

In The Matter Of:
Department of Education
Las Americas Aspira Academy of Dover

Public Hearing
April 8, 2019

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STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CHARTER SCHOOL OFFICE

IN RE: PUBLIC HEARING OF LAS AMERICAS
ASPIRA ACADEMY OF DOVER

Newark Free Library
750 Library Avenue
Newark, Delaware

Monday, April 8, 2019
5:00 p.m.

BEFORE: WALI W. RUSHDAN, II,
Board Member

LEROY TRAVERS,
Lead Education Associate,
Charter School Office

ALSO PRESENT: LEONDRA BROWN, Interpreter

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1 MR. TRAVERS: Good evening,
2 everyone. I declare this public hearing to
3 be open.

4 My name is Leroy Travers. I'm
5 the lead education associate for the
6 Charter School Office at the Delaware
7 Department of Education, and I've been
8 appointed by the Secretary of Education to
9 conduct this public hearing.

10 At this time I ask the person
11 to my left to introduce himself for the
12 record.

13 MR. RUSHDAN: Sure.

14 Good evening, everyone.

15 My name is Wali Rushdan. I'm
16 one of the members of the State Board of
17 Education. It's definitely a pleasure to
18 be here tonight with the Las Americas
19 ASPIRA Academy community. And I look
20 forward to hearing your comments about your
21 school tonight.

22 So thank you very much.

23 MR. TRAVERS: Las Americas
24 ASPIRA Academy has filed an application for



1 a major modification to their charter. As
2 is required by law, the matter was referred
3 to the Charter School Accountability
4 Committee for investigation and report.
5 This joint public hearing is being held by
6 the Delaware Department of Education and
7 the State Board of Education to receive
8 public comments on the application.

9 I would like the record to
10 reflect that the notice of time, date, and
11 place of today's public hearing was
12 published in The News Journal on
13 January 28th, 2019. In addition, notice
14 was posted at the Charter School
15 Accountability Committee's official place
16 of business on the Delaware Department of
17 Education's official website and on the
18 State Public Meeting Calendar on the
19 State's official website on January 7th,
20 2019. Furthermore, the applicant was
21 personally notified of the time, date, and
22 place of today's public hearing on
23 January 17, 2019.

24 A court reporter is present so



1 that a record of this hearing can be made.
2 It will be necessary for each speaker to
3 clearly identify his- or herself before
4 beginning to speak so that the court
5 reporter will be able to note who you are.
6 When you come up to spoke, please stand or
7 sit where Ms. Lopez-Waite is at this
8 moment.

9 The record of this hearing will
10 be provided to the Secretary of Education
11 and members of the State Board of Education
12 together with any written or electronic
13 comments received during the course of the
14 modification application process.

15 We will proceed in the
16 following manner: First we will hear from
17 any representatives of the charter school
18 who wish to comment on the modification
19 application. Then we will take comments
20 from anyone else who desires to speak.

21 There are sign-up sheets to my
22 left where Ms. Massett is raising her hand.
23 If you desire to speak, please make sure
24 you sign up now.



1 I'm going to pause for just a
2 second for a moment to permit anyone who so
3 desires to speak to sign up now, as this
4 will be your last chance to indicate that
5 you wish to speak.

6 Please remember that we reserve
7 the right to limit comment if it is purely
8 repetitive or cumulative.

9 At this point I will accept
10 comments from any representatives of the
11 school.

12 MS. LOPEZ-WAITE: I just want
13 to thank everybody for coming out this
14 evening. As you know, we have our
15 application for the high school, and this
16 is the final phase of the approval process.
17 So your comments -- and I'm so glad that
18 Wali is here, one of our State Board of
19 Education members, because it is now going
20 to be up to the State Board of Education to
21 decide whether to approve our application.
22 So it's really important that they not only
23 see your support but they hear your
24 support. So thank you so much for being



1 here. And I don't want to take away from
2 your time and limit any of your comments,
3 so I'll just pass it off to them.

4 MR. TRAVERS: Okay. Any there
5 other representatives from the school that
6 would like to speak?

7 Okay. At this time we will
8 accept comments from those who have
9 expressed the desire to speak. I'll call
10 your name. Please remember to identify
11 yourself before you begin your comments.

12 Okay. First we have Kellie
13 Cruz.

14 MS. CRUZ: Hello. I'm Kellie
15 Cruz. I used to be just a parent. I --
16 both of my children attend ASPIRA. And I
17 love the school -- everything that this
18 school was about -- so much that I quit my
19 job. I had a good job at Bank of America.
20 I ended up quitting that job to come to the
21 school because I felt that it was the
22 community I wanted to not only have my kids
23 in but I wanted to be in and help with as
24 well.



