

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
In Re: MOT Charter School

Hearing
October 12, 2015

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STATE OF DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AND THE STATE OF DELAWARE BOARD OF EDUCATION

PUBLIC HEARING

IN RE:

MOT CHARTER SCHOOL

Department of Education
The Townsend Building
401 Federal Street
Dover, Delaware 19901

Monday, October 12, 2015
5:15 p.m.

TRANSCRIPT OF HEARING

BEFORE:

DONNA JOHNSON, HEARING OFFICER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

CATHERINE HICKEY, ESQ.
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

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1 THE HEARING OFFICER: Good
2 evening. I declare this public hearing to be
3 open. My name is Donna Johnson. I'm the
4 Executive Director of the Delaware State Board
5 of Education. Tonight I will be acting as the
6 hearing officer for this public hearing.

7 MOT Charter School has applied
8 for renewal of its charter. As required by
9 law, the matter was referred to the Charter
10 School Accountability Committee.

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

18 I will now ask the others with
19 me today to introduce themselves.

20 MS. HICKEY: My name is
21 Catherine Hickey. I'm a Deputy Attorney
22 General with the Delaware Department of
23 Justice, and I'm serving as counsel to the
24 hearing officer this evening.



1 THE HEARING OFFICER: I would
2 like the record to reflect that the notice of
3 the time, date and place of today's public
4 hearing was published in The News Journal and
5 the Delaware State News. In addition, notice
6 was posted at the Charter School of
7 Accountability Committee's official place of
8 business, on the Department of Education's
9 official website, and on the State Public
10 Meeting Calendar on the State's official
11 website. Further, the school was personally
12 notified of the time, date and place of
13 today's public hearing.

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



1 We will proceed in the following
2 manner. First, we will hear from any
3 representatives of the charter who wish to
4 comment. Then we will take comments from
5 anyone else who desires to speak.

6 I have collected the sign-up
7 sheets for our renewal charter schools for
8 this public hearing. And if you have not yet
9 signed up and you desire to speak, please let
10 me know now.

11 Based upon the record of those
12 that have signed up to speak, I have five
13 individuals who have signed up to speak. And
14 that's not an overwhelming number, so I think
15 we'll be able to proceed without any further
16 reductions in time or limitations. I will try
17 to be as liberal as time and reason allow in
18 accepting comment. However, I do reserve the
19 right to limit comment if it is purely
20 repetitive or cumulative.

21 At this point, I will accept
22 comments from any representatives of the
23 school. Signed up to speak I have Linda
24 Jennings; Jennifer Taylor; Elaine Elston;



1 Mitch Weiss; and Rachel Dallas.

2 Would you like to speak in that
3 order or would you like to change the order?

4 MS. JENNINGS: That's fine.

5 Good evening. My name is Linda
6 Jennings. I would like to thank the
7 Department of Education and the State Board of
8 Education for the opportunity to place a
9 couple of comments on the record.

10 I'm the Head of School and a
11 founding member of the MOT Charter School.
12 Our application describes a thriving and
13 highly successful school. While not perfect,
14 there is little question that in all of the
15 ways that matter, MOT Charter is an
16 extraordinary school. MOT's vision of
17 providing a rigorous academic program in a
18 warm and friendly school where students enjoy
19 learning and parents feel included is
20 well-lived each and every day. Where we are
21 today is the culmination of years of hard work
22 by many, many caring people working together
23 to build trust and relationships that inspire
24 learning and success.



1 We are financially stable,
2 academically successful, and in high demand.

3 Since 2002, we have seen a
4 steady increase in our applications with our
5 waiting list reaching an all-time high this
6 past year.

7 In 2012, we expanded the K to 8
8 building by adding a gymnasium, library, two
9 classrooms, and a STEM room.

10 Last year, we launched a cutting
11 edge high school on a beautiful campus with
12 plenty of room to continue to grow.

13 Families and staff members are
14 highly invested in the school.

15 Our financial stewardship is
16 beyond question.

17 And despite the ever
18 accelerating compliance demands, we continue
19 to meet all of our state and federal
20 obligations.

21 MOT's high rate of staff
22 retention and low attrition is evidence enough
23 that our academic program and our school
24 environment are meeting the needs of our



1 community.

2 Our students know, and parents
3 appreciate, that every adult in the building
4 cares about them and their education.

5 Like all public education, MOT
6 Charter is relentlessly and urgently focused
7 on improving in the areas where we are not
8 currently excelling. We have a strong
9 foundation from which to reach even higher
10 levels of excellence in the coming years. So
11 while our charter renewal application provides
12 a lot of details regarding what we have
13 already achieved, you can expect that MOT
14 Charter will continue to improve and find
15 better ways of delivering quality education.
16 The dedication and commitment that are
17 pervasive and tangible throughout the MOT
18 Charter School community assures it.

