this the February 27th meeting?

DR. FARMBRY: I beg your pardon?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: The February 27th meeting.

MS. RUFFIN: February 23rd.

DR. FARMBRY: I think it was February 23rd.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I think it was February 27th.

DR. FARMBRY: Okay. The surveys, the meeting this coming Friday, and I will submit that between now and Friday, I mean, we would be open to any phone calls, any faxes, any emails, any meetings the people would want.

We are concerned about going beyond Monday, March 12th because, as Mrs. Ruffin just said, we know that the people need to make whatever registration arrangements either through PCN or elsewhere in a very timely fashion. In the spring is when that happens.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Well, I understand

that, but the February 27th meeting, it's my recollection, was called about four days before that date; is that correct?

MS. RUFFIN: Mm-hmm.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I think Miss Ruffin wants to say yes.

MS. RUFFIN: Yes, that is correct.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Okay. So tell me -- then tell me what happened between September 11th of 2000 and February 27th of 2001 that precipitated a four-day notice, which, I believe, was by phone and not by letter, limited advance notice, and everybody's hauled over to, I believe it was Girls High?

MS. RUFFIN: Mm-hmm.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: For a meeting.

MS. RUFFIN: Mm-hmm.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: There's another meeting scheduled for Friday, you have no resolution today, and you expect to make the announcement on Monday resolving this particular issue. How is that going to happen? And tell me what happened between September and February.

MS. RUFFIN: A couple of things have

gone on. As Dr. Farmbry said, the District is looking across the early childhood programs; not only looking at PCN, but looking at all of the early childhood programs, and looking across those programs.

There have been periodic meetings with the Director of PCN and the parent body of PCN. They have taken place on a regular basis throughout the year. The parents have made it very clear to us that their interest is primarily that there be no fee for PCN.

We did call the meeting. We have -- we have been working with Dr. Farmbry's office and others in the District, trying to figure out exactly when -- how we can get all of the players at the table. We have been included Debra Kahn in some of our conversations, also Harriet Dichter (ph.), who was the Director for Children's Policy.

The meeting that you referred to that was held on the 27th, we called that meeting because we are approaching quickly the registration point; and recognizing that, knew that we needed to hold that meeting with the parents and explore some additional possibilities.

The parents have made it clear to us prior to the 27th that they did have some suggestions, and they vocalized those at a Board meeting that took place just prior to the 27th. So we did have that information also.

We had presented proposals back in the summer of 2000 for possible fee schedules for the PCN. And, as you know, the Board approved a resolution that had the -- that had no fee for this current year.

So here we are.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I understand.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll return.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: I just have a question. What did you do with the parents' suggestions?

MS. RUFFIN: Well, I'm -- I'm not sure that I'm the person that needs to answer that.

I can tell you that we did have -- we did put survey forms in each of the centers so that we could collect information from parents. I think Miss DeRosa already spoke about those. We did, as of Tuesday of this week, have 204 responses, which we summarized, and we plan to

share those findings with the parents at the meeting on Friday of this week.

We have been hampered a little bit because of the weather, but we do want to share that information with the parents. I don't think they'll be surprised at what they have said collectively.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Is the 240 number a fair representation of the number of surveys that were sent out?

MS. RUFFIN: There are currently 336 children enrolled in this program, and we have 204 responses. I know that Miss Plummer-Davis did speak with Miss DeRosa yesterday, and Miss DeRosa said that there were responses that hadn't been turned in yet. And the response from Miss Plummer-Davis was that if they got to us by Thursday afternoon, we would be able to include those survey responses in the results that we report on Friday. So we are still collecting.

We only had four centers that did not report. We --

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay. So basically, the survey is really trying to find out

how parents feel about the fee and the amount of the fee?

MS. RUFFIN: Yes.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay.

MS. RUFFIN: And also, we did ask parents if they would share with us the factors they thought we should take into consideration in developing the fee.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay, okay, but the feedback and the response from the surveys is going to be included in the decision-making?

MS. RUFFIN: Absolutely.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: That will happen between now and Monday.

MS. RUFFIN: Mm-hmm, absolutely.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: And the meeting on Friday, parents will be included in that meeting also?

MS. RUFFIN: The meeting is with parents, and we called the meeting so that we could share the results of the survey and to update them on our whatever the latest proposal is by Friday.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to call on Councilman Rizzo. Thank you.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yesterday, we sat here, and this issue of the Parent Cooperative Nursery was discussed, and discussed at length. And since we have -- I believe I heard a little more detail in President Ramos's response to my question about this issue, and I'm not button-holing him, but I would ask him if he would come to the witness table tonight and discuss this issue, because it's hard for me to believe -- and I'm hoping that that February 27th meeting wasn't motivated by the fact that you folks had to be here to face City Council. I'm just hoping that that's not a coincidence.

(Applause.)

(Pedro Ramos comes forward.)

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: And I believe -- and I believe that I will not quote the President, since he's here. I believe I heard something a little more -- a little -- with a little more firmness in it than I heard today, and since you are the President of the Board of Education, and

I'm not asking you to discuss your decision that will be made on Monday, but I think that what I heard yesterday, I think this group would be a bit more reassured if they had an opportunity to hear what you said here in this Council yesterday.

Mr. President?

MR. RAMOS: Thank you, Councilman.

And part of what I did yesterday was report to City Councilmembers what had been reported to me thus far and to the Board about this process. So today, you heard -- you heard some of the background.

Just to take it a step further, perhaps beyond what members of the Administration are comfortable talking, and I am, perhaps to my detriment, less inhibited. The -- a -- the last feedback that the Board received was about the methodology, the approach that's being taken towards this fee. And what we were told, and you heard some today, was that as a result of the meeting with some parent representatives, that there was real apprehension about the sliding -- we had been talking about a sliding scale. That there was some apprehension about a sliding scale

because then you get into issues of income verification and all of that. I mean, the thought of the Board back then, when we said suspend the sliding scale, then look to what makes sense, was that you would have a range of incomes and then a different fee, depending on your income.

The feedback that we got was that the parent leaders were against that because -- and were against it generally and had a concern about disclosure of income. So that the -- my understanding of where we are is that staff is meeting with parent leaders again this Friday. And by the end of Friday, have a recommendation to the Board for the Board's consideration on Monday.

The -- so the Board doesn't have a formal proposal before it now, and I'm reporting to you and reported, you know, to my Board members yesterday here what I knew as of that time. And that approach is to do a flat fee that takes into account some of the feedback that we've heard. The flat fee would take into account that parents -- that parents -- that the PCN program is not the same length as the CDC program, it's shorter; that parents work in the program and should be

counted, because if they weren't there, we'd have to staff 'em, although, in other programs, like CDC, parents volunteer in this program. I think it's fair to say they're more heavily relied on. And that recognition of the $25 a month that parents are already paying, which is about 6.25 a week, and that the approach was that you would take -- you would take what -- you would look at the median family income, and somebody can jump in and correct me if I make a mistake here. They would look at the median family income and then set a PCN -- set a contribution rate as a family earned a median family income, and you would take this -- you would take what you would pay under the CDC scale and you would adjust it for those three things.

So that parents would essentially pay what they would pay if they were in CDC, but with an adjustment for those three things, as parents pointed out to us last year.

Then if parents were below a certain income -- and I can't tell you what that number is off the top of my head -- that the recommendation that I expect from staff would be that parents

below a certain income would continue to get the services under the terms that they currently get, and without extra pay.

That's a very -- that's maybe more than you wanted to hear. It's what I know the parent leaders have been informed of by Councilmembers that have been briefed as this has gone -- as this has developed.

But the basic idea being, you know, trying to be fair, and then the issue becomes whether -- you know, what we've said all along is that we were going to do some kind of fee, and we had set out to do a sliding scale. We understand that parents don't want to disclose income, so the approach, then, was to do some kind of reasonable flat fee, with some accommodation for folks below a certain income level.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: So at this point -- and I'm not suggesting or asking you to make an announcement on what that fee will be or what this arrangement will be, but it's hard for me to believe that we aren't almost there, where we can't comfort this group of interested people --

MR. RAMOS: Well, I mean --

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Where we're going to have a meeting on Friday, we're going to have a Board meeting on Monday. If you can't get us in the ballpark of where we're going to be, that really -- that concerns me.

MR. RAMOS: Yeah, I think the last thing I heard was probably along the lines of the last thing parents have heard from people that have been briefed, 'cause we were all kind of briefed in the process, and I believe that this figure was being quoted by parents took into account the $25 a week that they're currently paying -- the $25 a month, and took into account the in-kind contribution the parents were making.

So the -- and I don't know whether this is the number, but the last number I saw for a weekly contribution, unless they were below a certain income, was around 14 or $15 a week, in addition to the time and the monthly contribution that parents already make.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: So what I'm hearing is that on Monday, at the Board meeting, the -- we expect the fact that there's not going to be a sliding scale, that there will be a specific

amount associated with this program, and right now, we're in the ballpark of approximately $14 a week?

MR. RAMOS: And I have to caveat that by, you know, saying that, you know, I'm putting this out of respect and deference to this body and understanding what you said and just to just be out front, I don't know -- you know, I don't know what staff will ultimately recommend. That's the last that I heard.

I think that there's some merit to the sliding-fee schedule, where people who learn less pay less and people who earn more pay more, but my understanding is that that's something --

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: That's off the table?

MR. RAMOS: Well, it's something that, as of the last meeting, I understood had been put off the table by the leaders.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: So we'll patiently wait, and then Monday, we'll hopefully get a phone call and hear the result of that decision.

MR. RAMOS: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: And, again, I

appreciate you stepping forward to address this issue, but I had thought, since it was addressed at length yesterday, that hearing your remarks again today would be very helpful.

Thank you.

MR. RAMOS: And I would just keep in mind all of the limitations I put -- I'm just saying, you know, what's been reported to me and what I think I know.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thank you, thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you.

We want to bring -- we want to take a hold for a minute with the Parent Cooperative Nursery, 'cause we want to bring Mr. Ted Kirsch up now.

COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: Madam Chair, before they leave --

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: I know, we're going to bring 'em back, we want to bring 'em back, and Jerry Jordan. They have to leave. I couldn't hear you.

COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: I think the -- the

impression I get is that a decision has been made, an announcement will be made on Monday, but that's the feeling I get from what is being said here. And in talking to the parents, I don't think any real negotiation has taken place and a discussion with them.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Councilman --

COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: I don't think -- Madam Chair, I don't think bringing them back is going to change any of that reality unless some real discussions take place with the parents.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Right. Could you hold on just a minute, Councilman.

COUNCILMAN ORTIZ: No problem.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: The noise level is so very high, it is very difficult to hear up here. And, again, we understand our younger members here in Council, but can everyone else kind of keep quiet. Or if you want to talk, can you just leave the chambers and go outside and talk and then come back in when it's your turn. Thank you.

We really want to bring Mr. Ted Kirsch

and Jerry Jordan up. We're not --

COUNCILMAN COHEN: (Not completely audible, off-mic.)

Just one thing, Madam Chair. You know, this program, a dozen years ago, the School Board tried to kill it. And to propose that. . .

And the Board was stopped from killing it, and I don't understand why, when a good program comes along, it seems that the Board spends all of the time trying to find ways to destroy it.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: What the Board ought to be doing is looking for ways to expand this program all throughout the City, not to take it away.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: There ought to be no increase and no sliding scale. What are you going to do, have the kids compete with each other as to how much their parents are paying.

I don't know what goes on in the minds of people when they get appointed to the Board. Why don't you understand you've got a wonderful

program here. Have it grow.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: I say respectfully to the Chairman of the Board, call a special meeting of the Board to reach a decision today that this program continues on at the same rate of pay, under the same conditions as are present now.

(Applause.)

MR. RAMOS: Madam Chair --

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Go ahead.

MR. RAMOS: Madam Chair, I think that the Board, when it went to full-day kindergarten without a funding stream, took a big step in providing for -- in making sure that children started school ready to learn.

This -- this is -- this forum we have here is -- is a budget hearing, and it's one where we're talking about a cumulative deficit of $235 million, in which -- in a system where the School District is funded primarily for half-day kindergarten through 12th grade. You have -- this isn't an abstract thing.

You have -- we're in the business generally of K-to-12 education. We've got some

federal money in a fragmented way for some programs, and we would love nothing more than for children -- 4-year-old children to have an education, but the reality is that there has not been a commitment in the Commonwealth, as there has been in other states, to provide for the education of 4-year-old children, and we're here in a budget hearing, where we're asking to collaborate on finding a solution to providing -- to providing the services that we obviously can't even afford to provide now.

So I would love to have the luxury of saying, Let's do, you know, what we want to do. But if come September, we've said this is a great idea, a great policy, and we can't open schools, what was the point of it? We're interested in making sure that we have a solution for our core mission.

