

In The Matter Of:

*Department of Education Charter School Office
In the Matter of: Thomas Edison Charter School*

*Hearing
October 17, 2017*

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1 MS. STOUFFER: Good evening. I
2 declare this public hearing to be open. My
3 name is Denise Stouffer, and I am the Lead
4 Education Associate and I have been appointed
5 by the Secretary of Education to conduct this
6 public hearing. The Thomas A. Edison Charter
7 School has filed an application to renew its
8 charter for a term of five years. The matter
9 has been referred to the Charter School
10 Accountability Committee for investigation and
11 report. This public hearing is being held to
12 receive public comments.

13 I am here with Catherine Hickey,
14 the Deputy Attorney General for the Department
15 of Education.

16 I would like the record to
17 reflect that the notice of the time, date and
18 place of today's public hearing was published
19 in The News Journal and the Delaware State News
20 on September 17th, 2017. In addition, notice
21 was posted at the Charter School Accountability
22 Committee's official place of business, on the
23 Department of Education's official website, and
24 on the State Public Meeting Calendar on the



1 State's official website. Further, the Thomas
2 A. Edison Charter School was personally
3 notified of the time, date and place of today's
4 public hearing on September 9th, 2017.

5 A court reporter is present so
6 that a record of this hearing can be made. It
7 will be necessary for each speaker to clearly
8 identify his or herself before beginning to
9 speak so that the court reporter will be able
10 to note who you are. The record of this
11 hearing will be provided to the Secretary of
12 Education and members of the State Board of
13 Education, together with any written or
14 electronic comments received during the course
15 of this renewal decision process. To date, 17
16 comments have been received on this renewal
17 application.

18 We will proceed in the following
19 manner: First we will hear from any
20 representatives of the charter school who wish
21 to comment on the renewal application. Then we
22 will take comments from anyone else who desires
23 to speak. There are sign-up sheets in the
24 front of the room. If you desire to speak,



1 please sign up now, and I will pause for a
2 moment to permit anyone else who desires to
3 speak to sign up. First, however, I would like
4 a show of hands for all of those who desire to
5 make any comments so that I can determine
6 whether it may be necessary to impose a time
7 limit. So who would like to speak? Off the
8 record.

9 (Discussion off the record.)

10 MS. STOUFFER: We will go back on
11 the record. We will be imposing a five-minute
12 time limit. We do reserve the right to, I do
13 reserve the right to limit comment if it is
14 purely repetitive or cumulative. At this point
15 I will accept comments from any representatives
16 of the school.

17 MR. THOMAS-EL: Good evening. My
18 name is Salome Thomas-EL, S-A-L-O-M-E,
19 T-H-O-M-A-S, hyphen capital E, capital L,
20 otherwise known Principal EL.

21 To Academia, I would like to say
22 congratulations, in their absence, and how
23 honored we are to be on this journey as a
24 charter school with them, as well as First



1 State. It is an honor and pleasure to be a
2 member of the charter community. So I would
3 say que dios te bendiga to them, and that the
4 next block party you have, please invite Edison
5 because we would like to join.

6 I'd just like to be very brief in
7 my remarks. You can see from the people who
8 are present in the auditorium how much we love
9 and support our school. Since the year 2000
10 students from the community of Wilmington and
11 beyond have been able to walk into the doors of
12 Thomas Edison Charter School and meet adults
13 who have loved them before they ever meet them.

14 And it is an honor, I have been
15 the principal since 2010, and at Thomas Edison
16 we believe that each and every child can
17 achieve their dreams as long as they have
18 adults who believe in them enough to not give
19 up on them.

20 And as a principal, as a teacher,
21 as a leader and a member of the community, as a
22 father figure, it is an honor to walk into that
23 school and into that community daily and to
24 support the teachers and parents who are there



1 supporting those children.

2 As many of you may know or may
3 not know, Thomas Edison is a K to 8 school, 750
4 students, serves a very high-need, high-problem
5 population, but our students graduate from
6 Thomas Edison and attend some of the top public
7 and private schools in the State of Delaware.

8 We are also the two-time national
9 chess champions, the only school in Delaware to
10 ever win a national chess championship. We
11 also have a host of athletic programs. We have
12 wonderful academic programs. But what we also
13 have is a leadership program at our school
14 because we believe that if we build leadership
15 in our school then we can improve our
16 community.

17 So as you ladies can see, we have
18 a large number of people who are here to speak
19 on behalf of our school, so your night will be
20 very long, but we know that we have been
21 serving our children for 18 years and we look
22 forward to serving them for many decades, not
23 just five more years, for many decades serving
24 the children and the parents of our community.