19 THE HEARING OFFICER:

20 Thank you.

21 Next we have Jennifer Taylor.

22 MS. TAYLOR: Good evening. My
23 name is Jennifer Taylor, and I wear many hats
24 at MOT Charter, including founding member,



1 parent and faculty. I teach 7th and 8th grade
2 reading.

3 It is as a faculty member that I
4 would like to address you today.

5 MOT Charter is, at its core,
6 focused on the learning experience of each
7 child. As a school, we place our emphasis on
8 high academic expectations and community
9 citizenship. We strive to utilize various
10 teaching strategies to engage every child, and
11 endeavor to make cross-curricular connections
12 whenever possible. Our style is collegial and
13 collaborative, and our coordinated approach
14 allows us to be aware of what is happening
15 with each child in each content area.

16 For example, students in my
17 7th grade Reading class will research
18 Leonardo da Vinci's life and works while they
19 learn how to build mechanical structures,
20 based on his drawings, in STEM. In Writing,
21 how to write a solid, well-organized paragraph
22 is fused with the content standard of writing
23 the solution explanation of a math problem.
24 Students read To Kill a Mockingbird in 8th



1 grade Reading, which is set in the American
2 south in the 1930s, while exploring the Great
3 Depression in Social Studies. These seemingly
4 small things allow students to make
5 connections, retain more information, and
6 increase their bases of general and cultural
7 knowledge. They also allow us as a faculty
8 team to identify any "holes" that may exist in
9 the education of our students.

10 I would also like to note that
11 much of MOT Charter's success is due to our
12 "small school" approach. Teachers know the
13 names of student siblings and parents. On
14 Open House night, it is unusual to meet a
15 parent who doesn't know your name and what you
16 teach. As a faculty, we attend school sports
17 competitions, act as club advisors and
18 coaches, participate in school spirit events,
19 and are generally involved with our students'
20 interests. That builds a strong community.
21 And that is MOT Charter.

22 Our kids are happy and healthy.
23 Our staff are helpful and genuine. We consist
24 of a beautiful diversity of families and



1 individuals that are committed to one
2 fundamental idea, that MOT Charter School is a
3 place where we are safe, encouraged and
4 challenged.

5 THE HEARING OFFICER: Thank you.

6 The next person I have signed up
7 is Elaine Elston.

8 MS. ELSTON: Hi. I'm the senior
9 high school administrator in the high school
10 building, this year hosting grades and 9 and
11 10. So I have seen our application. We are
12 amazing on paper. We have great foresight.
13 We have great cross-curricular materials.
14 We're growing, and it's a place where children
15 want to be.

16 I'd just like to share an open
17 invitation to come to our building and see it
18 in action because as great as it is on paper,
19 those children are amazing, and they are
20 making this dream come true.

21 The many visitors that come
22 through our building to see the great
23 building, and when they see all the children
24 engaged and the openness of the space, the



1 collaboration amongst children who are 14, 15,
2 they just completely, you know, are amazed.
3 We have a lot of collaboration with Del State
4 currently and with Wilmington University.
5 When those professors come in, they're like
6 how do you get freshmen and sophomores to do
7 this? We don't even get our freshmen to do
8 this.

9 So it's really exciting to see
10 the dream coming to fruition. So an open
11 invitation for you to come see us in action.

12 Thank you.

13 THE HEARING OFFICER: The next
14 person signed up to speak is Mitch Weiss.

15 MR. WEISS: Hello. My name is
16 Mitch Weiss. I'm, in the K to 8 building, the
17 Principal of Curriculum & Instruction at MOT
18 Charter. But actually, I'd like to talk a
19 little bit more as a parent of three students
20 at MOT. I am lucky enough to have one student
21 in 9th grade in high school and then two
22 students in the K to 8 building.

23 You know, I remember back to
24 visiting as a parent ten years ago, visiting



1 the school and touring the school -- I visited
2 lots of different schools -- and how impressed
3 I was as the parent of a kindergartner in the
4 school. But now to see that same
5 kindergartner, who is in 9th grade, amazingly
6 ten years later, be so well prepared for a
7 wonderful high school is just really special
8 to me because, you know, high school is very
9 challenging. They have a very intense
10 schedule. They're taking college credit.
11 They have long classes. They have two hours
12 of homework. And to watch him just transition
13 to: Two hours of homework? Oh, no big deal,
14 I can handle that. Everything is turned in
15 electronically? That's great. That helps me
16 keep organized. Taking three college credit
17 classes as a freshman in high school. Has no
18 idea that that's even an odd thing to do or
19 amazing thing to do. Just totally
20 transitioned. And, you know, he's doing
21 homework that prepares him for the next day's
22 classes as opposed to just practicing what
23 he's already learned. And the big part of
24 that, too, is also the school culture being



1 reflected in him and him being a kind, caring
2 person who wants to help his peers. And all
3 of that, you know, comes from year after year
4 of that in the K to 8 building. And now to
5 see that in the high school is great.

