

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

Hearing
December 10, 2014

Wilcox & Fetzer, Ltd.
1330 King Street
Wilmington, DE 19801
email: depos@wilfet.com, web: www.wilfet.com
phone: 302-655-0477, fax: 302-655-0497



P U B L I C H E A R I N G

IN RE: REACH ACADEMY FOR GIRLS APPLICATION
 FOR CHARTER RENEWAL

Carvel Office Building
820 N. French Street, 2nd Floor
Wilmington, Delaware 19801

Wednesday, December 10, 2014
- 6:22 p.m. -

BEFORE: JENNIFER NAGOURNEY, Executive
 Director, Charter School Office

 TERI QUINN GRAY, President, Delaware
 State Board of Education

 DONNA JOHNSON, Executive Director,
 Delaware State Board of Education

 CATHERINE T. HICKEY, DEPUTY ATTORNEY
 GENERAL

 ILONA KIRSHON, DEPUTY ATTORNEY
 GENERAL

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1 MS. NAGOURNEY: We are going to
2 begin. I have to read a script. There are a
3 few procedural steps and formalities and then
4 we will call the speakers in the order they
5 were provided to us. Good morning, I declare
6 this public hearing to be open. My name
7 Jennifer Nagourney. I am the Executive
8 Director of the Charter School Office at the
9 Delaware Department of Education. I've been
10 appointed by the Secretary of Education to
11 conduct this public hearing.

12 The charter of Reach Academy for
13 Girls has submitted an application for the
14 renewal of the charter. The recommendation of
15 the Charter School Accountability Committee
16 was non-renewal. This joint public hearing is
17 being held by the Department of Education and
18 the State Board of Education to assist in the
19 decision of whether the charter should be
20 removed. This hearing provides the school and
21 public to provide public comments. I would
22 like to introduce the other individuals with
23 me.

24 MS. HICKEY: Good evening, my name



1 is Catherine Hickey and I am the Deputy
2 Attorney General with the Delaware Department
3 of Justice and I represent the hearing officer
4 this evening.

5 MS. JOHNSON: Good evening, my name
6 is Donna Johnson and I'm the Executive
7 Director of the Delaware State Board of
8 Education.

9 MS. KIRSHON: I'm Ilona Kirshon and
10 I'm a Deputy Attorney General and I am counsel
11 to the State Board of Education.

12 MS. NAGOURNEY: Can everybody
13 please silence their phones before we proceed?
14 Thank you. I would like the record to reflect
15 that the notice of the time, date and place of
16 today's public hearing was published in the
17 News Journal and the Delaware State News. In
18 addition notice was posted with the Charter
19 School Accountability Committee's official
20 place of business, on the Department of
21 Education's official website, on the State
22 public meeting calendar and the State's
23 official website. A court reporter is present
24 so a record of this hearing will be made. It



1 will be necessary for each speaker to clearly
2 identify himself or herself before beginning
3 to speak so the court reporter will be able to
4 note who you are. The most important part of
5 this whole evening is the court reporter
6 getting an accurate record of what you are
7 saying. So, we ask you to speak clearly and
8 slowly. As you come up to the podium we ask
9 for your full name and we also ask that you
10 spell out your last name so we can establish a
11 really clear record. Just as a reminder I put
12 a sheet up there for all of us. We will
13 proceed in the following manner.

14 First we will hear from any
15 representatives from the school who wish to
16 comment. Then, we will take comment from
17 anyone who desires to speak. We have sign-up
18 sheets here. We will go in the order in which
19 people are going to speak. First, however,
20 can I have a show of hands of all those who
21 desire to speak so I can determine whether it
22 may be necessary to impose a time limit on
23 comments?

24 (Show of hands.)



1 MS. NAGOURNEY: There will be a
2 very strict three-minute limit on comments for
3 individuals and five minutes for a group. I
4 would encourage you to consider coming up in a
5 group if that would be appropriate. We don't
6 like the idea of cutting everyone off, but in
7 the interest of everyone having an opportunity
8 to speak it will be necessary to do so. Also,
9 we reserve the right to limit comment if it is
10 purely repetitive or cumulative. Donna
11 Johnson will be managing the clock. Donna
12 will give you a warning at two minutes and
13 then a minute to help you mark your time.

14 At this point we will accept
15 comments from representatives of the school.
16 Ken Lloyd Casson?

17 MR. CASSON: Ken Lloyd Casson,
18 C-A-S-S-O-N. Good evening everyone. I begin
19 my brief remarks this evening stating that in
20 all honesty Reach Academy for Girls should not
21 be here tonight at least not to plead against
22 an Accountability Committee recommendation
23 that our charter should not be renewed. When
24 we were here at the same place last year



1 around this time we admit both organizational
2 and financial frameworks had not met academic
3 framework. At that time we ourselves
4 acknowledged poor academic performance. We
5 nevertheless pleaded for more time since
6 effectively Reach barely had had two academic
7 years to work with an academically challenged
8 population, especially given the particularly
9 staggered way the new grades were added into
10 our school each year through 2012 and 2013.

11 The Secretary did not agree with
12 that assessment and chose not to renew meaning
13 that Reach was closed at the end of the 2013,
14 2014 academic year. I must say that the
15 Secretary's ringing pronouncement at that time
16 was very painful, but we took his words to
17 heart. Having been given an additional year
18 by District Court Order in January with this
19 new opportunity to apply for a charter the
20 board of directors and all the rest of us
21 immediately began to take steps, major steps,
22 at turning our school around. I won't go
23 through all the details because others will
24 speak to them.



1 Suffice it to say that by the time
2 we submitted our application Reach had been
3 undergoing very thorough reviews, rigid
4 evaluations, recommendations, teacher
5 training, staff coaching by two nationally
6 known consultant firms, an education
7 consulting firm and a school turnaround
8 consulting firm, and that relationship is
9 still ongoing, by the way. As a result we
10 came to the Charter School Accountability
11 Committee having demonstrably improved in
12 every aspect of our school's function.

13 Most important for our purpose
14 tonight is the upward movement in academic
15 achievement based on spring 2014 test scores
16 and other assessments, including meeting AYP
17 for the first time. Our data makes it clear
18 that this upward trajectory continues. We are
19 not under any illusion, Reach is not where it
20 must be academically speaking, but there is
21 absolutely no question in our minds that given
22 the time of this next charter period this
23 school will not only meet, but eventually will
24 exceed State standards.



1 The evidence of this was submitted
2 to the CSAC Committee and discussed at its
3 initial meeting with us. At the meeting as
4 customary the committee requested additional
5 information to assist them in their
6 decision-making. At the final meeting,
7 therefore, we came back and heard committee
8 members all say that they were satisfied with
9 the subsequent submissions that we made and
10 the Chair in particular continually commented
11 on the strides made by Reach in a
12 congratulatory fashion. Other members not
13 only made favorable comments, but in
14 conversation with our school leader even
15 suggested resources that would be helpful to
16 our school going forward.