1 We have students who have
2 graduated from our school who have attended
3 some of the top universities, you know, in the
4 country and we are proud of them, we are proud
5 of our parents, and we are proud of the State
6 of Delaware for supporting us to be able to
7 give these children the opportunity to be
8 successful. Thank you.

9 MS. WHITE: Good evening. My
10 name is Beverly White, and I am an educator, as
11 well as a grandparent of two children that
12 attend Thomas Edison school. I have taught for
13 34 years. I have recruited teachers, the best
14 teachers in the United States for the State of
15 New Jersey before I retired in 2009.

16 I am so excited about Thomas
17 Edison Charter School. First of all, I was
18 looking for a school for my granddaughter, who
19 is now in 4th grade, and attended kindergarten
20 and, as I said, she is in 4th grade now. I
21 went all over the State of Delaware looking for
22 a school for her. I knew she was gifted. I
23 knew she was talented in the arts, as well as
24 the academics.



1 So when I explored, I said, you
2 know, I hope I don't have to take this child
3 all the way over to New Jersey where I came
4 from, so someone said, well, check out Thomas
5 Edison, they have got a principal down there
6 that's dynamite, he is a leader, he is this.
7 And I'm saying, well, how come I don't know
8 this man. I got to know him. So I went down
9 there and I caught myself sneaking in the
10 school. But, of course, Thomas Edison, you
11 know, you can't sneak in.

12 Principal EL said, "May I help
13 you, miss?" Yes. So I said, "May I come in
14 your office and talk with you?" And he said,
15 "Yes." And I walked in his office and I told
16 him I was there to observe teachers, what I was
17 looking for as a leader in the school, and he
18 said, "Well, you can walk around and you can
19 check out the teachers and the setting."

20 So I did. I came back and I
21 said, "I would like you to meet my
22 granddaughter. I'm going to bring her down to
23 you to meet her. I want you to tell me what
24 you think."



1 So I left her there with him for
2 a little while. He came back and he said, "She
3 is a gifted child. We would love to have her.
4 If I have a slot, I would like to put her in
5 it. Do you mind?" I said, "Oh, definitely."

6 So, we got her in kindergarten.
7 She was reading 1400 books with the hundred
8 book challenge. Not only did she do that, but
9 she was volunteering for Acadia Rehab, for the
10 handicapped adults. She was reading over
11 there. She was reading everywhere she could
12 read. She would read to the class. And she
13 would ask and beg to read to the other
14 students, which motivated the other students to
15 read.

16 It is hard to put it all in one,
17 but Principal EL, he is a leader. His
18 leadership is making sure that the students
19 have a thorough academic preparation for those
20 who have the desire and the ability to profit
21 by pursuing advanced studies within and outside
22 of the classroom.

23 He helps all of the students, not
24 only if they missed the school bus, he is there



1 to go and pick them up, to make sure they are
2 not watching television, that they are going to
3 get the academics. That's Principal EL. If
4 they need a clock to get up in the morning,
5 Principal EL will provide the clock. Believe
6 me, he is going to be there.

7 The teachers and staff are
8 dedicated. The teachers comb hair. They teach
9 the total child. They teach them everything
10 that they would need to go and be successful in
11 the community and outside of the community. He
12 is a father to the children, as I said. He
13 provides a wholesome recreation for pupils such
14 as chess, which will carry over into the family
15 and the community, and has done that. I mean
16 he has got my son, everybody playing chess.

17 He has, he has and is still
18 trying to meet all of the continuous needs of
19 the school community, like playground equipment
20 and, you know, you might not like it, and I
21 have to say this, because I listen to them
22 saying that they have a playground that they
23 got within weeks, and our kindergarten children
24 have not had a playground, my granddaughter is



1 in 4th and we are just getting ready to get
2 started with a playground they have been asking
3 for for 20 years.

4 I heard that at a meeting last
5 night and I was in tears. Principal EL has
6 tried all kinds of things to get for our
7 school, and we've had some people who are
8 supportive and some who are not.

9 And hopefully I can help in any
10 way I can. I am a public school person, but
11 now I am for charter, and I am thankful to meet
12 you ladies on this stage. Thank you very much.

13 MS. DORSETT: Hi. My name is
14 Erica Dorsett and I'm a parent of Thomas Edison
15 Charter. I believe that I am the oldest parent
16 at Thomas Edison. I'm going on my 16th year.
17 My daughter entered Thomas Edison in 2002, and
18 my youngest, Joshua, is currently there as a
19 first grader.

