

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
In Re: Reach Academy For Girls

Hearing
October 8, 2014

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THE STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

..

-- PUBLIC HEARING --

IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
Reach Academy For Girls)

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Department of Education
The Townsend Building
2nd Floor Cabinet Room
401 Federal Street
Dover, Delaware 19901

Thursday, October 8, 2014
7:20 p.m.

..

BEFORE: Jennifer Nagourney, Executive Director
Charter Office, Department of Education

Donna Johnson, Executive Director
State Board of Education

ATTORNEY: Catherine T. Hickey, DAG
Attorney for Department of Education

..

-- Transcript of Proceedings --

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

8 The charter of Reach Academy For
9 Girls has submitted an application for the renewal
10 of its charter.

11 At this point I would like to
12 introduce the other individuals with me today.

13 MS. JOHNSON: My name is Donna
14 Johnson. I'm the executive director of the State
15 Board of Education, also known as the door lady
16 today. (Laughter)

17 MS. HICKEY: My name is Catherine
18 Hickey. I'm the Deputy Attorney General. I
19 represent the Department of Education, and tonight I
20 am providing counsel to the hearing officer of this
21 matter.

22 MS. NAGOURNEY: This joint public
23 hearing is being held by the Department of Education
24 and the State Board of Education to assist in the



1 decision of whether the charter should be renewed.
2 This hearing provides the school and the public with
3 an opportunity to provide comment to the public
4 record.

5 I would like the record to reflect
6 that the notice of the time, date, and place of
7 today's public hearing was published in the News
8 Journal and Delaware State News on August 18, 2014.
9 In addition, the notice was posted at the Charter
10 School Accountability Committee's official place of
11 business, on the Department of Education's official
12 website, and on the State Public Meeting Calendar on
13 the State Official Website on August 18, 2014.

14 The court reporter is present so
15 that a record of this hearing can be made. It will
16 be necessary for each speaker to clearly identify
17 himself or herself before beginning to speak so that
18 the court reporter will be able to note who you are.

19 The record of this hearing will be
20 provided to the Secretary of Education and members
21 of the State Board of Education together with any
22 written or electronic comments received at or before
23 this hearing.

24 We will proceed in the following



1 manner: First, we will hear from any
2 representatives from the school who wish to speak.
3 Then we will take comments from anyone else who
4 wishes to speak. I have the sign-in sheets. Can I
5 have a show of hands of all those who desire to
6 speak?

7 Okay. I intend to be as liberal
8 as time and reason allow in accepting comments;
9 however, I do reserve the right to limit comments if
10 it's purely repetitive or cumulative.

11 And at this point we will accept
12 comments from any representatives of the school.

13 MR. CASSON: Good evening. Glad
14 to be back here to meet with you this evening. We
15 have come a long way since our last appearance.

16 MS. HICKEY: I just want to make
17 sure --

18 MR. CASSON: I'm Lloyd Casson.
19 I'm sorry.

20 MS. HICKEY: Thank you. That's
21 all right. Thank you.

22 MR. CASSON: Lloyd Casson,
23 President of the Board. I'm sorry.

24 We wouldn't have asked for the



1 trauma that we experienced last fall when, after
2 only a few short years, we faced the revocation of
3 our charter. We wouldn't have asked for it, and we
4 wouldn't wish it on anyone. But the truth of the
5 matter is that it has led to the ignition of a flame
6 that we hope will never go out -- that is our
7 efforts to renew and continually improve from year
8 to year to year to fulfill the mission of Reach
9 Academy.

10 The first move that we made
11 following the opportunity that was given to us to
12 continue for another year was to engage Claremont
13 Consulting, which is a national firm that works with
14 charter schools with grace, it says, to improve
15 academic and organizational performance.

16 We engaged them to conduct a
17 comprehensive system-wide review of our school --
18 everything, everything. John Tarmon, the principal
19 of that organization, came highly recommended to us
20 by state educators, regional educators -- not only
21 here, but elsewhere -- as one whose training of
22 school leaders with great success have led to great
23 turnaround, particularly in charter schools.

24 He was the founding executive



1 director of the Massachusetts Center for Charter
2 Public School Excellence. We are glad that he has
3 been part of our operation.

4 And with him on this project was
5 Kirstin Olsen, whose name many people in the
6 education field have heard of, a widely known and
7 published educator, an education coach.