17 So, even when the committee voted
18 that the school does not meet the academic
19 framework we were not surprised. We did think
20 -- we had almost taken bets on the fact that
21 probably our charter would be renewed albeit
22 with some stringent conditions to be met by
23 times certain or faced with formal reviews.
24 So, the surprise that came to us during the



1 final minutes of the CSAC meeting was a vote
2 to recommend non-renewal. The Chair explained
3 that in spite of the tremendous improvements
4 Reach has made since January none of that
5 mattered. The decision cannot be based upon
6 future promises, he said, but only on past
7 performance to date.

8 What actually has transpired is we
9 have been judged on the performance in the
10 exact same years that led us to the
11 non-renewal situation a year ago. According
12 to the Chair what has happened since then to
13 date may not be considered. That being the
14 case what was the purpose of the process we
15 had just gone through? Why were CSAC requests
16 made following the initial meeting for
17 information that would aid them in making
18 their decisions if, in fact, such information
19 didn't even matter? Truthfully, the past
20 years should not be considered at all for a
21 variety of reasons.

22 MS. JOHNSON: Sir, your time is up.
23 If you have written comments, you can give
24 them to the court reporter.



1 MR. CASSON: You get the drift.

2 (The remainder of the written
3 statement of Mr. Casson was typed into the
4 record by the court reporter.)

5 For one thing, it is like being
6 convicted more than once for the same crime,
7 if I may put it right out there. The evidence
8 which the Chair stated could not be taken into
9 consideration, it seems to us, is the only
10 evidence which CSAC could base a
11 recommendation regarding charter renewal for
12 Reach Academy.

13 On the other hand, we certainly
14 acknowledge that past performance could be the
15 basis for the committee to recommend specific
16 benchmarks and condition to be met by times
17 certain or face formal review proceedings.
18 This is a process already statutorily
19 available to CSAC. Having reviewed CSAC final
20 reports for other charters up for renewal at
21 this time we note that indeed this is the
22 course that CSAC has followed, and in one
23 instance at least, with a charter school with
24 a history of Does No Meet in all three



1 performance framework areas.

2 What is Reach's failure that such
3 an option is not available to us? Why is it
4 so important once again to deny parents choice
5 in determining where their daughters will
6 attend school or to deprive them of a single
7 gender education? Why is it necessary to
8 creat a climate for emotional and physical
9 disruption and trauma to the girls and parents
10 alike? Moreover, why should these girls be
11 consigned to schools no better performing (or
12 less so, or only a little more so) as an
13 alternative to Reach?

14 To leave them at Reach will produce
15 at least a neutral result and it has the
16 chance based on the evidence that we have seen
17 and CSAC obviously has acknowledged to become
18 a venue where they are safe and will thrive
19 academically and in all other ways.

20 MS. NAGOURNEY: Karen Allen?

21 A VOICE: Can I make a quick
22 announcement, please? The capacity in the
23 audience is only 182 people so anybody not
24 sitting down in a chair you are going to have



1 to go out to the lobby and wait.

2 MS. ALLEN: Can you ask anybody
3 standing that is a Reach representative to get
4 a seat?

5 A VOICE: As long as --

6 (Discussion off the record.)

7 MS. ALLEN: Tara Allen, school
8 leader at Reach Academy, A-L-L-E-N. I would
9 like to introduce into the exhibits nearly
10 3,000 signatures of a petition that Reach
11 Academy stay open.

12 MS. HICKEY: The petition will be
13 marked as Exhibit 1.

14 MS. ALLEN: And parent and student
15 letters directed to Secretary Mark Murphy.

16 MS. HICKEY: It's okay to mark this
17 as one?

18 MS. ALLEN: Yes.

19 MS. HICKEY: The envelope
20 containing parent and student letters that Ms.
21 Allen is handing us will be marked as
22 Exhibit 2. Thank you.

23 MS. ALLEN: Good evening. First,
24 let me say thank you to all of you who have



1 come out to support Reach Academy for Girls
2 this evening. This has been a long road with
3 hurdles and hills and we are still standing
4 tall to continue to fight.

5 I can stand here to give you three
6 minutes of facts about Reach Academy for Girls
7 facts that include our noted progression for
8 the past year that puts us on an upper
9 trajectory. Facts to inform you that we can
10 celebrate that we have made AYP. I can talk
11 about how many of our 370 students are of
12 different races. I can tell you the test
13 scores of these students. I can tell you that
14 the same bright, smiling faces have come from
15 our schools, from surrounding schools, in the
16 districts that have not made AYP whose scores
17 may be lower than ours.

18 Since we are talking about facts
19 and numbers I can tell you the number of times
20 any member of the Charter School
21 Accountability Committee and/or Secretary Mark
22 Murphy has even visited Reach Academy for
23 Girls to observe that progression. By the
24 way, that number is zero.



1 Or I can stand you before you and
2 give you a heartfelt speech about the 370
3 wonderful, talented and brilliant young ladies
4 that I see smiling at me every day. But the
5 truth of the matter is these are words. As
6 the leader of the school and even as I stand
7 here right now my actions have to speak louder
8 than these words.

9 A little more than a year ago I
10 stood here with a heartfelt speech addressing
11 Mr. Mark Murphy and the Department of
12 Education and almost pleading for a chance to
13 show them better than we can tell them with
14 our words what we could do. And that's
15 absolutely what we did. We showed you that we
16 could and we did achieve and progress.

17 So, a year later I'm not going to
18 stand here with heartfelt and sensitive, not
19 tonight. I'm not even going to address Mark
20 Murphy or the Department of Education. My
21 purpose is to address you, the public and the
22 parents, to tell you to speak up for our
23 daughters, to demand that they stay at Reach
24 Academy for Girls, to demand it with as much



1 force as you demand me to protect her if an
2 intruder came through the building, to demand
3 with the same passion that you demand of me to
4 push her to her full potential and to demand
5 to the highest power that we demand that they
6 even remain ladies even when someone or some
7 entity wants to close the doors of their
8 school yet again. Heartfelt? Not tonight.
9 Not this year.

10 MS. JOHNSON: Your time is up.

11 (The remainder of the written
12 statement of Ms. Allen was typed into the
13 record by the court reporter.)

14 My heart gets poured into educating
15 my 370 girls. That's what education is about.
16 It's all heart! But to all my fellow
17 educators and parents I know you already know
18 that! Thank you.

19 MS. NAGOURNEY: I would like to
20 note for the record that Teri Quinn Gray,
21 President of the Delaware State Board of
22 Education is here. Next, Carol Roth.

