

**In The Matter Of:**  
*Department of Education*  
*In Re: Family Foundations Academy*

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*Hearing*  
*March 9, 2015*

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*Wilcox & Fetzer, Ltd.*  
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DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
PUBLIC MEETING  
FAMILY FOUNDATIONS ACADEMY

Public Meeting of the Department of Education, taken pursuant to notice at The Carvel State Office Building, 820 North French Street, Second Floor Auditorium, Wilmington, Delaware, beginning at 4:11 p.m. on Monday, March 9, 2015, before Jennifer Shomper, Professional Court Reporter and Notary Public.

APPEARANCES:

CATHERINE T. HICKEY, ESQUIRE,  
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
102 West Water Street  
Dover, DE 19904

JENNIFER NAGOURNEY  
CHARTER OFFICE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DONNA JOHNSON  
STATE BOARD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## P R O C E E D I N G S

1  
2 MS. NAGOURNEY: Good evening. I declare this  
3 public hearing to be open. My name is  
4 Jennifer Nagourney. I am the Executive Director of  
5 the Delaware Department of Education, and I've been  
6 appointed by the Secretary of Education to conduct  
7 this public hearing.

8 The charter of Family Foundations Academy has  
9 been placed on formal review. As required by law,  
10 the matter is referred to the Charter School  
11 Accountability Committee.

12 This joint public hearing is being held by  
13 the Department of Education and State Board  
14 Education to assist in the decision of whether the  
15 criteria set forth for approval in the Delaware  
16 Code has been satisfied. The hearing provides the  
17 school with an opportunity to receive public  
18 comment and for the public, an opportunity to  
19 provide public comment.

20 I will now ask the others with me to  
21 introduce themselves.

22 MS. HICKEY: My name is Catherine Hickey.  
23 I'm the Deputy Attorney General with the Delaware  
24 Department of Justice, and I am here today as  
25 counsel for the hearing officer.



1 MS. JOHNSON: My name is Donna Johnson. I'm  
2 the Executive Director of the State Board of  
3 Education.

4 MS. NAGOURNEY: I would like the record to  
5 reflect that the notice of the time, date and place  
6 of today's public hearing was published in the News  
7 Journal and Delaware State News. In addition,  
8 notice was posted at the Charter School  
9 Accountability Committee's official place of  
10 business on the Department of Education's official  
11 website found at the state public meeting calendar  
12 on the state's official website. Further, the  
13 school was personally notified of the time, date  
14 and place of today's public hearing.

15 A court reporter is present so that a record  
16 of this hearing can be made. It will be necessary  
17 for each speaker to clearly identify himself or  
18 herself before beginning to speak so the court  
19 reporter will be able to note who you are. The  
20 record of this hearing will be provided to the  
21 Secretary of Education and members of the State  
22 Board of Education together with any written or  
23 electronic comments received at this hearing.

24 We will proceed in the following manner.  
25 First, we will hear from any representatives from



1 the charter who wish to comment. Then we will take  
2 comments from anyone else who desires to speak.  
3 There are sign-up sheets that I now have in front  
4 of me. If anyone has not yet signed in and wants  
5 to speak for Family Foundation's Academy, please  
6 let me know.

7 On the record I have two statements; is that  
8 correct -- three. Okay. I'm sorry. I intend to  
9 be as liberal as time and reason allow to accept  
10 any comments. However, I do receive the right to  
11 limit a comment if it's purely repetitive or  
12 cumulative.

13 At this point, we will accept comments from  
14 representatives of the school.

15 MR. CASPER: Good afternoon, ladies of the  
16 Department of Education, the State Board of  
17 Education. My name is Jason Casper. I am a  
18 teacher at Family Foundations Academy charter  
19 school as well as a member of the Board of  
20 Directors.

21 I stand in front of you this afternoon at the  
22 final public hearing for Family Foundations Academy  
23 charter school as it pertains to us being under  
24 formal review. To date, the new board members, the  
25 new leadership, and the entire staff have done our



1 very best to correct the situation at FFA at the  
2 recommendations of the Department of Education and  
3 the State Board. We certainly appreciate the fact  
4 that FFA was given the opportunity to prove  
5 ourselves to you, and I hope that after the reports  
6 that we have submitted, you will see the positive  
7 changes that we have put into place. The impact of  
8 the new board, the new leadership, has been  
9 extremely well-received by the staff, the parents,  
10 and the FFA.

11 We have hired a new elementary principal,  
12 Ms. Rachel Valentin. Ms. Valentin dove right in  
13 with some professional development training minutes  
14 after the announcement that she was hired. In the  
15 short time since her employment, she has already  
16 proven to be an asset to our school. We're in the  
17 process of interviewing a principal for our middle  
18 school building as well. I am honored to be a part  
19 of that process as both a teacher and a board  
20 member.

