

H E A R I N G

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IN THE MATTER OF: )  
 )  
 CHRISTINA SCHOOL DISTRICT AND )  
 NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS ACT )

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Keene Elementary School  
 Cafeteria  
 200 LaGrange Avenue  
 Newark, Delaware 19702

Monday, January 7, 2008  
 7:00 p.m.

BEFORE:

JEAN ALLEN  
 DR. TERRY WHITTAKER  
 BARBARA RUTT

APPEARANCES:

MARY L. COOKE,  
 Deputy Attorney General  
 Counsel to the State Board of Education

WILCOX & FETZER  
 1330 King Street - Wilmington, Delaware 19801  
 (302) 655-0477  
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1 ALSO PRESENT:

2 ANN CASE

3

- - -

4 MS. ALLEN: I'd like to call this public  
5 hearing to order. The purpose of our hearing tonight,  
6 as many of you know, in May 2007, the Court of Chancery  
7 mandated that Christina submit an act compliant  
8 Neighborhood School Plan to the State Board of  
9 Education. Tonight's proceeding is to hear public  
10 thoughts, comments, concerns on the plan that has been  
11 submitted to the State Board by Christina.

12 I'm Jean Allen. I'm the president of the  
13 State School Board. I'd like to introduce you to the  
14 other members of the Board that are here this evening.

15 This is Mrs. Barbara Rutt, a member of  
16 our Board.

17 To my far right is Dr. Terry Whittaker,  
18 another member of our Board.

19 And I'd also like to introduce you to  
20 Ms. Mary Cooke, who is acting as legal counsel to the  
21 State Board this evening.

22 I want to point out, and I think most of  
23 you have seen this, that there is a sign-up sheet over  
24 on the table here. If you'd like to speak to our

1 Board, please sign up.

2 We also have with us tonight limited  
3 copies of the revised plans and the most recent hearing  
4 transcripts that are available, and that would be the  
5 transcripts from the hearing when Christina brought the  
6 plan to the State Board.

7 What we're going to do tonight is we will  
8 be calling the speakers one at a time from the sign-in  
9 sheet. In you are speaking as an individual, you have  
10 three minutes. If you're speaking on behalf of a  
11 group, then you may speak to us for five minutes.

12 We will have a timer up here and we ask  
13 that you take note of the timer as you're speaking, and  
14 it will ring at the end of the three minutes. If  
15 you're speaking for five minutes, we will reset it for  
16 two minutes, and then I believe Miss Case --

17 MS. CASE: It will just reset for three,  
18 so it will just be a countdown again.

19 MS. ALLEN: Right, but for five minutes.

20 I would point out to you that we do have  
21 a court reporter here with us tonight who is keeping a  
22 record of this hearing. She will provide a transcript  
23 to the State Board so that we have that record.

24 When you speak, you need to identify

1 yourself, spell your name, especially if your name  
2 might be a bit different, but for clarity it's probably  
3 better if all of you spell your name.

4                   Try not to speak too fast and speak  
5 loudly enough for the reporter to hear you.

6                   You can submit written comments to us.  
7 You may submit them when you speak tonight if you have  
8 those with you or you may also send them to the State  
9 Board at the Townsend Building in Dover. And if you  
10 need a more complete address, if you would see  
11 Miss Case, who is here this evening. Miss Case is a  
12 policy analyst for the State Board and she's here with  
13 us this evening.

14                   We're going to move now to receive  
15 comments, and I would say the Board is here to listen  
16 to your comments tonight, and we will not be responding  
17 in any way.

18                   The first name that I have on my list is  
19 Earnest N. Davis.

20                   Mr. Davis.

21                   MR. DAVIS: Would it be allowable for me  
22 to go last? Do I have to go in order since I put my  
23 name on first? I only put my name in first because I  
24 was the first one here. Would it be okay if I went

1 last?

2 MS. ALLEN: I believe it's fine if you'd  
3 like to go last.

4 MR. DAVIS: I'd like to see what everyone  
5 else has to say, if I can fill in, whatever. Thank  
6 you.

7 MS. ALLEN: The second name on our list  
8 tonight is Tom McMullen. Is Mr. McMullen here?

9 Welcome.

10 MR. McMULLEN: Thanks.

11 I just wanted to bring to your attention,  
12 my name is Tom McMullen, M-C-M-U-L-L-E-N, and I live in  
13 the Scottfield development.