23 MS. ROTH: Good evening, my name is
24 Carol Roth, R-O-T-H. I'm here tonight as a



1 board member of Reach Academy and a
2 Wilmington, Delaware taxpayer. I am a retired
3 38-year veteran teacher, teacher coach, staff
4 developer and Director of Instruction from the
5 School District in Philadelphia. As a
6 longtime educator I know what good looks like
7 and in my opinion Reach is a school that works
8 well. It is my fervent conviction that Reach
9 Academy is a charter school success story,
10 which I've had the opportunity to observe
11 personally since late August, and a school
12 that I believe deserves to have its charter
13 renewed. Certainly, the staff along with Ms.
14 Allen and the Board, take the low test scores
15 from our previous years seriously. It is
16 these scores and recommendations by the State
17 which have prompted Reach Academy to make
18 sweeping reforms.

19 To a savvy educator who might visit
20 the school let me describe what you would see
21 today if you visited: A school climate that
22 is calm and conducive to learning. Happy
23 students and academically engaged students.
24 Involved parents who are in and out of the



1 school all the time. A school leader who is
2 supportive of her staff and visible everywhere
3 in the school, including greeting students at
4 the front door in the morning. Effective
5 instruction based on the Common Core Framework
6 for Literacy, including outstanding practices
7 in literacy-themed units, independent reading,
8 shared reading, specific skill instruction and
9 guided reading. Effective instruction in Math
10 based on Common Core Standards using Singapore
11 Math and Engage New York Mathematics programs
12 that and courage use of manipulatives,
13 calculators and deep understanding rather than
14 rote regurgitation. Technology via smart
15 boards, computers. A school focus on Science,
16 Technology and Math, Engineering and Art
17 through labs, robotics and participation in
18 Math League competitions.

19 Student work displayed in the
20 hallways. Upon close scrutiny of student
21 writing you would see that no two samples are
22 alike, which speaks to the fact that
23 individual skill and creativity is heralded
24 and students are not copying from the board.



1 Regular administration of universal screeners,
2 benchmark testing and other assessments to
3 monitor continuous growth of students.

4 Benchmark scores, incidentally, that show
5 increases in Math and Reading achievement this
6 fall. Ongoing professional development. RTI
7 and tutoring plans for students identified as
8 having learning difficulties.

9 One board member, Martha Buell, a
10 professor in the Department of Human
11 Development and Family Studies at the
12 University of Delaware, could not be here
13 tonight. She had submitted a letter to Mr.
14 Secretary on Monday in which she related that
15 she is not in general a charter school
16 advocate for the same reasons that the ACLU
17 stated in its recent complaint against the
18 State.

19 However, she is an active member of
20 the board and a strong supporter of Reach
21 because she believes it is the height of
22 inequity to not offer a single sex girls'
23 charter school if there is to be a single sex
24 boys' charter school. I echo that concern of



1 hers tonight citing violations of Title 9.

2 (Applause from the audience.)

3 (The remainder of the written
4 statement of Ms. Roth was typed into the
5 record by the court reporter.)

6 Dr. Buell also pointed out in her
7 letter that using Brandywine and Colonial
8 school districts as comparators (as was done
9 by the State in Reach Academy's Delaware
10 Academic Framework Report) there is only one
11 other school in Brandywine with a higher
12 non-white and low-income proportion and no
13 schools in Colonial that even come close to
14 the proportion of non-white and low-income
15 students currently enrolled at Reach Academy.
16 Over 80% of the students at Reach are African
17 American, and almost 60% are low-income.

18 By all accounts, this would lead
19 one to predict that raising standardized test
20 scores would be a huge challenge. Yet the
21 State has not given the school enough time to
22 proved that they can increase test scores
23 since according to the State's charter code it
24 wasn't until the 2012-13 school year that



1 Reach had its full complement of grades in the
2 K-8 organization. It is, therefore, in that
3 year when Reach would be considered a new
4 school.

5 Thus, the 2013-14 school year
6 should be the first year to consider test
7 scores, which as you may recall, though not
8 superlative, did allow the school to achieve
9 AYP. Therefore, a decision for non-renewal
10 would thrust students back into public schools
11 and other charter schools that are not meeting
12 academic standards also. What kind of sense
13 would that make?

14 In conclusion, I'd like to point
15 out that the State could use Reach Academy for
16 Girls as an example of a phoenix-like
17 institution that counters the criticisms of
18 the ACLU complaint. Why? Because Reach is a
19 charter that attracts families of varied
20 socio-economic levels including a high
21 percentage of minority and low-income students
22 meeting the standard in its financial and
23 organizational obligations that is spiraling
24 upward in student achievement based on



1 recommendations and support provided by the
2 State's superintendent and Department of
3 Education consultants.

4 MS. NAGOURNEY: If you have
5 prepared a copy of your statement, it's very
6 helpful for the court reporter if you could
7 bring it that you and share it after you
8 speak. Ms. Winstead?

9 MS. WINSTEAD: Hi, my name is
10 Cherese Winstead, last name is spelled
11 W-I-N-S-T-E-A-D, and I am a board member of
12 Reach Academy. I'm also the Chair of the
13 department of chemistry at Delaware State
14 University. I would like to talk to the
15 public audience in regards to the importance
16 of a single sex school as relates to Science,
17 Mathematics, Engineering and Technology.

18 Now, there is a notable gap when it
19 comes to Math and Science that persists for
20 minorities and low-income students nationwide.
21 This is reported by the National Science
22 Foundation. The reason why schools like Reach
23 Academy are very important is the fact that
24 the gap between men and women when it comes to



1 STEM related fields such as Science,
2 Technology, Engineering and Mathematics is
3 huge and the reason why Reach Academy is
4 notably one of those institutions that can
5 actually bridge that gap is because the
6 source, the pipeline, of our future engineers
7 and scientists lies in the fact that these
8 young women who are cultured and nurtured in
9 an environment as Reach Academy are necessary
10 in order to bridge that gap. Reach provides
11 the opportunity to bridge the gap in Math and
12 Science achievement.

13 Now, over the past couple years
14 Reach Academy they know that the academic
15 standards in Mathematics and Science may have
16 been low, but over 2011 and 2013 those numbers
17 have risen. And, so, the aspect of that is if
18 given more time these young ladies will get
19 the opportunity to be exposed to Science,
20 Mathematics activities such as what we call
21 STEM, which is Science Technology, Engineering
22 and Art as it relates to STEM related fields.

23 Now, we have a partnership with
24 Delaware State University with Reach Academy



1 and what we do in those activities is we
2 expose these young ladies to different types
3 of experimentation, experiential learning,
4 experience things such as crystallization,
5 very complex science experiment activities,
6 but they're able to understand the fundamental
7 concepts of these scientific activities by
8 having fun, they're entertaining, and the
9 opportunity of these young ladies who come
10 from 80 percent African American and six
11 percent low-income populations is very rare.

12 So, I see it as an excellent
13 opportunity for Delaware State University to
14 actually be a leader, a role model, for these
15 young ladies growing up in Reach Academy.