21 Dr. Browne has made it a point to have  
22 teachers, teams, parents, and board members all  
23 involved in the hiring process. The impact that  
24 this has had on our staff has been credible. The  
25 staff has been given a voice in the selection



1 process, which gives us a sense of empowerment and  
2 ownership. Our operations team led by  
3 Mr. Nicholas Medaglio has been working countless  
4 hours with our Board Treasurer,  
5 Mr. Thomas Humphrey, to make certain that any  
6 extending debts have been satisfied, as well as  
7 tightening some unnecessary monthly expenditures  
8 that were being frivolously spent.

9 As a member of the Board of Directors, I as  
10 well as the other new and experienced members of  
11 the board have attended the required trainings set  
12 forth by the state in an effort to prove that we  
13 are committed to seeing Family Foundations' success  
14 grow even stronger.

15 It is my understanding that there has been a  
16 recommendation made to place FFA on probation. As  
17 I respect the committee's decision, I would like  
18 the Department of Education and the board to  
19 reconsider this. Probation has such a negative  
20 connotation of eyes in the public. As a parent of  
21 two public school children myself, I would be less  
22 likely to send my children to a school that is on  
23 probation. Parents want the best possible  
24 education for their children, and FFA does just  
25 that. We provide the best education possible for



1           our students. It is because of this that I would  
2           respectfully request that the committee's  
3           recommendation for probation would be denied and  
4           that leniency would be granted in this case.

5           Due to the negative publicity that FFA has  
6           received over the past several months, it is  
7           imperative that we show the public that our new  
8           leadership has in fact corrected the wrongdoings  
9           and that FFA is sustainable both academically and  
10          financially. By not accepting the committee's  
11          recommendation to place FFA on probation, you will  
12          be showing that the staff, students, and new  
13          leadership of Family Foundations Academy are not to  
14          blame for the poor decisions of the two former  
15          school leaders and the previous board's lack of  
16          governance.

17          Please help us to show the citizens of  
18          Delaware that we are here for one thing: To  
19          educate our students and to prepare them to be  
20          tomorrow's leaders.

21                 Thank you.

22           MS. NAGOURNEY: Mr. Casper, would you be able  
23          to provide your comments to our court reporter.

24                 MR. CASPER: Certainly.

25           MS. JOHNSON: It will help with the



1 transcription.

2 MS. VALENTIN: Thank you to the Delaware  
3 Department of Education and community leaders for  
4 an opportunity to speak today. My name is  
5 Rachel Valentin, the new principal of Family  
6 Foundations Academy Elementary School. I am a  
7 Delaware native, honored to be able to serve in  
8 this capacity in the state where my educational  
9 foundation began, given now this incredible  
10 opportunity to pay it forward as a school leader.

11 After several years of working in a  
12 high-needs school with the Uncommon Charter Schools  
13 network in New York City, I desired an opportunity  
14 to increase my impact as a transformative leader,  
15 and I join the Delaware Leadership Project, which  
16 is a program designed to provide a systematic and  
17 hands-on approach to improving the performance and  
18 culture of failing schools in the state of  
19 Delaware. And through the positive relationships  
20 with the Department of Education and the Brandywine  
21 School District, I was able to start my appointment  
22 earlier as the principal of Family Foundations.  
23 Dr. Lamont Browne's passion and vision, the  
24 partnership between East Side Charter and Family  
25 Foundations, members of our incredible, selfless



1 board have immediately contributed towards  
2 providing better educational opportunities for  
3 students.

4 At Family Foundations, we are aiming to be  
5 the best, and I know that our students and their  
6 families, they deserve that opportunity. We've  
7 been giving them now another chance, sort of a  
8 sense of stability and comfort, with leaders who  
9 are now standing in their corner with the  
10 commitment of improving their lives.

11 Our continued goal this year at Family  
12 Foundations is to maintain a culture of stellar  
13 academic achievement, solid staff culture, and  
14 family partnership, catapulting the school's image  
15 from something of distress to absolute greatness by  
16 strengthening the day-to-day operations,  
17 establishing financial oversight and  
18 accountability, clearer systems and practices. I'm  
19 requesting that leniency be granted during this  
20 time as we do our best to reverse the perception  
21 that's currently prevailing at Family Foundations  
22 Academy.

23 Great schools have great leaders, and great  
24 partnerships like this one are driven by their  
25 powerful mission that children deserve an



1 opportunity to have options and leaders who will do  
2 whatever it takes to provide a platform for  
3 success. This partnership is redefining what it  
4 means to be student-driven, and we are guaranteeing  
5 a better outcome for all of the students and the  
6 families. Yes, this work is about challenging the  
7 prevailing myths and stereotypes that many of our  
8 young students are forced to adopt by society.  
9 However, what binds us and the community is that  
10 this is a belief that does not have to stay the  
11 same, and success for young students is attainable  
12 when we implement a formula that has vision,  
13 partnership, high academic expectations, hard work  
14 and accountability. The magnitude of this  
15 partnership between the East Side and Family  
16 Foundations is expansive, and I am truly honored to  
17 be a contributing leader because I know that all  
18 the students that are benefiting from this will be  
19 successful, and we will certainly get them there.