14 Currently we go to Jenny Smith Elementary  
15 School and with the proposed plan, half of Scottfield  
16 will go to Jenny Smith and half will go to Brookside.  
17 Of course my half will go to Brookside. And I don't  
18 think there's anything wrong with Brookside School, I  
19 think it's a fine school, but I have built a lot of  
20 relationships with the teachers at Jenny Smith and I'd  
21 like to continue to have my son attend that school.

22 So I just wanted you to consider making  
23 the whole development of Scottfield go to one school  
24 instead of splitting it up into two different

1 elementary schools.

2 That's mainly all I had to say.

3 MS. ALLEN: Thank you.

4 THE WITNESS: Thank you.

5 MS. ALLEN: Rob Osborne.

6 Is Mr. Osborne here tonight?

7 MR. OSBORNE: Good evening. My name is  
8 Rob Osborne, O-S-B-O-R-N-E. I'm a resident of Newark  
9 and I have two six-year-old daughters who attend  
10 kindergarten.

11 Thank you for your interest in the  
12 Christina School District and the education of our  
13 State's children.

14 I'm here tonight to support the Christina  
15 School District's Neighborhood Schools Plan. I voted  
16 for Option A, like so many others in our community. I  
17 believe in the merits of it. I attended the Christina  
18 School District as a child myself. I was bused from  
19 Newark to Wilmington.

20 I think I got a decent education out of  
21 the Christina School District, but I can tell you that  
22 that bus ride up and down I-95 every day was not  
23 probably the best use of my time. Many behavior  
24 problems occurred on the buses at that time. Children

1 were sometimes behaving in inappropriate ways and  
2 school bus drivers had to pull over. I probably  
3 learned some behaviors on the school bus that I regret.  
4 Having kids closer to home I think is a way that we can  
5 manage that time better and reduce the bus trips for  
6 students in the district. I also believe that the  
7 Neighborhood Schools parent also goes a long way  
8 towards allowing parents to participate more fully in  
9 their children's education.

10 I was struck by some comments this summer  
11 in workshops that I attended with the school district  
12 in Wilmington to hear that parents who live in  
13 Wilmington and were sending their kids to Newark. It  
14 really was a hardship for them to participate in their  
15 child's education because of that distance that their  
16 children were away from the city. These are parents  
17 who worked in the city and would be in a position to  
18 attend their children's after school activities or  
19 in-school activities if they were closer to home.

20 So in summary, I just ask for your strong  
21 support of the neighborhood schools plan and thank you  
22 for your time tonight.

23 MS. ALLEN: Thank you.

24 Joe Brady.

1                   MR. BRADY: I'm sorry, I thought that was  
2 just a list of people who are here. I have nothing to  
3 say.

4                   MS. ALLEN: You don't have to speak.

5                   MR. BRADY: Sorry to bother you on that.

6                   MS. ALLEN: No bother.

7                   The next person on the list is Mindy Cox,  
8 and she's representing the Shue-Medill PTA, and you  
9 will have five minutes.

10                  MS. COX: Thank you.

11                  Good evening, President Allen, members of  
12 the Board and Ms. Cooke.

13                  I am Mindy Cox, M-I-N-D-Y C-O-X, proud  
14 Christina parent and PTA leader in the district.

15                  I am here tonight to ask you to support  
16 Christina's Neighborhoods School Plan. When I was  
17 riding the bus into the city as a Brandywine School  
18 District middle schooler, I never thought that some 23  
19 years later my daughter would do the same, only she  
20 would end up spending a minimum of two hours a day on a  
21 bus if there were no traffic issues.

22                  As my children got older, I began to hear  
23 more stories about families with issues around the  
24 distance between them and their child's school: The

1 parent who had to take three different buses to get to  
2 a parent-teacher conference. The student who wanted so  
3 badly to participate in her school's evening choral  
4 performance that she never got on the bus at dismissal,  
5 and then after the performance that night, she had no  
6 way home. The parent who had always volunteered time  
7 in his child's classroom during his lunch break who  
8 could no longer do so because just the travel time to  
9 and from the school would take more than his allotted  
10 lunch hour.

11 Neighborhood schools in Christina is long  
12 overdue. Every parent and student should feel they are  
13 an integral part of their school community with easy  
14 access to their child and school staff.

15 How do you feel a part of a community if  
16 you can't get there? How do you feel as a parent  
17 knowing that if your child is sick or if there's an  
18 emergency, you either can't get to them at all or it  
19 will take you at least 30 or 40 minutes to do so?