16 We also have a peer mentoring
17 program where these young ladies are actually
18 exposed to collegiate students who are
19 actually in STEM related fields so they
20 actually see they can achieve what they see as
21 possible because they see younger people who
22 are on the collegiate level that can actually
23 attain those degrees in Science, Technology,
24 Engineering and Mathematics.



1 Aside from that we also have
2 tutoring sessions where these young ladies if
3 they are having trouble in STEM related fields
4 collegiate students and myself and other
5 faculty members from the department are able
6 to tutor these young ladies in Science,
7 Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. So,
8 we actually effect the loss of --

9 MS. JOHNSON: Ma'am, thank you.

10 MS. WINSTEAD: Thank you.

11 MS. NAGOURNEY: Ms. Malseed?

12 MS. MALSEED: My name is Monica
13 Malseed, M-A-L-S-E-E-D. Good evening. I am
14 Monica Malseed and I have the privilege of
15 teaching at Reach Academy for Girls. I am
16 also a faculty representative on the Board.
17 At Reach we believe that every action, every
18 interaction and every decision must benefit
19 students. In this spirit we have made
20 extraordinary efforts to ensure Reach's
21 continued academic growth. To wit: Our
22 summer institute and year-long professional
23 development for teachers in Singapore Math,
24 Common Core, depth of knowledge and



1 technology. Our partnership with model
2 schools in New York and Philadelphia to
3 observe best practices. Our relationship with
4 school turnaround for guidance and direction.
5 Our work to provide support and accommodations
6 for our special needs students. Our increased
7 time spent on Reading and Math for all
8 students in all subjects.

9 We have produced solid evidence
10 that what we are doing is working. We have
11 seen significant results in relatively short
12 amount of time. Hence, the finding of the
13 School Accountability Committee shocked us
14 into silence. Their rationale being that our
15 current gains could not override our past, yet
16 every action taken does indicate that the
17 growth will continue because the changes are
18 fundamental and school-wide.

19 Every person involved in Reach has
20 made a commitment to its future. Our school
21 leaders, faculty and staff have committed to
22 the next three to five years. All the board
23 members are all in. Parents too are
24 determined to be part of the upward bound high



1 achieving future of Reach Academy for Girls.
2 Our commitment is solid. Every girl benefits
3 from every action and every decision that we
4 make.

5 I ask you to consider how closing
6 Reach Academy would benefit our students?
7 Indeed, current research shows that this
8 decision would be detrimental to every girl at
9 Reach. Please review the evidence and
10 consider a decision that would benefit our
11 girls. I thank you.

12 MS. NAGOURNEY: Before we proceed I
13 need you to remind you that per the fire code
14 everybody needs to be in a seat or either
15 waiting outside. I'm sorry, I don't like
16 saying it, but this is an absolute necessity.
17 Thank you. Next, Kevin McDonald?

18 MR. McDONALD: Kevin McDonald,
19 parent representative on the Reach Academy for
20 Girls board of directors. My wife and I are
21 proud parents of two students that attend
22 Reach Academy for Girls. Both of our children
23 love their school and wake up every day
24 excited about learning. We are also members



1 of Holy Rosary Parish and when the parish's
2 elementary school closed after the 2006-2007
3 school year, I sadly helped empty the school's
4 contents into the parking lot to be sold or
5 given away.

6 Just a couple short years later we
7 were happy to find out that Reach Academy
8 would be leasing the vacant school to open the
9 State's first and only all-girls charter
10 school. We originally enrolled our daughters
11 at Reach because we liked the idea of them
12 having a single sex education, were happy that
13 the school was located close to our home in
14 Claymont and pleased that it would provide us
15 with an alternative to larger public
16 elementary schools, many of which have
17 historically underperformed academically and
18 have high rates of student suspension.

19 When the school moved to New Castle
20 despite having to bus our daughters we kept
21 them enrolled because we see a leadership team
22 and teachers that were dedicated to providing
23 them with a superior education in a safe,
24 nurturing environment where self-esteem in



1 young ladies is promoted on a daily basis.

2 Research strongly indicates that
3 parental and family involvement has a positive
4 effect on both student achievement and overall
5 school performance. At Reach Academy we as
6 parents are not only encouraged, but expected
7 to take an active role in our daughters'
8 education by participating in volunteer
9 opportunities such as being room mothers and
10 watch dog dads.

11 Many policy makers also contend
12 that implementing school choice programs can
13 bolster parental engagement. Thus, one might
14 infer that closing Reach Academy and forcing
15 the students out of their parents' school of
16 choice could have a detrimental impact on
17 parental involvement resulting in a decline in
18 student performance.

19 Therefore, on behalf of the many
20 devoted parents who have chosen to place their
21 daughters in the competent hands of our
22 school's administrators and teachers I demand
23 that Reach Academy for Girls remain and assert
24 that the closure of the State's only all-girls



1 charter school would violate Title 9 by
2 denying our daughters the same benefits of a
3 single sex education, which would continue to
4 be provided to their male counterparts.

5 If you were to visit Reach Academy
6 you would see a facility conducive to
7 learning, a school leader that knows and is
8 adored by every student, parents helping with
9 activities such as planting flowers in front
10 of the school, walls covered with student art
11 and, most importantly, classrooms full of
12 smiling, well-behaved young ladies being
13 taught by dedicated teachers who are supported
14 by a strong leadership team and school board.

15 In conclusion, we understand that
16 there is still much work that needs to be done
17 to raise test scores, but I agree we as
18 parents can best see how much our daughters
19 have grown academically, emotionally and
20 socially while at Reach Academy for girls and
21 it is still our school of choice. Thank you.

22 MS. NAGOURNEY: Natalie Gimbel?
23 Once again, we cannot have people standing.
24 Everybody in the room needs to be in a chair.



1 MS. GIMBEL: Natalie Gimbel,
2 G-I-M-B-E-L. Good evening. I have worked in
3 various grades at Reach Academy since its
4 doors opened in August of 2010. In these past
5 five years I have quietly fought with my Reach
6 community to keep our school open, but in my
7 educating do my talking. Yes, educating, not
8 teaching. Providing more than how to
9 instruction, but considering the whole child
10 intellectually, morally and socially.
11 Developing problem solving citizens of our
12 future communities.

13 However, I can stay quiet no more
14 because yet again, my educating, my school has
15 been deemed as failing, a failure. Webster's
16 dictionary defines failure as a lack of
17 success. By this definition Reach Academy for
18 Girls is certainly not a failure. I am not a
19 failure. My students are not failures. My
20 families and my colleagues are not failures.
21 In fact, just last year we improved our DCAS
22 test scores and met AYP. That is not a
23 failure. What is a failure, however, are the
24 numerous transfer students we receive from



1 various Delaware public schools that are way
2 below grade level.