20 I definitely appreciate your time. Thank  
21 you.

22 MR. BROWNE: Good afternoon. I heard my  
23 colleagues today talk about doing their best, and a  
24 lot of people who finish in second place talk about  
25 doing their best. It is my belief that it's our



1 responsibility not just to do our best but actually  
2 be successful on all the goals that we sets forth.

3 I believe there are three main things that  
4 are important in schools: Money, manpower and  
5 mindset.

6 Money: Doing the best with what we have, not  
7 making excuses for what we have or what we can do  
8 but making sure that we're making the best decision  
9 in the interest of kids at all times. Since our  
10 board and since myself and our new team has taken  
11 over, we've made sure to correct all the wrongs  
12 that were done in the aspect of the school's  
13 finances and operations. We have put systems in  
14 place that are strong, that have been invented by  
15 professionals to make sure that we are strong and  
16 sound financially -- not just now, not just the  
17 remainder of the school year, but for years going  
18 forward. That's going to be a strong bedrock of  
19 our success going forward.

20 The second thing is manpower, making sure  
21 that we have the strongest adults in the building  
22 from school teachers, support staff, leadership,  
23 and board members. It's our duty to make sure that  
24 every single person is there with the best interest  
25 of kids in mind and doing what it takes. You heard



1 from a committed teacher and board member who has  
2 been at FFA for many years and from our new, good  
3 principal who is strong, who is dedicated, not just  
4 at being here for a while but doing the best for  
5 our kids at all times.

6 And the last thing is mindset. There's a  
7 mindset around what schools can be about. There's  
8 a mindset around what our young people,  
9 particularly those from Wilmington communities, are  
10 capable of achieving. At FFA, we have a mindset  
11 that we believe in every single kid. We believe in  
12 holding our teachers accountable to doing the best  
13 at all times and making sure that every decision is  
14 in the best interest of our kids at all times.  
15 This mindset, this collective belief, of what we  
16 can do is powerful, and that's why we've been able  
17 to not just eradicate the wrongs but set forth a  
18 solid foundation to ensure our success.

19 We understand that it's required by the CSAC  
20 committee to recommend probation. However, it's  
21 not required that a probation is for an extended  
22 period of time. We respectfully ask that we are  
23 given a period of time to show that we have  
24 corrected our wrongs, show that we have the right  
25 foundation in place with the right procedures and



1 protocol to maybe sure we are implementing our  
2 program effectively.

3 We believe in accountability not just from  
4 school leadership standpoint, from our board  
5 standpoint, but also from the state. We respect  
6 that accountability. We actually welcome it  
7 because it pushes us to do our best at all times.  
8 So, again, we respect the probation status that has  
9 been recommended. We hope that the department, the  
10 secretary, and the Board of Directors, the board of  
11 the state, takes us into consideration and  
12 alleviates the time limit so that we can continue  
13 to go forward not just with a strong staff and a  
14 strong mission but the public's belief that we are  
15 doing the right thing and that FPA is, will be, one  
16 of the best schools in the state for all of our  
17 kids.

18 Thank you very much.

19 MS. NAGOURNEY: Is there anyone else who  
20 wants to speak for Family Foundations Academy?

21 If not, this hearing is now closed. I would  
22 like to thank everyone for participating today.  
23 The secretary will consider your comments as part  
24 of the decision-making process, and your comments  
25 will also be available for the state board to



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consider.

(This public hearing concluded at 4:25 p.m.)