COUNCILMAN COHEN: Your continuing this program isn't going to bankrupt the system.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: This is one of the shining stars of the school system. Don't kill it off, because when you kill this off, you're

killing off support for the public school system.

MR. RAMOS: Councilman --

(Applause.)

MR. RAMOS: Councilman, what we heard from Dr. Farmbry today was that the School District is trying to come up with a way, an equitable way, a way that treats this program fairly compared to other programs, while we deal with the broader issue of preschool education, which we have to deal with in some thoughtful and comprehensive way, and in a very short term. And this is not about killing the program; this is about providing -- of doing -- continuing the program in a responsible way and in a way that's fair across the Board. This is the only program that is completely unfunded, and apart from the $25 a month that the parent contribute, is completely free and unfunded from any other source.

We're interested in continuing it. We've offered some alternatives, including taking income into account and making it just like CDC, and that's been rejected. I think there is nothing more that we would want than to make sure

that every 4-year-old in this city has access to a program like PCN or Head Start.

COUNCILMAN COHEN: Well, do it instead of continuing to find excuses not to do it. You're taking a program that's really the bright light of the whole school system, that has tremendous support, and you're saying, Well, we missed 12 years ago; now is a good time to kill it. Why are you doing it when you ought to be expanding this program? It's the same thing we talked about. Why don't you have an educational perspective that looks to producing good things instead of killing off the good things that you have.

MR. RAMOS: Well, I understand your point, Councilman. And we are here talking about the survival of the --

COUNCILMAN COHEN: We need public support for public schools.

MR. RAMOS: Absolutely, and we need to have public schools.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: We're really getting double talk all afternoon coming from this panel.

MR. RAMOS: Well, Councilman --

COUNCILMAN COHEN: Because there's no reason why you can't announce right now what you're going to tell the parents next Friday.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: Are you going to just tell them that privately, away from the Council?

MR. RAMOS: Well --

COUNCILMAN COHEN: You're very disrespectful of the Council. We sent you a letter signed by 11 Councilmembers last September, thinking you could read that letter and understand how strongly Council supported the program.

You got that letter, didn't you sir?

MR. RAMOS: Councilman, we --

COUNCILMAN COHEN: (Inaudible). . . the result of that letter that you continue the program this year.

MR. RAMOS: Councilman --

COUNCILMAN COHEN: We expected you to come forth with programs to expand that program, not to kill this program.

MR. RAMOS: Councilman, if I recall,

the request of City Council -- the request of City Council was to suspend the implementation of a sliding scale, which is what the Board did. And what you're saying is that what you really meant was to eliminate the sliding scale altogether, which is not what the request was.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Mr. Ramos --

COUNCILMAN COHEN: (Inaudible, off-mic.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Excuse me, Councilman Cohen.

You want a point of order, Councilman Nutter?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I was going to ask for a point of order, but I know you want to try to get Mr. Kirsch on.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Right, absolutely.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I can get my point of order later.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Absolutely.

This is an issue -- certainly the educating of preschoolers is a issue that we're all very concerned about. And, you know, our

concern and the written testimony of a couple of the testifiers here says that they've just asked for a fair and open dialogue, they want their feedback to a part of the decision-making. I, as Education Chair, want that too, and I know you want the same thing.

MR. RAMOS: Right.

And, Councilwoman, the other thing that we hear is that we should -- I mean, and this is a broader context, and I know this body could appreciate it if it put itself in the position of the School Board, where you have one program, such as CDC, where we don't negotiate fees with parents and where there is some kind of scale, and where the request is made that with -- that we treat some folks differently or that we engage in negotiations over how much you should pay. We've been trying to take information, trying to be fair, and I think that that's as much as we can offer as we look at the whole preschool education program.

We -- I mean, there should be -- there should be at the State level some dedicated funding, or at the national level, for all

4-year-olds. We believe that too, and we advocate. When we're not at budget hearings, we do spend time talking about education policy and advocating, and we intend to continue to do that, but we do -- you know, we are also here in the reality -- in the context that we've been talking about for the last two days, financial.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Well, we want to put this discussion on hold for a few minutes. I know you have to leave, okay. Mr. Ramos, I am aware that you do have to leave, but we would ask other members of the School District staff and Board and to stay, but we want to bring up the PFT reps, Ted Kirsch and Jerry Jordan, and then we're going to bring up Dr. Robert Palmer, who hasn't had a chance to do testimony either as it relates to the cooperative nursery issue.

Thank you.

(Witnesses come forward.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Good evening.

MR. KIRSCH: Good evening.

For the record, I am Ted Kirsch, President of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, and with me is Jerry T. Jordan, who is

or General Vice President.

I'm not sure whether it's "good afternoon" or "good evening" at this point, but Council President Verna, Education Chairman Miller and members of the City Council, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' 19,000 members and retirees who live in the City of Philadelphia.

We are fortunate to be involved in public education today. We have more information today than ever before about the cognitive development of children. We have been an abundance of solid research on which education programs, methods, and strategies are most likely to help the greatest number of children succeed. We have more learning materials and more technology to expand the boundaries of our knowledge of how children learn.

We have pushed the issue of education to the top of the national agenda, recognized the need to close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, and begun demanding that all children achieve high standards. We've

devised a myriad of tests to measure student progress, and we've demanded accountability from the people responsible for educating children.

Yet, in spite of our newly devised knowledge, today in Philadelphia, fewer than half of our children in our schools read at basic levels. Two-thirds of Philadelphia schools perform in the bottom quartile of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment. And little more than half of our students who enter the 9th grade complete high school four years later.

We have a constant shortage of trained and qualified teachers. The School District is so strapped for cash that many students and schools are deprived of basic services such as librarians, full-time nurses, and reading teachers, among other missing services.

For all of the talk about leaving no child behind, for all of our setting of standards and the outcry for accountability, the achievement gap between our children and those attending schools in neighboring suburban districts remain large. Last spring, Philadelphia was placed on the State's education empowerment list, and unless

we raise achievement significantly within the next three years, the State officials can take over or dismantle or privatize Philadelphia's public schools.

The State-approved school improvement plan contains many of the programs and improvements we desperately need to raise reading and math test scores. For example, reducing class size in every kindergarten through 3rd grade to 17 students.

(Applause.)

MR. KIRSCH: Maximizing instructional time devoted to course subjects, developing a uniform curriculum based on State standards, and redesigning a District safety plan.

Yet, the State's $16 million Empowerment Grant is a fraction much what the District estimates it will cost to implement the plan. Clearly, we need more resources to do the job we know we can do.

In Pennsylvania and Philadelphia, the State and local boards of education have set high standards and instituted testing to measure progress, but neither has provided the funds or

the resources necessary to make sure that all students have an opportunity to reach these standards.

As a result, what exists in Philadelphia is not so much an achievement gap but, rather, an opportunity gap. It's not about what our students can do; it's about opportunities and services that we never afford them. And that must change. We must make sure that money is used directly in our schools and in our classrooms, where it will have the greatest impact on student achievement.

Our students deserve activities such as band, choir, dance, smaller class sizes, advanced placement classes in every high school.

(Applause.)

MR. KIRSCH: It is clear that Philadelphia's public school children need more services to compete with surrounding districts. We spend nearly $2,000 less per pupil in Philadelphia than in neighboring districts. We have 11 extra children in every classroom compared to the State average. We shortchange our students daily by not providing sufficient textbooks,

educational materials, technology, and enrichment activities that other children take for granted.

The District's initial projections of a $235 million cumulative budget deficit is discouraging because it means that we're even further from our goals of improving the finances of the District and providing all of our students the kind of high-quality education that will make them competitive in a high-tech global economy.

This year, both the City and State are considering much needed increases in funding for the School District. This is a step in the right direction. Now we must set priorities to ensure that additional money is channelled directly into classrooms, where it will benefit children the most.

We need your help and your commitment to reduce class size. Smaller classes, particularly in the early grades, are the single most successful educational reform available today. Students who are in small classes in grades K to 3 are one year ahead of students in regular classes in reading, math, and science by the 8th grade. They are more likely to take

advanced placement courses, college entrance exams, and graduate on time.

We have known about the lifelong education gains from reducing class size for more than ten years; and yet, we have made no major commitment to reducing class size in Philadelphia.

We have also known for nearly a quarter of a century the benefits of high-quality early-childhood education, particularly for disadvantaged children. And to the parents who are here today, research shows that children enrolled in high-quality early-education programs are less likely to be placed in special education or to be retained in grade.

Yet, in Philadelphia, too few preschool children participate in early learning programs. Quality preschool programs must be universally available so that every child enters the school ready to learn, and we support additional funding for the PCN program.

(Applause.)

MR. KIRSCH: As a high school history teacher, I can tell you, it is difficult to teach students who cannot read. Philadelphia must focus

relentlessly on literacy. Every elementary school by now should have a balanced program literacy program, with every teacher trained to teach every child to read by the 3rd grade.

Impossible? No. With tested and proven reading programs and intensive professional development, our schools can teach almost all of our students to read well.

We also need reading teachers and intervention programs in our middle and high schools to address the needs of students who have not benefitted from the current wave of reforms. Many, if not most, of the disciplinary problems we encounter in the higher grades are linked directly to students who cannot read at grade level and who have not mastered other basic skills. They act out because they are frustrated, anxious, and cannot do the work.

High school is the toughest place to make school reform work, but if we can reverse the years of failure for these students and help them master reading and math through intensive programs, we have a chance to make significant improvements in two areas: reducing the high

retention and dropout rates, and eliminating many of the disciplinary problems our schools face.

For those students who are severely disruptive or violent, we must insist that they meet the same standards of behavior as others. We must develop clear standards for conduct and enforce consequences for violations fairly and uniformly. We cannot let classrooms be disrupted continually by a few students.

We have an obligation to educate students who come to school ready to learn. Students who want to learn resent having their teacher's time wasted disciplining disruptive students. Those students who disrupt regular classrooms should be given a chance to succeed as well, but in alternative schools, where special programs and services are available to address their special needs.

Until this past September, Philadelphia had six ABLE Academies, which were alternative schools for disruptive students who were unsuccessful in traditional classrooms. When the District was challenged by Harrisburg to cut 30 million in services, ABLE Academies fell under the

budget ax. For the sake of students in regular classrooms and those who need a second chance in special settings, these schools must be restored.

Order and discipline in every school is not only essential for students, it is a key to attracting and retaining qualified teachers. A recent survey of student teachers showed that student behavior and school climate were the chief reasons new teachers do not seek employment in Philadelphia.

For the past three years, we have begun the school year with between 200 and 300 teacher vacancies. Although the District has been able to fill two-thirds of those vacancies, 40 percent of new teachers in the City quit before the end of the first year because of the discouraging school climate, the lack of professional support and educational resources.

We cannot raise test scores without qualified teachers; we cannot attract qualified teachers without improving the learning environment in our schools. And even if we could hire enough teachers, they cannot do their jobs amid chaos.

Along with class size, the level of teacher training, knowledge and skill is one of the most significant factors in raising student achievement. We must focus not only on attracting trained and qualified teachers but retaining them by providing mentoring, classroom support, and high-level professional development.

Without adequate support, meaningful professional development, and coherent disciplinary policies, neither teachers nor students can be successful. We must work together as a community to create a positive learning environment in every school.

We urge the City Council this year to dig deep to fund classroom programs that help students succeed. We know which programs work. The question is whether we have the commitment and the political will to put programs that work into our classrooms.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Certainly, we want to thank you and

Jerry Jordan for your commitment to our schools. And let me say that we just learned even today from one end of the City to another, from Frankford to Elmwood, we had students arrested today. So we're really, really having a crisis.

I remember some 15 years ago, we held school violence hearings, and I still have all of the material from those days, but now we see people like Tigerman, people like Tigerman, who help youth deal with crime. And we have serious, serious problems now with youth with guns and with violence, and it's really, really an epidemic.

And finally, I'd like to say that just last week for Black History Month, we went to Miller School, E.S. Miller School, and they're not filled to capacity, they're looking for students. So that's one alternative that I hope the Board will consider for placement of students who are not making out in their traditional school setting, with people who care about students. And the new principal has been there three weeks, great teachers -- I went to school with half of them -- but it's a good crew, and I'm sure that they would do a good job if given the opportunity.

I thank you very, very much.

And if there are no questions for Mr. Kirsch and Jerry Jordan, we thank you. I know that you have another meeting. And thanks for staying.

And, Dr. Palmer, would you come up, and we will finish up the Parent Cooperative Nursery. I know that all of you have to leave in a few minutes, so we will have Dr. Palmer back and certainly ask my colleagues to get ready ask any questions. And then, Mr. Katz, you will be next.