8 And their recommendations to us
9 were sweeping, ranging from clarifying our
10 organizational structures to really lifting up and
11 making much more rigorous our academic side of our
12 operation, et cetera.

13 One of the first things that he
14 did with us was to create a plan of action by which
15 we would begin to implement the recommendations that
16 they made, and you will hear more about that from
17 Ms. Allen and others.

18 The other thing that I want to
19 report on, which was one of their recommendations,
20 and I'm so glad that we immediately stepped up to,
21 was expanding the board of directors to bring on the
22 board resources that will enable us to see and know
23 what we are doing in all aspects of our operation.

24 We have people from University of



1 Delaware, Martha Buell. Some of you may know her.
2 She is the director of the Early Learning Center at
3 the University. Cherese Winstead, who is the
4 chairman of the Department of Chemistry here at
5 Delaware State. Martha -- rather, Carol Roth, who
6 is from Pennsylvania, Philadelphia School District,
7 a great consultant in data work and so on. Thelma
8 Hines, Wilmington University, who is involved with
9 practicum placement statewide.

10 And our other one was a lawyer --
11 that is Alvera Berry, who is a human resources
12 lawyer, specialist.

13 So we have begun to get our act
14 together in this way with having resources to help
15 us, people around the table to help to make sure
16 that the policies we develop, the work that we do
17 really is consistent with best practices in every
18 way.

19 I feel and I know that the members
20 of our board of directors feel that we really are
21 moving in the right direction. It was great news to
22 us, for example, that we made AYP for the first
23 time, and something is really already beginning to
24 happen. You will hear something about that from



1 Ms. Allen and the others.

2 I think I will stop here, because
3 there are other people I know we want to have. And
4 we have got some of our political friends here. We
5 would like them to have a chance to speak, so I
6 don't want to take any more time.

7 I want to -- one more thing I will
8 say: With our board of directors, we have actually
9 added a parent and a teacher, so we now have two of
10 each so that there is real communication at both the
11 lower school and the middle school at the level of
12 the board. It's already making a big difference in
13 the way the board feels and interacts with the whole
14 school.

15 So, with that, I will stop and
16 turn it over to you.

17 MS. ALLEN: Good evening. My name
18 is Tara Allen. I am the school leader at Reach
19 Academy For Girls.

20 Thank you for having us here
21 before you today. We're pretty familiar with the
22 room.

23 So I would like to take this
24 opportunity right now to say that Reach Academy is



1 making great strides. It has been a tough year for
2 us this past year. However, we feel that -- and
3 someone just told me constantly that anything worth
4 having is hard work. And I believe that it's been
5 hard work for the past few years, much harder work
6 this past year, but the progression that I have seen
7 has made it all worth it. And I just -- it kind of
8 makes me look forward to, while we have more work to
9 do, it makes me look forward to that hard work, if
10 you will.

11 But as a school and as a family,
12 as you can see, you know, we have overcome some very
13 high hurdles thus far. And we recognize that there
14 is still work to be done. But, as Reverend Casson
15 just said, I'm just absolutely happy to report that
16 we have made AYP for the very first time since
17 opening, and I attribute this to all of our hard
18 work and the collaboration of our staff, our
19 students, as well as our families.

20 And we have -- we definitely
21 recognize our weaknesses, as Reverend Casson just
22 said, and we have put an action plan in place. And
23 I think that's key. That has had to be key for us.

24 We have just completed our first



1 year in our new location that's on Lukens Drive in
2 New Castle. And I have to say just having the space
3 for our students to grow and provide a conducive
4 learning environment as opposed to where we were has
5 made also a world of difference, and I think that
6 has something to do with the progression.

7 The students are able to come in.
8 The classrooms are spacious. Our teachers make sure
9 that they are inviting. So that's pretty much the
10 first step of a positive learning environment, which
11 we know plays a huge part when you are working
12 toward student growth.

13 Our location now houses two
14 buildings where we have a building for the
15 elementary school and a building for the middle
16 school. And, again, the girls have the opportunity
17 to see what's in store for them in the upcoming
18 years with the space that we have.

19 Our board of directors, I can't
20 say enough. I'm very, very pleased that our board
21 is expanding, and the wealth of knowledge and
22 experience that those individuals are bringing to
23 the table to assist me and the rest of the staff
24 with growing our school.