20 I have been there, and it doesn't feel  
21 good.

22 Christina School District has  
23 accomplished what so many said could not be done.  
24 6,786 votes in favor of the November referendum which

1 provides the necessary steps to give Christina the  
2 space needed for neighborhood schools. Our community  
3 came together and sent a clear message to support what  
4 is best for our children.

5                   Dr. Lowery has done what no other  
6 superintendent has been able to do since my children  
7 started kindergarten: She listened to her community.  
8 She and her staff have worked diligently with integrity  
9 to begin to make possible what we have been pleading  
10 for for years: Strong neighborhood schools for every  
11 child and the opportunity for every family to actively  
12 participate in their child's education without the  
13 barrier of distance.

14                   I am so proud of our community.  
15 Residents from both Wilmington and Newark who came  
16 together at many meetings over the summer to create  
17 this plan. We worked together as one community,  
18 respecting each other's comments and concerns. This  
19 plan was born out of a collaboration and the belief  
20 that there is a better way. It is not perfect, but  
21 neither is 15 miles of interstate between two sections  
22 of one school district.

23                   I am asking you to please vote in favor  
24 of this plan. Happy New Year.

1 (Applause.)

2 MS. ALLEN: Our next speaker is Lisa  
3 Reed, who is from the PTA Region III Council.

4 MS. REED: Good evening, President Allen,  
5 members of the Board and Miss Cooke.

6 My name is Lisa Reed, L-I-S-A R-E-E-D. I  
7 am a Christina parent and president of Region III PTA  
8 Council which serves and supports all of the PTA units  
9 in our schools in the Christina School District, and I  
10 am also here tonight to ask you to vote in favor of the  
11 Neighborhood Schools Act or Plan that was presented to  
12 you in December.

13 I had the privilege of serving on the  
14 committee that ultimately created the Neighborhood  
15 Schools Plan that is before you. Many hours of  
16 discussion over several weeks in the summer that aired  
17 a lot of the dirty laundry that we have in the  
18 district, revealing issues that we yet need to address,  
19 but in the end we came up with a plan that we felt best  
20 served the need of our students at this time in a  
21 manner that we could accomplish.

22 My oldest son spent the last two years  
23 riding a bus into town. He had two good years at the  
24 school in the city that he attended, and other than by

1 the end of his two years he was just tired of the bus  
2 ride, he really didn't have some of the complaints and  
3 problems that many of the other students and parents  
4 face.

5                   Now, our family is privileged enough to  
6 be able to have our transportation and be able to get  
7 into the city. I did volunteer my time as I could at  
8 his school when he was in town, but at the same time,  
9 given my level of involvement with PTA in the district  
10 over the past seven years, when he was at Bancroft, I  
11 just was not able to do that. I helped in the  
12 classroom when I could, I was there when I could be,  
13 but I just couldn't devote the level of involvement  
14 that I really desired to do.

15                   So having him closer to home now that he  
16 is at Gauger certainly allows me to do that, and I see  
17 parents struggle, not only parents in the suburbs, but  
18 also parents in the city whose children are bused out.  
19 They don't have the luxury of just being able to jump  
20 in their car and drive 15 miles to be able to volunteer  
21 at their child's school. Many of them work and many of  
22 them have more than one job. And it's really a concern  
23 for them, they would like to be involved, but they just  
24 can't be.



1 Delaware, I didn't go to school here, but ten years ago  
2 when my son started kindergarten, we thought it was  
3 going to be a year or two and here he is starting his  
4 freshman year at Newark and it's finally happened.

5                   So we worked really hard. The district  
6 gave us quite an opportunity to really be a part of  
7 this, and it is my hope that the other districts in New  
8 Castle County that have had failed referendums will be  
9 able to come together as we have and really get that  
10 community input that is really so crucial to making a  
11 plan like this work.

12                   So I want to thank the Christina School  
13 District, the people, the staff who we worked with  
14 giving us that opportunity, and Dr. Lowery who has  
15 really come in here and motivated I think everyone. So  
16 thank you.

17                   MS. ALLEN: Thank you.

18                   MS. ARMSTRONG: We hope you vote for the  
19 plan.

20                   MS. ALLEN: Thank you.

21                   (Applause.)

22                   MS. ALLEN: Our next speaker is Richard  
23 Gaskins.

24                   MR. GASKINS: Good evening. I support

1 the Neighborhood School Plan for three basic reasons:

2           One, the empowerment process that was  
3 used for developing the plan;

4           Two, for the educational continuity that  
5 it offers;.

6           And three, because of the Christina  
7 School District leadership in terms of the process of  
8 how they did things.