So I'll ask my colleagues, since the bus leaves at 6 and the young people have to leave, if you will be kind enough to keep your comments short, ask your questions, and we will try to keep this moving quickly.

Dr. Palmer, please identify yourself for the record and present your testimony.

DR. PALMER: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.

Again, could we please have it quiet. Thank you very much.

DR. PALMER: Thank you, Madam President and members of City Council.

My name is Robert Palmer. Today I come before you to talk about the Parent Cooperative Program. This very successful program, with almost a half century record for quality early education, is again in danger.

As you have heard, the PCN is not day care, but an educational program. How the School District officials cannot recognize the PCN for the last 46 years, which has surpassed every criteria for true educational programs, is unfathomable. It has become suddenly self-serving to make this erroneous comparison between PCN or day care or CDC.

The PCN does meet all acceptable educational standards for social readiness, intellectual readiness, and whoever heard of a day care center that runs from 9 a.m. to 12 noon and you must volunteer in class.

A very recent School Board poll revealed one important point: over 90 percent of parents are opposed to any fee for public education.

We have heard about the loss of tens of thousands of our citizens in the last census.

This PCN feel will only help drive people from the City and to the suburbs for free education.

As you realize, public education is not really free, but it's paid for out of wage taxes, sales taxes and, of course, property taxes. The School Board wishes to add one additional non-legislative tax; I like to call it "the innovative education tax." That is, if you want your 4-year-old child to enroll into the PCN program, you must pay this tax. This will only help to drive people from the City. This will also eliminate from this program many people who make too much for Head Start but not enough to pay this tax. Public education should be provided to all regardless of how much you make or don't make.

Innovative education, like the type that the PCN program provides, is a window to the soul of the City and one of the important benchmarks as to whether young families stay in the City or even move to the City.

I realize that there is a $196 million deficit in the school budget and the school budget is $1.7 billion, but this is not the solution.

The total PCN budget is only 1/1700th of the total school budget. The proposed fee would provide only 1/17,000th of the total budget. Why do some of the School District's top officials devote so much time and money to save only 1/17,000th of the total budget. This gives a new meaning to the old saying "a drop in the bucket."

Why endanger a program that early education research has proven has long-lasting benefits to students, the School District, and the community. This unauthorized fee or tax is an ominous precedence by the School Board where public programs in the future can have any arbitrary fee attached to it.

Finally, after 46 years, this highly effective and efficient educational program should finally be grandfathered into the mainstream of Philadelphia public education.

(Applause.)

DR. PALMER: And should receive the full protection of this body. It is time for someone to be fair to the parents and the children of the PCN, and not unfair.

Thank you for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Any questions from members of the Council for Dr. Palmer or about Parent Cooperative Nursery?

(No questions.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very much.

Councilman Nutter?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I know you have another witness coming up. I was going to at least add -- I know you asked whether --

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Mr. Katz, excuse me one moment. Sam Katz, while Councilman Nutter is speaking, would you please come forward.

Thank you.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: I know you asked if we had any questions with regard to Parent Cooperative Nursery. I did not indicate at that time that I did because I knew that we had another speaking coming on. I would like to reserve the opportunity, when appropriate, to raise other questions with regard to Parent Cooperative

Nursery.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you. And we will certainly ask all of those who speak therein, Dr. Farmbry and Pedro Ramos, et cetera, to be available for Councilman Nutter's questions. Thank you very much.

(Sam Katz comes forward.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Welcome. Good evening. Please identify yourself for the record.

Please, could we have -- thank you. We really, really need you to keep the noise level down, otherwise we just can't hear. This room does not lend itself well to noise.

Thank you.

MR. KATZ: Thank you, Councilwoman. I'm Sam Katz, with Greater Philadelphia First, a civic organization comprised of 38 of the region's major employers, and I appreciate this opportunity to address the members of Council regarding the School District's 2001-2002 fiscal budget.

I would add parenthetically that in listening to this debate, I am reminded about a debate that I heard 20 years ago when I was a member of the School Board of the School District

of Philadelphia on exactly the same program, facing exactly the same problems during a period when I chaired the Board's Budget and Finance Committee.

Greater Philadelphia First --

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Excuse me, Mr. Katz.

Again, please, we ask you, those -- I know that you have a bus to catch, but would you please be as quiet as you can because we just cannot hear the testimony.

Sorry, Mr. Katz.

MR. KATZ: That's okay, Madam Chairwoman.

As you know, the Greater Philadelphia First has been actively involved over the past half-decade or so in support of the former superintendent's program, Children Achieving, and more recently in efforts to try to unite Governor Ridge and Mayor Street in the negotiations of a new teachers contract. We feel very positive about the results of that contract and the image that its results project to Harrisburg and the improved relationships, not only between the City

and the State, but also between the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.

We continue to believe, as you know, Madam Chair, that greater Philadelphia and the City of Philadelphia are locked in a very heated battle with other regions throughout the country in order to establish a preeminent position as the center of knowledge, and that a key component of that effort will be whether we are successful in converting the more than 215,000 students in our Philadelphia public school classrooms into tomorrow's knowledged workers. Their economic future, and indeed the City and the region's economic future, depends on the quality of education they receive today.

We think important strides have been made over the past several years, particularly with this new contract. While everything sought by each side was not gained, we did see a new pay-for-performance system, a dilution of seniority, a control being returned to management in the transference of teachers, greater flexibility to principals in buildings, and a

longer school day, as well as improvements to the pay offered to Philadelphia School District teachers.

When these improvement are added to the reforms outlined in the School District's improvement plan that was submitted recently -- among them, reducing class size to 17 through 3rd grade, phasing out of middle schools in favor of a K-through-8 program, providing extra reading and math instruction for lower grades, and offering programs, including summer sessions for at-risk students -- Greater Philadelphia First believes that a foundation has been laid that can be built on in the future for a better product for Philadelphia school children.

The District has been rewarded to some extent for its efforts in the Governor's 2000-2001 budget and 2001-2002 budget, but it is no secret that increased State aid is not nearly enough to eliminate, or even substantially reduce, the District's projected deficit, the reasons for which this Council will hear a great deal about over the course of these hearings.

We are here to ask the City and the

Council to consider an increased contribution to the District this coming fiscal year. We are not prepared to suggest what the size of this contribution should be, but we believe it is sufficient -- that it be sufficient to send a clear message that the City is not looking to Harrisburg alone for deliverance. No one should be able to point the finger at Philadelphia and say that the City is not is not doing, or has not done, its part.

Let me be clear that GPF is not here to implore Council to close the funding gap. We are acutely aware of the City's constraints and the fact that taxpayers are already shouldering an enormous tax burden compared to other districts and cities across the state. Bemoaning this reality, however attempting, is ultimately unproductive. The focus must instead be on what the City does have to spend on its schools and how that money can be most effectively spent.

Yesterday, we received a draft financial plan from the School District that has been circulated to members of this Council. That plan is thorough and impressive, and the District

is to be commended for its Herculean effort to clarify the perilous situation in which it now finds itself, but we have not had the time to carefully review the plan's contents. Even a cursory reading leads to the inescapable conclusion that the solution to the current and future definite crisis cannot and will not be found in any combination of new local and State revenues or cuts in programs or services. Instead, radical change is needed in the way in which public education in Philadelphia is funded and managed. To be sure, such change cannot happen overnight, for it requires reforms of a nature and scope not previously considered by the District's leadership.

GPF believes that the School District of Philadelphia's new management structure is a step in the right direction. We look forward to the appointment of a permanent CEO who will continue Interim CEO Phil Goldsmith's commitment to reducing operating costs, streamlining functions, and introducing other revenue and expense improvement. GPF has already begun discussions with the District concerning how the

business community can assist in helping the District to become leaner, better managed, and more entrepreneurial.

But, Madam Chair, must face the reality that more may be needed to reverse what may well be a desperate situation. In addition to internal management reforms, it may also take deficit financing and State oversight. There are numerous models that can be considered for the type of financial control and oversight that may prove to be necessary, and we are not here to suggest which is the most appropriate model.

What we are suggesting, however, is that it may well be time for both the Commonwealth, the City and the District to consider the swiftest possible rescue. The District will inevitably have to give up some of the freedom and flexibility with which it currently operates in exchange for a fiscal recovery mechanism. Yet, this short-term pay in compromise may be a worthy price for long-term stability.

Years of large deficits and one-time fixes will soon give way to a gargantuan gap on

which incremental action will make little dent. GPF would, therefore, urge this Council to convey the clearest possible signal to Harrisburg that it is willing to consider and, if necessary, take any step to assure the District's future fiscal and operating health. One could not be more impressed or overwhelmed by the materials presented on Page 14 of the draft plan, which show by Fiscal Year 2004 a cumulative deficit of such a magnitude that it's incomprehensible.

I would now, like to say just a few words about Greater Philadelphia First's education policy in initiatives that we hope will be able to provide a framework for a broader statewide educational agenda, which we believe will greatly benefit the School District of Philadelphia.

One such issue that we believe deserves considerable attention is whether it's prudent to continue to rely on the property tax as a primary source of public school financing. As this Council knows all too well, Philadelphia's real estate taxes have not kept pace with the growing needs of the School District. The problem is exacerbated by the number of county functions for

which the City is responsible and the large proportion of tax-exempt property. Moreover, the City's extensive use of Tax Increment Financing and the establishment the Keystone Opportunity Zones means that a portion of the new development will not generate increased real estate taxes for the District.

We believe that the time is ripe to move ahead on a statewide solution to the growing number of counties, including Philadelphia, and some of the region's suburban counties unable to adequately support their schools. GPF looks forward to leadership on this question and welcomes the Council's input and support.

Another area where GPF is equally interested is in charter schools. We fully support charter schools as one of several viable educational choices for parents and as incubators for innovation and creativity. Furthermore, we believe that the competition afforded by charter schools will step up pressure on public school leadership, pressure that will lead to greater improvements.

The charter school movement is still in

its infancy, yet serious concerns are being raised about curriculum, performance standards, accountability, compliance with State regulations, and funding, among others. GPF will work with the City and the School District and other interested stakeholders to ensure that charter schools can flourish and produce a high-quality education for students and their families opting to enroll. Indeed, GPF strongly favors providing parents with the widest possible range of choices in pursuit of a quality education for their children, particularly children who attend consistently failing schools.

Finally, we look forward to addressing a regrettable trend over recent years: the diminished appeal of teaching as a professional career. Many factors account for this, including compensation, poor or insufficient teaching materials, and unsafe working conditions. In the view of all too many teachers, increased emphasis on standards, assessment, and accountability has led to a public perception that teachers are not doing their jobs, and consequently, fewer and fewer are entering the profession. Both the

Commonwealth and the City must undertake aggressive efforts to attract more teachers.

The best practices of other states including housing assistance programs, low-cost mortgages, and bonuses for teachers who remain in the City must be considered for adoption here. The comprehensive legislative proposal recently unveiled by Representative Dwight Evans, which contains six different initiatives aimed at teacher recruitment and attention, should receive swift legislative scrutiny and action. And while GPF's board has not yet taken a position on relaxing the residency requirement for new teachers, we would urge that this issue be revisited as part of an exhaustive search to ensure that there is a teacher in every classroom.

In short, there are fewer issues of greater or more lasting significance than the education of our youngest citizens. Business leadership views its role as advocate for public education reform to be vital to the transformation of the region and the City and to one of the nation's leading centers of knowledge. GPF will, therefore, be following the progress of the

Council's hearings on the District with deep interest and concern.

Thank you very much.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very much, Mr. Katz.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Councilman Cohen, did you have a question for Mr. Katz?

COUNCILMAN COHEN: Yes.

You know, I -- it's only fair for me to express my deep disappointment that you had your statement. When the business community felt we needed stadiums for the City to be a first-class city, it said a billion.3, sure, we'll support that campaign: we'll have bonds issues, we'll do everything we can, we'll get State appropriations especially for it.

Your statement says education's the most important thing; what do you offer? State control, no money, nothing.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: It seems to me if the business community is serious about how important it is for public education, Greater

Philadelphia First and the Chamber of Commerce ought to be out front, on the Governor's doorstep and on the President's doorstep, saying, We need immediately maybe a half a billion to clear up the operating deficit and another half a billion in order to deal with the decrepid capital structure of our schools. Why don't you lead that kind of campaign?

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: Or else your words are meaningless. You parrot the words, just like the School Board did as they tried to kill off one of its most successful programs. They say they're for education but they don't do anything; in fact, they move in the wrong direction.

Why don't you and the business community show real leadership. Go to the Governor, go to the President. You know the City can't raise taxes, 'cause if we raise taxes, more people will leave, more businesses will leave. Where are we going to do everything? What do you offer us? You say somehow or other, we're going to change things, the City's going to have to give up its freedom, the School Board's going to have

to give up all of the options it has. State control is going to do nothing for us unless the State is willing to put in scads of money, and the State, working together with the federal government, both have the same kind of political leadership. There ought to be no problem.