6 I have another child, who is
7 struggling student, a special education
8 student, who is often frustrated by school and
9 annoyed by homework, and makes it very clear
10 that he would rather not go to school or have
11 off summer, and yet for him to be in classes
12 where his teachers take care of him and make
13 him happy to be there and make him excited to
14 learn. And to see his growth as well is
15 probably even more special because it's a
16 little harder for him. You can see him
17 learning each little piece piece by piece.
18 And for him to, you know, be doing so well as
19 a special education student, like in the 65th
20 percentile nationally in reading and math, is
21 a tribute to the teachers there.

22 THE HEARING OFFICER: Thank you.

23 And the final person that we
24 have signed up to speak is Rachel Dallas.



1 MS. DALLAS: Hello. I'm Rachel
2 Dallas. I'm a parent of a 1st and 3rd grader
3 at MOT, as well as the PTO president.

4 I'm here to tell you, as parent
5 and classroom volunteer, about the
6 unparalleled education our students are
7 receiving at MOT Charter. To illustrate that,
8 I'd like to give you a brief description of
9 what it's like inside the walls of our school.

10 If you walk the halls of MOT
11 Charter, you would undoubtedly see evidence of
12 our high academic standards. In the trophy
13 case, you would see projects created in our
14 STEM lab where students are able to apply the
15 instruction they've had in math and science.
16 You might also see a group of children headed
17 down the hallway for math league, which
18 challenges students to analytically approach
19 problems above their skill level. Outside of
20 every classroom, you would see research
21 projects, graphing posters or some sample of
22 challenging coursework hanging on the walls.
23 Inside the classrooms, multiple reading groups
24 would be discussing literature specifically



1 tailored to meet their learning needs. And if
2 you stopped to talk to a teacher about their
3 classroom goals, they would tell you the goal
4 is not a specific test score or grade, it's to
5 encourage a love of learning and to inspire
6 students to challenge themselves.

7 If you walked our halls, you'd
8 also see that there is a strong emphasis on
9 character building. Kindness, respect and
10 responsibility are the pillars of our culture
11 at MOT Charter. Our halls are covered with
12 banners that every student has signed in
13 agreement to not tolerate bullying and
14 celebrate differences. And students are
15 taught to respect one another by teachers who
16 model that respect and kindness.

17 What you wouldn't see, while
18 walking our halls, is how dedicated our staff
19 at MOT are. We have an administration who is
20 extremely responsive to students and families
21 and encourages involvement at every
22 opportunity. We have teachers who
23 consistently collaborate to find academic
24 approaches that maximize student potential.



1 And there are a number of staff that volunteer
2 their time to coordinate C2Y admissions,
3 honors programs, school plays, fine arts
4 nights, sports teams, etc., simply because
5 they know that students benefit from it.
6 There are also staff and parents who spend
7 countless hours raising funds. Whether it's
8 to build a gym, replace a failing HVAC system
9 or fund an educational assembly, our MOT
10 Charter community contributes wherever there
11 is a need.

12 In summary, MOT Charter is a
13 community where students feel safe,
14 encouraged, and challenged, parents feel
15 engaged and supported, and everyone is
16 committed to providing the best education
17 possible education for students.

18 So on behalf of the MOT Charter
19 parent community, I urge your support of our
20 charter approval and thank you for your time.

21 THE HEARING OFFICER: At this
22 point, those are all that have signed up on
23 the sign-in sheet to speak regarding MOT's
24 renewal charter application.



1 Are there any comments from
2 anyone else who desires to speak?

3 If not, I want to thank you all
4 for participating today. The Secretary will
5 consider your comments as part of the
6 decision-making process. Your comments will
7 also be available to the State Board of
8 Education to consider.

9 This hearing is now closed.

10 (Hearing concluded at 5:19 p.m.)

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1 State of Delaware)
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4 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

5 I, Lucinda M. Reeder, Registered
6 Diplomat Reporter, Certified Real-time
7 Reporter and Notary Public, do hereby certify
8 that the foregoing record is a true and
9 accurate transcript of my stenographic notes
10 taken on October 12, 2015 in the
11 above-captioned matter.

12 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set
13 my hand and seal this 14th day of October 2015
14 at Wilmington, Delaware.