9           Getting back to the empowerment. The  
10 feedback was public. We were able to hear what the  
11 plan was and to provide some input, and that was  
12 exceptional to be able to do that. So the plan that  
13 was developed represents the neighborhood based on  
14 input.

15           Secondly, in terms of empowerment, the  
16 busing has been limited, has been reduced  
17 significantly, which will allow the students and the  
18 parents to increase their participation. Studies have  
19 shown in Chicago and the East Coast and other places  
20 where you have extra curricular activities for the  
21 students and they participate, their academic and their  
22 social skills improve.

23           The educational continuity speaks for  
24 itself, and you can have the youngsters attend the same

1 school from kindergarten up versus having to have that  
2 break with the youngsters who they know. It offers a  
3 significant springboard for them in terms of their  
4 educational journey.

5                   And the leadership. The Christina School  
6 District leadership. The process that they used. Now  
7 we did, we talked about, many of our committee members  
8 are here and the finance committee, for example, and  
9 for the referendum committee, but we were very, very  
10 engaged in doing things. And the School Board  
11 empowered the finance committee to look at it, to see  
12 does it make sense and we provide our input on that.  
13 The teachers will, of course, have increased access now  
14 to the students, and that means even improved site  
15 management for the school principals.

16                   My name is Richard Gaskins and you spell  
17 my last name G-A-S-K-I-N-S. I am a resident of Newark,  
18 Delaware.

19                   MS. ALLEN: Thank you.

20                   (Applause.)

21                   MS. ALLEN: We are back to Mr. Davis.

22                   MR. DAVIS: I'm Earnie Davis, E-A-R-N-I-E  
23 D-A-V-I-S.

24                   I was thinking someone would speak

1 against the referendum and then I could come here and  
2 counter, but they didn't.

3 I guess I saw the struggles that a couple  
4 other of the referendums have had in the State of  
5 Delaware and I just want to emphasize that this one had  
6 a public airing and it got really a lot of support in  
7 the community, and I was there at a social gathering at  
8 West Park Place. I'm member of the West Park Place  
9 PTA, but I'm not speaking officially on behalf of them.  
10 And I just remember the feeling, I have seen many  
11 losing elections, too many, way too many. But this one  
12 I could just sort of sense that night that there are  
13 people -- and this is for, and I know you have heard  
14 this so much, but this is our future, these are our  
15 kids. If we fail them, they are already going to face  
16 major problems internationally.

17 Anyone with eyes to see, who keeps their  
18 heads up, sees what's happening environmentally,  
19 globally. It's 80 degrees, whatever, 60 degrees in the  
20 middle of January. Threats of war. And we're going to  
21 have to give our kids as much of a chance out there as  
22 we possibly can. And it's not all with education. The  
23 people around the concentration camps are well  
24 educated. It's something of the human heart of how

1 people get along and work together as a community.

2 But I want to reemphasize I agree with  
3 what the other people said, if the people are closer to  
4 their schools, then they can have access to it and help  
5 the teachers as they go through the day and not have to  
6 worry about their kids. I know myself I have a long  
7 journey to worry about where my kids are. Just me  
8 going to Wilmington is a long journey of will my car  
9 make it.

10 I don't want to take up any more of your  
11 time. Thank you for existing and thank you for all  
12 your efforts.

13 MS. ALLEN: Thank you.

14 (Applause.)

15 MS. ALLEN: I do not have any other names  
16 of people who have signed up to speak. Is there  
17 someone who would like to speak?

18 MR. WORTON: Excuse me for letting you  
19 not be last.

20 MR. DAVIS: That's okay.

21 MS. ALLEN: Would you sign your name here  
22 for me, please.

23 MR. WORTON: Certainly.

24 Good evening. I hadn't planned to say

1 anything, but I hate to see you go back without hearing  
2 from a few people. My name is John Worton. I live in  
3 Newark. I'm retired. I have served and do serve as a  
4 volunteer on the financial review committee for the  
5 district, but I'm speaking as an individual, not as a  
6 representative of the district.

7 I think the plan that you have submitted  
8 is a sensible plan, it's a fair plan, and it makes good  
9 forward steps for the school children in this district.  
10 It has the support of many of my neighbors, many of  
11 whom are retired.