If the business community takes the bull by the horn, organizes itself, and goes on the doorstep of the capitol in Harrisburg and the capitol in Washington and says, We as the business communities are saying to you, if you want cities to survive, particularly Philadelphia, you've got to give us the support we need now. That's the program I think the Greater Philadelphia First ought to be coming forth.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN COHEN: And I'd like a reply from Mr. Katz. I don't mean that as merely a statement.

MR. KATZ: Well, I think it's --

COUNCILMAN COHEN: Why doesn't the business community back up its words with some real support?

MR. KATZ: Mr. Cohen, I think that you

know that the business community provided over $100 million over the last five years in support of Superintendent Hornbeck's Children Achieving program to match a $50 million Annenberg Foundation Grant. I think there is clear evidence that the business community of this city, and of this region, has done a tremendous amount, both with wallets and with their political support to support Superintendent and to support the School District.

I have personally gone to Harrisburg and talked to the many legislators. I recently met with members of the House Education Committee here in Philadelphia. And I don't think that you know any less than I know about the political support that exists for significantly new appropriations in Harrisburg for education in this commonwealth. We are supporting together with other business organizations throughout the State, and I would say at this point, not yet successfully, increases in aid for early-childhood education.

The proposal that I outline today calls for significant financing to wipe out, as you

know, as is shown on Page 14 of that presentation the District handed out, what will accumulate if left untended a $700 million-plus cumulative deficit. That's a lot of money and to divert appropriations from the School District of Philadelphia into a financing mechanism that would give the District the means to put behind it thirty years of accumulated financial neglect strikes me as a pretty strong statement in support of public education by the business community.

Now, if it's not strong enough for everyone, that's not something I can satisfy you on. But I can assure you that Greater Philadelphia First will continue to lend its support to efforts not only to increase appropriations to the School District of Philadelphia, but also to find a solution to a problem without which there will be no future for the School District of Philadelphia.

We've been watching one-time gaps being used to close deficits for 25 years, and I think that Rhonda Chatzkel, Deirdre Farmbry, Pedro Ramos, Phil Goldsmith will tell you that we are out of those. We are looking at a $185 million

deficit after a $62 million increase in State appropriations this fiscal year, an increase that the Governor will have to put every single ounce of political capital behind in order to get this legislature to approve. You know that and I know that.

And it seems to me that if you look back at the history over the City over the last ten years, the exact same kind of mechanism that we're talking about trying to put the School District on a sound footing today that ten years ago was put in place in order to put the City on a sound footing is precisely the right kind of strategy for the business community to support, and that's precisely why we are supporting it. And I think it brings a tremendous amount of leverage and flexibility.

And if the price for doing that is to give up to an agency of government that now argues that they put up 60 percent of the dollars but get little say in the spending and that's the price for doing it, I think it's a price that most educators would argue that we should consider making.

COUNCILMAN COHEN: Thank you.

MR. KATZ: Thank you, sir.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Councilman Rizzo.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thank you.

Good evening, Mr. Katz.

MR. KATZ: Councilman.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Mr. Katz, before your leadership of Greater Philadelphia First, I believe a lot of time and effort was expended in doing a study of the non-educational areas of the Board of Education, and I asked the Administration and the Board members about the way they implemented those recommendations.

Have you had an opportunity to look back at that report and to analyze and to see how seriously they accepted that report? Because you, here in your testimony today, indicate that we're going to have to make some radical changes in the School District to protect its future. So I'd just like you to comment on how that report was implemented.

MR. KATZ: Councilman, as you know, that report was authored probably in 1997 and '98,

and I did ask for, and I have a copy of, the summary of some of the recommendations that were made that was done under the recommendations of Richard Smoot and Emma Chappelle. Approximately 117 recommendations were made to the School District about modifying management and reforming operations, facilities, transportation, food services, and so on. And I would be happy to provide that information to you.

I can't sit here today and tell you that I have audited it, that I know it to be a fact, but we had asked the School District to advise us, and they have advised us, on the reforms that they have made as a result of that report. And I'd be happy to pass that onto you.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: I'd appreciate you providing that to the Chair, but for the purpose of this public testimony, do you -- after just a cursory review, do you have a feel that they were responsive? Just rate the response, without getting specific.

MR. KATZ: Well, I would say they were very responsive to the recommendations of the report; however, not adequately to the conditions

in which they find themselves today and going forward. The School District remains in businesses that arguably are not core-mission businesses of public education and for which they may have to out-source or privatize or in some other fashion get out of those businesses, because somebody else may be able to do them more effectively and strategically more cost-efficiently.

And we're not talking about that's something we like to say as opposed to that's something that may be necessary in order to help further reduce operating budget deficits.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Well, I agree with you totally, 'cause I asked the question of the School District and the Administration that I would think that the first thing we would do is review most of the operating departments that you just mentioned, and it doesn't appear to me that they have really explored cutting and doing some things that are -- would underline radical. A fleet management operation that in fact grew from 41 employees just to administer it to 43 this year.

So it's difficult for me to be sympathetic to the School District when, in fact, I don't think they've really looked at the District as a business and have analyzed where they can make improvements to save the taxpayers and lessen the deficit.

MR. KATZ: Councilman, I believe that even when all of those kinds of radical changes -- restructurings, out-sourcings, downsizings -- are done on the non-core mission of education, the School District will still have a gargantuan deficit, and at the end of the day, the only way that deficit can stop being the front and center issue that dominates the leadership's attention is to finance it.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Thank you, Mr. Katz.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: You're welcome.

Are there any other questions from members of the committee?

(No further questions.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Mr. Katz, thank you so much for your patience and for your

testimony.

MR. KATZ: Thank you very much, Madam President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

Vernard Johnson is our next witness.

(Witness comes forward.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Good evening.

MR. JOHNSON: Good evening, Council President Verna and Councilwoman Blackwell. My name is Vernard Johnson, and I'm the Executive Director of Healthy Family Healthy Life, and I'm a parent of a 15-year-old young lady who is at the World Communications Charter School, and I'd like to start out my testimony today by talking a little bit about charter schools.

As both of you ladies know, and probably some of School District people that are here, our family has been an active supporter of public schools in Philadelphia for the past 15, 16, 17 years. Our oldest daughter is a graduate of Philadelphia public schools and graduated -- actually graduated from the Parkway Program. Wanted to be a nurse, had As and Bs in science, tested well, started her college career at

Community College of Philadelphia, and --

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Mr. Johnson, I'm sorry. The noise level is much too high. If you're having conversations, do so in the corridors so that we can hear the witness.

Thank you.

Please proceed.

MR. JOHNSON: Started her college career at Philadelphia Community College that has one of the better associate-degree nursing programs in the country and couldn't cut the mustard in science, but tested very well. Has now readjusted her thinking and is going to become a public school teacher. Is going to enter Cheyney in the fall and hopes to come back and teach in Philadelphia public schools.

So we're supporters of public schools, but we couldn't sacrifice our youngest daughter, so we had sent her to private school; that was costly for us. And then the opportunity for charter schools opened up, and we sent her to a charter school that is now under scrutiny by the School Board, and we have a public hearing tomorrow for the renewal of our charter.

And I say to the Board of Education while they're here and in front of Council that we are all public schools, charter schools included, and that we need to look at the issue of equity in the schools together, we need to look at the process for reviewing charter schools together. And really, I'll just leave that charter school piece like that.

I'd now like to talk a little bit about public schools in general. I've been attending the United Way City of Philadelphia effort to plan for early-childhood education programs over the last month or two along with the School District, along with some School District personnel. And one of the missing links in those meetings is that there are no parents there. So we plan and we talk about successful programs, about what it costs, and we do all of that in the absence of parents.

And so I say to the parent leaders who are here that this is a strong mayor environment now, that the Mayor makes decisions and influences the School Board. And Estelle Richman is the Director of Social Services for this city. And

Harriet Dichter is the person who's responsible for children's services in this city, and her phone number is 685-5670, and maybe you might want to give them a call to tell them that you want to be involved in the process for long-term planning of early-education programs.

I'd like to move to partnerships. If we keep looking at violence in schools as a police issue, we may be doing ourselves a disservice. Violence is a public-health issue, has been classified as a public health issue for several years now, and every time we talk about violence in Philadelphia public schools, we talk about it from a safety and security perspective. Maybe we need to begin to talk about violence from a health and safety perspective.

We see too many children daily who are entitled to services, City services, that they're not getting, but the agencies are being paid. DHS workers are being paid, (indiscernible) workers are being paid, and our children go without services to a large degree. So as we're talking about partnerships, maybe we could talk about how the School District partners with DHS, partners

with them in an effort to get the kind of services that are being paid for right now, every day. It doesn't cost anything, it's already being paid for. It takes a effort to coordinate the services to make sure that the families who are eligible for 'em are getting 'em, so maybe that's a way that we could look at partnerships.

Maybe we could look at the Health Department, if we're not, as a partner. Maybe they could do the -- maybe they could provide nurses for schools that don't have nurses. Maybe they could look at the health education programs that nurses don't have an opportunity to complete every day like around critical illnesses such as asthma.

And I'd like to say to School District officials and to Council that my organization, along with an organization by the name of Asthma Disease Management, the CEO is A.J. Henley, who used to be the Chief Executive Officer of HMA, and we've discussed this with Mr. Ramos.

We're prepared to offer every child in the Philadelphia School District who has asthma or allergy and who has not been tested for the

allergy that triggers the asthma, we're prepared to offer those children, free of charge to the School District, free of charge to the family, an education program and testing, with the testing results going back to the school nurse, to the doctor, and to the family, making recommendations on how to handle the allergies that are triggering the attacks, free of charge.

We see more children, Councilwoman Blackwell, today, under the care of school psychologists and psychiatrists and taking Ritalin than we've ever seen before. And I'll close with this: than we've ever seen before. We see children standing in line, asking each other, have you had your pill today, have you had your Ritalin today? We're keeping kids good and dumb. And so, you know, 20 years ago, we sat here and said 50 percent of the children couldn't read; today we sit here and say 50 percent of the children can't read. And if the children can't read, we know they're going to act out.

So I close by saying this: If we could provide the children with quality health services, a quality physical, quality counseling, help

parents and families who are in need of help and who deserve help -- and in some cases, help is being paid for but is not being delivered -- maybe we could change the behavior and the environment of our schools so that teachers can teach and children can learn.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

And let me say thank you for your help with Ritalin because when we had hearings back in about 1983, without your help, we would not have even known the problem existed. And albeit we still have all of the problems, and even Mr. Kirsch testified that 50 percent of 9th-graders -- that's the grade I used to teach -- aren't even finishing school. We know that the struggle continues, but certainly, you have been in the forefront of that, and we say thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: It's my understanding that we may have people or witnesses in from the PCN. Are they still here? Would you

please approach the witness table.

(Witnesses come forward.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Councilman Nutter, are you asking that someone from the School Board also be at the table?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Yes, Madam Chair.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Can we have someone from the School Board also at the witness table to address this issue, please?

(Witness comes forward.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Councilman Nutter.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I wanted to go back some of the earlier discussion to get a little better sense of where things are, where things are going. And I think from some of the comments of my colleagues earlier, one is it should be fairly clear that there is a significant amount of concern about the situation with regard to PCN. We all have our various take on this situation.

But I think one of the glaring issues at the time at the moment is what the amount and

level of contact and discussion has been over whatever the period of time has been, where things are at the moment, what may or may not happen on Friday, is there agreement, is there not agreement and then Monday.

And so, again, at least for the record, I do want to get a better understanding of two items that I thought would be driven not only by this reference that a significant number of Councilmembers sent a letter to the School District about this back in the summer of 2000, as well as the Board took an action back on September 11th, which I came to that Board meeting, commended the Board for their action, and I took their action and their words in this Board resolution very seriously.

And so, for instance, the Board said that the District, in conjunction with the Mayor's Office, City Council, and appropriate City and nongovernmental agencies, shall undertake a comprehensive review of the need, cost, and funding of pre-kindergarten, early-childhood programs in the District, and that the District staff are directed to take all necessary steps to

facilitate the program review process and report back to the Board as appropriate.

What I'm trying to understand in any of that is, what happened from September 11th going forward to February 27th of 2001 that responded to the two resolve clauses that I just made reference to leading to where we are at this moment?

DR. FARMBRY: Okay, I will say that since that time, the District has been in contact and discussions with Harriet Dichter from the City regarding the whole issue of early childhood in general. We're looking at it from the standpoint of what do we offer, the quality of what we offer, how does the quality of what we offer compare with national initiatives, and so forth. We've also done that in collaboration with the United Way. Some of our programs are in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania and a study that they're doing.