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Lucinda M. Reeder, RDR, CRR



A	<p>also (7) 9:7,10 12:24 14:16 15:8 16:6 17:7 amazed (1) 11:2 amazing (3) 10:12,19 12:19 amazingly (1) 12:5 American (1) 9:1 amongst (1) 11:1 analytically (1) 14:18 annoyed (1) 13:9 another (2) 13:6 15:15 anyone (2) 4:5 17:2 application (4) 5:12 7:11 10:11 16:24 applications (1) 6:4 applied (1) 2:7 apply (1) 14:14 appreciate (1) 7:3 approach (3) 8:13 9:12 14:18 approaches (1) 15:24 approval (2) 2:15 16:20 area (1) 8:15 areas (1) 7:7 arts (1) 16:3 ask (1) 2:18 assembly (1) 16:9 assist (1) 2:13 assures (1) 7:18 attend (1) 9:16 Attorney (1) 2:21 attrition (1) 6:22 available (1) 17:7 aware (1) 8:14</p>	<p>back (1) 11:23 banners (1) 15:12 Based (2) 4:11 8:20 bases (1) 9:6 beautiful (2) 6:11 9:24 before (2) 3:17, 23 beginning (1) 3:17 behalf (1) 16:18 being (3) 2:12 12:24 13:1 benefit (1) 16:5 best (1) 16:16 better (1) 7:15 beyond (1) 6:16 big (2) 12:13,23 bit (1) 11:19 Board (5) 2:4,13 3:21 5:7 17:7 brief (1) 14:8 build (3) 5:23 8:19 16:8 building (10) 6:8 7:3 10:10,17, 22,23 11:16, 22 13:4 15:9 builds (1) 9:20 bullying (1) 15:13 business (1) 3:8</p>	<p>challenges (1) 14:18 challenging (2) 12:9 14:22 change (1) 5:3 character (1) 15:9 Charter (25) 2:7, 8,9 3:6 4:3,7 5:11,15 7:6, 11,14,18,24 8:5 9:21 10:2 11:18 14:7,11 15:11 16:10, 12,18,20,24 Charter's (1) 9:11 child (4) 8:7,10, 15 13:6 children (5) 10:14,19,23 11:1 14:16 citizenship (1) 8:9 class (1) 8:17 classes (4) 12:11, 17,22 13:11 classroom (3) 14:5,20 15:3 classrooms (2) 6:9 14:23 clear (1) 13:9 clearly (1) 3:16 closed (1) 17:9 club (1) 9:17 coaches (1) 9:18 Code (1) 2:15 collaborate (1) 15:23 collaboration (2) 11:1,3 collaborative (1) 8:13 collected (1) 4:6 college (2) 12:10, 16 collegial (1) 8:12 come (5) 10:17, 20,21 11:5,11 comes (1) 13:3 coming (2) 7:10</p>	<p>11:10 comment (4) 2:17 4:4,18,19 comments (7) 3:23 4:4,22 5:9 17:1,5,6 commitment (1) 7:16 committed (2) 10:1 16:16 Committee (1) 2:10 Committee's (1) 3:7 community (7) 7:1, 18 8:8 9:20 16:10,13,19 competitions (1) 9:17 completely (1) 11:2 compliance (1) 6:18 concluded (1) 17:10 connections (2) 8:11 9:5 consider (2) 17:5, 8 consist (1) 9:23 consistently (1) 15:23 content (2) 8:15, 22 continue (3) 6:12, 18 7:14 contributes (1) 16:10 coordinate (1) 16:2 coordinated (1) 8:13 core (1) 8:5 counsel (1) 2:23 countless (1) 16:7 couple (1) 5:9 coursework (1) 14:22</p>
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<p>court (2) 3:14,18 covered (1) 15:11 created (1) 14:13 credit (2) 12:10, 16 criteria (1) 2:14 cross-curricular (2) 8:11 10:13 culmination (1) 5:21 cultural (1) 9:6 culture (2) 12:24 15:10 cumulative (1) 4:20 currently (2) 7:8 11:4 Curriculum (1) 11:17 cutting (1) 6:10</p>	<p>Deputy (1) 2:21 describes (1) 5:12 description (1) 14:8 desire (1) 4:9 desires (2) 4:5 17:2 despite (1) 6:17 details (1) 