1 Before I started my work
2 career, I had a great opportunity to travel
3 a lot. And in that traveling, you realize
4 how much other countries value different
5 languages. And the importance of knowing
6 more than just one language is so much
7 that's what I want for my children. It is
8 part of their culture. But, besides that,
9 the importance of language is so great that
10 I can't even say it enough.

11 Right now -- please correct me
12 if I'm wrong. But once they leave ASPIRA,
13 there is no way they can continue to grow.
14 My son -- my oldest is currently in fifth
15 grade. He is outspeaking Spanish of his
16 cousins, who are in seventh and eighth
17 grade at a public school, because they
18 don't offer the language that we do at
19 ASPIRA. For them to stop when they leave
20 would be so sad. They need to be able to
21 continue that growth. Hopefully, we can
22 grow that high school into more than just
23 Spanish also. So if they could pick up
24 multiple languages -- it's been proven,



1 once you learn one language, it's easier to
2 pick up another and another. Let's keep
3 that growth going. We need that, not only
4 in -- here in Delaware but just in general.
5 So I really hope that you would consider
6 having this high school.

7 That's it.

8 MR. TRAVERS: Thank you.

9 Kim Whyte.

10 MS. WHYTE: Hello.

11 My name is Kim Whyte. I am not
12 only a proud ASPIRA team member, but I'm
13 also a parent of a fourth grader.

14 Continued charter school
15 expansion and overall growth allows more
16 students to be better served by having
17 educational choice. This is especially
18 true when a school like ASPIRA keeps up to
19 speed on all things educationally related,
20 including informational resources, school
21 growth, and the advancement of the charter
22 school as a whole.

23 It is no secret that, as
24 charter schools like ASPIRA have become



1 more popular, opposition has grown.
2 However, it's unfair to hold minority
3 parents and students hostage in
4 underperforming district/feeder schools.
5 ASPIRA High School would decrease the
6 probability of that scenario from
7 continuously occurring.

8 Overall, charter schools like
9 ASPIRA have provided an entrepreneurial
10 challenge to the status quo and delivered
11 results to make it worth expanding.
12 Recently, a Stanford study concluded that
13 not only do charter schools provide
14 significantly higher levels of growth in
15 math and reading for all students, but
16 minority and low income students benefit
17 disproportionately more. This is true
18 before considering that the
19 possibilities -- what the possibilities
20 would actually be in a dual language
21 environment.

22 Yes, charter schools are
23 becoming a bigger part of the United States
24 education system every year. And for about



1 1,000 families -- if we have a high
2 school -- ASPIRA would offer a much needed
3 choice that's different than a
4 one-size-fits-all public school.

5 Expanding ASPIRA to the high
6 school level provides hundreds to thousands
7 of children with the ability to continue
8 their dual language education in a
9 family-oriented environment that provides
10 for their needs through educators who are
11 dedicated to knowing their students as
12 individuals.

13 Allowing these children an
14 opportunity to continuously utilize the
15 skills and strategies they are taught
16 without interruption will not only ensure
17 success and foster a lifelong love of
18 learning with bonds that shall never be
19 broken but will also allow for
20 uninterrupted development and acquisition
21 of a second language proven to demolish
22 barriers in the world beyond the classroom.

23 Due to limited time, I will end
24 there. However, I'm urging the Department



1 of Education to strongly consider the
2 approval of the ASPIRA High School as we
3 continue to do our parts as citizens to
4 paint a picture in the minds of our young
5 people of a world where we can all work
6 together.

7 Thank you.

8 MR. TRAVERS: Margie Rivera.

9 MS. RIVERA: Good evening.

10 My name is Margie Rivera. I'm
11 actually a founding member of Las Americas
12 ASPIRA Academy Charter School. I'm also a
13 member of ASPIRA of Delaware.

14 Many years ago when ASPIRA of
15 Delaware was founded, we had a dream. We
16 had a vision. And that dream and vision
17 meant inclusivity to a language,
18 opportunity, and the desire to ensure that
19 our families, as well as our children,
20 could reach to the stars.

21 In my capacity now, I work as
22 family engagement manager. It astounds me
23 every single day when I see the faces, the
24 camaraderie, the learning styles of the



1 children that are there, and the
2 inclusivity that we engage our families to
3 be a part of that process. There is very
4 few schools that have an opportunity to do
5 that with a -- such a diverse population
6 that we have here at the charter school.
7 We're probably, if memory serves me
8 correctly, one of the top five charter
9 schools that has a large percentage of
10 diverse students and families.