1 This forward movement that the
2 board has put in place is sort of a breath of fresh
3 air. And it gives me -- I see more than a pinhole
4 light at the end of the tunnel these days shining
5 brightly, and I might have to get my sunglasses
6 soon, which, again, is exciting; and it gives me all
7 the energy in the world to continue to keep moving
8 our staff, keep moving our students in that forward
9 progression.

10 Outside of the -- and, again, I
11 won't repeat the extra steps that the board has
12 taken. The consultants that were hired have -- I
13 think the information that they have given us has
14 been priceless, so to speak. Just showing us where
15 we were -- where we may have been falling short and
16 where we needed to grow and what we may have been
17 doing correctly and giving us the guidance to put
18 that action plan in place has also helped.

19 We have now also partnered with an
20 organization called School Turnaround, which is also
21 providing training to myself for principals of
22 low-achieving schools. This organization has proven
23 strategies that gets those schools on the right
24 track. I have been excited to work with them. We



1 started this past summer work withing them and will
2 continue throughout the year. So, again, our
3 progression is just -- has no -- it has no other
4 place to go but up.

5 As for student growth and
6 improvement, we have shown progress in all areas of
7 the academic framework. We know, again, we have a
8 ways to go, and we are up for that challenge. Our
9 students are excited, even to see the growth that
10 they have had in this past year. We want to make
11 sure that we continue that momentum with them and
12 with the staff.

13 We understand that we will -- we
14 have to continue to put all of the strategies in
15 place to get our girls where they need to be. But
16 after last year we feel that we are certainly on
17 that trajectory to get to -- to become a school
18 that's meeting state standards in the near future.

19 And with all that I have just
20 stated, I can't stress enough how dedicated my staff
21 has been to include the admin team that's here now
22 in getting us where we need to be. The countless
23 hours of work and time of an educator are priceless.
24 But to see the face of our students when the



1 lightbulb comes on or they have accomplished
2 success, it can't be described with words.

3 So this is something that these
4 sort of things that are going on right now at Reach
5 Academy, and we just continue to feel the excitement
6 as we continue on the next five years of Reach
7 Academy and making sure that our girls are where
8 they need to be. Thank you.

9 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you. Who
10 wants to speak next? You also have the option, for
11 those who are shy, I just want to remind you that
12 you have the option of coming up in a group. If the
13 teachers want to come forward all at once, you are
14 most welcome to do that, or if parents want to come
15 forward all at once. It's totally up to you.

16 MS. BANKS: My name is Maria
17 Banks. And what I would like to say this evening is
18 very easy but difficult; so, if you don't mind, I'm
19 going to read it. Okay?

20 At Reach Academy, the last three
21 years has brought us many trials and tribulations.
22 But through those trials and tribulations, we have
23 learned a lot of things, like the importance of
24 humility, the importance of professionalism, the



1 importance of growing and learning every day.

2 Each school year brings with it a
3 dawn. For Reach Academy, it's been a dawn of at
4 least 150 new students each year. They come to us
5 broken sometimes, hungry sometimes, socially,
6 emotionally, and academically distressed sometimes.
7 But they look to us to continue to provide them the
8 following: Someone who will model a written
9 response, what it looks like, what it sounds like;
10 someone to explain text rendering; someone that
11 understands the difference between academic language
12 and code switching; someone who will meet them at
13 the door every day at 6:45 to tutor them in math,
14 ELA, or just to listen to their story.

15 This year at Reach Academy, we
16 are, for the first time, going to put on a play. We
17 have established a collaborative partnership with
18 other teachers and schools, charter and public, to
19 host a reading olympics. We have 18 girls signed up
20 for the math olympiad. The girls tell us every day
21 that we are becoming a real school.

22 One thing we know for sure, that
23 at Reach Academy every single thing we do, every
24 choice we make every day, is about teaching and



1 learning, and it's for the girls.

2 MS. MALSEED: Thank you. My name
3 is Monica Malseed, and I would like to speak a
4 little bit to the future of Reach. At Reach we are
5 student centered. Every action, interaction, every
6 decision that is made benefits our students. That's
7 the bottom line.

8 Within a culture of respect and
9 caring, all of our teachers work tirelessly to serve
10 our students by providing an education of the
11 highest standards. We know that everything we do is
12 teaching and learning, not just what happens in the
13 front of our classroom. We are models in all that
14 we do, mindful of and proud to be teachers who
15 influence and affect children's lives.

16 We nurture. We build
17 relationships. We foster in each child a vision, a
18 vision of a girl who will grow to be strong,
19 capable, a vital citizen who can impact society in a
20 positive way. And we promise the skills. We
21 promise to give each girl the skills to live up to
22 that vision and to forward that vision.