12 It's sensible. It makes maximum use of  
13 existing facilities. It's reasonable. It provides  
14 full kindergarten now. It let's kids go to a  
15 neighborhood school K through five and then sixth  
16 through eight without all of this transition between  
17 different schools, so there's continuity that way.  
18 It's sensible. It's economic.

19 It's making use of the Bayard Middle  
20 School. It's providing a middle school for those  
21 people in Wilmington who have had to be bused over to  
22 Newark. So now they have their own neighborhood  
23 school. And this is what the people in Wilmington were  
24 saying last summer at some of these discussion groups.

1 It was an input. It was very, very constructive.

2 It's economic and sensible. The district  
3 has property over on Porter Road. They have funding  
4 for a good part of completing that school if the  
5 referendum passed money, and we're looking for your  
6 support to finance and complete that Porter Road  
7 Elementary School which will provide a school where it  
8 is badly needed in this district with the heavy growth,  
9 the large growth area.

10 And so on balance, this plan, this  
11 referendum was supported. I won't throw stones at  
12 previous attempts, but this one made sense. Our  
13 superintendent and our staff listened to the people in  
14 the community, and it was the community ideas that came  
15 forth, and I think it's a good plan and my friends and  
16 my neighbors and associates also think it's a good  
17 plan. We encourage you to go ahead and approve it.  
18 Thank you.

19 MS. ALLEN: Thank you.

20 (Applause.)

21 MS. ALLEN: I don't have any other names  
22 on my list. Anyone else who would like to speak this  
23 evening?

24 MS. GRAWE: May I?

1 MS. ALLEN: If you would sign up also.

2 MS. GRAWE: My name is Denice Grawe,  
3 G-R-A-W-E. Denise with a C.

4 I'm really just here to offer anecdotal  
5 evidence in support for the referendum. My son Elliot  
6 is in kindergarten at West Park. As far as I can tell,  
7 we live a quarter mile away from our front door to the  
8 door to West Park, and so every day so far this school  
9 year we have either walked or biked to school. We have  
10 never driven to school because that would be absurd.

11 We just moved to Newark a year and a half  
12 ago. Whenever I looked at the feeder pattern, we  
13 figured out he would have to go to fifth grade in  
14 Wilmington, and I thought that can't be, that makes no  
15 sense.

16 So I just would like to ask you to pass  
17 this because it makes sense to be able to keep walking  
18 to school instead of driving up 95. So that's all I  
19 wanted to say. Thank you.

20 MS. ALLEN: Thank you.

21 (Applause.)

22 MS. ALLEN: This is the last time, anyone  
23 else? We're happy to have you address us. Is there  
24 anyone else who would like to speak to the Board?

1 (No response.)

2 MS. ALLEN: If not, I'm going to ask  
3 Ms. Cooke to enter some items into the record.

4 MS. COOKE: As Exhibit 1 to this  
5 evening's public hearing, I am entering copies of the  
6 notices that were published in the Delaware State News  
7 for this evening's hearing.

8 MS. CASE: And the News Journal.

9 MS. COOKE: And the News Journal, they  
10 were published, yes, you are correct. Thank you,  
11 Miss Case.

12 I am also entering in the letters  
13 submitted by Miss Cox as Exhibit 2.

14 And the written comments supplied by  
15 Mr. Gaskins as Exhibit 3.

16 MS. ALLEN: I would just like to remind  
17 you that the State Board will be holding another public  
18 hearing this Thursday, January 10th, at 7 p.m. at  
19 Bayard, and we look forward to hearing comment at that  
20 hearing also.

21 Following that, the State Board will  
22 deliberate on January the 17th at 9 a.m., and a written  
23 decision will follow once our Board has made a  
24 decision. So we will be, again, making that decision

1 January 17th at 9 a.m.

2 I want to thank all of you for being here  
3 tonight and for taking the time to come out and share  
4 your thoughts with the State School Board, and at this  
5 time I'd like to close this public hearing. Thank you.

6 (The hearing adjourned at 7:30 p.m.)

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1 State of Delaware )  
2 New Castle County )

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

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I, Terry Barbano Burke, RMR-CRR and Notary Public, do hereby certify that the foregoing record, pages 1 to 24 inclusive, is a true and accurate transcript of my stenographic notes taken on Monday, January 7, 2008, in the above-captioned matter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 11th day of January, 2008, at Wilmington.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Terry Barbano Burke, RMR-CRR  
Certification No. 233-RPR  
(Expires January 31, 2008)