So we really have approached it through the umbrella of looking at the quality of all of our early-childhood programs because we are committed to the premise that if we as a district are going to offer these programs, then we're

offering them for educational reasons, because that's what differentiates them from babysitting. So we want to make sure that all of our programs -- Head Start CDC and PCN -- are educationally sound, educationally rigorous, and that has really been the trust thrust of our work.

As far as PCN goes --

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Well, let me just ask one question.

MS. FARMBRY: Yes, mm-hmm.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: It was Miss Ruffin who was at the table earlier, right?

MS. FARMBRY: Correct.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Now, did I understand from her testimony that Head Start has a significant educational component to it and that PCN does as well?

DR. FARMBRY: Correct.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: And that Comprehensive Day Care, making no judgment between and among any of these programs, just trying to understand again what their purpose is, that Comprehensive Day Care was, or is, more of a day care program as opposed to an educational program;

is that correct?

DR. FARMBRY: No. It has an educational component. I think that the major difference may be in the certification requirements for the teachers. In PCN, there are certified teachers, as there are in Head Start.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: All right. So at least at a baseline, you have the opportunity to have an educationally-driven program, given that you have certified teachers running it. We don't have certified teachers providing, in your words, a babysitting service, right?

MS. FARMBRY: Correct. And --

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: We're providing an education.

DR. FARMBRY: Correct. And we also have a rigorous program in that all of our early-childhood programs use our curriculum frameworks. You know, we have an early-childhood component in frameworks. The teachers get training, there's professional development, and we just want to make sure that we maintain a high standard of academic instruction so that we as an educational institution will be different --

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Right.

DR. FARMBRY: -- than what is offered in the community at large, the private providers, you know, your next door neighbor, who maybe can watch your kids.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Well, I understand that. And I'm sure that you don't mean in any way, shape, or form to suggest what's going on at PCN is similar to sending your child down the street --

DR. FARMBRY: Absolutely not.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: -- to the neighbor or across the street to grandmom's.

DR. FARMBRY: No, not at all.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: So how does any of that -- and I have my own view and position that the parents are quite clear with regard to the cost issues, but how does that evaluation that you're going through, which is great and appropriate -- one, where does that -- 'cause I didn't hear anything about the parents in any of that discussion, is one. And, two, how is that driving the cost issue or the increased few issue? And is that being looked at with regard to

any of the other programs?

DR. FARMBRY: Okay. The only program right now that current is under review for fee questions is Parent Cooperative Nursery. So in terms of long-range and short-range goals, we realize that we have a short-range goal to resolve the fee schedule for Parent Cooperative Nursery by virtue of the resolution and by virtue of the District's in September when we rescinded the fee for this year. That's the short-term goal that has to be resolved very soon.

But our long-term goal is to evaluate all of early childhood because, as the District is financially strapped at this time, we really do have to make decision long-term around the future of early childhood in general.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: But you would make decisions around early childhood if we had all of the money that we need because you're in the education business, and we're running three different programs that serve multiple constituencies, and you would want to know the answer to those questions if there were no funding issue, right?

DR. FARMBRY: Absolutely. We would want to have assurance that the quality of our program is the quality that we would want it to be given that we are an educational institution.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Okay.

MS. FARMBRY: Correct.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Tell me where the parents fit in any of that earlier discussion when I asked you what's going on between September 11, 2000 and February 27, '01. I heard about United Way, I heard about Harriet Dichter, I heard about the University of Pennsylvania, I heard about a whole host of people, but didn't hear anything about the parents.

DR. FARMBRY: Okay. The parents -- first of all, there were periodic meetings with PCN Center representatives. We've had parents come to several Board meetings between then and now to express their ongoing concern about PCN and the ongoing appeal that we collaboratively reach a decision. And then there was the meeting on February 27th and the meeting this Friday, in addition to the surveys.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Okay. I mean,

first, obviously, allowing parents to speak at a Board meeting, I mean, I don't think that anyone would necessarily consider that to be a part of any kind of discussion process about a program. You don't have discussions at the Board; you make a statement, they say thank you very much, next speaker.

What happened between September and February related to the parents around the evaluation of this particular program, cost estimates, analysis of the educational service being provided? What's the cost of this program to the District, what's the estimate of the cost?

DR. FARMBRY: 1.1 million.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: And if the program -- all of the teachers are certified teachers, right?

DR. FARMBRY: Yes, in Parent Cooperative Nursery.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: They're all School District employees.

DR. FARMBRY: Correct.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Okay. If the program went away, would you fire the teachers?

DR. FARMBRY: If the program went away, would we fire the teachers?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: If people either stopped participating because either they felt that they couldn't financially afford it, or the circumstances or the situation around its operation were becoming onerous, or it was a hassle to be involved, or for whatever other reason, the program went away, would the teachers go away or would they be absorbed into the School District.

DR. FARMBRY: They would be absorbed into the School District.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: And you would still pay them a salary.

DR. FARMBRY: Correct.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: You would not save the money by the teachers going away or this program going away, right?

DR. FARMBRY: Correct, we would not.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: This program operates in school buildings.

DR. FARMBRY: Correct.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: All right. And the

proposal to increase the fees, what will that generate?

DR. FARMBRY: I'm sorry, would you repeat the question?

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: The proposal to increase the fees, what would that generate?

DR. FARMBRY: You mean -- we don't have a proposal yet, but you're saying, what would a fee -- what would a fee support? Or -- I don't understand.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Well, you articulated earlier that there was at least a model or a proposal last summer for a sliding scale. I'll take it -- when you say that you don't have a proposal at the moment, I take that to mean you don't have a proposal that you necessarily want to talk about here because you haven't had a chance to talk about it with the parents on Friday in anticipation of an announcement on Monday.

But, I mean, I don't want us to get into a situation where anybody who is either listening to this or is subsequently going to read the record would be under the impression that as

of today, March 7th, on Wednesday, the District has no idea what they might potentially put forward or charge as the increased fee but they might know either by Friday, when they talked to the parents, or will be ready to announce on Monday.

I don't think you're going to come up with a proposal between tonight and Friday's meeting, right?

DR. FARMBRY: We are taking the input from -- the additional input from the parents and planning to share our thinking at the moment with them on Friday.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Okay.

DR. FARMBRY: With the anticipation that on Friday, we will have a proposal to present before the Board.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: What happens if you don't reach agreement on Friday? Or is that necessary?

DR. FARMBRY: Well, Debra Kahn wants to come up and also address this.

But, you know, we are aware of the concerns that the parents have expressed. We are

trying very hard to adhere to a Monday deadline because we are aware that should people care to exercise the option to attend PCN or exercise other options, that this is the time of year when people have to make those decisions, contact possible providers, give deposits in many cases, and we realize that time is of the essence.

So it's our expectation that we will have a resolution to recommend to the Board on Monday.

(Witness comes forward.)

MS. KAHN: Debra Kahn Secretary of Education for the City of Philadelphia.

Councilman, I think just in response to the one question about how much would the proposal generate, along the lines of what Mr. Ramos had described about the kinds of things that had been heard from the parents and what we took into account in terms of the time of the program, the parent volunteering, and accounting for that time, so that the current proposal -- and I think the numbers you had heard around were roughly $20 a week. That would generate, I think, approximately $200,000 in new revenue. That's just taking into

account that we already receive the $25-per-month fee, so it would be roughly a net increase of about $200,000.

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Well --

MS. KAHN: I also --

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Let me say this. I mean, you know, every dollar to the District is critically important. I mean, a dollar is a dollar; I do understand that and I'm mindful of it.

I have to say, though, that -- I mean, if anyone did a cost-benefit analysis of the time, the effort, and the anxiety factor that has gone into this since last year and now culminating over the past couple weeks, I'm just not really sure that that analysis would show that for $200,000 in a district that has a $235 million cumulative deficit and a program for 4-year-olds, preparing them for kindergarten and helping to train their parents, that this is worth it.

In addition, it's my understanding, at least according to the calendar, that I think this hearing is going to at some point be recessed until Tuesday, the 13th. Is that correct, Madam

Chair?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: (Nods head.)

COUNCILMAN NUTTER: Now, the Board meeting is on Monday. I don't know what we will know or not know out of Friday's meeting. If anyone is sensitive to the timing aspect of this whole thing, I certainly am and I'm sure my colleagues are because that's how we got involved in this -- I'll just kind of call it "mess" in the first place, although certainly letting people know something sometime in March is a whole lot better than letting them know sometime in July.

On the other hand, the Board President talked about this program, the cost of this program, the fact that Head Start has a dedicated funding source from the federal government, that CDC has a dedicated funding source from the State, and that this program, which I don't think anyone in the couple hours that we've been talking about, no one has seem to do indicate is not a worthwhile program, is not a program that's providing good service to the 4-year-olds and to their parents, has ever said anything bad about this particular program. Its only problem is it has no dedicated

funding source from anyone other than the District supporting a program in its buildings, paying for certified teachers, and what the parents pay on a monthly basis.

Now, we have not been asked for anything or to do anything or to look at any additional funding for this, and I'm not saying that any of my colleagues at the moment are willing to put an additional dime on the table, but we haven't been asked that particular question.

And with all of that in mind, all I can ask is, if the Board was anticipating taking an action on Monday based on a meeting coming up on Friday, and we're going to be back in session on all of the budget matters on Tuesday, that I would ask for some accommodation for this City Council to have an opportunity before the Board takes any action or takes any action under consideration on Monday, that a report be made to this Council and to this committee on Tuesday to let us know what is going on and what has happened or transpired from the meeting on Monday and what's going forward from the meeting on Friday and what's

going forward from that point before any action is taken.

We know the Board has multiple meetings and also obviously has the ability to schedule special meetings. This is a critical issue. Under the circumstances, I think -- and I probably wouldn't suggest this, other than the fact that no one has been able to tell me with any clarity what specific actions of a meaningful fashion have taken place from September 11, 2000 to February 27, 2001. Clearly, most of the components of the resolution passed by the Board, for whatever reason, not pointing any fingers at anybody. It snowed a lot, we have a lot to do, we had Christmas, New Year's, stadiums, whatever anybody wants to talk about, but I don't get the impression that a whole lot of time and attention was devoted this particular issue, which this program, for some people, will be a pimple on an elephant's behind, but it's important to a whole lot of parents and a whole lot of kids, and it's very important to many members of this City Council. And I don't think it's going tear up anybody's week next week to wait a day or so and

be able to bring some information back to us as to what's going on with this before the Board takes any action.

My position has been crystal-clear since last summer: If there's going to be an increase, whether it's a sliding scale or a flat fee, as proposed by the parents -- there probably should be some level of increase. We got into a problem last year because of a timing issue. Now we ask, take a long-term view, what's the evaluation, what's the cost, what's the benefit of the program. That information, for whatever reason, has not been completely put together.

We are not that far apart, I believe, on getting a resolution to this particular issue, and I would say to take a little more time to try to get it right is better than trying to rush it at the last minute and further upsetting the parents and their children about this particular program. And that is the request that I'm making at this moment to the Chief Academic Officer and to the Secretary of Education on behalf of the Mayor.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

3/7/01 - SCHOOL BUDGET - PUBLIC TESTIMONY

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: You're welcome.

Oh, I'm sorry. Councilman Rizzo?.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: I would just like to follow up on that. Again, what was the price tag associated with the revenue of this program? How much money does the District make?

MS. KAHN: Per the proposal that's in the works, I would say roughly $200,000 now.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Just maybe quickly, could you point to four areas in the School District where you have reduced your spending by $200,000?

MS. KAHN: Well, actually, you had asked the question previously of Mr. Katz about the Greater Philadelphia First study, and actually in the footnote of his testimony, he indicated there that the total of the GPF projections or recommendations had been, I think, $45 million. And at the end of that formal oversight process, a GPF audit had indicated that there were $47 million worth of savings and many of those are recurring. So I think that's just one area.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: I don't think I

heard Mr. Katz say that. I heard him say he wasn't sure --

MS. KAHN: I know he didn't, but it's in his printed testimony.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: But I'm going by what he testified here today. If it was in his testimony, then I don't know what his reluctance was to say it.

Just point to what you know -- not Philadelphia First's old -- that thing's three or four years old, that report. Today, tell me four areas in the administrative offices and in the administrative operation where you've been able to trim $200,000 from anything that you do over there.

MS. KAHN: In the last round of budget cuts in professional development, there were significant cuts. There were cuts last year in the cluster budget as well. And we could provide for you, you know, a number of --

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: If you needed to come up with the monies to offset the cost of this program, could you give me on idea of where you might find $200,000? 'Cause I think I could do it

in about 30 seconds.

MS. KAHN: We would be interested, as we said to you this morning, you know, to take any of your suggestions and any other Councilmember's.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Well, I gave you -- I want to give you some interesting statistics.