7:12 differences (1) 15:14 different (1) 12:2 Director (1) 2:4 discussing (1) 14:24 diversity (1) 9:24 Donna (1) 2:3 down (1) 14:17 drawings (1) 8:20 dream (2) 10:20 11:10 due (1) 9:11</p>	<p>encourage (1) 15:5 encouraged (2) 10:3 16:14 encourages (1) 15:21 endeavor (1) 8:11 engage (1) 8:10 engaged (2) 10:24 16:15 enjoy (1) 5:18 enough (2) 6:22 11:20 environment (1) 6:24 etc (1) 16:4 even (4) 7:9 11:7 12:18 13:15 evening (4) 2:2, 24 5:5 7:22 events (1) 9:18 ever (1) 6:17 every (6) 5:20 7:3 8:10 14:20 15:12,21 everyone (1) 16:15 Everything (1) 12:14 evidence (2) 6:22 14:11 example (1) 8:16 excellence (1) 7:10 excelling (1) 7:8 excited (1) 13:13 exciting (1) 11:9 Executive (1) 2:4 exist (1) 9:8 expanded (1) 6:7 expect (1) 7:13 expectations (1) 8:8 experience (1) 8:6 explanation (1) 8:23 exploring (1) 9:2</p>	<p>extraordinary (1) 5:16 extremely (1) 15:20</p> <p style="text-align: center;">F</p> <p>faculty (4) 8:1,3 9:7,16 failing (1) 16:8 Families (3) 6:13 9:24 15:20 federal (1) 6:19 feel (3) 5:19 16:13,14 final (1) 13:23 financial (1) 6:15 financially (1) 6:1 find (2) 7:14 15:23 fine (2) 5:4 16:3 First (1) 4:2 five (1) 4:12 focused (2) 7:6 8:6 following (1) 4:1 foresight (1) 10:12 forth (1) 2:14 foundation (1) 7:9 founding (2) 5:11 7:24 freshman (1) 12:17 freshmen (2) 11:6,7 friendly (1) 5:18 fruition (1) 11:10 frustrated (1) 13:8 fund (1) 16:9 fundamental (1) 10:2 funds (1) 16:7 Further (2) 3:11 4:15 fused (1) 8:22</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">G</p> <p>General (2) 2:22 9:6 generally (1) 9:19 genuine (1) 9:23 get (2) 11:6,7 give (1) 14:8 go (1) 13:10 goal (1) 15:3 goals (1) 15:3 Good (3) 2:1 5:5 7:22 grade (6) 8:1,17 9:1 11:21 12:5 15:4 grader (1) 14:2 grades (1) 10:10 graphing (1) 14:21 Great (7) 9:2 10:12,13,18, 22 12:15 13:5 group (1) 14:16 groups (1) 14:23 grow (1) 6:12 growing (1) 10:14 growth (1) 13:14 gym (1) 16:8 gymnasium (1) 6:8</p>
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<p>da (1) 8:18 Dallas (4) 5:1 13:24 14:1,2 date (2) 3:3,12 day (1) 5:20 day's (1) 12:21 deal (1) 12:13 decision (1) 2:14 decision-making (1) 17:6 declare (1) 2:2 dedicated (1) 15:18 dedication (1) 7:16 Del (1) 11:3 Delaware (4) 2:4, 15,22 3:5 delivering (1) 7:15 demand (1) 6:2 demands (1) 6:18 Department (4) 2:12,22 3:8 5:7 Depression (1) 9:3</p>	<p>each (6) 3:16 5:20 8:6,15, 15 13:17 edge (1) 6:11 Education (17) 2:5,12,13 3:21,22 5:7,8 7:4,5,15 9:9 13:7,19 14:6 16:16,17 17:8 educational (1) 16:9 Education's (1) 3:8 Elaine (2) 4:24 10:7 electronic (1) 3:23 electronically (1) 12:15 else (2) 4:5 17:2 Elston (3) 4:24 10:7,8 emphasis (2) 8:7 15:8</p>			<p style="text-align: center;">H</p> <p>halls (4) 14:10 15:7,11,18 hallway (1) 14:17 handle (1) 12:14 hanging (1) 14:22 happening (1) 8:14 happy (2) 9:22 13:13 hard (1) 5:21 harder (1) 13:16 hats (1) 7:23 he (1) 13:10 Head (1) 5:10</p>