20 When I thought about preparing my
21 speech for today and I knew that I needed to
22 talk about what Thomas Edison meant to me, what
23 it would mean to you guys in the community and
24 what I needed you guys to do, and it is hard



1 for me to compile 16 years' worth of memory and
2 effort into that, but I'm going to do my best
3 by telling you what Thomas Edison has done for
4 my family.

5 All of my kids have gone through
6 Thomas Edison from kindergarten to 8th grade.
7 With that, my oldest daughter is now a junior
8 at the University of Delaware. Next year she
9 will be applying to enter medical school. And
10 this January she will be studying in South
11 America at Nicaragua. She will there be for a
12 week to learn their culture and to build
13 houses.

14 One of the first things she
15 decided to do when they gets back from
16 Nicaragua is give Principal EL a call and come
17 back to speak to the students. So one of the
18 things that I feel like is important to the
19 community is knowing that there is value on
20 Locust Street.

21 A lot of times in the inner city
22 they look at the children, they look at the
23 parents, they look at the neighborhoods and
24 they judge it. Many times is judged unfairly.



1 But it is very important to have a community
2 school, with people from the community, to show
3 our children that we can make it and we can
4 succeed.

5 My youngest graduate, he is now a
6 10th grader at Tatnall. He has given a TED
7 Talk this past April. During this time one of
8 his Thomas Edison teachers literally drove ten
9 hours to make it. Another person that was in
10 attendance from Thomas Edison was Mr. Durant,
11 which was his 4th grade chess teacher.

12 So when I talk about Thomas
13 Edison, it doesn't stop when your children
14 graduate. Literally, we were with Principal EL
15 on Saturday at an event. It just, it just goes
16 forward.

17 The other thing that I want to
18 say is that we have had some challenges. Our
19 school isn't perfect. We have had a lot of
20 public attention lately. But I find that to be
21 an opportunity. Reason being is because it
22 exposed to us the things that we need to fix
23 and change.

24 Thomas Edison has been



1 reactionary, as well as the board. I have
2 personally put my name in a hat to be a board
3 member for Thomas Edison. So I'm confident
4 that not only are we going to overcome our
5 challenges, but we are going to continue to
6 provide the needed necessities and resources to
7 the kids.

8 Now, technically, each one of
9 these kids have five minutes, but they are not
10 going to use it all. So Joshua wanted to tell
11 you about, okay, he wanted to tell you guys
12 about his teacher.

13 JOSHUA DORSETT: Hi. I'm Joshua
14 Dorsett, and I am in 1st grade. I'm six years
15 old. So my teacher has been pushing us on the
16 right limit, she challenges us, and she is a
17 very good teacher, and her name is Miss Wynn.

18 MS. DORSETT: And what do you
19 know about Miss Wynn?

20 JOSHUA DORSETT: That she is a
21 very good teacher.

22 MS. DORSETT: What else? Does
23 she have any pets?

24 JOSHUA DORSETT: She has Mason,



1 Izzy, Tucker and Puppy.

2 MS. DORSETT: I mean, I ask that
3 question because I need you guys to understand
4 that the teachers don't just go to the
5 classroom. It is a family. Judae.

6 JUDAE DORSETT: My name is Judae
7 Dorsett, and I'm in 2nd grade. I'm seven years
8 old. And my favorite teacher is Miss Downey.
9 Whenever we need help on a problem in math, if
10 we don't know the answer, she will say, "It is
11 okay not to know, but it is not okay not to
12 try." And it helps me a lot.

13 MS. DORSETT: Micayla. Now, even
14 though Micayla is their height, she is actually
15 11. She is our 6th grader that's there.

16 MICAYLA DORSETT: Yes. Actually,
17 my name is a Micayla, M-I-C-A-Y-L-A, my last
18 name is Dorsett, D-O-R-S-E-T-T. One of my 5th
19 grade teachers are here, and I know that she
20 helps like students with like their
21 extracurricular help and other stuff like that,
22 but she was also like a teacher to me and my
23 classmates -- sorry -- and she helped us, she
24 helped me emotionally, physically and like with



1 my homework and stuff. And if we had questions
2 we could always ask her.

3 MS. DORSETT: So I just wanted
4 you guys to just hear from my kids and
5 basically the students at Thomas Edison.

6 One thing that I want you guys to
7 do is renew our charter, because it means not
8 only so much to the students but to my family
9 personally. I have an opportunity to allow my
10 last three to have the same journey that my
11 first three did. I thank you guys for taking
12 your time out to listen today and just know
13 that even though we don't have a lot of the
14 other things a lot of other schools have, and
15 people love to say, they take pride in saying
16 our school is in Wilmington, our school is in
17 the hood, and in the inside it is not hood. In
18 the inside it is love. In the inside it is
19 teaching. In the inside there is rigor. And
20 just understand that there is value in keeping
21 that school there for that community. Thank
22 you guys.