23 We employ our best educational
24 practices. We are committed to continuous



1 improvement of ourselves as teachers so that we can
2 benefit our students, and we are dedicated to teach
3 each girl success, to have each girl reach success.

4 Our school has faced many
5 challenges and has successfully met them all,
6 internalizing and reflecting on what we needed to do
7 to be a better school for our students. So I see a
8 strong future, because we have a clear vision and a
9 solid program. I see Reach as being a successful,
10 positive school. Thank you.

11 MS. PRATCHER: I'm Tilhiera
12 Pratcher, and I'm currently in the eighth grade at
13 reach. For me, Reach Academy has changed me a whole
14 lot. My sister, Tiffany, and I have been at Reach
15 for four years, and it has made an impact on our
16 lives for the better.

17 In fifth grade was our first year.
18 It was a little bit challenging. We went through
19 many teachers, but we did what we needed to do to
20 get it over with.

21 They have wonderful teachers who
22 have good relationships with students, and they help
23 us to prepare for what's coming in high school.
24 They don't sit in class and hold your hand and



1 babysit you. They hold you accountable for your
2 time and work.

3 I think Reach Academy should stay
4 open because they always -- they are always
5 empowering each and every student to achieve dreams,
6 accomplishments, and goals. They don't settle for
7 anything less than the best. They have great
8 academic goals for students. They also give
9 students a voice for reason.

10 I also think Reach should stay
11 open because they say what they mean and mean what
12 they say. Reach doesn't just say send your student
13 to Reach Academy because we are the only all-girls
14 charter school in Delaware; they actually have a
15 vision for these students.

16 The academic standards they set
17 are very high, especially for middle school
18 students, because they want to see their students go
19 up to high school and college.

20 In my three years here at Reach, I
21 have learned new things. I'm still learning things
22 every day. Reach offers a lot of extracurricular
23 activities such as cheerleading, basketball,
24 volleyball, tai-chi, girl scouts, yearbook,



1 tutoring, math league, choir, and student council.

2 They also offer high school day
3 for eighth graders to get them prepared to see what
4 high schools they would like to go to. And just
5 today we visited Howard High School of Technology.

6 And for fifth grade, they offer a
7 moving-up ceremony. In eighth grade they have a
8 graduation.

9 If Reach is to close down, some of
10 us that have been here for the longest time ever,
11 they would just go crazy. (Laughter) And a great
12 number of us have been there since the beginning.
13 If Reach closed down, it's like losing a friend or a
14 family member. Reach has changed a lot of us. Our
15 past or our future wouldn't be the same without
16 Reach Academy For Girls.

17 MS. WINSTEAD: Hi. Good evening.
18 My name is Dr. Cherese Winstead, and I'm the chair
19 of the Department of Chemistry at Delaware State
20 University.

21 And Reach Academy, even though I
22 have just recently been introduced to the fantastic
23 institution, I call it "institution" because it's
24 more like a camp than it is a school.



1 And what I have learned since I
2 have interacted with the girls there is that it
3 actually fits a certain niche. So being in the
4 field of stem and chemistry, Reach Academy is unique
5 in that it fits one of the labor workforce of
6 requirements going forward.

7 Nine out of ten students do not
8 undergo a degree in stem fields, and even less than
9 that actually. If they are underrepresented groups
10 such as young women, they do not -- they are not the
11 ones that actually try to attain the advanced degree
12 in the stem areas.

13 So Reach Academy is really unique
14 in the region in that it actually fits that bill.
15 It has the mechanism to increase those numbers. And
16 being introduced and encountering the fields of stem
17 such as mathematics and engineering and chemistry
18 and physics and things like that, it's an
19 opportunity for a laboring institution such as the
20 University of Delaware and Delaware State University
21 for us to partner with Reach Academy in order to
22 increase those numbers and get those young ladies
23 interested in the areas of stem at an early age,
24 which is really when an interest needs to be



1 generated with a lot of those young females.

2 And being an educator in higher
3 education, you actually are able to see the
4 intimidation, the lack of confidence. By that time
5 when they're in collegiate level, it's really hard
6 to turn that back around. But if you are able to
7 reach those young ladies at an earlier age, you can
8 generate that interest and that motivation for them
9 to feel like it is attainable and that their
10 interest in stem is something that they can pursue,
11 and that they should get an advanced degree in the
12 stem area, because nine out of ten jobs in the
13 future will be in a stem-related area.