11 Engagement is key. We engage
12 students. We engage the family. And vice
13 versa. You walk through the hallways. I
14 have had the pleasure and the opportunity
15 to bring in a lot of different resources to
16 the school. And the first thing that they
17 think about is, oh, my gosh, the
18 atmosphere, the congeniality, the teaming,
19 the children. And it's all about the
20 children. And we can't stop with eighth
21 grade.

22 So our vision was not just to
23 be a K to 5 or K to 8 school. Our vision
24 was really to have a high school.



1 Education does not stop at eighth grade.
2 It is the sauce that starts them going, but
3 it's not the meat that will keep them
4 going. And I think the high school, with
5 the commitment that we have to our
6 citizens -- and these individuals are not
7 just citizens of the State of Delaware.
8 These individuals will be citizens of the
9 world. They have the compassion. They
10 have the knowledge. They have the spirit.
11 And we believe that we can achieve much
12 more given the opportunity to have a high
13 school. So don't let us stop at K to 8.
14 Let us continue to grow the philosophy that
15 we started with: Every child counts.
16 Every family member counts. No one should
17 be left behind.

18 Thank you.

19 MR. TRAVERS: Is there anyone
20 that came in after we brought up the sign-
21 up sheets that would like to speak at this
22 time?

23 Speakers?

24 A STUDENT: My name is



1 . I attend ASPIRA
2 Academy. I'm in seventh grade. And I
3 personally love the school, not just
4 because the way we learn, but the teachers
5 and the environment.

6 When I first attended school, I
7 was in second grade, and I was kind of
8 scared. But, then, throughout the years, I
9 would adjust to the way that they, like,
10 helped -- like the way they helped. And I
11 personally think that we should have the
12 high school because it would be so great to
13 have the high school so we can keep on the
14 Spanish speaking and the other languages
15 and the other learnings that we have.

16 Thank you.

17 MR. TRAVERS: Anyone else that
18 came in afterwards that would like to
19 speak?

20 MS. PATRICK: My name is
21 Clissita Patrick, and I am a parent. I'm
22 grandmother. And I just wanted
23 to follow up with him.

24 I did submit a letter that



1 spoke more to the whole of how I feel about
2 ASPIRA. However, I just wanted to say that
3 ASPIRA has been -- meant a lot to me and my
4 family. Just as Senora Rivera spoke, it
5 includes the whole family. It's more --
6 not so much just a school, but it's
7 inclusive of the whole family.

8 And because I have so many
9 children -- I have six students at -- well,
10 no. I have five now. I had one that
11 graduated on to high school. And I did
12 have a discussion with him. And he told me
13 that, you know, if there was an ASPIRA High
14 School that he would have continued to the
15 ASPIRA High School. And that spoke a lot
16 to me because he had the choice of any high
17 school that he wanted. He had to make a
18 choice. For me, it would have been better
19 if he would have been able to continue.
20 And I would really like to see them go on
21 and continue to learn at ASPIRA. And I
22 know that because they have been there.

23 As said, he's in the
24 seventh grade now. And he started when he



1 was in the second grade. So we've been
2 there for five years. And to see where the
3 school started when we started to come here
4 and then to see how much it has grown and
5 with -- you know, without dropping the
6 standards for the students, it really
7 speaks volumes to me, as a caregiver, a
8 parent. And I just really would like to be
9 able to feel the comfort of having to
10 continue in the education in the family way
11 that ASPIRA offers for me. It has really
12 made a big difference for our family.

13 Thank you.

14 MS. MASSETT: Is there anybody
15 else?

16 MS. PADILLA: Hi. I'm Geisa
17 Padilla -- G-e-i-s-a, Padilla,
18 P-a-d-i-l-l-a.

19 Last time I was in front of
20 this Board, I talk to you. I am a fourth
21 grade math teacher at ASPIRA and I am also
22 a mother there. And I present to you my
23 little charming prince over there, .
24 He is autistic. But he has grown a lot in



1 ASPIRA.

2 But I want to share to you
3 something that one of -- well, not one, but
4 a few of them last Friday told me. And
5 they told me, "Ms. Padilla, you know what?
6 Even though you are teaching us in Spanish,
7 we understand perfectly, even if it's not
8 our first language."

9 So we are -- as a teacher, we
10 push -- we put so much heart in our work.
11 Even if we teach in Spanish, they get the
12 common course. They get the standards we
13 hid in them. Even in another language.
14 That's the important part. We want them to
15 grow. We want them to learn.