23 MR. BLOCKSOM: Good evening. My
24 name is Halvin T. Blocksom, B-L-O-C-K-S-O-M,



1 and I am a board member. And I had a message
2 to do, but I'm going to change that. I'm just
3 going to speak from my heart, because I just
4 got an inspiration from Mrs. Dorsett and her
5 kids, and I want to tell you that as a board
6 member I love Thomas Edison School with all of
7 my heart. I love spending time there, love the
8 staff. They sometimes don't realize that. But
9 I do. And I know that our board does.

10 And I want you to know that Mrs.
11 Dorsett said it all for me when she made the
12 comment that we may be in the hood, and the
13 hood may be around us, but we are a family. We
14 are an open and honest group of people, trying
15 to do the very best that we can for our kids.
16 And the kids at Thomas Edison, regardless to
17 what anyone thinks, are our kids.

18 And the last thing I want to say
19 is we've had our ups and downs, but remember
20 what we have said, family. Family have ups and
21 downs. We will work through our differences,
22 and we will come out better for having had this
23 experience. Thank you.

24 MS. SIMMONS: I have to read.



1 Good afternoon. My name is Suzie Simmons. I'm
2 a parent of three children who attend Thomas
3 Edison Charter School. I volunteer many hours
4 at the school. I want to express why I feel
5 strongly the charter school needs to be
6 renewed.

7 When I moved to Delaware over six
8 years ago I searched on the Internet for local
9 schools that were testing high in the state,
10 and Edison stood out.

11 I met with nurturing teachers who
12 expressed their desires to build leaders. The
13 fact that chess was a part of the curriculum
14 and let me know that my children not only would
15 be educated academically but they would be
16 taught skill and strategy.

17 As a very over-protective parent
18 I feel, I felt completely comfortable with my
19 children attending this school. My children
20 exceeded standards year after year because of a
21 joint effort of the teachers, staff and myself.

22 When my youngest son's behavior
23 became a distraction and an issue for himself
24 and class, the teachers didn't label him as a



1 bad kid. They worked with me directly, and
2 together we got my son back on track, and now
3 I'm proud to say his 1st grade year so far is
4 B's. We are going to push it up to A's. Right
5 now we are at B's. And I'm very proud of that
6 big change.

7 And I just want to say I'm truly
8 thankful that they were patient with him and
9 willing to work with me because of that.

10 I know that there is concerns
11 about the test scores, and I understand that.
12 Rightfully so. But I'm happy to say that I'm
13 seeing it more and more parents are willing to
14 work in, make suggestions, and offer things to
15 help change it and make it better, whether it
16 is working with a board, making changes with
17 the board, making suggestions about policies
18 that would actually affect them academically,
19 the parents are being more vocal.

20 Like I said, I'm volunteering.
21 I'm seeing more people and more parents that
22 are willing to volunteer and come in and lend
23 the help to the teachers so we can all
24 succeed -- excuse me -- so we can all continue



1 to succeed.

2 Our 8th graders are graduating
3 and going to the best high schools in the State
4 of Delaware, and that started in kindergarten,
5 so we want to continue this.

6 Sorry. Overall, I just want to
7 say that the school is very family and
8 community orientated, and they sincerely want
9 to see that the students continue to succeed,
10 and they want to continue to provide quality
11 education.

12 I often explain to my children
13 that in life you will go through highs and
14 lows, and it is our job and your job to stick
15 it through. Find the things that is wrong, fix
16 it. Make all the changes necessary to make
17 things better and keep going.

18 Thomas Edison deserves and needs
19 to have its charter renewed. Thank you.

20 MS. WHITE: Hello everyone. I am
21 Irenée White, I-R-E-N-E-E, accent between the
22 two E's, and this is my lovely daughter that
23 went from K to 4, Mianay White, M-I-A-N-A-Y.
24 And I just want to say, I didn't start



1 anything, I didn't write anything up or
2 anything. I just want to go from the heart.

3 Thomas Edison is diamond in the
4 rough. Knowing we have a diamond, it has
5 imperfections and then you see the clarity and
6 you know its worth. So when you know its
7 worth, you want to cherish something. That's
8 not something that you get from everywhere.

9 And like they have been saying
10 over and over again, we are a family. We
11 support family. You may not like everything
12 that happens, but you work with it to make it
13 better. And I have seen so much growth in my
14 daughter and other children at Thomas Edison.