14 So we really do need to foster and
15 motivate and make sure that those types of schools
16 actually stay open for those young ladies, because
17 that's the mechanism in which we are going to be
18 able to increase those numbers.

19 That's all I have to say. Thanks.

20 SENATOR HENRY: Good evening. I'm
21 Senator Margaret Henry, and I'm here as an advocate
22 on behalf of Reach Academy. I have the good fortune
23 of representing them. They are in my senatorial
24 district, and I can honestly say I have spent time,



1 many trips at the school visiting.

2 And I can tell you that the school
3 climate is conducive to learning. It's an exciting
4 place. When you enter, you feel a sense of welcome.

5 Also, I love the fact that it
6 teaches the girls how to assume responsibility and
7 respect and confidence. And I actually was a
8 graduation speaker for the graduating class this
9 year. And the sense of pride they have had in their
10 accomplishments to reach being able to graduate and
11 go on to high school is remarkable.

12 The support of parents, you need
13 to know, is very, very strong. The parents love
14 that their children -- that their girls go there.
15 The girls are in a safe environment. No one has
16 talked about that, but there is a safe learning
17 environment there, free from the worries about crime
18 and other things that some of our girls have had to
19 experience before coming to Reach.

20 And so many of the parents --
21 actually, the girls travel a great distance just to
22 come to school there, because they want that for
23 their children. They want their children to be in a
24 safe environment where they can learn and know what



1 it means to be a woman.

2 Because let's be honest. A woman
3 is going to have to nurture her children. And so
4 when you educate a woman, you are educating a
5 family. I mean, it sounds like a cliché, but it's
6 the truth; because we are teaching them family
7 values, but we're also teaching them academic skills
8 that will enable them to take their rightful place
9 in society as our future leaders.

10 So I have also met with Secretary
11 Murphy numerous times about the school, because I'm
12 very passionate about the fact that it should be
13 able to continue. Actually, I was responsible for
14 creating the legislation with Representative Hudson.
15 And we started Prestige, and then that opened a way
16 for there to be Reach Academy.

17 So we recently passed legislation
18 to say that there would always be a single-gender
19 school for girls, too, this past legislative
20 session.

21 So I have a vested interest in the
22 fact that they need to be successful. And so I have
23 made it my business to visit, encourage, take other
24 people in to volunteer. I have exposed them to the



1 arts. We took them to see a play this year.
2 Anything and everything that we can do in terms of a
3 community, we need to do to support this school.
4 Because, as I said, the parents -- looking at the
5 parents when they are bringing their kids to school,
6 their happiness that their girls are finally getting
7 a chance to learn what it means to be a responsible
8 young lady. But to be in an environment where it's
9 safe and it's conducive to learning, I think, makes
10 Reach really a success for parents and for the
11 children who attend there. Thank you.

12 COUNCILMAN STREET: My name is Jea
13 Street, and in December I will have completed four
14 years as a so-called education advocate in the
15 arena. And it's been a lot of trials and
16 tribulations.

17 Ironically, I'm here today,
18 tonight, and I'm going to be here tomorrow with
19 Moyer. I want Reach to stay open. I don't want
20 Moyer to be closed.

21 And I'm not even a proponent of
22 charter schools. I don't like charter schools
23 because of the negative impact that they have on the
24 public schools and the clear absence of diversity



1 across the board.

2 But I'm also a proponent of
3 fairness, and I'm a proponent of not taking away
4 what's already been given.

5 Now, I'm going to take you back.
6 This is my little red wagon, but I have had to pull
7 it for 30 some years. August 25, 1981, the first
8 time that I was at council table with the cause to
9 save our children.

10 And Judge Schwartz had a
11 conversation with us and basically said school
12 districts were allowed to close schools as they saw
13 fit; he wasn't going to run the school system.

14 Subsequently, half the schools in
15 the city of Wilmington closed, and all but one of
16 the schools in the former De La Warr School District
17 closed.

18 The problem with that is it has
19 haunted me all this time, because it was on my
20 watch.

21 And then in 1994, I'm chairman of
22 coalition. The cooler is lifted, and we went to
23 so-called neighborhood schools. And, as far as I'm
24 concerned, it's even worse than I thought it would



1 be 20 years ago because of the disastrous effect of
2 the test scores and the performance of these
3 children in these resegregated high-poverty schools.