16 And we, as a family, in
17 ASPIRA -- I found out this -- great
18 teachers -- that they support so much of
19 our students. And we want to continue
20 doing that. And I'm pretty sure that the
21 administration has the letter of
22 responsibility in this because they did
23 this wide process to select a candidate to
24 be a teacher. And that is very important.



1 And also, about that, they support us in
2 every way.

3 At the end, that is only for
4 the children. And I'm pretty sure that's
5 going to be continuing on on a high school.
6 So that's a great opportunity that -- if
7 you give the approval to it.

8 Thank you.

9 MS. MASSETT: Is there anybody
10 else? Is there anybody that wants to
11 speak?

12 Oh, see. Look.

13 MS. MEDINA: I apologize. I
14 came in a little late.

15 My name is Laura Medina. I
16 just wanted to share that I am so thankful
17 for this school. I came here a long time
18 ago. I came from Mexico. I was only 11.
19 And I didn't know any English at all. It
20 was a very hard struggle for me learning
21 it. And I am so thankful for the school --
22 for ASPIRA.

23 I have a one -- one daughter.
24 She's a first grader. And just seeing



1 her -- how much she's learned and -- it's
2 amazing. We try to keep Spanish at home
3 all the way. And so she started there
4 until she was in kindergarten. And she's
5 just -- she impress me so much. There's
6 things that she's teaching me in Spanish.
7 I'm like, "Wait. You are learning the real
8 Spanish and you are actually teaching me."
9 And not just that, but you are learning it
10 in English as well. And I am so thankful
11 for what she has now. I didn't have. I
12 wish I would have been able to have the
13 same education that she's getting now. It
14 would have been so much easier, I guess,
15 for myself. But I'm so happy that she's
16 now being able to get -- having it now.
17 And not just that. But, like they say, you
18 speaking another language always opens more
19 doors, not just for job-wise but
20 friendship, travels, endless things. So I
21 will be so happy if that goes more along
22 the way to have a high school as well.

23 MR. TRAVERS: Thank you.

24 MS. MASSETT: Anybody else?



1 MS. MASTROIANNI: Hi. My name
2 is Sabrina Mastroianni, and I'm a senior at
3 the University of Delaware. And I'm
4 actually from New York, New York. But me
5 and a couple of my other peers, we were
6 brought to ASPIRA to pretty much come up
7 and help with ideas for their new high
8 school to make it super innovative. And so
9 when the kids graduate high school they are
10 better prepared for college and their
11 careers. So we've been bouncing back some
12 ideas with them on that.

13 And we actually got to tour the
14 ASPIRA High School. And we were blown
15 away. Absolutely blown away. The
16 design -- the innovative design of the
17 school -- from that and how happy all the
18 kids were.

19 I came from a public high
20 school. So we had a very standard where
21 every period once a day we learned a
22 different language of our choice. So I
23 learned Italian from seventh to twelfth
24 grade. And four years out of school I



1 couldn't tell you -- not one sentence in
2 Italian, literally not one. And, to me,
3 now looking back on all those periods, it's
4 almost a waste of time. And if someone
5 told me that these little kids could speak
6 as well as they do in Spanish, I would say,
7 "Absolutely no way." And we went to the
8 school. And they're all doing it. It's
9 seriously absolutely amazing.

10 And, honestly, back in high
11 school too where -- I got straight As in
12 all my Italian classes. I was good in the
13 Italian classes. It's just -- it's lost.
14 And all the other classes, it overshadows
15 the language classes. So I'm really just
16 studying it to learn for the test. It gets
17 overshadowed. They have almost the
18 expectation every day to know both
19 languages. It really is amazing. And
20 they're all so happy. It was an amazing
21 experience walking into that school. And
22 I'm jealous.

23 And now that -- even now I'm
24 looking into study abroad, work abroad,



1 missions trips. And I don't know any other
2 language but English. And it's extremely
3 limiting to all the possibilities that I
4 would have if I were a bit more fluent or
5 even just a little bit more than I do now.
6 But it's very amazing. I'm really
7 impressed with all of you little ones too.
8 It's amazing.

9 Thank you.

10 MS. FASSANO: Hi, everyone.

11 I'm Maggie Fassano. I'm a
12 first grade teacher at ASPIRA. This is my
13 first year there. And to be honest with
14 you, I never knew what it was. I lived in
15 this area my whole life and driven down
16 Ruthar Drive so many times and was like,
17 "What is that warehouse?" you know. And
18 then when I went for my interview, I was
19 like, "Oh, an old warehouse?" And I walked
20 in and like -- I'm sorry. The girl who
21 just spoke just said that "I was blown
22 away," like, just to see the inside of the
23 school.