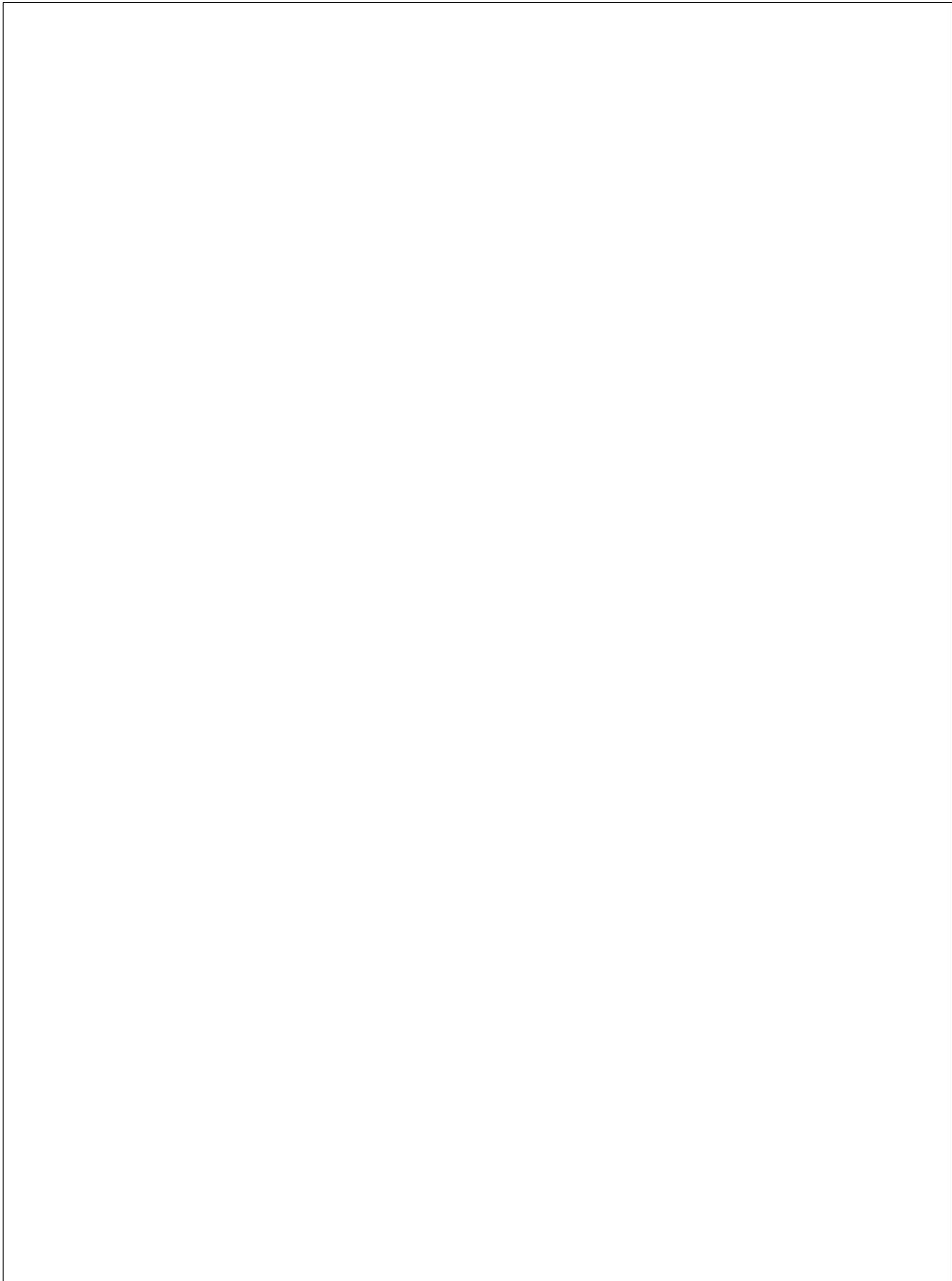
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C E R T I F I C A T I O N S

I, Jennifer Shomper, Professional Court Reporter, certify that the hearing before The Delaware Department of Education regarding Family Foundations Academy on Monday, March 9, 2015, is a true and accurate transcript of the foregoing proceedings.

I further certify that I am neither attorney nor counsel for, nor related to nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this proceeding was taken; further, that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed in this case, nor am I financially interested in this action.

/s/Jennifer Shomper  
Jennifer Shomper  
Professional Court Reporter and Notary Public