15 My nephew actually was going to a
16 private school in Pennsylvania. Wasn't the
17 greatest. He was like a C average student.
18 Came to Thomas Edison Charter School. He is
19 now an honor roll. So for me, I see what the
20 capabilities are and what we can flourish into.
21 And all you have to do is keep the faith and
22 make sure that you are on the same accord as
23 us.

24 We are not all there yet. I'm



1 praying that we get there one day. You know,
2 there is hope. And just stay believing in what
3 we know we can do. Because in a family you
4 want to make sure we are all here for each
5 other, and I'm going to support my school, not
6 only for my child, but Principal EL is like an
7 Uncle EL. You know, he is there for everybody.
8 So we love that and we cherish that and we
9 don't want to let that go. We are not going to
10 let it go.

11 Okay. Go ahead, say what you
12 were thinking.

13 MIANAY WHITE: My name is Mianay
14 White. I'm a part of Thomas Edison Charter
15 School, and I actually love Thomas Edison
16 Charter School with all my heart, and that's
17 the best school I ever been to. I love the
18 Thomas Edison family. And I love the teachers
19 there. And I also love Principal EL.

20 And I actually want to say this
21 little speech, that our teachers support us
22 with all their heart, and they try to teach us
23 so we can go to college. And we also love our
24 staff there, and they help us when we make milk



1 spills and stuff, and also even though
2 sometimes we have ups and downs, we try to make
3 it better.

4 And I am also honor roll student
5 there, and I just want to say that I love
6 Thomas Edison Charter School and that's the
7 best school I ever been to.

8 MS. WYNN: Okay. Good evening.
9 It is falling. Okay. Here we go.

10 Good evening everyone. My name
11 is Courtney Wynn. I'm a 1st grade teacher at
12 Thomas Edison Charter School. This is my third
13 year teaching at the school, though I did my
14 student teaching here. I'm originally from
15 Connecticut, and I moved down to Delaware for
16 this school specifically. And one of the
17 driving factors in my move was the family of
18 Thomas Edison. Between the teachers, between
19 the students, between the community, between
20 admin, it is, honestly, I have done a lot of
21 student teachings, and this is by far the one
22 that left the biggest impact on me.

23 So I just wanted to come up here
24 and say that I love my family, I love that I



1 feel comfortable enough to go to them with my
2 problems or go to them with, not issues, I
3 don't know, go to them with anything, and just
4 know that they will be there for me in any way,
5 shape or form. They are there to help me
6 support my students. They are there to help me
7 support my parents.

8 And so we should get renewed for
9 our charter because we are part of the
10 community and we are part of their family as
11 much as they are a part of ours. Keep our
12 family.

13 MS. FAULKENSTEIN: Hello. My
14 name is Diane Faulkenstein,
15 F-A-U-L-K-E-N-S-T-E-I-N. I have been a
16 grandparent of two grandchildren who graduated
17 from Thomas Edison school, have gone on to
18 college, and they are still concerned about the
19 school, what is going on and what is happening.
20 But I want to say it is a good school and that
21 they care about you.

22 I have been there, they had two
23 principals before Principal EL, and the kids
24 was more happy with him. I'm just saying that



1 because they say he cares about you, he wants
2 you to graduate, and he wants you to go to
3 college. So I guess that's what you tell
4 everybody, Principal EL.

5 Because, so when my granddaughter
6 said, when she come home from school, that her
7 and her friend had to come and let him know how
8 they are doing in college. But the bottom line
9 is to me that you have a caring principal and
10 caring teacher. If you have a principal that
11 cares and show good leadership, everybody else
12 will fall in place.

13 And that's what I love about the
14 school. They all try to help our kids in the
15 school and out the school. Even some of the
16 ones that drop out, they still care about those
17 kids. So you couldn't pick a better person
18 than Principal EL. Thanks.

19 MS. HEARNE: Good afternoon
20 everyone. My name is Lacle Hearne. My son is
21 Cassius Hearne. He attends Thomas Edison, been
22 there since 1st grade. And I chose Thomas
23 Edison for some students that I have. I teach
24 at Hodgson Vo-tech. And students came from



1 Thomas Edison into Hodgson in 9th grade, I
2 teach 9th grade math, proved themselves, and at
3 some point I wanted to find a school for my
4 son, and these students showed much respect. I
5 kept saying, what school do they go to? I got
6 to look up what school they went to. I found
7 out they went to Thomas Edison. Called Thomas
8 Edison up, went in there, and they said: We
9 don't have any teachers for you to talk to. I
10 said: I don't want to talk to any teachers.
11 I'm a teacher. I need to talk to the
12 administrator. Made appointment to see Mr. EL.
13 Mr. EL had my name on the board.
14 I got there. I grilled him, as a teacher, as a
15 parent, sat down. By the time I left it was
16 like family. I entrusted them with my son, and
17 when he was in 1st grade, he is now in 4th
18 grade. I'm very comfortable with the school.
19 If we have issues, they fix the
20 issues quickly, promptly, and it feels like
21 community. If we have to go in for PTA, they
22 take care of the parents, they take care of the
23 students. We get what needs to be done done.
24 We get home. We get our kids ready.