24 But I also want to say a



1 shout-out to my first grade students that I
2 see in the audience tonight. The fact that
3 you guys are here says a lot about you and
4 your parents and how invested in your
5 future that they are.

6 So I just wanted to say two
7 things that I thought about while I was
8 standing over there. One of them is that I
9 feel like there are two different ways to
10 see moving on, like continuing your
11 education. And one way is, oh, I want a
12 fresh start. I want to go to a different
13 school where I don't know anybody, nobody
14 knows me, and I can start over. But there
15 are a lot of us -- and especially this day
16 and age -- that would prefer a place where
17 we can feel comfortable, loved, and a
18 connection. And I think that that would be
19 a lot of our students. I think a lot of
20 our students feel that way and that they
21 would want that to continue into a high
22 school where they already know what it's
23 going to be like and they don't have to be
24 anxious about the first day of school



1 because they have already been there since
2 kinder. So that's...

3 MS. ARAGON: Hello. Good
4 afternoon. I'm Natalia Aragon. I'm an
5 ASPIRA mom. I think that it's very
6 important that we have a high school.
7 ASPIRA needs to have a high school.

8 I have two daughters that study
9 in ASPIRA. One is in eleventh grade.
10 She's in another charter school. And my
11 second daughter, she's in sixth grade. And
12 I like that she is staying at ASPIRA High
13 School. We need ASPIRA High School. My
14 daughters -- I am from Peru. My daughters
15 were born here. My second daughter loves
16 the -- maybe six years -- four, six years
17 old. She start to lost her Spanish, you
18 know, her mother language. And when she
19 entered to ASPIRA, she start to talk
20 perfect Spanish. My two daughters are
21 bilingual. They speak Spanish and English.
22 And I very proud mother. And I'm proud for
23 ASPIRA. We need the high school.

24 Thank you.



1 MR. TRAVERS: Before she comes
2 up, can I just see a show of hands of
3 anyone else who would like to speak?

4 MS. LA BANDA: My name is Nancy
5 LaBanda. I have been at ASPIRA since the
6 very first day it opened, if not before
7 even a little bit. I started off as a --
8 well, I'm still a parent. I started as a
9 parent and then started working there,
10 continued to work there.

11 I hadn't planned to speak, but
12 I felt kind of moved or compelled to do so
13 because I am the eighth grade advisor at
14 the school. So I work very closely with
15 our graduating students in helping them
16 prepare for their high schools. And --
17 sorry. It's not going to happen. It does
18 become very emotional when you have
19 students who work very, very hard and they
20 cannot find a home that kind of fits who
21 they are. So there are high schools out
22 there, but many of them do not provide the
23 family, the support, and the education that
24 our students are used to. And I think that



1 building a school for our students to have
2 that choice to continue feeling not just
3 the love they get but the acceptance that
4 they feel for who they are as they are
5 growing both personally and
6 educationally -- I think it's detrimental
7 to their progress really as humans to kind
8 of push them out and force them to go
9 somewhere where they don't feel welcome. I
10 have given many hugs and wiped many tears
11 of students who are forced to go to, you
12 know, a feeder school because the charter
13 schools were full or they were wait-listed
14 and they didn't have an opportunity to do
15 that.

16 So, as a mother of a seventh
17 grader who will be going into eighth grade
18 next year, I am personally beginning to be
19 faced with this. You know, where do I send
20 my son? What is a good fit for him? I am
21 very much hoping for a high school for him
22 to continue that opportunity and continue
23 to grow and be accepted and to just have a
24 choice. You know, I think that there are



1 some choices in Delaware. But when it
2 comes to high school, it's very limited for
3 our students, depending on where you live.
4 You know, we are currently trying to move
5 our house just to find a better option for
6 him to go to school.

7 So I just felt compelled, as an
8 eighth grade advisor, as someone who has
9 been watching the school continue to grow
10 and improve, to just speak on the
11 importance for our students -- that they do
12 need to have an opportunity to continue to
13 be where their heart is, to continue to
14 have that home for them.

15 So that's all.

16 MS. FORBES: Hi. I'm Jessie
17 Forbes. I wasn't going to speak either,
18 because I'm definitely afraid of people.
19 But I'm a teacher at ASPIRA Academy also.
20 But I was driven to speak, because I have
21 two daughters. One is in the ECDC, and the
22 others is in first grade. And my -- the
23 one that's in the ECDC, she started when
24 she was four months old. So I feel not



1 only like a family, because I work within
2 this environment, but because they're
3 family because they're helping raise my
4 children. And it's a really big deal when
5 you know that you're safe and you're going
6 to school and they're learning two
7 languages. My children come home and -- I
8 don't know what they're saying. But it's
9 something in Spanish and it's amazing. And
10 when I try and speak with them in Spanish,
11 they also -- they know what I'm talking
12 about. But it's very little.