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<b>A</b>	<p>another (1) 9:7          anyone (3) 4:2,4          13:19          appointed (1) 2:6          appointment (1)          8:21          appreciate (2) 5:3          10:20          approach (1) 8:17          approval (1) 2:15          around (2) 12:7,8          ask (2) 2:20          12:22          aspect (1) 11:12          asset (1) 5:16          assist (1) 2:14          attainable (1)          10:11          attended (1) 6:11          Attorney (1) 2:23          available (1)          13:25</p>	<p>blame (1) 7:14          Board (22) 2:13          3:2,22 4:16,          19,24 5:3,8,          19,22 6:4,9,          11,18 9:1          11:10,23 12:1          13:4,10,10,25          board's (1) 7:15          both (2) 5:19 7:9          Brandywine (1)          8:20          Browne (2) 5:21          10:22          Browne's (1) 8:23          building (2) 5:18          11:21          business (1) 3:10</p>	<p>colleagues (1)          10:23          collective (1)          12:15          comfort (1) 9:8          comment (4) 2:18,          19 4:1,11          comments (7)          3:23 4:2,10,          13 7:23 13:23,          24          commitment (1)          9:10          committed (2)          6:13 12:1          Committee (2)          2:11 12:20          Committee's (4)          3:9 6:17 7:2,          10          communities (1)          12:9          community (2) 8:3          10:9          concluded (1)          14:2          conduct (1) 2:6          connotation (1)          6:20          consider (2)          13:23 14:1          consideration (1)          13:11          continue (1)          13:12          continued (1) 9:11          contributed (1) 9:1          contributing (1)          10:17          corner (1) 9:9          correct (3) 4:8          5:1 11:11          corrected (2) 7:8          12:24          counsel (1) 2:25          countless (1) 6:3          court (3) 3:15,18          7:23</p>	<p>credible (1) 5:24          criteria (1) 2:15          CSAC (1) 12:19          culture (3) 8:18          9:12,13          cumulative (1)          4:12          currently (1) 9:21</p>
<p>able (5) 3:19          7:22 8:7,21          12:16          absolute (1) 9:15          academic (2)          9:13 10:13          academically (1)          7:9          Academy (8) 2:8          4:5,18,22          7:13 8:6 9:22          13:20          accept (2) 4:9,13          accepting (1) 7:10          Accountability (6)          2:11 3:9 9:18          10:14 13:3,6          accountable (1)          12:12          achievement (1)          9:13          achieving (1)          12:10          actually (2) 11:1          13:6          addition (1) 3:7          adopt (1) 10:8          adults (1) 11:21          after (3) 5:5,14          8:11          afternoon (3)          4:15,21 10:22          again (1) 13:8          aiming (1) 9:4          all (11) 5:22          10:5,17 11:2,          9,11 12:5,13,          14 13:7,16          alleviates (1)          13:12          allow (1) 4:9          already (1) 5:15          also (2) 13:5,25          announcement (1)          5:14</p>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	
	<p>bedrock (1) 11:18          before (1) 3:18          began (1) 8:9          beginning (1) 3:18          being (4) 2:12          4:23 6:8 12:4          belief (4) 10:10,          25 12:15 13:14          believe (4) 11:3          12:11,11 13:3          benefiting (1)          10:18          best (16) 5:1          6:23,25 9:5,          20 10:23,25          11:1,6,8,24          12:4,12,14          13:7,16          better (2) 9:2          10:5          between (2) 8:24          10:15          binds (1) 10:9</p>	<p>calendar (1) 3:11          capable (1) 12:10          capacity (1) 8:8          case (1) 7:4          CASPER (4) 4:15,          17 7:22,24          catapulting (1)          9:14          Catherine (1) 2:22          certain (1) 6:5          certainly (3) 5:3          7:24 10:19          challenging (1)          10:6          chance (1) 9:7          changes (1) 5:7          charter (8) 2:8,          10 3:8 4:1,18,          23 8:12,24          children (4) 6:21,          22,24 9:25          citizens (1) 7:17          City (1) 8:13          clearer (1) 9:18          clearly (1) 3:17          closed (1) 13:21          Code (1) 2:16</p>	<p>date (3) 3:5,13          4:24          day-to-day (1)          9:16          debts (1) 6:6          decision (4) 2:14          6:17 11:8          12:13          decision-making (1)          13:24          decisions (1) 7:14          declare (1) 2:2          dedicated (1) 12:3          definitely (1)          10:20          Delaware (9) 2:5,          15,23 3:7          7:18 8:2,7,15,          19          denied (1) 7:3          Department (10)          2:5,13,24          3:10 4:16 5:2          6:18 8:3,20          13:9          Deputy (1) 2:23          deserve (2) 9:6,          25          designed (1) 8:16          desired (1) 8:13          desires (1) 4:2          development (1)          5:13          Director (2) 2:4          3:2          Directors (3) 4:20          6:9 13:10</p>	