1 Our kids are ready for chess.
2 They are ready for college. They are ready for
3 the best schools. I couldn't have chosen a
4 better school for him to attend. He will be
5 there until he is 8th grade and he will go to a
6 better school once he leaves.

7 And Thomas Edison is the place to
8 be. People don't know. It is Delaware's best
9 kept secret.

10 MS. JOHNSON: Hello. My name is
11 Charity Johnson, and I have two brilliant young
12 men that are coming up here. They are
13 representing the chess team. They have gone to
14 different competitions. And I will say that
15 Thomas Edison, Principal EL has always backed
16 all of the kids at Thomas Edison Charter School
17 with the best, offering them opportunities to
18 see the world in a different aspect.

19 Some of these children don't even
20 get the opportunity to go anything, anywhere
21 outside of the hood that they live in. But I
22 will say that Thomas Edison is a school that's
23 in the heart of the hood, but it has the hood
24 in their heart. And I really am proud to say



1 that I am a Thomas Edison Charter School
2 parent, and I will be, I also have a daughter
3 that went, that goes to the University of
4 Delaware.

5 My son Nicholas, he is in the
6 light program which will afford him an
7 opportunity to go into another prestigious high
8 school and go to college as well.

9 Jonathan is right next to him,
10 and he will be going to an elite school as
11 well.

12 But Thomas Edison prides
13 themselves in making exceptional leaders,
14 exceptional students, exceptional people, that
15 are going to lead this nation. So I will stand
16 behind Thomas Edison Charter School, 100
17 percent behind my principal, behind the staff,
18 and do what I need to do to make sure that we
19 are the next leaders in this world.

20 MR. VELAZQUEZ: Jerry Velazquez.
21 Good evening everybody. My name is Jerry
22 Velazquez, and I also wear two hats here. I am
23 a board member, but, as also some of the
24 parents here, I am also a proud parent of three



1 graduates of Thomas Edison. My oldest also
2 just, not just, but attended New England
3 Culinary Institute, is a supervisor now for a
4 restaurant, Washington, D. C., hotel chain of
5 the Ritz Carlton. And my youngest, my baby is
6 getting ready to graduate Wesley College. So
7 those are my credentials that I bring.

8 And as a board member I think it
9 is important that the state knows that based on
10 the turnout that they see here, the kind of
11 support, but I think it is also worth noting
12 the credentials of Thomas Edison. Thomas
13 Edison is about 18 years old. As a child, you
14 are in adolescence. And for those of us that
15 have teenagers, we know how adolescents can be.
16 You have your ups, you have your downs.

17 But with another renewal in front
18 of us, that will make us a young adult, and I
19 think as a young adult it is worthy that, it is
20 worth repeating the accomplishments by the
21 staff, the principal, and the parents that
22 Thomas Edison has achieved, starting with in
23 2014 the national chess championship.

24 When you think of a school, there



1 was 98 percent African-American, okay, and to
2 become a national champion, and Delaware did
3 not acknowledge it I think was something that
4 was a missed opportunity.

5 When 2015 came around and Thomas
6 Edison was awarded the education award, I think
7 was also another feather in their hat, but then
8 also they turned around and just recently, in
9 2016, again became a national champion in
10 chess.

11 I think it has been an innovative
12 thing that the administration, Principal EL and
13 the staff, have used something outside of the
14 box in terms of teaching kids. When you think
15 of them as national champions, two years in a
16 row, and have not been acknowledged.

17 It would be a travesty for the
18 State of Delaware not to renew this charter. I
19 think that, as you have clearly heard, the
20 support that is there comes from being
21 entrenched in the school, and not so much for
22 the good times but I think also for the bad
23 times. The bad times are I think what makes us
24 great.



1 And there is an old saying that
2 you never know how much wine you get out of a
3 grape until you squeeze it. And I think what
4 we are seeing is the squeezing of a grape and
5 how much wine we are going to get out of it.

6 So with that, I hope that the
7 State of Delaware considers our application and
8 approves it, and we will see you again in
9 another five years. Thank you very much.