13 But I also, though, grew up in
14 Southern California. So I've been at four
15 different -- five different schools within
16 four different states. And so I've had
17 that experience of knowing that, like, when
18 you're in a very great situation, it's a
19 good situation. And this is an amazing
20 school.

21 Like I said, it's a fantastic
22 family. But it's also something that --
23 the English and the Spanish is also
24 something that's near and dear to me,



1 because I did -- I grew up very close to
2 the border. So there within my school
3 community -- and then the outside
4 community -- it was a lot of Spanish. And
5 I tried to learn Spanish. And it just
6 never stuck with me. So I'm hoping that my
7 children, because they get to go through
8 this program, will be able to be bilingual.

9 But I also grew up in
10 California where we didn't have options.
11 There was no -- there wasn't a charter
12 system. And so I did get to go through
13 school with my friends from kindergarten
14 all the way through twelfth grade. And it
15 scares me that they might not have that
16 opportunity. It worries. And my first
17 grader right now -- and I do worry that she
18 will not be able to -- or that she'll have
19 to start over in high school. And so I
20 would -- I think it would be amazing if we
21 could continue with the high school.

22 That's it.

23 (The next speaker spoke through
24 the use of an interpreter.)



1 MS. MILLA: Good evening.

2 My name is Yelina Milla. I
3 have a child who is in the second grade.

4 Her child was going to start
5 collegiate classes right from kindergarten.
6 She heard that it was bilingual. So when
7 he started -- I'm from another country. I
8 have a few years here. His father speaks
9 English -- the whole family on his father's
10 side. I'm the only one, as his mother,
11 that speaks Spanish. So my son has learned
12 to speak English since -- from his -- since
13 he was very little. He only spoke English
14 as a child. And I would speak to him in
15 Spanish. He would understand a little bit,
16 but he wouldn't respond. He would always
17 respond in English.

18 So he entered -- when he
19 entered ASPIRA, she notices the difference.
20 Not only can he read, but he can also write
21 in Spanish. And I'm very happy because he
22 speaks a little bit. But his progress has
23 been amazing. And I'm very happy because
24 now her child can communicate with her



1 family members from her native country.
2 And that also opens a lot of doors for him
3 because now that gives him the opportunity
4 to travel to other countries with more
5 confidence and to be able to communicate
6 with other cultures from other countries.
7 And I've always been interested that he
8 learn both languages. And he's very happy
9 at ASPIRA.

10 She also has him enrolled in
11 their summer camp because he feels like
12 he's part of the family. He's familiar
13 with the teachers. The teachers are
14 familiar with him. So I feel very
15 satisfied. I feel very happy with ASPIRA.
16 My son feels comfortable. He feels like
17 he's at home. He even says he even wants
18 to stay in after care. But you don't
19 really -- because she picks her son up
20 after school. So there's no need for him
21 to stay in after care. But he has already
22 expressed his desire to stay in after care
23 because he likes the activities that they
24 have, the games. And he -- and she has him



1 participating in soccer -- soccer shots on
2 Fridays. And he's very happy. He enjoys
3 the school a lot. And I feel happy and I
4 feel secure. And that matters to me. As a
5 mother, that matters the most to her.

6 A STUDENT: My name is .
7 I'm a student from ASPIRA. And I like
8 ASPIRA because it's a dual language program
9 in that I could learn English and Spanish
10 at the same time. And then my friends
11 could learn English and Spanish. And
12 throughout it, I mean, if we have a high
13 school, we can keep that program growing.
14 And then our friends would be able to speak
15 Spanish and English at the same program.

16 (The next speaker spoke through
17 the use of an interpreter.)

18 MR. LOPEZ: My name is Jose
19 Lopez. I'm a member of ASPIRA. I'm a
20 professional, even though I'm not
21 performing in my professional studies. But
22 I perform my duties in different areas.

23 ASPIRA gave me the opportunity
24 to be a participant of their group. He



1 believes that the need for a high school
2 stems from the very need that was there
3 when a lot of adults that have come from
4 different countries come to this country
5 with the need to speak English. Even
6 though we're American citizens, as American
7 citizens, they still feel that there is a
8 level of discrimination in regards to not
9 being able to speak English. I understand
10 that the opportunity to have a high school
11 can give us the opportunity that our
12 children can remain in the school and be
13 able to dominate both languages.