<p>headed (1) 14:16 healthy (1) 9:22 hear (1) 4:2 HEARING (21) 2:1,2,6,6,11, 16,24 3:1,4, 13,15,20,24 4:8 7:19 10:5 11:13 13:22 16:21 17:9,10 held (1) 2:12 Hello (2) 11:15 14:1 help (1) 13:2 helpful (1) 9:23 helps (1) 12:15 here (1) 14:4 herself (1) 3:17 Hi (1) 10:8 HICKEY (2) 2:20, 21 high (13) 6:2,5, 11,21 8:8 10:9,9 11:21 12:7,8,17 13:5 14:12 higher (1) 7:9 highly (2) 5:13 6:14 him (11) 12:12, 21 13:1,1,11, 12,13,13,16, 16,18 his (4) 8:20 13:2,12,14 hissself (1) 3:17 holes (1) 9:8 homework (4) 12:12,13,21 13:9 honors (1) 16:3 hosting (1) 10:10 hours (3) 12:11, 13 16:7 House (1) 9:14 how (5) 8:19,21 11:6 12:2 15:18</p>	<p>However (1) 4:18 HVAC (1) 16:8</p>	<p>K</p>	<p>lot (2) 7:12 11:3 lots (1) 12:2 love (1) 15:5 low (1) 6:22 lucky (1) 11:20</p>	<p>7,10 15:11,19 16:9,12,18 MOT's (3) 5:16 6:21 16:23 much (1) 9:11 multiple (1) 14:23 My (6) 2:3,20 5:5 7:22 8:16 11:15</p>
	<p>I</p> <p>idea (2) 10:2 12:18 identify (2) 3:17 9:8 illustrate (1) 14:7 impressed (1) 12:2 improve (1) 7:14 improving (1) 7:7 included (1) 5:19 including (1) 7:24 increase (2) 6:4 9:6 individuals (2) 4:13 10:1 information (1) 9:5 inside (2) 14:9, 23 inspire (2) 5:23 15:5 Instruction (2) 11:17 14:15 intense (1) 12:9 interests (1) 9:20 introduce (1) 2:19 invested (1) 6:14 invitation (2) 10:17 11:11 involved (1) 9:19 involvement (1) 15:21</p>		<p>keep (1) 12:16 kids (1) 9:22 Kill (1) 8:24 kind (1) 13:1 kindergartner (2) 12:3,5 Kindness (2) 15:9,16 knowledge (1) 9:7</p>	<p>M</p> <p>made (1) 3:15 make (4) 8:11 9:4 13:12,13 makes (1) 13:9 making (1) 10:20 manner (1) 4:2 many (4) 5:22, 22 7:23 10:21 materials (1) 10:13 math (4) 8:23 13:20 14:15,17 matter (2) 2:9 5:15 maximize (1) 15:24 may (1) 9:8 mechanical (1) 8:19 meet (3) 6:19 9:14 15:1 Meeting (2) 3:10 6:24 member (3) 5:11 7:24 8:3 members (2) 3:21 6:13 might (1) 14:16 Mitch (3) 5:1 11:14,16 Mockingbird (1) 8:24 model (1) 15:16 more (3) 9:5 11:19 13:15 MOT (21) 2:7 5:11,15 7:5, 13,17,24 8:5 9:11,21 10:2 11:17,20 14:3,</p>
<p>J</p> <p>Jennifer (3) 4:24 7:21,23 Jennings (3) 4:24 5:4,6 Johnson (1) 2:3 joint (1) 2:11 Journal (1) 3:4 Justice (1) 2:23</p>	<p>L</p> <p>lab (1) 14:14 Last (1) 6:10 later (1) 12:6 launched (1) 6:10 law (1) 2:9 league (1) 14:17 learn (2) 8:19 13:14 learned (1) 12:23 learning (6) 5:19, 24 8:6 13:17 15:1,5 Leonardo (1) 8:18 level (1) 14:19 levels (1) 7:10 liberal (1) 4:17 library (1) 6:8 life (1) 8:18 like (13) 3:2 5:2, 3,6 7:5 8:4 9:10 10:16 11:5,18 13:19 14:8,9 limit (1) 4:19 limitations (1) 4:16 Linda (2) 4:23 5:5 list (1) 6:5 literature (1) 14:24 little (4) 5:14 11:19 13:16,17 long (1) 12:11</p>	<p>O</p> <p>obligations (1) 6:20 odd (1) 12:18 off (1) 13:11 OFFICER (9) 2:1, 6,24 3:1 7:19 10:5 11:13</p>		