10 MS. JASPER: Annia, A-N-N-I-A,
11 J-A-S-P-E-R. Okay. I'm going to keep this
12 short. I just want to share a short story.

13 I came from another charter
14 school, and it honestly was not the best fit,
15 but when I pulled up from my interview at
16 Thomas Edison, I knew right then that I loved
17 the school, and then when I met Principal EL
18 and Miss Yates, it just felt so right. I could
19 feel the love. I could feel the mutual respect
20 and the shared goals of everyone in the
21 building. And I just fell in love with the
22 atmosphere and the family environment.

23 I just want to say I'm
24 continually inspired to be the best teacher



1 that I can be because of Principal EL's
2 leadership, and I feel that the admin. team at
3 Edison is phenomenal and I literally cannot
4 feel more supported as a teacher.

5 When I say I absolutely love this
6 school, like I love this school so much. I
7 wake up in the morning and I'm just so inspired
8 and I just cannot wait to go to work and help
9 mold the minds. I know I'm working with so
10 many wonderful people who are sharing this goal
11 and this dream of molding the minds of young
12 people, and I'm so inspired every day to do the
13 work that I do, because of the leadership, and
14 because of the people that I work with, and
15 because of the students that I teach.

16 So the charter should absolutely
17 be renewed because of all the love you guys are
18 hearing from this room today. Thank you.

19 MS. HUFNER: Hello. My name is
20 Nicole Hufner. I'm a kindergartner teacher at
21 Thomas Edison.

22 I was not going to come up here
23 and talk because I hate public speaking. But
24 Micayla, in the back, I told her if she had



1 courage to come up that I would follow her,
2 which is one thing that is so special about
3 Edison, is that it gives the kids an
4 opportunity to become leaders, even to the
5 adults.

6 I became involved with Edison six
7 years ago. I started as a substitute. I then
8 became an interventionist. And then I got
9 certified to teach.

10 Like everybody has said, Edison
11 is like a family. I picked up and left my own
12 family. And I just had my first baby, and I
13 keep on questioning, what keeps me in Delaware,
14 why am I raising my own children away from my
15 own family. And it is because of the love I
16 feel every day going into that building. The
17 love from my administration, the love from the
18 staff, and definitely the love that the kids
19 show and that the staff shows the children.
20 So --

21 A VOICE: We love you too.

22 A VOICE: So as you can see.

23 There is love. We love.

24 MR. COOPER: Wayne Cooper.



1 Currently I'm a board member. I just came on
2 to the board in January. Before that I had
3 retired from Thomas Edison as an administrator,
4 and started off when the school opened up in
5 2000 as a teacher.

6 I have enjoyed -- and also I'm a
7 parent of a student who attended Thomas Edison.
8 And that's one of the things that you notice,
9 we have heard of teachers who stood up and said
10 that her child goes here, we have a number of
11 faculty members, current faculty members, past
12 faculty members that have their children to
13 attend Thomas Edison, meaning that they feel
14 that this is a very good school. This is a
15 good school. If it is good enough to teach
16 there, it is good enough for your child to go
17 there, and we work hard to make all of our
18 students successful.

19 One of the key things about the
20 students, we get students from two-parent
21 families to single family, single-parent
22 family. Those students, we have a number of
23 students who come from the inner city, who walk
24 around the school, who come from a very



1 difficult, live in a very difficult situation.

2 One of the things that we have to
3 do in terms of inspiring those students is to
4 tell them to leave their armor at the door, to
5 leave all of the issues, how they have to deal
6 with society at the door, so that when they
7 come to the school they can feel safe and ready
8 to learn.

9 That's one of the things that
10 Edison has done since the beginning, continues
11 to do, and as long as we can continue to do
12 that, as long as the state renews our charter,
13 we will continue to do that, we will continue
14 to have students to be successful, we will
15 continue to have students who go on to some of
16 the better high schools in the state, as well
17 as colleges in the country. Thank you.

18 MR. BROWN: Good evening
19 everyone. My name is Emile Brown. I serve as
20 a board member, secretary. And I just wanted
21 to address three things very quickly. I see
22 the time is short and my car is probably double
23 parked now.

24 First and foremost, I came on the



1 board maybe a year after Principal EL, and it
2 is my honor to serve on the charter school
3 board.

4 Although Principal EL is my
5 fraternity brother, we don't always agree, but
6 we love each other no matter what, first and
7 foremost.

8 The reason I serve on that board
9 is because the students here look like me. And
10 I want to see the kids be successful, as when I
11 went to Indianapolis and watched in the chess
12 tournament and how successful they were. It
13 was exciting to serve.