4 And we resegregated, created
5 high-poverty schools, provided no additional
6 resources, knowing that, under Senator Henry's
7 watch, under her leadership, the Neighborhood School
8 Committee was clear in 2001 that high-poverty
9 resegregated schools had to have additional
10 resources, and no additional resources have been
11 forthcoming.

12 And if you look at Reach, not only
13 did they make AYP, but they made AYP having to go
14 through a hearing in September to prepare for it
15 administratively and work with that; a hearing in
16 November, to prepare for it and go through that and
17 work around that; and a trial in January. And they
18 met AYP anyway, contrary to what everybody said they
19 could do.

20 So, having done that, I think they
21 should be allowed to go forward. And I don't think
22 that these children should be deprived of what they
23 obviously love and are doing well in.

24 The fact of the matter is the same



1 argument I made last year, and I'm going to make
2 tomorrow and going forward: Until such time as the
3 State Board can say that, if they go back to their
4 feeder schools, that we know for a fact they will do
5 better, then leave these charter schools alone.

6 And the other thing is, the
7 presenter, the principal of Odyssey School sitting
8 here this evening continually talked about
9 30 percent minority, 30 percent minority, and
10 30 percent minority. And, to hear him tell it, his
11 school is the best thing since sliced bread. That
12 might be. Okay. But what about 90 percent high
13 poverty? What about 90 percent minority with no
14 additional resources?

15 So, to me, the success of this
16 school, which is under resourced like a lot of the
17 schools, is even greater than that.

18 That's not knocking that
19 situation; it's just presenting what I think are the
20 positive attributes of the success of this school.

21 And everybody talks about the
22 little group of Boys to Men, Boys to Men. Well,
23 what about Girls to Women?

24 And Senator Henry has been over



1 here. I don't have any daughters. As a matter of
2 fact, the Lord knew what he was doing because, if I
3 had a little girl, she would be handcuffed to me
4 right now, and she would hate me. So I will let the
5 girls take care of the girls and let them strive
6 toward womanhood.

7 But one other thing: And I think,
8 you know, I was going to leave tonight, because I
9 got to come back down here tomorrow. My day started
10 at 5:30, and I have a grant due tomorrow that I have
11 to get done before I come down here.

12 And I'm going out the door. But
13 then I said, number one, this man, who I have more
14 respect for probably than any other person in this
15 state (referring to Reverend Casson), he never
16 turned his back. And when we needed him when we
17 were kids, he was always there, and here he is still
18 on the battlefield. And so I got no excuse.

19 And, second, if I walked out and
20 turned my back on those little girls back there,
21 then why wouldn't you all? So nobody got too tired
22 to do what was necessary for me to be where I am
23 today, so I didn't have that excuse.

24 And then I listened to the



1 presentation that was made by Father Casson in
2 regard to the board. Before I left to come down
3 here, I signed an agreement, my agreement with the
4 University of Delaware with their early head start
5 program. Dr. Martha Buell created that program
6 around 2000, 2001, and it has flourished. And to
7 me, in my opinion, which is very advised with
8 foundation, it was actually the genesis of the
9 Governor's Initiative, the Early Start Education
10 Program. The success of that program speaks for
11 self.

12 Everything that she has touched in
13 the educational arena has flourished, been very,
14 very successful, and been a great benefit to the
15 State of Delaware.

16 And with her on that board among
17 the other people, I know full well that working with
18 the team that she has and the rest of the board
19 members, that it's going to continue to do well, and
20 I urge your support of the renewal accordingly.

21 And the other is, in my own self
22 interest, I really don't feel like sitting through
23 another trial next year.

24 (Laughter)



1 MS. NAGOURNEY: Are there any
2 other?

3 MS. CONRAD: Good evening. I'm
4 Beth Conrad. I am a parent of a fourth grader and
5 second grader at Reach Academy For Girls. They have
6 both been at Reach since kindergarten.

7 I am often in the school
8 volunteering with the PTO, and I have seen students
9 eager to learn and teachers engaging students. The
10 environment is caring and encouraging.

11 This past year I had the
12 opportunity to tutor math in my daughter's third
13 grade class. Through that, I was able to see more
14 of the broad spectrum of levels that the girls are
15 at in just the third grade.

16 Most of the girls I worked with
17 were new to Reach this past year and had areas in
18 math in which they were lacking, especially towards
19 the beginning of the year.