3 For example, when I taught first
4 grade a few years ago one transfer student out
5 of my class not knowing the majority of her
6 alphabet letters and letter sounds. For those
7 of you have not well-versed in first grade
8 curriculum it's all about learning how to
9 read, how to put those sounds and letters
10 together to create words, sentences and
11 stories. Imagine this student's struggle to
12 read when the letters and words in front of
13 her were as new and strange as a foreign
14 language.

15 With a lot of hard work both in and
16 out of school that student not only learned
17 how to read that year, but in the final and
18 fourth quarter she made honor roll. She has
19 continued to be an honor roll student and just
20 last year met her DCAS growth goals. She is
21 not a failure.

22 In closing I have one question to
23 ask the members of the Charter School
24 Accountability Board, members of the



1 Department of Education, Mr. Murphy, how many
2 times have you visited Reach Academy for
3 girls? How many times have you walked our
4 halls, observed students actively engaged in
5 learning, heard teachers collaborating to best
6 instruct our students? Before you judge a
7 book by its cover come and take a tour and see
8 why Reach Academy for Girls rocks always.

9 MS. NAGOURNEY: Once again, I need
10 you to remind you need to be either in a chair
11 or not in the auditorium. There are some
12 seats down front and some back there. I'm
13 sure people would have to help everybody make
14 sure they have a place. Ms. Muhammad?

15 MS. MUHAMMAD: My name is Valeria
16 Muhammad, M-U-H-A-M-M-A-D, V-A-L-E-R-I-A, and
17 I'm the Secretary and I'm representing the PTO
18 of Reach Academy for Girls. My daughter is
19 Najla Muhammad, who is in the fifth grade and
20 this is my first year at Reach Academy for
21 Girls. Despite the fact that Reach Academy
22 for Girls we did reach the organizational
23 performance and financial performance
24 standards and did not reach the academic



1 performance, although they did meet the level
2 that they did before, one of the things that I
3 did at home and is I looked a little bit up
4 about the academic testing, what it does for
5 children.

6 One of the things that I wanted to
7 speak to tonight as a member of the PTO is
8 what it does not represent in our children and
9 is one of the things I saw is that the
10 standardized tests and measures only a small
11 portion of what makes education meaningful.

12 According to the late education
13 researcher, George W. Bracey, Ph.D., qualities
14 that standardized tests cannot measure
15 includes creativity, critical thinking,
16 resilience, motivation, persistence,
17 curiosity, endurance, reliability, enthusiasm,
18 empathy, self-awareness, self-discipline,
19 leadership, civic-mindedness, courage,
20 compassion, resourcefulness, sense of beauty,
21 sense of wonder, honesty and integrity,
22 everything that Reach Academy for Girls
23 represents that this test cannot measure.

24 There is a whole lot of other



1 things that I wanted to say, but I'm going to
2 take a challenge that Ms. Allen inspired all
3 of us to do. One of the things that our
4 President Obama said on March 13th when he
5 wanted to overhaul the no child left behind
6 law is promising further incentives to states
7 if they develop improved assessments tied more
8 closely to state standards and emphasizing
9 other indicators like pupil attendance,
10 graduation rates and learning climate in
11 addition to test scores. Testing opponents
12 have decried both initiatives for their
13 continued reliance on test scores that they
14 were often opposed to that.

15 He said in March 2008 -- March 28,
16 2011, "Too often what we have been doing is
17 using these tests to punish students or to in
18 some case punish schools."

19 What that is showing our students
20 is you are trying to punish our students, our
21 girls, for what they're doing on a test that
22 sometimes doesn't show what they represent.
23 What I've noticed since we have been speaking
24 is you are up here playing your phones,



1 writing notes back and forth to each other
2 when we are having to figure out what we have
3 to do with our girls despite that our school
4 may close, which is heartbreaking.

5 (Applause from the audience.)

6 When the Governor came here in
7 September he acknowledged the issues that
8 giving more financial support to these other
9 six priority schools in the public schools is
10 that he acknowledged it would take time to
11 turn around the school. That's all we're
12 asking for Reach Academy for Girls is time.
13 You cannot -- it takes time to turnaround what
14 we need to do with our girls.

15 So, what we're doing is we're
16 demanding it's time for our parents -- and I'm
17 addressing the parents because we're
18 representing the PTO -- it's time for the
19 parents, the families and the community, most
20 importantly, the students to have a voice in
21 deciding what is happening with their
22 education. We choose Reach Academy for Girls.

23 So, with all due respect since
24 Secretary Mark Murphy did not honor us with



1 his presence, the Department of Education, the
2 Charter Accountability, we voted and we
3 recommended our charter school renewal
4 application is approved. So, we have a right
5 to decide what will be the future of our
6 children's education.

7 It is our right and we demand --
8 we're not asking -- we demand that this
9 Charter School remains open. It is our
10 responsibility to educate our children, not
11 your responsibility, and we do not want the
12 doors -- we will not disappoint our children.
13 You cannot take our school away.

14 So, we're asking all the parents we
15 are going to fight, we are going to fight, we
16 are going to fight, and Reach Academy for
17 Girls school is going to remain open, our
18 doors are not going to shut. Thank you.

19 (Applause from the audience.)

20 MS. NAGOURNEY: Ms. Conrad will be
21 next.

22 MS. CONRAD: My name is Beth Conrad
23 and this is Dianne Neal. We have both been
24 parents at Reach Academy for the past five



1 years since the doors at Reach Academy opened
2 in August of 2010. We have seen a lot and it
3 seems that the State will not be happy until
4 Reach Academy is closed. I ask you to look at
5 the progress that Reach Academy has made and
6 stop focusing on the what seems to be very
7 personal past.

8 Up until just last year we added
9 three new grades each year, one at the top of
10 middle school, for example, eighth grade, one
11 in the middle, for example, third grade, and
12 kindergarten. That is a lot of new staff and
13 students as well as the new students that come
14 in each year because families could no longer
15 take the drama that, you, the State keep
16 putting us through and other girls then have
17 the opportunity to join us from other schools.

18 What this school needs is some
19 stability without the State harassing us. It
20 seems every time we turn around you, the
21 State, has found something new to pick on us
22 for. Even when our test scores went up this
23 past year, which should have been seen as a
24 good thing, you came to in to see if we were



1 cheating and then your own workers who came in
2 to observe the testing were on their cell
3 phones and , therefore, breaking your testing
4 rules. These teachers need to be given peace
5 to be able to teach and learn.

6 Speaking of the DCAS test you
7 cannot use that as the only judging factor for
8 the education these girls are receiving at
9 Reach. The test is only four to six days out
10 of the whole school year. What about the 180
11 other plus days? Have you ever seen come into
12 the building to see these girls learning on
13 any of those days?

14 We did not reach proficiency this
15 past year, but the improvement was
16 considerable. We went from far below to below
17 proficiency. To expect us to go from far
18 below standards to meeting standards within
19 one year would be beyond reasonable
20 conditions. Do you honestly believe that all
21 students should be able to meet proficiency in
22 one year's time? At Reach Academy for Girls
23 our girls are encouraged to reach as high as
24 possible and become leaders in society, but



1 reality would show that not every person can
2 attain the highest level positions or
3 proficiency on a standardized test.