14 There are so many things that go
15 on behind the scenes that you really don't
16 appreciate. The location of Thomas Edison
17 right now used to be a tannery, historically.
18 One of our responsibilities as a board member
19 is fiduciary to make sure that the kids are
20 safe. So that field out there was not safe to
21 have a playground on. All right.

22 We just got the brown fields, the
23 disposition of the brown fields cleared within
24 the last two years. So it hasn't been a



1 20-year issue.

2 I would be remiss if I don't ask
3 for the renewal. I hope to continue to work on
4 the charter school board, and if they don't
5 want me on the charter school board, I'll be
6 glad to leave. But I love serving on the
7 board. I can see all the emotion on everyone's
8 faces.

9 And I apologize, I'm not big
10 social media, and I don't read the News
11 Journal, but the elephant that's in the room,
12 we can get by this. All right.

13 So on behalf of myself, my
14 family, numerous educators, I look forward to
15 having Thomas Edison Charter School around for
16 many years to come. Thank you.

17 MS. STOUFFER: Is there anyone
18 else who desires to speak?

19 MR. THOMAS-EL: Denise, am I
20 allowed to provide closing remarks?

21 MS. STOUFFER: Does the school
22 wish to provide closing remarks? Yes, sir.

23 MR. THOMAS-EL: Briefly. I just
24 want to thank everyone for coming out.



1 Probably the most important word I heard
2 tonight other than family was you heard the
3 word hood, you heard the word hood often, and I
4 think sometimes it might be underestimated how
5 powerful the hood can be. Because I grew up in
6 Philadelphia, in the notorious Diamond Street
7 Projects. I was a single kid, one of eight. I
8 was taken -- I was attending a struggling
9 public elementary school, and I was taken out
10 of my school to attend a school for gifted
11 students in Philadelphia.

12 My other siblings were not able
13 to. I'm the only one of my mother's eight
14 children to graduate from college. And sitting
15 in this audience and in that school, just, the
16 same teachers you see today are the teachers
17 that I had in the school where I was and the
18 school where I attended, and I just think if my
19 other brothers and sisters had the opportunity
20 to attend Thomas Edison, I know they would be
21 college graduates.

22 And I'm just so thankful and
23 honored to have the family that we have. We
24 want you to know what the hood means. We are



1 not ashamed of the hood. We overcame in the
2 hood. The hood is in us. We are raising the
3 hood and in our school we are proud, we embrace
4 that, because when those children come, they
5 enter to learn, but they leave to serve.

6 And I just want to thank our
7 families and our teachers for coming here every
8 day and sacrificing, and I want to thank our
9 board. And Brother Emile, we want you on that
10 board. We need you. We can't have this
11 without our board. We can't have this without
12 the leadership. So we need you. We need our
13 parents and we need all of our teachers to
14 continue to work hard for our children.

15 And I think the state, after
16 hearing tonight, there is no way they could not
17 give us a charter for five years.

18 A VOICE: Amen.

19 MR. THOMAS-EL: We might be the
20 first school to get a 15-year charter, just so
21 they don't have to hear teachers crying every
22 five years.

23 I just want to thank you for
24 giving you us the opportunity to publicly



1 express the love that we have for our children
2 and the love that we have for one another. And
3 love is stronger than pride. And love will
4 conquer all. And I think that's what we have
5 in our school, and we will continue to love
6 these children.

7 These parents, they won't tell
8 you this, many of them have children who score
9 perfect scores on Smart Balance. You will hear
10 about the low test schools in our school and in
11 the state. Our 7th and 8th grade students
12 exceeded the state average. Our elementary
13 school often double and triple the performance
14 of schools that service the same children.

15 You rarely hear our parents brag
16 about what their children do. But our children
17 are doing a great job, and they will continue
18 to do so as long as we have the opportunity to
19 provide a safe haven for them to come and
20 experience two things in our school every day,
21 rigor and joy. Thank you very much.

22 MS. STOUFFER: The Secretary will
23 consider your comments in determining, at the
24 conclusion of the renewal process, what



1 decision to submit to the State Board for
2 assent, if needed. This hearing is now closed.

3 (Proceedings conclude at 7:00
4 p.m.)

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1 State of Delaware)
2 New Castle County)

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4
5 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

6
7 I, Eleanor J. Schwandt, Registered
8 Merit Reporter and Notary Public, do hereby
9 certify that the foregoing record, pages 1 to
10 41 inclusive, is a true and accurate transcript
11 of my stenographic notes taken on October 17,
12 2017, in the above-captioned matter.

13
14 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto
15 set my hand and seal this 19th day of October,
16 2017, at Wilmington.

17
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20 

21 Eleanor J. Schwandt
22
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24



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