<p>distress (1) 9:15 District (1) 8:21 done (2) 4:25 11:12 Donna (1) 3:1 dove (1) 5:12 Dr (2) 5:21 8:23 driven (1) 9:24 Due (1) 7:5 during (1) 9:19 duty (1) 11:23</p>	<p>every (3) 11:24 12:11,13 everyone (1) 13:22 excuses (1) 11:7 Executive (2) 2:4 3:2 expansive (1) 10:16 expectations (1) 10:13 expenditures (1) 6:7 experienced (1) 6:10 extended (1) 12:21 extending (1) 6:6 extremely (1) 5:9 eyes (1) 6:20</p>	<p>former (1) 7:14 formula (1) 10:12 forth (4) 2:15 6:12 11:2 12:17 forward (4) 8:10 11:18,19 13:13 found (1) 3:11 foundation (3) 8:9 12:18,25 Foundations (12) 2:8 4:18,22 7:13 8:6,22, 25 9:4,12,21 10:16 13:20 Foundations' (1) 6:13 Foundation's (1) 4:5 FPA (1) 13:15 frivolously (1) 6:8 front (2) 4:3,21 Further (1) 3:12</p>	<p>guaranteeing (1) 10:4</p>	<p>implement (1) 10:12 implementing (1) 13:1 important (1) 11:4 improving (2) 8:17 9:10 increase (1) 8:14 incredible (2) 8:9, 25 intend (1) 4:8 interest (3) 11:9, 24 12:14 interviewing (1) 5:17 introduce (1) 2:21 invented (1) 11:14 involved (1) 5:23</p>
<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>J</b>
<p>each (1) 3:17 earlier (1) 8:22 East (2) 8:24 10:15 educate (1) 7:19 Education (15) 2:5,6,13,14 3:3,21,22 4:16,17 5:2 6:18,24,25 8:3,20 educational (2) 8:8 9:2 Education's (1) 3:10 effectively (1) 13:2 effort (1) 6:12 electronic (1) 3:23 elementary (2) 5:11 8:6 else (2) 4:2 13:19 employment (1) 5:15 empowerment (1) 6:1 ensure (1) 12:18 entire (1) 4:25 eradicate (1) 12:17 establishing (1) 9:17 even (1) 6:14 evening (1) 2:2</p>	<p>fact (2) 5:3 7:8 failing (1) 8:18 families (2) 9:6 10:6 Family (15) 2:8 4:5,18,22 6:13 7:13 8:5, 22,24 9:4,11, 14,21 10:15 13:20 FFA (10) 5:1,4, 10 6:16,24 7:5,9,11 12:2, 10 final (1) 4:22 finances (1) 11:13 financial (1) 9:17 financially (2) 7:10 11:16 finish (1) 10:24 First (1) 3:25 following (1) 3:24 forced (1) 10:8 formal (2) 2:9 4:24</p>	<p>General (1) 2:23 get (1) 10:19 given (4) 5:4,25 8:9 12:23 gives (1) 6:1 giving (1) 9:7 go (1) 13:13 goal (1) 9:11 goals (1) 11:2 going (3) 11:17, 18,19 Good (4) 2:2 4:15 10:22 12:2 governance (1) 7:16 granted (2) 7:4 9:19 Great (3) 9:23, 23,23 greatness (1) 9:15 grow (1) 6:14</p>	<p>held (1) 2:12 help (2) 7:17,25 her (1) 5:15 here (3) 2:24 7:18 12:4 herself (1) 3:18 HICKEY (2) 2:22, 22 high (1) 10:13 high-needs (1) 8:12 himself (1) 3:17 hired (2) 5:11,14 hiring (1) 5:23 holding (1) 12:12 honored (3) 5:18 8:7 10:16 hope (2) 5:5 13:9 hours (1) 6:4 However (3) 4:10 10:9 12:20 Humphrey (1) 6:5</p>	<p>Jason (1) 4:17 Jennifer (1) 2:4 JOHNSON (3) 3:1,1 7:25 join (1) 8:15 joint (1) 2:12 Journal (1) 3:7 Justice (1) 2:24</p>
			<b>I</b>	<b>K</b>
			<p>identify (1) 3:17 image (1) 9:14 immediately (1) 9:1 impact (3) 5:7,23 8:14 imperative (1) 7:7</p>	<p>kid (1) 12:11 kids (5) 11:9,25 12:5,14 13:17</p>
				<b>L</b>
				<p>lack (1) 7:15 ladies (1) 4:15 Lamont (1) 8:23 last (1) 12:6 law (1) 2:9 leader (3) 8:10, 14 10:17 leaders (6) 7:15, 20 8:3 9:8,23</p>