4 As learning happens over time if
5 students come to us without important previous
6 knowledge we need to fill in the gaps to be
7 able to teach them new information.

8 This past year we did meet AYP, a
9 rating that all schools in Delaware meet or do
10 not meet. At our final meeting the Charter
11 School Accountability Committee said that AYP
12 was not a measurable thing. If that is the
13 case, how do you decide which schools to
14 receive the rating and which schools do not?
15 It seems to me an AYP would actually be a
16 better measure of how a school is improving as
17 of the average of all students' growth
18 throughout the year.

19 Since all students do not start the
20 year with the same base knowledge a student
21 that was previously proficient would have a
22 much easier time of remaining proficient
23 compared to a student that is far below
24 proficiency.



1 I quote you Mark Murphy from the
2 Department of Education's website article from
3 September 4, 2014 talking about your priority
4 schools. "In some of these schools --" this
5 is not Reach, but other schools, the regular
6 public system "-- only 29 percent of children
7 are reading and performing Math at grade
8 level," he said. "They are beginning the
9 school year far beyond their peers and they
10 are not meeting their individual growth goals
11 by the spring, instead falling further behind
12 their peers. We can all do better for our
13 children. Their parents want more for them,
14 educators want more for them and they want
15 more for themselves."

16 Reach Academy students are meeting
17 their individual growth marks. Many Reach
18 students just didn't start at proficient. If
19 you have so much hope for schools that have
20 not already shown students meeting individual
21 growth marks and not on an upward performance
22 path, then you need to be able to have that
23 same hope for Reach Academy for Girls.

24 It seems the State would be sending



1 a message to charter schools they better find
2 a way to keep out or get rid of students that
3 don't do well on tests, even if they're
4 special needs students as is the situation
5 with Gateway Lab School. At Reach Academy we
6 allow all girls that want an education in an
7 all-girls environment that unique opportunity.
8 We do not require essays or tests or mandatory
9 volunteer hours to attend. We do offer the
10 girls of Delaware an education where they are
11 valued and given personal attention whether
12 they are below or above the standards.

13 Each one has the opportunity to
14 shine in their own unique way and given a love
15 for learning and achievement for themselves.
16 No school is perfect because people are
17 teaching, people are learning, people are not
18 perfect. But we love Reach Academy and their
19 test scores, all you seem to care about, are
20 improving.

21 MS. JOHNSON: You can finish your
22 sentence or give a copy to the court reporter.

23 MS. CONRAD: Do not put out the
24 light of these shining stars. I have the



1 article that I cited with Mark Murphy's quotes
2 with some comments added.

3 MS. HICKEY: That would be
4 Exhibit 3.

5 MS. CONRAD: An e-mail from a
6 former parent.

7 MS. HICKEY: That's Exhibit No. 4.

8 MS. CONRAD: Some showing of test
9 scores chronologically by class, et cetera.

10 MS. HICKEY: That's Exhibit 5.

11 MS. CONRAD: This is a song some of
12 the girls are going to be sharing in a minute.

13 MS. HICKEY: Exhibit 6.

14 (The remainder of the written
15 statement of Ms. Conrad was typed into the
16 record by the court reporter.)

17 We believe in Reach Academy and we
18 think that you, the State, should stop trying
19 to shut us down, start believing in us too and
20 let us be a success story. We will continue
21 to do everything in our power to help these
22 girls succeed. We are on an upward path. The
23 girls, staff, and parents are serious. We can
24 be one of your shining stars even while still



1 letting any girl into our school to have a
2 chance at a better future. These little girls
3 have never done anything to you, give them the
4 school they love. Do not put out their hope
5 and shining lights.

6 MS. NAGOURNEY: Ms. Collins?

7 MS. COLLINS: My name is Crystal
8 Collins, C-O-L-L-I-N-S. I usually don't get
9 up and speak because I'm always a quiet
10 person, but when I heard that the school was
11 going to be closed I felt like I had to say
12 something. Good things take time to develop.
13 Rome was not built in a day. I know that's
14 cliché, but it's so applicable to this
15 situation. A baby does not come out of the
16 womb walking and talking. You have to nurture
17 it, teach it, you have to help it develop.

18 In my experience -- I'm a first
19 year parent. I have two daughters that attend
20 Reach Academy, Mickayla and Akeelah Romeo, and
21 this is their first year here. In the short
22 amount of time that they have been here I've
23 seen nothing but a nurturing environment in
24 the school.



1 My children and some of these
2 teachers know the background our kids have.
3 They came from a public school, which will
4 remain nameless, where they were bullied quite
5 frequently. They were bullied five, five
6 months in the course of a school year. And it
7 got to a point where I was ready to press
8 charges against the school, the transportation
9 company, superintendent, whomever I needed to
10 in order for them to take responsibility for
11 what was happening to my children.

12 This is the first school in four
13 years that I feel safe with my children being
14 there. I feel like they come to school,
15 they're greeted by their teachers, they're
16 greeted by the principal, assistant principal.
17 I know that I can rest easy during the day
18 when I'm at work that I'm not going to get a
19 phone call from the teacher or principal
20 saying that my daughter has been beat up on
21 the school bus.

22 My children used to come home
23 crying every day for a long time -- I'm sorry,
24 I'm getting emotional, but they were suffering



1 mentally, physically, emotionally and this is
2 the first school that they have been at where
3 they are happy to go to school every day.
4 They get up and they don't want to stay home.
5 They were faking sick to avoid going to school
6 and none of that is happening anymore because
7 of where they are now.

8 If you close this school you are
9 basically sending my children back to an
10 environment that they don't belong in, that no
11 child belongs in, not mine, not hers, not his,
12 anybody's. Reach Academy is raising
13 productive young women. They're well-rounded.
14 The demographics may not speak to the levels
15 that you want them to right now, but you have
16 to give them the opportunity to reach the
17 levels that you want them to reach. They're
18 not only instilling values in these girls,
19 they're raising their self-esteem.

20 Like I said, my daughters were
21 suffering. They smile every day when they
22 talk about Ms. Hodges or they talk about Ms.
23 Wallace or they talk about cheerleading or
24 they talk about Math or whatever the case is.



1 They're happy where they are and no public
2 school has done that for them in all of their
3 academic career.

4 MS. JOHNSON: Thank you, ma'am.

5 MS. COLLINS: Thank you.

6 MS. NAGOURNEY: Samantha Conrad and
7 friends?

8 MS. CONRAD: My name is Samantha
9 Conrad, C-O-N-R-A-D.

10 MS. HITCHENS: My name is Icyss,
11 I-C-Y-S-S, Hitchens, H-I-T-C-H-E-N-S.

12 MS. WORTHAM: We are Morgan and
13 Jordan Wortham, W-O-R-T-H-A-M.

14 (At this point the four girls sang
15 the song that is reflected on Exhibit 6.)