14 MS. DANKEL: Good evening.

15 My name is Alison Dankel. I am
16 a fourth grade enrichment teacher. I am
17 speaking to you as a teacher, as a parent.
18 And I have been an educator in Delaware for
19 15 years. I have worked in district
20 schools. I have worked in charter schools.
21 I have never worked in a school where the
22 staff puts so much into every student's
23 success. And the enrichment program -- to
24 see the measures that the program director



1 and each teacher is taking to ensure that
2 their students' needs are being met, that
3 we are teaching the whole child, that we
4 are looking at what is best for the whole
5 child and not what we can fit with our
6 faculty or what we can fit with our
7 numbers, it's amazing.

8 And I am honored to be part of
9 this school so much so that this school
10 year I actually pulled my daughter from an
11 academic -- rigorously academic preschool
12 to enroll her in the Early Childhood
13 Education Center at ASPIRA. And the gains
14 that she is making are -- they're
15 incredible. She's coming home and telling
16 me that snowflakes are translucent. What
17 four-year-old knows the word "translucent"?

18 Also, comparing different
19 academic programs, the Wolves reading
20 program is extremely rigorous, yet
21 scaffolded to meet all learners. And the
22 co-teaching of the English teachers and the
23 Spanish teachers and the enrichment
24 teachers is beyond compare in any district



1 and any charter school that I have worked
2 in in the State of Delaware.

3 I am, as I said, honored to be
4 a part of the ASPIRA team. I am honored to
5 be an ASPIRA parent. And I am very excited
6 at the opportunity for our students and for
7 our community to have a high school to
8 continue the support, to continue this
9 rigorous educational programming, and to
10 offer so many opportunities for our
11 community.

12 Thank you.

13 MS. SWIFT: Hi. My name is
14 Sara Swift. And I am a middle school
15 enrichment teacher and I have the
16 opportunity to loop with my students from
17 sixth, seventh to eighth grade. So I'm
18 co-teaching in all three of those grade
19 levels in our English Humanities class this
20 year. And it's truly a blessing for me to
21 be able to do that, because then I can
22 stretch their brains even more by knowing
23 them for a longer time period.

24 And I am also the transition



1 coordinator for our eighth grade special
2 education students. And it has been a
3 challenge over the last few years, as we
4 have students of higher needs, to be able
5 to find appropriate placements for them
6 within the districts and the other charter
7 schools. And some of our higher needs
8 students unfortunately have not been
9 invited or accepted to the vo-tech schools,
10 which then poses a huge problem for them in
11 trying to determine what the best academic
12 setting would be for high school. So by
13 being able to follow them from the
14 kindergarten to eighth grade ASPIRA School
15 to the high school would be beneficial to
16 them and make their transition that much
17 easier and more succinct and just fluid.

18 Many of the parents will call
19 us with questions and ask us for
20 recommendations for where they should --
21 once they have gathered their information
22 from the high schools, trying to decide
23 where to send their child. And from a
24 parent's perspective, I have taken eight



1 years of Spanish. But my children -- I
2 have a fourth grader at ASPIRA at this
3 point. And she knows more Spanish than I
4 learned and can communicate better with
5 others speaking Spanish than I can after
6 the eight years that I took for high school
7 and college and study abroad. So the
8 program that we have at ASPIRA, I think, is
9 very solid and challenging and rigorous.
10 And it's just fabulous for all the
11 students.

12 A STUDENT: My name is ,
13 and I'm a third grade student at ASPIRA.
14 And, I mean, being at ASPIRA for, like,
15 almost four years now makes me really
16 happy, because during the years I have had
17 a lot of success. And, I mean, it helps
18 that -- if there was a high school. And I
19 just -- like, I could just go straight
20 through. And I could be more comfortable
21 and happy and -- I don't know what to say.
22 This school is amazing.

23 MS. MASSETT: Kendall Massett,
24 M-a-s-s-e-t-t. I'm the executive director



1 for the Delaware Charter Schools Network.
2 And I don't normally speak, but I just had
3 her explain this -- correct me if I'm
4 wrong. Estoy muy orgulloso. I am so proud
5 of all of you. I started -- I was going to
6 stand up -- because you all weren't
7 talking. And then you all decided to.

8 I want it on the record that
9 there are over 80 of you here in support of
10 continuing this school into high school.
11 It is absolutely wonderful to see all of
12 you here.

13 You made me cry. You can speak
14 to your son. He can communicate with you.
15 Because of you. Because of all of you.

16 So everything that you've said
17 is going to be on the record. The State
18 Board is going to hear this. The Secretary
19 of Education is going to hear this.

20 Mr. Travers may say to you
21 before you leave, "If you have anything
22 else that you want to say, put it in
23 writing." Your words matter. Your voice
24 matters. You being here matters.