<p>10:1 leadership (7) 4:25 5:8 7:8, 13 8:15 11:22 13:4 led (1) 6:2 leniency (2) 7:4 9:19 less (1) 6:21 liberal (1) 4:9 like (4) 3:4 6:17 9:24 13:22 likely (1) 6:22 limit (2) 4:11 13:12 lives (1) 9:10 lot (1) 10:24</p>	<p>mind (1) 11:25 mindset (6) 11:5 12:6,7,8,10,15 minutes (1) 5:13 mission (2) 9:25 13:14 Money (2) 11:4,6 monthly (1) 6:7 months (1) 7:6 much (1) 13:18 My (12) 2:3,22 3:1 4:17 6:15, 22 8:4,8,14, 21 10:22,25 myself (2) 6:21 11:10 myths (1) 10:7</p>	<p>official (3) 3:9,10, 12 one (3) 7:18 9:24 13:15 open (1) 2:3 operations (3) 6:2 9:16 11:13 opportunities (1) 9:2 opportunity (8) 2:17,18 5:4 8:4,10,13 9:6 10:1 options (1) 10:1 other (1) 6:10 others (1) 2:20 our (32) 4:25 5:16,17,24 6:2,4 7:1,7,19, 23 8:25 9:5, 11,20 10:7,25 11:1,9,10,19, 23 12:2,5,8, 12,14,18,24 13:1,4,7,16 ourselves (1) 5:5 outcome (1) 10:5 over (2) 7:6 11:11 oversight (1) 9:17 ownership (1) 6:2</p>	<p>passion (1) 8:23 past (1) 7:6 pay (1) 8:10 people (2) 10:24 12:8 perception (1) 9:20 performance (1) 8:17 period (2) 12:22, 23 person (1) 11:24 personally (1) 3:13 pertains (1) 4:23 place (9) 3:5,9, 14 5:7 6:16 7:11 10:24 11:14 12:25 placed (1) 2:9 platform (1) 10:2 please (2) 4:5 7:17 pm (1) 14:2 point (2) 4:13 5:21 poor (1) 7:14 positive (2) 5:6 8:19 possible (2) 6:23, 25 posted (1) 3:8 powerful (2) 9:25 12:16 practices (1) 9:18 prepare (1) 7:19 present (1) 3:15 prevailing (2) 9:21 10:7 previous (1) 7:15 principal (5) 5:11, 17 8:5,22 12:3 probation (8) 6:16,19,23 7:3,11 12:20, 21 13:8 procedures (1) 12:25</p>	<p>proceed (1) 3:24 process (5) 5:17, 19,23 6:1 13:24 professional (1) 5:13 professionals (1) 11:15 program (2) 8:16 13:2 Project (1) 8:15 protocol (1) 13:1 prove (2) 5:4 6:12 proven (1) 5:16 provide (5) 2:19 6:25 7:23 8:16 10:2 provided (1) 3:20 provides (1) 2:16 providing (1) 9:2 public (14) 2:3,7, 12,17,18,19 3:6,11,14 4:22 6:20,21 7:7 14:2 publicity (1) 7:5 public's (1) 13:14 published (1) 3:6 purely (1) 4:11 pushes (1) 13:7 put (2) 5:7 11:13</p>
<b>M</b>	<b>N</b>			
<p>made (4) 3:16 5:21 6:16 11:11 magnitude (1) 10:14 main (1) 11:3 maintain (1) 9:12 make (3) 6:5 11:15,23 making (5) 11:7, 8,8,20 12:13 manner (1) 3:24 manpower (2) 11:4,20 many (2) 10:7 12:2 matter (1) 2:10 maybe (1) 13:1 means (1) 10:4 Medaglio (1) 6:3 meeting (1) 3:11 member (4) 4:19 5:20 6:9 12:1 members (6) 3:21 4:24 5:22 6:10 8:25 11:23 middle (1) 5:17</p>	<p><b>NAGOURNEY (5)</b> 2:2,4 3:4 7:22 13:19 name (5) 2:3,22 3:1 4:17 8:4 native (1) 8:7 necessary (1) 3:16 negative (2) 6:19 7:5 network (1) 8:13 new (12) 4:24, 25 5:8,8,11 6:10 7:7,12 8:5,13 11:10 12:2 News (2) 3:6,7 Nicholas (1) 6:3 note (1) 3:19 notice (2) 3:5,8 notified (1) 3:13 now (7) 2:20 4:3 8:9 9:7,9 11:16 13:21</p>			
	<b>O</b>			
	<p>officer (1) 2:25</p>		<b>P</b>	
		<p>parent (1) 6:20 parents (3) 5:9, 22 6:23 part (2) 5:18 13:23 participating (1) 13:22 particularly (1) 12:9 partnership (5) 8:24 9:14 10:3,13,15 partnerships (1) 9:24</p>		<b>R</b>
				<p>Rachel (2) 5:12 8:5 reason (1) 4:9 receive (2) 2:17 4:10 received (2) 3:23 7:6 recommend (1) 12:20 recommendation (3) 6:16 7:3,11 recommendations (1) 5:2</p>