16 MS. NAGOURNEY: Mr. Wortham?

17 MR. WORTHAM: Good evening, my name
18 is Tim Wortham, W-O-R-T-H-A-M. I am standing
19 to represent my three daughters, Jordan,
20 Morgan, who were just up here singing
21 wonderfully, beautifully, amazingly, and
22 Ariel, who is in kindergarten at Reach. I am
23 also a Reach parent who has been there since
24 day one and am still there because I believe



1 in the school and its mission and its
2 leadership and its teachers.

3 The irony of it all is that before
4 me is two tables full of women in leadership
5 positions, which is what Reach is striving to
6 create, future leaders, and to show our young
7 ladies that they can be just that.

8 And, you know, recently here we
9 have all kinds of race discussions, but let's
10 not overlook the fact that there is not gender
11 equality either and, so, we want our girls to
12 have a level playing field to go to school
13 every day and know they are on the same level
14 as everyone else. They're not looked as
15 second class, second tier, second anything.
16 They're first, they're always first and they
17 should be just that.

18 If you close Reach you have to tell
19 us parents where else will our girls go? And
20 no one has offered that so far. No one has
21 said this is your alternative. Every
22 alternative for me is a public school because
23 my wife and I cannot send our children to
24 private school and there no public school that



1 I have found that can give my girls what they
2 are receiving at Reach Academy.

3 So, I too demand our school remain
4 open. I emphatically demand that our school
5 remains open. Give them time to get where
6 they need to be because they have already
7 demonstrated progress and, so, there is no
8 logical reason to assume that they will not
9 continue to progress. Thank you.

10 MS. NAGOURNEY: Thank you. Tiffany
11 Wynn?

12 MS. TIFFANY WYNN: Good evening.
13 My name is Tiffany Wynn, W-Y-N N. For my
14 sister and I, Tikiera, Reach has changed us a
15 whole lot. We have been at Reach for four
16 years. It has made an impact on our lives for
17 the better. Our first year at Reach was in
18 fifth grade was a little bit challenging, but
19 we overcame those challenges. For me Reach
20 has changed me as an individual. We have
21 wonderful teachers who get to know the
22 students really good and to help us get
23 prepared for what is coming in high school.
24 They don't just sit in class and babysit us.



1 They hold us accountable for our work.

2 I think Reach should stay open
3 because they're always empowering each and
4 every student to achieve dreams and accomplish
5 goals. They don't settle for anything less
6 than the best. They have great academic goals
7 for the students. They also give students a
8 voice. I also think Reach should stay open
9 because they say what they mean. Reach
10 doesn't just say send your students because we
11 are the only all-girls charter school in
12 Delaware. They show you why you should send
13 your child there.

14 The academic standards are set very
15 high especially from middle school because
16 they want us to get ready for high school and
17 other challenges we may face throughout life.

18 MS. TIKIERA WYNN: Good evening.
19 In my four years at Reach I've learned new
20 things every day. Reach offers a lot of
21 extracurricular activities from tutoring to
22 Math League to sports. What I have grown to
23 know is that students can juggle school and
24 sports at the same time. They have various



1 activities for everyone like cheerleading,
2 basketball, volleyball, Girl Scouts, Yearbook
3 and dance. They offer high school day for
4 eight graders for us to obtain information
5 about different high schools that we would
6 like to go to.

7 We recently took a trip to St.
8 Elizabeth's and Howard High School of
9 Technology. They offer moving up ceremonies
10 for fifth grade, graduation for eight graders
11 and kindergarten.

12 If Reach were to close down, some
13 students that have been there for quite a
14 while would just lose their mind. Our path to
15 our future wouldn't be the same without Reach
16 Academy for Girls.

17 (Applause from the audience.)

18 MS. NAGOURNEY: Mr. Theis?

19 MR. THEIS: My name is William
20 Theis, T-H-E-I-S, and I'm a retired middle
21 school principal. I'll probably get emotional
22 about this and I have no dog in the play. I
23 walked into the school -- I have it -- I
24 walked into school the other day unannounced



1 and a young lady, a staff member, took me
2 around the building. The feeling in that
3 building of joy of the smiles on the faces,
4 the respect one teacher has for another, the
5 respect that the children have for one another
6 and the respect they have for the staff is
7 amazing.

8 I arrived at the school because I
9 didn't want them to know I was coming. I
10 didn't know if I was going to be able to visit
11 that way, but they accommodated me graciously.
12 It was an amazing experience. Every contact
13 that was shown by the staff to their students
14 was respectful. A young lady came to the
15 assistant principal's office and she said, I'm
16 having a problem, can I talk to you? I said,
17 What class are you going to now? I will be
18 there in five minutes, is that okay with you?
19 It was wonderful.

20 This is a safe, nurturing and
21 caring school that deserves to remain open
22 and continue to meet the needs of these
23 people, these young ladies, that can get lost.
24 And I have to say this, in the public schools



1 often times the lower socio-economic minority,
2 underachieving young ladies, are pushed off to
3 the side because they often put themselves
4 there, but, because as one person said they
5 are bullied and it doesn't have to be out in
6 the open.

7 I want to tell you about a young
8 man named DJ. I know this is about girls, but
9 I had a student that came into the school as a
10 seven grader. You almost had to hold him by
11 the shoulder in a corner to talk to him. He
12 wouldn't listen. Heard every word, but he
13 wouldn't listen. We worked really hard and
14 got him through seventh grade and put him into
15 eighth grade. He started to become acclimated
16 to the school. He started to be able to stay
17 in classes and be successful in his classes.
18 He graduated out of there in eighth grade.

19 MS. JOHNSON: You have 30 seconds
20 left.

21 MR. THEIS: I'm not anywhere I want
22 to be, but, anyhow. I went over the school
23 where he went to high school. He ran down the
24 hall and jumped on me, starting dancing on the



1 floor and said, I made the honor roll. I had
2 a graduate class and they said, Why are you
3 here? Required class. No, why are you here?
4 Somebody in your life made a difference and
5 that spark is coming from this school.

6 MS. JOHNSON: Thank you, sir.

7 MS. NAGOURNEY: Mr. Wilson?

8 MR. WILSON: Hello, everybody.

9 Daniel Wilson, last name W-I-L-S-O-N. I stand
10 here as a worker at Reach Academy and I don't
11 want to be redundant so what I'm going to say
12 is I'm challenging every last one of you to
13 make it a priority to make it out to Reach
14 Academy tomorrow. You can just pop up as you
15 are and I guarantee you you will see something
16 that you are not seeing in these other schools
17 because the only thing you read are numbers.
18 You don't see the faces of the kids we see
19 every day.