MS. KAHN: Okay.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Fleet Management is responsible for almost 7,000 vehicles, giving you an example. They do it with about 50 administrators that manage Fleet Management. You do just a little over 1,000 vehicles, and you do it with 43 administrators in the operation. I don't want to beat this to death.

MS. KAHN: Mm-hmm.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: My point is, I haven't seen, and Mr. Katz, obviously, if it's on paper, couldn't really point to where you've accepted and adopted those, and you're telling me that you adopted and saved the School District $45 million, adopting the recommendations of the Philadelphia First study?

MS. KAHN: Yeah, over time, yes. And, again, as he testified, there are the reports and

the summary reports, and I imagine that they've been provided to Council in the past, but we'll certainly be happy to do that again.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: I'm going to have to call Sam Katz tomorrow morning to find out why he wasn't willing to say that because you heard him say he'd have to get back to us to review and audit the recommendations to see what in fact were implemented, rather than just say what we normally here -- that's a great idea, we think it's wonderful. And next year and the year after that and the year after that, we're still using Nextel phones.

Thank you.

MS. KAHN: Thank you.

MS. DEROSA: Madam President, if I may. Mr. Nutter wanted to know -- some clarifications were needed concerning meetings or what has happened since September 11th to February 27th of this year.

When it is said that various meetings have been held in which the parents have had discussions concerning the PCNs, there are three meetings a year held at Girls High School in which

Mrs. Bunny Verbit is, you know, supervising it. There are educational meetings, okay? The very first meeting, we had someone there from Shanghai Press, and he talked to us about his books, and it was a very lengthy meeting. At the end of the meeting, I believe we had five minutes in which I addressed the parents.

And I told them that we needed to get together, that we needed to do something concerning our program, that I felt that we were in imminent danger of being -- you know, they keep saying to me, we're not trying to do away with your program. Well, if you put this high money rate to this program, you're closing the door on this program. There is a House bill that protects our program, okay? Mr. Cohen did address that earlier, I believe, that he was part of putting together that House bill.

Now, the second meeting had to do -- I believe Danielle had to do something with how we take care of our children, children's safety. And then, again, at the end of that Miss Jennifer Plummer-Davis was there, and she did more or less say to us that they're here to ask us how we feel

as parents, and there were some pointed questions asked as to why are you trying to change the program, why will there be a sliding scale, why are you doing this.

As far as the February 27th meeting, we were not negotiated with. We were asked what kind of information we parents would be willing to submit concerning the decision-making of a sliding-scale fee or any fee to be implemented on this program. We were not asked to help make that decision. We were told about this survey. I have handed over copies, 'cause we made copies of every one of these surveys that were passed over, and we have passed them in to City Council, what the parents have actually said.

And I can tell you, because I have seen them, that the majority of the parents have said they would like no fee. And if no fee at all, then at least the $5 a week that we in our proposals to the School Board have said that we would be willing to at least in an effort to establish open and fair dialogue with them, at least come meet them part way. Because we understand that there's a deficit, we understand

that they have to come up with money, okay? So we are trying to be honest and we're trying to be fair and we're trying to say if we must pay something, let me tell what you we can pay, because this is all we can pay.

We have given them three different proposals: a flat $45 rate, a sliding scale, and a flat rate, which, for those parents who have any kind of economic hardships, would be able willingly and privately to bring forth those items that would be necessary to determine what their income is so that they would either be excluded from paying or pay a lower rate. At no time did the School Board recommend that to us; we recommended it to them.

If this is fair and open dialogue, this is what the School Board feels is negotiating, me sitting there telling them what I have worked very hard countless of hours and sleepless nights to put together, and this is what they feel is fair and open dialogue, well, I have to stand here in public and tell you, that's unfair. I've done most of the work, they have included me in no decision-making.

And I hope that answers your question, sir.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry. There have been a number of students that have been waiting. I'm going to ask you to please --

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: If you want to add anything to what has already been said, I ask that you please be brief in doing so.

MS. MILLER: I just want to answer Mr. Rizzo's question.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Kindly identify yourself for the record, please.

MS. MILLER: Danielle Miller.

I just want to add that the $45 flat fee, Mr. Rizzo, that we proposed, $80,000 would be contributed that would be generated by the parents to the School District, and for the volunteer hours, the grand total would be $327,200 contributed in volunteer hours, mandated hours, and the fee, the $5 per week.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes Councilman Goode.

COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you, Madam President. I was only going to make the point that you already made, that there are other people here to testify, and this issue's not going to solved here tonight until School District makes its proposal.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you all very much.

The next group to testify are the National Students Association: Jeremy Kaplan, Day Augustine, Eboney Jones, and Tara Colston.

(Applause.)

(Witnesses come forward.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Who's testifying first? Okay, would you please identify yourself for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MISS JONES: My name is Eboney Jones and I'm from the Philadelphia Student Union.

(Applause.)

MISS JONES: Unfortunately, we had

about 100 people here but they had to leave because of the time.

And I would like to say that our tokens, school token, is now expired because we had to wait. It expired at 7 o'clock and it's now 7 o'clock. Okay.

Hello. My name is Eboney Jones, and I'm a student at Simon Gratz High School. I enjoy going to school and I am very serious about getting my education.

My mother has four children that attend public schools. She spends $144 a month on school tokens to send me and my siblings to school and back, and $144 a month is too much to pay for a free education.

(Applause.)

MISS JONES: This is money that we can't spend on food or clothes or other things we need.

I believe that school is very important in a child's life and I would hope that you have the same beliefs as I do.

I'm not just speaking for myself. There are lots of other students in a similar

situation. Some students are ashamed of letting people know that they can't afford tokens. That's why some aren't here today.

What I am so adamantly asking you is to consider not voting on the budget until you come up with a plan to make tokens free or more affordable.

(Applause.)

MISS JONES: We understand that you don't have to vote on the budget until the end of May, so that gives you time to find a solution to our problem. You are our leaders and we look up to you, so take responsibility for this tragic situation.

(Applause.)

MISS JONES: We can tell that money is not an issue. When City Council wants something done, it happens; for example, the stadiums.

Everyone says that education is paramount; this is your chance to prove it.

(Applause.)

MISS JONES: I also have copies if you need.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Yes. We'll

have them distributed. Thank you.

MISS JONES: I also have the testimony from a counselor. Her name is Andrea Clyman (ph.).

"As a counselor in the Philadelphia public schools, I have always seen a problem with the cost of school tokens. Tokens cost $36 per month per child. Many parents call asking for free tokens or a way to get free tokens for their children. Unfortunately, there is nothing available. Occasionally, I can get money from a fund for a few packs of tokens. This is the tip of the iceberg.

"many times, we just do not know why kids are not coming to school. Kids will tell me that the parents did not have the money for tokens. Many teachers provide kids with tokens, which they pay for themselves. There is one girl I give a token to every day. Most of our children live in homes with very low incomes or families with no assistance. Money for food, rent, and utilities come before tokens.

"Ironically, children here for disciplinary transfers get free tokens. Families

with two children must provide $72 for school tokens. I believe we would provide a great service if we could provide or greatly reduce the cost of tokens.

"I graduated from Olney High School in 1960. Tokens were then $1 for 10 tokens. I do not think the cost of living has risen nine times. For all of the money our city spends, it would be more for good use to have children travel to school for free or at a more affordable cost.

"Simon Gratz, where I have worked as a counselor for 12 years is an inner-city Title 1 school. Our children receive free lunch and breakfast. Money is a huge problem for our families. Help in this area would be greatly appreciated.

"Sincerely, Andrea Clyman."

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Our next witness is?

MS. NELSON: Hello. My name is Sherelle Nelson, and I am here to testify on behalf of Tara Colston. Unfortunately, she had to

leave earlier.

"My name is Tara Colston, and I am a sophomore at Simon Gratz High School. I am also faced with the issue of getting to school due to token costs. My parents spend $37 per week -- that is $148 per month -- to get my siblings and I to and from school. I feel that school is already challenging enough in dealing with the lack of books teachers, school supplies, et cetera."

(Applause.)

MS. NELSON: "Why does SEPTA, the School Board, City and State feel another challenge is necessary. Although my family is not poor by School District standards, there have been a few times where I have had to stay home school because we did not have money for tokens.

"I attended yesterday's City Council hearing and heard that Councilman Goode asked whether lack of tokens affect truancy. I would like to say, through personal experience, that it has a drastic effect on truancy. I have many friends who miss school on a regular basis because they don't have tokens. I suspect that between 30 and 50 students miss school every day at my school

because they can't afford tokens.

"If you don't believe me, call my principal. The assistant principal has several teachers in my school spend money out of their own pockets to give out tokens every day because they recognize that students need tokens to get the school."

(Applause.)

MS. NELSON: "I do not recall that being a part of a teacher's or principal's job description.

"For many students, whether or not they have a token is primarily the issue in whether they go to school. It is a huge burden. It should not be this way. Many students are ashamed to go around begging for tokens. They shouldn't have to do that. They shouldn't have to beg to get to school.

"I understand that many of you are working to find new creative ways to pay for the tokens. This has been going on for many years, and nothing has changed. Meanwhile, I am losing out. This is my education and my future at stake. I want to go to school and I want to

learn, but I need your help.

"We demand that you find a way to make the tokens fee before you vote on this budget."

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. DAY: Hello. My name is Day Augustine. I also have copies of this testimony as well.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you. We'll be happy to circulate it and give a copy to the stenographer.

MR. DAY: Also, I am a member of the Philadelphia Student Union.

(Applause.)

MR. DAY: And I attend West Philadelphia High School.

I am here to testify because so many other students and I sometimes miss school because I cannot afford tokens. I am not afraid to admit it.

I have been here to testify before, but people don't seem to take us seriously. I want to get my education, but how I do it -- I mean -- excuse me. But how can I do it if I can't get to

school. We need to do something about this problem as quickly as possible.

(Applause.)

MR. DAY: I do believe Councilman Rizzo said last time I testified that there was a foundation called the Mary Mason Foundation. We called the Mary Mason Foundation, as Councilman Rizzo suggested last week, and a very rude woman told us that she couldn't give us any information and that we would only listen to the show more -- we would have to listen to the show more to get more information because the tokens are just a gimmick, just to get people to listen to her show. That's what she told us.

I am attending West Philadelphia High School for ROTC and the Aviation program. And I live in Wynnefield area, meaning that my grandma has to put out $36 every month just to send me to school. A free education, huh? People fail to realize that she is on a fixed income. She is retired and she has to pay bills. She has to pay mortgage on her car, on her house, and yet she still has to put out money for a supposed free education, which I so rightfully deserve.

Public schools are supposed to be free, but if we have to pay to get there, then it's not really free. I don't think that sitting around this table, just talking, is going to fix our problems. We have to work harder and we have to work together in which to make this token situation work for us.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: For the record, I would like to show that we still have a large number of students here, and it's now 7:13. We've been here for the last three hours waiting patiently because all voices are going to be heard no matter what discouraging (inaudible).

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: All right. So, my name is Jeremy Kaplan, and I am a senior at Masterman High School and a member of the Philadelphia Student Union.

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: As you have heard from the personal testimony of my colleagues, the price of school tokens is a major obstacle to getting an

education for many students in this city. Thousands of families across the City are burdened by this cost. This is not right and we demand that something be done about it.

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: New York, Pittsburgh, Erie, and many other cities all provide free public transportation for their students. Students in Boston and San Francisco pay a third and a quarter respectively of what we pay in Philadelphia. Meanwhile, we are paying $9 a week to get a public education.

We tell students that it is crucial that they go to school every day, which it is, but then we leave them on their own to figure out how to pay for it. Many families are able to put the money together, although they certainly do not have it to spare. Other students are able to plead with caring teachers or administrators to get them to provide token money out of their own pockets. Many other students just can't find the money and don't go to school.

Finding this money a huge hardship for thousands of students. If we truly believe it is

important for everyone to go to school, we should not be making it this hard.

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: We know that the money is out there. The City has a large surplus and is spending far more than this on stadiums.

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: We know that when City Council makes up its mind to do something, you can get it done.

We are asking you to do this: We are saying that helping students get to school needs to be a top priority.

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: This is not a free education of some families are paying $144 a month to get their children to school.

We understand that some of you want to find other ways to do it, but we have been told that for years, and nothing is happening. Meanwhile, our education and our future is at stake.

Now we are asking you to show us that you care, show us you want us to go to school. We

hear these words from adults all the time. Well, now we need some action to back it up. If you all vote on this budget next week without finding a way to help us get to school, it will send a clear message to ours students, to the young people of the City that no one is listening and no one cares.

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: If that is your intent, then go ahead and vote on the budget. I mean, we will then see where your priorities are.

(Applause.)