<p>13:22 16:21 official (3) 3:7,9, 10 often (1) 13:8 one (3) 10:1 11:20 15:15 open (4) 2:3 9:14 10:16 11:10 openness (1) 10:24 opportunity (3) 2:17 5:8 15:22 opposed (1) 12:22 order (2) 5:3,3 organized (1) 12:16 others (1) 2:18 our (34) 4:7 5:12 6:4,4,15, 19,23,23,24 7:2,11 8:7,12, 13 9:9,11,19, 22,23 10:11, 17,22 11:7 14:6,9,12,13 15:7,10,11,18, 18 16:9,19 Outside (1) 14:19 overwhelming (1) 4:14</p>	<p>17:5 participate (1) 9:18 participating (1) 17:4 past (1) 6:6 peers (1) 13:2 people (1) 5:22 percentile (1) 13:20 perfect (1) 5:13 person (4) 10:6 11:14 13:2,23 personally (1) 3:11 pervasive (1) 7:17 piece (3) 13:17, 17,17 pillars (1) 15:10 place (7) 3:3,7, 12 5:8 8:7 10:3,14 plays (1) 16:3 please (1) 4:9 plenty (1) 6:12 pm (1) 17:10 point (2) 4:21 16:22 possible (2) 8:12 16:17 posted (1) 3:6 posters (1) 14:21 potential (1) 15:24 practicing (1) 12:22 prepared (1) 12:6 prepares (1) 12:21 present (1) 3:14 president (1) 14:3 Principal (1) 11:17 probably (1) 13:15 problem (1) 8:23 problems (1) 14:19</p>	<p>proceed (2) 4:1, 15 process (1) 17:6 professors (1) 11:5 program (2) 5:17 6:23 programs (1) 16:3 projects (2) 14:13,21 provided (1) 3:20 provides (2) 2:16 7:11 providing (2) 5:17 16:16 PTO (1) 14:3 public (9) 2:2,6, 11,17 3:3,9, 13 4:8 7:5 published (1) 3:4 purely (1) 4:19</p>	<p>19 4:11 5:9 reductions (1) 4:16 referred (1) 2:9 reflect (1) 3:2 reflected (1) 13:1 regarding (2) 7:12 16:23 relationships (1) 5:23 relentlessly (1) 7:6 remember (1) 11:23 renewal (4) 2:8 4:7 7:11 16:24 repetitive (1) 4:20 replace (1) 16:8 reporter (2) 3:14, 18 representatives (2) 4:3,22 required (1) 2:8 research (2) 8:17 14:20 reserve (1) 4:18 respect (3) 15:9, 15,16 responsibility (1) 15:10 responsive (1) 15:20 retain (1) 9:5 retention (1) 6:22 right (1) 4:19 rigorous (1) 5:17 room (2) 6:9,12</p>	<p>4:23 5:10,11, 13,16,18 6:11, 14,23 7:18 8:7 9:12,16, 18 10:2,9,9 11:21 12:1,1, 4,7,8,17,24 13:5,8,10 14:9 16:3 schools (2) 4:7 12:2 science (1) 14:15 score (1) 15:4 Secretary (2) 3:20 17:4 see (15) 10:17, 22,23 11:9,11 12:4 13:5,14, 16 14:11,13, 16,20 15:8,17 seemingly (1) 9:3 seen (2) 6:3 10:11 senior (1) 10:8 serving (1) 2:23 set (2) 2:14 9:1 share (1) 10:16 sheet (1) 16:23 sheets (1) 4:7 siblings (1) 9:13 signed (9) 4:9, 12,13,23 10:6 11:14 13:24 15:12 16:22 sign-in (1) 16:23 sign-up (1) 4:6 simply (1) 16:4 Since (1) 6:3 skill (1) 14:19 small (2) 9:4,12 Social (1) 9:3 solid (1) 8:21 solution (1) 8:23 some (1) 14:21 sophomores (1) 11:6 south (1) 9:2 space (1) 10:24</p>
		Q		
		<p>quality (1) 7:15 question (2) 5:14 6:16</p>		
		R		
		<p>Rachel (3) 5:1 13:24 14:1 raising (1) 16:7 rate (1) 6:21 rather (1) 13:10 reach (1) 7:9 reaching (1) 6:5 read (1) 8:24 reading (5) 8:2, 17 9:1 13:20 14:23 really (2) 11:9 12:7 reason (1) 4:17 receive (1) 2:17 received (1) 3:23 receiving (1) 14:7 record (5) 3:2,15,</p>		
P				
<p>paper (2) 10:12, 18 paragraph (1) 8:21 parent (8) 8:1 9:15 11:19,24 12:3 14:2,4 16:19 parents (5) 5:19 7:2 9:13 16:6, 14 part (2) 12:23</p>				
		S		
		<p>safe (2) 10:3 16:13 same (1) 12:4 sample (1) 14:21 satisfied (1) 2:16 schedule (1) 12:10 School (35) 2:7, 10,16 3:6,11</p>		