20 You won't see kids coming into
21 school with no coats on, parents just dropping
22 kids off and just rolling out and they're not
23 coming in and they're not saying anything and
24 it's almost like you are doing a job that is



1 unfair to the kids. So, I'm challenging every
2 last one of you if you have a moment tomorrow,
3 please come to Reach Academy.

4 Ms. Gray, if you can make it I
5 would greatly appreciate it. I will walk you
6 around myself and you will see that the
7 chemistry in the building is not what you all
8 are projecting it to be.

9 MS. NAGOURNEY: That completes the
10 list of the speakers who signed up. At this
11 points we'll accept comments from anyone else
12 who desires to speak?

13 (A hand is raised in the back of
14 the auditorium.)

15 MS. MACK: Greetings, my name is
16 Kadreana Mack, M-A-C-K, K-A-D-R-E-A-N-A.
17 Greeting everybody, how are you? Glad to be
18 here to represent the school, Reach Academy.
19 I am a first year parent. My daughter is just
20 coming in here to this charter school because
21 the public school that she attended was
22 overcrowded. Because of that in the middle of
23 the school year we had to find another school
24 for my daughter to attend and Reach Academy



1 was so gracious to let us in in the middle of
2 the school year because of overcrowding.

3 So, my concern as a parent is that
4 I would just like the administration or
5 whoever is reading the report let's consider
6 the children first. It seems like no one took
7 my child into consideration when the school
8 was overcrowded. We could have did a
9 transition in the summer. We could have did
10 it, you know, at the end of the school year,
11 but she had to say good bye to her friends in
12 the middle of the year. We had to get
13 acclimated to a new protocol and learning
14 system.

15 I'm so grateful that my daughter
16 was advanced that she could just been in
17 advanced classes because her grades were good,
18 but now we found a school that was so
19 welcoming. I mean, the teachers and the
20 principal and everyone was just so welcoming
21 to my child that she glows every time she
22 comes home from school and it is just a
23 blessing.

24 I'm not even going to take my three



1 minutes, but instead of closing the school
2 down can we come up with an alternate solution
3 to give them the assistance that they need to
4 reach the levels that you need to see? Don't
5 close it down. Send them help. That's an
6 alternative. Thank you.

7 (Applause from the audience.)

8 MS. NAGOURNEY: At this point in
9 the evening it's my understanding that the
10 team from Gateway there is bus that is coming
11 to pick people up. So, again, I would ask
12 that we want to hear from everybody. We'll
13 accept any written comments. You have two
14 days after this hearing to submit comments.
15 If you are making a statement that
16 representatives have already just said, please
17 consider submitting your statements in writing
18 and allowing the Gateway hearing to proceed.

19 MS. COLEMAN: I'm Donyell Coleman,
20 D-O-N-Y-E-L-L, C-O-L-E-M-A-N. I have two
21 children at Reach, a third and a sixth grader.
22 This is our second year so I'm very upset that
23 we're going through this process again. We
24 transitioned to Reach because I moved into



1 this City out of Bear and I was not sending my
2 children to any public school in Wilmington.
3 My children are not built for that. They
4 don't understand it. So, I was not putting
5 them out there to do that.

6 I've known Ms. Allen for years.
7 She was my 23-year old daughter's fourth grade
8 teacher. I'm telling our ages. I was so
9 excited when I found out that she was going to
10 be principal at Reach. She was also my
11 neighbor. When it was time for me to send my
12 children to another school Reach was the very
13 first school that even came to my mind. I
14 probably would have did it sooner had they had
15 all the grades for my children, but two years
16 ago was the first year they had both of their
17 grades.

18 I'm standing here because I believe
19 you guys need to consider the children, again,
20 what everybody else is saying, because my kids
21 have flourished at Reach and I don't
22 understand why I have to keep telling them
23 every year the school might close this year,
24 your school might close this year. Nobody is



1 thinking about them and the transitions they
2 have to make as children and they don't
3 understand what they're doing wrong, but
4 they're not doing anything wrong.

5 My daughter came in and made honor
6 roll last year twice. I have one child that
7 is ADHD and they are very accommodating to her
8 and help her and you don't get that
9 everywhere. You don't get a principal that
10 cares about you. Mr. Wilson and I -- I walk
11 in the school and Ms. Parker and Mr. Wilson
12 they all know me and I don't want to start
13 over anywhere else to do that and to have to
14 develop a relationship with new people. It's
15 very difficult to do that.

16 When you go home tonight just think
17 about what you would do if you were in a
18 situation and your child was affected
19 negatively because you are not taking the time
20 to learn the people in the climate of the
21 school. You are just looking at numbers.
22 Numbers don't say everything. You have to
23 look at people's hearts and what they are in
24 there for. You may need to consider your own



1 heart and what you are in for.

2 (Applause from the audience.)

3 MS. NAGOURNEY: At this point if
4 it's not something we have not heard, only if
5 it's something we have not heard about
6 already.

7 A VOICE: Let the kids speak. Give
8 them one minute each.

9 MS. ALLEN: I'll say this, I don't
10 know what they want to say. They have the
11 nerve after hearing all the things about their
12 school that they want to speak on behalf of
13 where they go to school. If you are going to
14 tell them no, tell them no.

15 A VOICE: Because you are closing
16 down anyway, right? You are sitting up there
17 not paying attention.

18 MS. NAGOURNEY: Ma'am, please.

19 A VOICE: Let the kids speak.

20 MS. NAGOURNEY: We will let them
21 speak and after that we are going to have to
22 call the hearing closed.

23 MS. NAJLA MUHAMMAD: I am Najla
24 Muhammad, N-A-J-L-A, M-U-H-A-M-M-A-D. I've



1 been going to Reach since it actually opened.
2 I was in kindergarten and if you guys shut it
3 down it would just break my heart.

4 MS. ICYSS HITCHENS: This is my
5 first year at Reach and please don't break
6 down this school.

7 MS. NAGOURNEY: At this point the
8 hearing is now closed and I want to thank
9 everyone for participating today. The
10 Secretary will consider your comments as part
11 of this process. Your comments will also be
12 sent to the State Board to consider. We are
13 going to take a five-minute break to
14 transition. We ask all folks from Reach to
15 leave through this set of doors so we can
16 bring in the folks from Gateway from the other
17 set of doors.

18 (The hearing was concluded at 7:43
19 p.m.)

20
21
22
23
24



1 State of Delaware)
2)
3 New Castle County)
4

5 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER
6

7 I, Christina M. Vitale, Certified Court
8 Reporter and Notary Public, do hereby certify
9 that the foregoing record, pages 1 to 60
10 inclusive, is a true and accurate transcript
11 of my stenographic notes taken on Wednesday,
12 December 10, 2014 in the above-captioned
13 matter.
14

15 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set
16 my hand and seal this 12th day of December,
17 2014, at Wilmington.
18

19 
20

21 Christina M. Vitale, CCR
22
23
24



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