MR. KAPLAN: If that is -- sorry. We know that you do not have to vote on this until the end of May. We are saying that we want to go to school but we need your help. Please find a way to make tokens free before you vote on the budget.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Councilman Goode.

COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you, Madam President.

I have one quick question. Who gave you the May date for passing the budget?

MR. AUGUSTINE: I beg your pardon?

MR. KAPLAN: Cohen?

COUNCILMAN GOODE: Who gave you the May date for passing the budget?

MR. KAPLAN: It was Councilman Cohen.

COUNCILMAN GOODE: Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: The Chair recognizes Councilwoman Blackwell.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you. Welcome again, young people.

MR. KAPLAN: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Miss Mason will be here tomorrow. I stepped out and I just read your statement, and we'll let her know, but she does give out tokens. That much I know.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you all for your patience in coming in to testify. Thank you very much.

MR. KAPLAN: We will not be silenced.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: The stenographer would just like a five-minute break if you don't mind.

(Break taken.)

- - -

(Proceedings resume.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you very much. Our stenographer is back so we'll resume our hearing.

We thank you for your patience. William Mackey, Citywide Youth Agency. That includes: Jennifer Robinson, Raymond Webb, and other guests.

(Witnesses come forward.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Welcome. We recognize you to present your testimony. Please identify yourself for the record for the stenographer and proceed.

DR. KIRSNER: Good evening. I'm Dr. Mark Kirsner (ph.), speaking for Philadelphia Youth in Control. I am the evaluator of the project. I have here Raymond Webb, who is a senior at Benjamin Franklin High School. On my

right is Miss Jennifer Robinson, a sophomore at Parkway High School. And on my further right is Sarah Murdoch, who is a Citywide staff and PYIC coordinator, and I'll explain to you PYIC in a moment.

We are asking Council and the Administration to pass an executive order making Philadelphia Youth in Control as an administration demonstration project. The Philadelphia Youth in Control Project is a unique coalition of major institutions, public agencies, and local community organizations joined together to make the resources available and accessible for the children and youth of the William Penn School Cluster.

The members of the coalition include Temple University, the School District of Philadelphia, the Free Library, City Departments of Human Resources, Recreation and Police, and local organizations like the Philadelphia Anti-Drug Anti-Violence Network and the Citywide Youth Agency.

The program serves high school and middle school students by encouraging them to

succeed in their academic studies by having them pursue studies in knowledge-based fields like health, architecture, science, engineering, and business, and by teaching them to appreciate others through service to their community.

The program encourages use of the best of what this City offers: field trips to our museums, research in our libraries, person-to-person contact with community leaders, business people, teachers and academics, and most importantly graduates of our community who have succeeded in their studies and who have gone on to higher education.

Our program is important because these children are important. Most of the students with whom we work are in academic trouble. Our latest count, 80 percent of our school students, test below grade level in one of three basic subjects; 54 percent test below on two subjects; and 27 percent on three subjects. We see some high school students entering our programs reading or testing at 2nd- and 3rd-grade levels. They need our help.

There are barriers with which the

program and the students enrolled in the program must deal. First of all, while organizations may want to be part of joint efforts, coordination of the lower level of staff is often difficult because, indeed, there are some of those who are unwilling to go beyond their routine assignments.

Secondly, parents are so hard to involve in these programs. Perhaps it is the burden of being the sole bread winner, perhaps it is time demands of other children, or some other reason. But whatever the cause, many of our children's parents or caretakers are not a part of the child's social processes.

Finally, transportation is a barrier for delivering service to these children. Our city promotes a new fatality (sic) to tourists coming from all over the globe and yet we are reluctant fatality (sic) to our own children.

How an students learn about the world when the cost of getting around the City is so expensive to them. Increased mobility of our students through subsidizing a program which helps these students get to cultural and educational programs, after school and on weekends is sorely

needed.

I thank you for your consideration.

(Applause.)

MR. WEBB: Good afternoon. My name is Raymond Webb. I'm 18 years of age and I am currently a senior at Benjamin Franklin High School.

(Applause.)

MR. WEBB: I am also part of Citywide Youth Agency. I have been a member for six years. I'm in the law division and hope some day to be a corporate lawyer.

This will be my sixth year of speaking before City Council.

(Applause.)

MR. WEBB: I feel that students from grade 6 to 12 should be able to ride SEPTA because parents have enough bills without having to worry about money for school tokens, especially single parents such as my mother. The yearly cost is $432, but that's just for one student. What about the families with multiple children. Parents already have to pay taxes to provide for school funding, so why shouldn't their children be able

to ride the bus for free.

By doing this students, you will give truant students that only miss school due to the fact that they can afford tokens every -- hold it. Afford tokens a chance to (indiscernible) education along with their not-so-less-fortunate peers. This will also help parents save money for more useful things such as their child's college education. This will not only help single-parent homes but also two-parent homes that are struggling to make ends meet, because, let's face it, Philadelphia isn't exactly a wealthy city.

You punish us when we don't go to school, but you won't give us the financial help we need for transportation.

(Applause.)

MR. WEBB: You say you want to help us to get our education, but are you willing to go to any extreme to help us.

Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. ROBINSON: Hello. My name is Jennifer Robinson. I attend Parkway

(indiscernible) and also Citywide Youth Agency, and I'm -- at CWY, we take a different career such as law, arts and culture, business, architecture, health and computer technology. I'm in the law division. I was at the State competition law program, and I learned a lot of things. Citywide and my fellow students, my partners and to Robert Brown, who is -- who was the Councilman Darrell Clarke's office.

Citywide give us stipends and they give us a monthly TransPass. And when the School District can give it to us, I think -- let me see, hold up. There are the only reason why we receive transportation from Citywide is because we earned it due to participation. Citywide spends at least $3200 a month for transportation for us when the School Board should do it for us.

(Applause.)

MS. ROBINSON: My mom was paying $42 a month, even though my mom couldn't afford it. That's why I join Citywide and also because I thought that, well, since they got a law program, I'm not going to be coming on the bus, I'm not going to try to be on the streets.

And also, why is it that the schools in New York and Erie and Pittsburgh, they get their tokens for free. Why can't we?

(Applause.)

MS. ROBINSON: Yo, can you all please stop worrying about the new stadium and think about us, because, let me tell you, in my schools, we don't ever have books or we don't ever have our own ID. What's up with that? You all supposed to be the School Board, you all supposed to be thinking about the schools, not about no stadiums. And I think you all should hear what we saying and you all decide. You all make the right decision.

(Applause.)

MS. MURDOCH: Hello. My name is Sarah Murdoch.

For the past four to five months, I have been a part of Citywide Youth Agency, working with Philadelphia Youth in Control Coalition. Our coalition has 65 representatives from different public and private organizations.

Citywide Youth Agency is developing a ID card which will allow the students to record his or her presence by swiping his or her card in

a computerized machine to track the use of social, educational, and recreational services. This swipe system will help us direct not only to get the right resources but also know where our students are going in their future. The students will be able to use their ID cards at the library, health clinics, and SEPTA, et cetera. With money allotted towards this project, youth will be able to receive services from these resource providers without them worrying about spending money for fees.

Half of the time youth do not take the initiative or take advantage of resources accessible to them because their families have insufficient funds. We believe that money should be invested in this project to provide more resources so that we can better serve the youth. Citywide Youth Agency spends $3200 a month on transportation for our students when we could spend this money on other initiatives.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. ROBINSON: Again, I'd like to say something else about how Citywide give us

stipends. Even though my school only have ID's, it's hard for me to cash my check and it's hard for me to do over things because I don't got no stipend.

And you all talking about safety in schools. People from all over be coming in our schools, say they part of Parkway, and they get away with it. You don't know how old they is, you don't know what they carry. Our metal detectors have -- they down half of the time.

So I would like for you all to look into that because in my school, I ain't learning nothing 'cause I don't have nothing to learn with.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: So we hear you say you don't have books. We do have the School District here and we hope that they will carry back the issue of ID and get back to certainly your organization and to school and to the Council. Would you get back to us?

Thank you.

MS. ROBINSON: Thank you.

(Witnesses come forward.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Please

identify yourself for the record and again your testimony.

We cannot hear you. You must speak into the mic. Pull it over, pull it close to you. You have a soft voice.

MS. KELLUM: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Shira (ph.) Kellum, and I'm a senior at Samuel S. Fels High School. And Citywide gave me the encouragement to organize a stop the violence and violence control classes. And being as though students do not have tokens or extra money, the parents can't provide extra money or any type of way to get transportation to the classes, I can't do it. Being as though they need that -- they don't need -- basically, they don't need to stop the violence class or whatever. That's why violence is bad. That's why we getting violence, a lot of it.

So, therefore, me being young and Citywide encouraging me to stop the violence classes and the prevention and all of that, we need them extra tokens or whatever you all can do to provide. Ya'll can't probably provide a lot, but a little bit would help and a little bit will

go far.

And I think it's that -- it's the adults' responsibilities to provide us with token money for transportation or something. And it's funny how education is free, but transportation to get there is not.

Can I ask you a question? Should we have to struggle, which you all had to struggle too.

Thank you. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. MACKEY: Hi. My name is William Mackey. I'm an employee at Citywide Youth Agency.

First, I just want to say thanks to all of the young people that stayed here, the Student Union and the Citywide Youth Agency and all of the other students.

(Applause.)

MR. MACKEY: The Council had a strong representation from them this evening and they should be proud of that.

Now, I want to talk about the SEPTA issue, along with other City services. And as we

look at the City School District, we look at the cluster system.

Now, let me give you an example. In the William Penn Cluster, we have a average of 11,000 students, so we believe that about 25 percent is really achieving at the honor roll level, and we believe that about maybe another 50 percent is average. And then you have another portion of 25 percent that may be at risk or really need some resources. Somebody in that cluster has to stand up and be a leader, even if it's the School District, it's DHS, it's the Rec Department, it's the Health Department.

I just think that the services is not coordinated and it's not filtering down to the student. Therefore, everybody flip over each other. You go into high school, you have to pay for security, you have to pay for the electricity costs, and then you bring the Recreation Department in to provide the same service. It's a lot of duplication. And who's the losers? These young people.

When you look at SEPTA and the swipe ID system in the school system, have SEPTA and the

School District technology people sit down to develop a interactive system that mirror each other. We believe that the swipe system that the School District use and they scan ID's can be mirrored and worked out with the technology at SEPTA. SEPTA employees don't use TransPasses; SEPTA employees use they ID and swipe the public transportation free, if I'm not mistaken.

We know that if Council and the chairman, Wilson Goode Jr., bring in SEPTA people and the technology people at the School District and the swipe ID system, that we can very quickly develop a demonstration model for youth ridership. Not only can that swipe card work as a disciplinarian measurement in the School District; it should be the library card, it should be the youth health card, it should be -- why should a kid get suspended at 11 o'clock from William Penn High School and shoot the jump-winning shot at Demby playground at 11th and Oxford. It don't make sense. We are not talking to each other.

So I commend this administration for its youth efforts. However, we are not at the table when it comes to direct services for our

children and youth. And I can say this year, in Year 2, in Philadelphia Youth in Control Project, with 340 students enrolled in it, we are moving that way. When the library system is recognizing the students ID card. We had SEPTA at the table. We spend a minimum of $3200 a month for monthly TransPasses. We had SEPTA at the table and ask them to have those youth ID cards be recognized by SEPTA scan machines, the swipe machines, the magnetic TransPasses. And it can happen -- only if this Council authorizes and brings those people to the table.

And we say it should go further. With 12,000 students in the William Penn Cluster, only 25 percent had a physical God knows when, it doesn't make sense. Shouldn't every Philadelphia student have a library card? Shouldn't every student have comprehensive social services if they need it? It's not making sense.

My recommendation is hold SEPTA contribution from Council until you get 'em to the table. And once they come to the table, ask them to look at all of the other mechanisms that they do. SEPTA say that they cannot do donations to

organizations and all, but the University of Penn have a unique system with they students how they ride on public transportation, don't they? 'Cause somebody pulled back they contribution and put them to the table.

I'm very proud of Raymond Webb. Raymond Webb started at Citywide six years ago, and when he was a little kid, we brought him in here to start testifying. We chose Raymond Webb to be our youth delegate. We are proud that Raymond Webb is getting ready to go off to college. So when people question about do after-school programs work, they work.

And this is next young lady I'm getting ready to let speak, Charlita Hardy, was one of the youth in our program, and she's a outstanding mentor and staff member at Citywide.

(Applause.)

MR. MACKEY: I want to thank you, but do not underestimate the ability that these young people have. They know how to get by with SEPTA. Now, if you want to work with 'em, you could, but sooner or later, they going to show you how to ride for free. Believe me.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: Thank you, Mr. Mackey. You make some excellent points.