recommended (1) 13:9	11:17,22 13:4	4:2,5 8:4 13:20	12:13 13:1	12:5,13,14 13:7
reconsider (1) 6:19	Schools (6) 8:12, 18 9:23 11:4 12:7 13:16	speaker (1) 3:17 spent (1) 6:8	sustainable (1) 7:9 systematic (1) 8:16	today (4) 2:24 8:4 10:23 13:22
record (4) 3:4,15, 20 4:7	school's (2) 9:14 11:12	stability (1) 9:8 staff (8) 4:25 5:9, 24,25 7:12 9:13 11:22 13:13	systems (2) 9:18 11:13	today's (2) 3:6,14 together (1) 3:22 tomorrow's (1) 7:20
redefining (1) 10:3	second (2) 10:24 11:20	stand (1) 4:21 standing (1) 9:9	<b>T</b>	
referred (1) 2:10	Secretary (4) 2:6 3:21 13:10,23	standpoint (2) 13:4,5	take (1) 4:1 taken (1) 11:10	towards (1) 9:1
reflect (1) 3:5	see (1) 5:6	start (1) 8:21	takes (3) 10:2 11:25 13:11	training (1) 5:13
relationships (1) 8:19	seeing (1) 6:13	State (14) 2:13 3:2,7,11,21 4:16 5:3 6:12 8:8,18 13:5, 11,16,25	talk (2) 10:23,24	trainings (1) 6:11
remainder (1) 11:17	selection (1) 5:25	statements (1) 4:7	teacher (3) 4:18 5:19 12:1	transcription (1) 8:1
repetitive (1) 4:11	selfless (1) 8:25	state's (1) 3:12	teachers (3) 5:22 11:22 12:12	transformative (1) 8:14
reporter (3) 3:15, 19 7:23	send (1) 6:22	status (1) 13:8	team (2) 6:2 11:10	Treasurer (1) 6:4
reports (1) 5:5	sense (2) 6:1 9:8	stay (1) 10:10	teams (1) 5:22	truly (1) 10:16
representatives (2) 3:25 4:14	serve (1) 8:7	stellar (1) 9:12	Thank (5) 7:21 8:2 10:20 13:18,22	two (3) 4:7 6:21 7:14
request (1) 7:2	set (3) 2:15 6:11 12:17	stereotypes (1) 10:7	their (7) 6:24 9:5,9,10,24 10:23,25	<b>U</b>
requesting (1) 9:19	sets (1) 11:2	strengthening (1) 9:16	them (3) 7:19 9:7 10:19	Uncommon (1) 8:12
required (4) 2:9 6:11 12:19,21	several (2) 7:6 8:11	strong (6) 11:14, 15,18 12:3 13:13,14	themselves (1) 2:21	under (1) 4:23
respect (3) 6:17 13:5,8	she (2) 5:14,15	stronger (1) 6:14	There (6) 4:3 6:15 10:19 11:3,24 13:19	understand (1) 12:19
respectfully (2) 7:2 12:22	sheets (1) 4:3	strongest (1) 11:21	they (1) 9:6	understanding (1) 6:15
responsibility (1) 11:1	short (1) 5:15	student-driven (1) 10:4	thing (4) 7:18 11:20 12:6 13:15	unnecessary (1) 6:7
reverse (1) 9:20	show (4) 7:7,17 12:23,24	students (9) 7:1, 12,19 9:3,5 10:5,8,11,18	things (1) 11:3	us (6) 4:23 6:1 7:17 10:9 13:7,11
review (2) 2:9 4:24	showing (1) 7:12	submitted (1) 5:6	Thomas (1) 6:5	<b>V</b>
right (5) 4:10 5:12 12:24,25 13:15	Side (2) 8:24 10:15	success (5) 6:13 10:3,11 11:19 12:18	three (2) 4:8 11:3	Valentin (4) 5:12, 12 8:2,5
<b>S</b>	situation (1) 5:1	successful (2) 10:19 11:2	tightening (1) 6:7	vision (2) 8:23 10:12
same (1) 10:11	society (1) 10:8	support (1) 11:22	time (9) 3:5,13 4:9 5:15 9:20 10:20 12:22, 23 13:12	voice (1) 5:25
satisfied (2) 2:16 6:6	solid (2) 9:13 12:18	sure (7) 11:8,11, 15,20,23	times (5) 11:9	<b>W</b>
School (19) 2:10, 17 3:8,13 4:14,19,23 5:16,18 6:21, 22 7:15 8:6, 10,12,21	some (2) 5:13 6:7			want (1) 6:23 wants (2) 4:4
	something (1) 9:15			
	sorry (1) 4:8			
	sort (1) 9:7			
	sound (1) 11:16			
	speak (5) 3:18			

13:20 <b>We (41)</b> 3:24,25 4:1,13 5:3,6,7, 11 6:12,25 7:7,18 9:4,20 10:4,12,19 11:2,6,7,7,13, 15,21 12:10, 11,11,15,19, 22,22,23,24 13:1,3,5,6,8,9, 12,14 <b>website (2)</b> 3:11, 12 <b>welcome (1)</b> 13:6 <b>well-received (1)</b> 5:9 <b>whatever (1)</b> 10:2 <b>Wilmington (1)</b> 12:9 <b>wish (1)</b> 4:1 <b>work (2)</b> 10:6,13 <b>working (2)</b> 6:3 8:11 <b>written (1)</b> 3:22 <b>wrongdoings (1)</b> 7:8 <b>wrongs (3)</b> 11:11 12:17,24				
<b>Y</b>				
<b>year (2)</b> 9:11 11:17 <b>years (3)</b> 8:11 11:17 12:2 <b>York (1)</b> 8:13 <b>young (3)</b> 10:8, 11 12:8				
<b>4</b>				
<b>4:25 (1)</b> 14:2				