20 I did have one student -- and this
21 just stands out to me -- she had other areas where
22 she needed help, as well, but she didn't know her
23 simple shapes. She didn't know an oval from a
24 rectangle in third grade. Obviously, she was not



1 being served fully in her previous school.

2 Reach Academy is a place where all
3 students are welcome, and teachers do an excellent
4 job of teaching all of the different students where
5 they are at and helping them to achieve higher
6 levels.

7 My older daughter has always been
8 at a higher level of learning and achieving, and she
9 has always been challenged at Reach Academy For
10 Girls. She has never been held back in her pursuits
11 of education. She has always been encouraged to
12 continue, what can you do next, what, you know, what
13 can we reach for that's higher than where you
14 already are.

15 We have been very happy with our
16 experience at Reach Academy For Girls, with the
17 education and care that our girls have received and
18 being part of the Reach Academy family.

19 I ask that you give Reach Academy
20 another five years to improve the lives of the girls
21 in Delaware, as they are all given the opportunity
22 to learn in a safe and encouraging environment.

23 MR. MCDONALD: Hello. My name is
24 Kevin McDonald. My wife and I currently have two



1 daughters that attend Reach Academy For Girls. We
2 have a second grader and a first grader. Both of
3 our daughters have been at Reach since they were in
4 kindergarten when the school was located on
5 Philadelphia Pike in Claymont.

6 We originally enrolled our
7 daughters at Reach because we were intrigued about
8 having the opportunity for a single-sex education.
9 And, to be honest, we were pleased that Reach was
10 within walking distance of our home.

11 When the school moved to New
12 Castle last year, we made the choice to keep them at
13 Reach, because we saw a leadership team and teachers
14 who we felt were devoted to them getting an
15 excellent education in a safe, nurturing
16 environment.

17 I am also a parent representative
18 on the Reach Academy Board of Directors. Since
19 joining the Board of Directors in January of this
20 year, I have seen a lot transpire.

21 You have heard from Hanny Casson
22 and Ms. Allen about our comprehensive school review,
23 which is performed by nationally recognized experts
24 from Claremont Consulting, and our involvement with



1 the School Turnaround organization.

2 I believe we have implemented all
3 of the recommendations that the Claremont consulting
4 team made and are moving forward with improving the
5 scores of the students at the school.

6 We have also added seven new board
7 members, including but not limited to a curriculum
8 consultant, as well as professors from the
9 University of Delaware, Delaware State University,
10 and Wilmington University you heard about tonight,
11 as well.

12 What hasn't been mentioned is that
13 the leadership team of Reach has introduced an
14 intensive summer academy where our teachers are
15 given the opportunity for extra professional
16 development during the summer to prepare for the
17 next year.

18 I believe that we have a strong
19 board, a very strong board, and administrators,
20 teachers, and parents who are devoted to the
21 continued scholastic improvement of our students
22 and, therefore, have earned and deserve a five-year
23 extension of our existing charter. Thank you.

24 MS. NAGOURNEY: Are there any more



1 speakers who wish to come forward or speak from
2 where they are, which is totally acceptable,
3 as well.

4 Going once. Going twice. If
5 there is no one else who wishes to speak, this
6 hearing is now closed. I want to thank you all for
7 coming to Dover and participating today.

8 The Secretary will consider your
9 comments as part of the decision-making process, and
10 your comments will also be available for the State
11 Board to consider. Thank you.

12 MS. HICKEY: Wait one second.
13 This doesn't have to be on the record. Well, it can
14 be. As I mentioned, we will just take a brief
15 break, and somebody will go down and make sure there
16 is nobody that didn't get in, just to make sure that
17 we have covered everybody. We don't want anybody
18 sitting out there on the steps.

19 (Short recess)

20 MS. HICKEY: Okay. We checked,
21 and there was no one waiting outside.

22 (Concluded at 8:02 p.m.)
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CERTIFICATE

I, Lorena J. Hartnett, a Notary Public and Registered Professional Reporter, do hereby certify that the foregoing is an accurate and complete transcription of the proceeding held at the time and place stated herein, and that the said proceeding was recorded by me and then reduced to typewriting under my direction, and constitutes a true record of the testimony given by said witnesses.

I further certify that I am not a relative, employee, or attorney of any of the parties or a relative or employee of either counsel, and that I am in no way interested directly or indirectly in this action.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal of office on this 9th day of October 2014.

 ett

Lorena J. Hartnett
Registered Professional Reporter

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