<p>speak (11) 3:18 4:5,9,12,13, 23 5:2 11:14 13:24 16:23 17:2 speaker (1) 3:16 special (4) 12:7 13:7,15,19 specific (1) 15:4 specifically (1) 14:24 spend (1) 16:6 spirit (1) 9:18 sports (2) 9:16 16:4 stable (1) 6:1 staff (6) 6:13,21 9:23 15:18 16:1,6 standard (1) 8:22 standards (1) 14:12 State (9) 2:4,13 3:5,9,21 5:7 6:19 11:3 17:7 State's (1) 3:10 steady (1) 6:4 STEM (3) 6:9 8:20 14:14 stewardship (1) 6:15 stopped (1) 15:2 strategies (1) 8:10 strive (1) 8:9 strong (3) 7:8 9:20 15:8 structures (1) 8:19 struggling (1) 13:7 student (7) 9:13 11:20 13:7,8, 19 15:12,24 students (17) 5:18 7:2 8:16, 24 9:4,9 11:19,22 14:6, 14,18 15:6,14, 20 16:5,13,17 students' (1) 9:19</p>	<p>Studies (1) 9:3 style (1) 8:12 success (2) 5:24 9:11 successful (2) 5:13 6:2 summary (1) 16:12 summer (1) 13:11 support (1) 16:19 supported (1) 16:15 system (1) 16:8</p> <p style="text-align: center;">T</p> <p>tailored (1) 15:1 take (2) 4:4 13:12 taking (2) 12:10, 16 talk (2) 11:18 15:2 tangible (1) 7:17 taught (1) 15:15 Taylor (4) 4:24 7:21,22,23 teach (2) 8:1 9:16 teacher (1) 15:2 Teachers (5) 9:12 13:12, 21 15:15,22 teaching (1) 8:10 team (1) 9:8 teams (1) 16:4 ten (2) 11:24 12:6 test (1) 15:4 thank (7) 5:6 7:20 10:5 11:12 13:22 16:20 17:3 their (6) 7:4 9:6 14:19 15:1,2 16:2 them (1) 7:4 themselves (2)</p>	<p>2:19 15:6 there (8) 5:14 13:13,21 15:8 16:1,6,10 17:1 they (10) 8:18 9:7 10:19,23 11:2 12:9,11, 11 15:3 16:5 thing (2) 12:18, 19 things (1) 9:4 think (1) 4:14 three (2) 11:19 12:16 thriving (1) 5:12 throughout (1) 7:17 time (6) 3:3,12 4:16,17 16:2, 20 today (4) 2:19 5:21 8:4 17:4 today's (2) 3:3,13 together (2) 3:22 5:22 tolerate (1) 15:13 Tonight (1) 2:5 totally (1) 12:19 touring (1) 12:1 transition (1) 12:12 transitioned (1) 12:20 tribute (1) 13:21 trophy (1) 14:12 true (1) 10:20 trust (1) 5:23 try (1) 4:16 turned (1) 12:14 two (4) 6:8 11:21 12:11,13</p> <p style="text-align: center;">U</p> <p>undoubtedly (1) 14:11 University (1) 11:4 unparalleled (1)</p>	<p>14:6 unusual (1) 9:14 up (8) 4:9,12, 13,23 10:6 11:14 13:24 16:22 upon (1) 4:11 urge (1) 16:19 urgently (1) 7:6 us (3) 8:14 9:7 11:11 utilize (1) 8:9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">V</p> <p>various (1) 8:9 Vinci's (1) 8:18 vision (1) 5:16 visited (1) 12:1 visiting (2) 11:24, 24 visitors (1) 10:21 volunteer (2) 14:5 16:1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">W</p> <p>waiting (1) 6:5 walk (1) 14:10 walked (1) 15:7 walking (1) 15:18 walls (2) 14:9,22 want (2) 10:15 17:3 wants (1) 13:2 warm (1) 5:18 watch (1) 12:12 ways (2) 5:15 7:15 We (26) 4:1,2,4 5:20 6:1,3,7, 10,18 7:7,8, 12,21 8:7,9 9:16,23 10:3, 11,12,13 11:3, 7 13:23 15:19, 22 wear (1) 7:23</p>	<p>website (2) 3:9, 11 Weiss (4) 5:1 11:14,15,16 well-lived (1) 5:20 well-organized (1) 8:21 whenever (1) 8:12 wherever (1) 16:10 Wilmington (1) 11:4 wish (1) 4:3 without (1) 4:15 wonderful (1) 12:7 work (1) 5:21 working (1) 5:22 works (1) 8:18 write (1) 8:21 Writing (2) 8:20, 22 written (1) 3:22</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Y</p> <p>year (5) 6:6,10 10:10 13:3,3 years (4) 5:21 7:10 11:24 12:6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>10 (1) 10:11 14 (1) 11:1 15 (1) 11:1 1930s (1) 9:2 1st (1) 14:2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p>2002 (1) 6:3 2012 (1) 6:7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>3rd (1) 14:2</p>
---	--	---	---	--

5				
5:19 (1) 17:10				
6				
65th (1) 13:19				
7				
7th (2) 8:1,17				
8				
8 (4) 6:7 11:16, 22 13:4 8th (2) 8:1,24				
9				
9 (1) 10:10 9th (2) 11:21 12:5				