And, again, we ask the School District, when we resume these hearings, since you are coming back to report on other issues, that you will respond to the whole issue of ID and how it can be used for libraries, for students in and around school and for various other functions that Mr. Mackey mentioned. He makes some excellent points.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. HARDY: Thank you. My name is Charlita Hardy, and I'm the Special Events Coordinator at Citywide Youth Agency/AIDS Prevention Specialist.

And what I would like to say is for me being in Citywide for my senior year and then escalating on to a staff member at Citywide Youth Agency, I have learned a lot on hands-on training within the agency, and I support the agency with their initiative to support the youth and empowering the youth. And so I really think it's

very important that they receive the resources that's needed in order for all of us, the parents, the youth, the community residents, the City Councilmembers, elected officials to join in as a joint effort to provide these resources for the youth.

And I am glad to be a member of Citywide, and I'm glad to be able to be in the presence of the young people and allow them to be a backbone for Citywide as well as I am a backbone for Citywide.

And I can't stress the importance enough for us to try to provide those resources for the youth because they do need the tokens and they do need the parents' initiative to come out and support their children. We do need the mentors and the tutors because it's a lot. And as I, you know, as I grow within the agency and the challenges that come upon us, you know, I realize more and more that it's a group effort. We need the young people, the young people need us, and we need the City Councilmembers, and everyone has to join in -- the community residents, the grassroot organizations need to come together to make change

for the youth to make it happen.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Next is Shelly Yanoff, Philadelphia Children and Youth, PCCY.

(Witness comes forward.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Is Arnold Hall in the room?

(Mr. Hall not present.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay. The next group, most of them are from Comprehensive Day Care. Will you just kind of move over this way so you can go on right after Miss Yanoff.

MS. YANOFF: Good evening. It is a long day. I'll try to be very brief.

I'm Shelly Yanoff, Executive Director of PCCY, the region's outside government child advocacy organization. I'm here today to speak very briefly on the School District's budget.

I begin by stating the obvious: The City will continue to lose people unless we have a good public education system. We can try to sell the City --

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Excuse me. Can

you please be quiet as you're leaving. We need to hear the testifier. Thank you.

MS. YANOFF: The City will continue to lose people unless we have a good public education system. We can try to sell the City to developers in many different ways, but we won't sell the City to family or to employers without a successful school system.

And while we may sometimes differ on the small print, we all do understand what a successful school system looks like. We start with teachers, students, and a decent learning environment.

We don't have enough teachers. Why, you heard, and it was in response, I believe, to both the Council President and the Chairperson the Education Committee. Today you heard that there are currently about 130 teaching vacancies and about 200 more long-term substitutes currently in the School District. There are also about 1300 other employees who are not fully certified as teachers in the subject they're teaching and they are teaching our kids every day in our schools. That translates to about 45,000 kids being taught

by people who are not fully certified.

We at PCCY, together with the parent organization, the Alliance Organizing Project, are just completing a report on the teacher vacancy issue. And in fact, (indiscernible) Jordan over there is the one that did all of the work on it. Our teachers there paid less, have harder working conditions, and have students who need more supports but receive less than most of the surrounding districts and all of the districts in the State.

The discussion about how to make the situation better is a long one, and we believe it deserves a Council session. We would urgently ask that the Education Committee consider having a session on how we deal with the vacancy issue in our schools.

As you know, there is State legislation that's been introduced to provide some additional supports to potential teachers who work in urban districts where they're needed, but whatever the answer are, we need more trained supported teachers, and that means money.

The next crucial ingredients are

students who get to school ready to learn. That means children who start school, having had good preschool experiences, and are able to have enough time, supplies, and attention spent on them to succeed. That means preschool programs, full-day kindergarten, adequate supplies, and small class size. We have seen the positive results of many of these programs. We've seen improved achievements by the kids who have profited by good pre-school experiences, by full-day kindergarten, and by the smaller class size that the Literacy Initiative has started this year. They are doing much better in the early grades, and we are seeing that improvement.

But we can't begin to get to scale even in 1st grade and kindergarten. We can't fulfill the requirements of our empowerment plan without another $75 million on top of the $191 million. We won't be implementing the empowerment plan. And, Council President Verna, that was your first question in these hearings, how are we going to do it? We're not going to be able to do it, and if we don't do it, we can't empower Philadelphians. So we have to really go back to the drawing table,

it seems.

Every year, there's State legislation introduced urging the State to support quality child care, full-day kindergarten, small class size in the early grades. We don't usually have the Philadelphia delegation all speaking with one voice in favor of them; we need to.

In the last several years, there have been also been bills introduced in the legislative to change our reliance on property taxes and move to have schools predominantly supported by the State income taxes; that's what other states are doing, but we are not and we will suffer for it. Again, our State delegation does not unanimously support it; we need them to.

In the last year, PCCY conducted a survey asking neighborhood voters about their views on the local schools and how to make them better. Make class size smaller, they said. Make the schools safer, provide support for teachers, and provide adequate supplies. More than 40 percent of the people we interviewed moved into the neighborhood because of the quality of the elementary schools. Unless we do far more, they

will move out as well. The schools then are our tickets to success as a city.

Speaking of tickets, we don't want to beat this horse, but we must return to the subject of tokens. You've heard tonight our kids need to get to school in order to be successful in school. I feel a little like Jobe -- how long, how long do we have to ask kids to wait to do something about the high price of tokens?

As we've said and you've heard, thousands of kids are losing out every day because they don't have enough money to get to school. Nine dollars per week is a lot of money for a school district whose students are between 78 and 80 percent low-income. Ask any principal of a high school in the City, ask a magnet school teacher, ask a charter school teacher or administrator or a teen who goes to the academies. They will tell you that they miss out and that thousands of kids miss out because of high cost of getting there.

Everyone's waiting for someone to do something. We again ask you to end the juggernaut now, and just for this year, while we're waiting

for more creative answers, take 2.3 million out of SEPTA's budget, put it to the School District to spend on transfers. That will reduce the price of tokens to 60 cents.

(Applause.)

MS. YANOFF: Then we can turn to the State. Show these kids that it matters to you that they get to school.

Schools do need to provide good learning environments. That means all of the above in a safe, secure, responsive atmosphere in buildings in good condition. We do find ways to fund the buildings and stadiums and programs we want. We must show that we want to save our schools and our children, and thus our city.

We know this is just the beginning of a long process, but it must form the foundation for a new way to fund our schools. Locally, our support has not grown, except for this year, this current year's $20 million grant. We must increase our local support for public education.

We can be successful as a city if we want to be, and that means building success in our schools. That's the prize we have to keep our eye

on.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA:

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Thank you, Miss Yanoff, and I do believe you know that we will be having public hearings later in the year regarding teacher vacancies.

MS. YANOFF: Good.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: We didn't miss a bunch of young people, did we? Okay, just checking.

So now we'll have the parents from the Comprehensive Day Care.

(Applause.)

(Witnesses come forward.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: And we have Donna Gonzales, Stephanie Bankole, Alice Coles, Lawrence Floyd, Angela Hawkins, and Crystal Ashton.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Please identify yourself for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MS. HAWKINS: Good evening. My name is Angela Hawkins.

I just wanted to say that I am a single mom. I have four children, two of which that attend Comprehensive Day Care at the Christian Street facility. There is a continuous need for Comprehensive Day Care in our community. The Comprehensive Day Care has provided me with affordable, quality day-care services for my children. Having my children attend the program has played a very important part in their early-childhood development.

Comprehensive Day Care has not only provided my children with quality services, but it has also provided me with services. The institution of parental involvement in the program makes me feel like I have a voice on how my children are being cared for and educated. The monthly parent meetings that are held give us valuable information on how to better our parenting skills, disciplining of our children, nutrition, and how to deal with the special needs of our children.

There is a great need for the continuance of this program in our communities if our children are going to have a better, brighter

future. Our children are the future leaders of tomorrow. We owe it to them as parents, teachers, and as legislators to continue to support programs such as these to help pave their way.

Thank you.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Please identify yourself for the record an proceed with your testimony.

MR. FLOYD: Good evening. My name is Lawrence Floyd. I'm a single parents of two, with one child attending Christian Street Comprehensive Day Care.

Since my child has been attending this program, I have seen a academic and social skill development at a rate that will put him shoulder to shoulder with other incoming kindergarteners. To say that I am pleased with this program is an understatement. The thought of it not being available to me is uncomprehensible (sic).

I don't know where I would turn if this program was not available to me. We need this program funded. I need the program funded so that

my child can continue to receive early the education that will help him make a smooth transition into elementary school.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: I don't remember reading that this program's being cut. Someone said it's being cut? Is this program being cut? I don't think so.

MS. HAWKINS: I don't think so.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: Okay, all right. You had some other parents with you. Did they leave?

MS. HAWKINS: Yes.

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: This is it? Okay.

That's it, Council President.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Does anyone else wants to testify?

COUNCILWOMAN MILLER: That's it.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Is there anyone else to testify? Would you approach the witness table.

(Witness comes forward.)

3/7/01 - SCHOOL BUDGET - PUBLIC TESTIMONY

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Good evening kindly identify yourself for the record.

MS. HALL: Hi. My name is Nicole Hall, and this is my daughter Imani (ph.).

And I feel as though as a parent -- I'm a single parent raising my daughter. I work a full-time job, but I cannot afford to send her to a private center, and the day care program that she goes to at Bach Teen Center is very excellent. She's two and a half and she's well advanced for her age. And I like the program and I think that it's excellent in the City, and I think that more programs need to be like the Center at Bach. The teachers are excellent, and I feel that they really are caring and they're concerned about the children.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: What's the name of the program?

MS. HALL: Bach Teen Parent Center.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Teen Parent Center. Thank you.

MS. HALL: And that's all I have to say.

(Applause.)

3/7/01 - SCHOOL BUDGET - PUBLIC TESTIMONY

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: If anyone else is interested in testifying, please approach the witness table.

(Witness comes forward.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Good evening. Kindly identify yourself for the record.

MS. IRO: Good evening. My name is Sonya Iro.

I came to Philadelphia from London and I now live here, in Philadelphia. And when I arrived to this city, I didn't know what to do. I was faced with a situation where I have to go to law school for one year before I can qualify to take the bar in this country because I was already (indiscernible) in England. So I came cross Miss Gambrell (ph.) at the Bach Teen Center, and she helped me out. Of course, I don't have any money because I am studying, and it cost me a lot of money, and I'm on a loan as well.

So I have watched my daughter grow over the months, and I leave her there in the center. I go to school and I feel very comfortable because she's in safe hands. I do not think that even if I could have afforded the most expensive day care

that I would have had the comfort that this day care provides for me, being somebody new in the City, in the country, for that matter.

So I would please be grateful for this day care to be left to continue to operate to help a lot of young people that goes to the high school and for people like me as well who is benefitting enormously from the Bach Teen Center.

Thank you very much.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: And we do have somebody from the School Board here who has indicated that this program is not in jeopardy in any way.

DR. FARMBRY: It is not being cut. The Comprehensive Day Care programs are not being cut.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Are they being funded? You said they're not being cut. My question now is, are they being funded?

DR. FARMBRY: Yes.

(Dr. Farmbry returns to witness table.)

DR. FARMBRY: No. The program is not

being cut; it is being funded. What we may have to do is consolidate some of the sites based on enrollment, but we don't plan to cut the program.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: I think the parents were very anxious to hear that.

Is there anyone else that wants -- oh, I'm sorry. Councilman Rizzo? I'm sorry.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: I just heard something that my antenna went up about consolidating some locations. I understand what you said, but what's the impact of consolidating locations to people that need these programs in the immediate proximity of their home that don't have a car to go to or an alternate location or don't have a token?

(Applause.)

DR. FARMBRY: We're aware of all potential problems; that's why looking very carefully at where locations are and trying to make sure that there is equitable distribution across the City in terms of the sites that remain open.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: So there will be

some sensitivity to --

DR. FARMBRY: Oh, absolutely. And there has been to this point as we looked at our enrollment increase in some areas and drop in others.

COUNCILMAN RIZZO: Terrific. Thank you very much. Just wanted to clarify that. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

(Applause.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Thank you.

Do we have anyone else to testify?

(No response.)

COUNCIL PRESIDENT VERNA: Seeing no one, I certainly want to thank all of you for your patience. I know you've been sitting here and we certainly appreciate your coming in to testify and expressing your concerns.

This committee will stand in recess until Tuesday, March the 13th, at 10 a.m. And the School Board will come back with information that was requested on Tuesday.

Thank you.

(Adjourned 8:05 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing proceedings of the Council of the City of Philadelphia of Wednesday, March 7, 2001, were reported fully and accurately by me, and that this is a correct transcript of same.

RE: COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
BILL NO.'S 010011, 12, 13

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA FY '01 BUDGET

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

_____,
JOSEPHINE CARDILLO,
Registered Professional Reporter