1 So thank you. And I've got my
2 fingers crossed. If I could make it
3 happen, I would. I would do the wand and
4 make it happen. It's not a done deal. So
5 you being here is huge. So that's all I'm
6 going to say.

7 MS. GUTTIEREZ: Hello,
8 everybody. My name is Erika Gutierrez. I
9 am a mom of two beautiful kids at ASPIRA.
10 My two kids are pretty high demand. ASPIRA
11 is a school that has helped me to make sure
12 that they have proficiently ready to read
13 in English and Spanish like pretty much
14 right away. I am confident of the
15 education that my kids are getting. I also
16 say to the state -- I've been going to
17 schools. And I realize that we don't have
18 many people that is bilingual in schools,
19 in hospitals, in any of the institutions
20 that we need that help. Our Spanish
21 population is huge in the state. So what
22 are we doing about providing the schools or
23 institutions that prepare our kids to be
24 filling those jobs? So my call to you is



1 to think about it. This school is going to
2 transfer our kids' skills into bilingual
3 settings where Spanish is going to be
4 highly proficient. It's going to help with
5 our shortness of teachers and professionals
6 that need to be speaking both languages.

7 Secondly, this school -- I know
8 there is a lot of issues about charter
9 schools. This charter school is one of the
10 best. It's one the Latino community needed
11 for decades. We need this school. We love
12 this school. We support this school.

13 And the last meeting we brought
14 like about forty-something letters of
15 families that couldn't be here. Now, look
16 at this. Our community needs this
17 school -- the program, the language, the
18 culture, the approach, the cultural
19 sensitive approach. The drama and formal
20 care that we get in this school is
21 beautiful. And I invite you to consider
22 that, support this project, and give us
23 push for it through the state. We need
24 immersion education not just in charter



1 schools but in our public schools. So take
2 the best of this school. This model help
3 us keep supporting our kids, support the
4 needs and the demand of bilingual people in
5 the state.

6 And that's all I'm going to
7 say. Thank you very much.

8 MR. TRAVERS: Before you start,
9 this is going to have to be the last
10 comment, because we are running into a time
11 constraint. But, as Ms. Massett said, if
12 you have further comments, you can submit
13 that in writing. You can get it to the
14 Charter School Office by visiting our
15 website. You can give it to
16 Ms. Lopez-Waite, who will also forward it
17 to us. If you're so inclined, you can give
18 it to Ms. Massett, and she can get it to
19 us.

20 Thank you.

21 (The next speaker spoke through
22 the use of an interpreter.)

23 MS. MARIA: Good evening to
24 everyone. My name is Maria Yolanda Sava



1 (phonetic).

2 I have two children, but one
3 has already moved -- has already advanced.
4 And one is in the seventh grade. They
5 started ASPIRA ever since ASPIRA was under
6 construction, my oldest son from the first
7 day he started. He's very happy to be a
8 part of the school. And for me, as a
9 mother, I feel at ease because my
10 children -- they never suffered any
11 bullying attacks. And they never suffer or
12 went through any type of abuse, whether it
13 was from a teacher or anything else. And
14 the one who has graduated felt sad that he
15 had to leave. And my other son, who's
16 currently a student, he's happy that he
17 still is a student, but he still at the
18 same time is sad because he knows that his
19 time is short.

20 It would be a comfort for her,
21 as a mother, that ASPIRA does advance and
22 to create a high school for these students
23 because of the information she's received
24 where there's been a history of bullying



1 from other high schools. For her, as a
2 mother, it would be a comfort.

3 And she also recommends the
4 school.

5 And now that I have my
6 grandchildren, she would like to see her
7 grandchildren also be nurtured and be
8 educated under ASPIRA. Aside from the
9 education that they're receiving at home,
10 they are also receiving great education in
11 the school. It would benefit them to
12 continue their bilingual education all
13 through high school. It would be excellent
14 that it would be considered.

15 That is all, please.

16 MR. TRAVERS: I want to thank
17 everyone for your participation today. The
18 Secretary will consider your comments in
19 making her decision at the conclusion of
20 the modification application process.

21 This hearing is now closed.

22 (The hearing adjourned at
23 approximately 6:05 p.m. this same day.)

24 - - - - -



1 C E R T I F I C A T E

2
3 STATE OF DELAWARE :
4 NEW CASTLE COUNTY :

5
6 I, Robert Wayne Wilcox, Jr.,
7 Registered Professional Reporter and Notary
8 Public, do hereby certify that the
9 foregoing record, Pages 1 to 43 inclusive,
10 is a true and accurate transcript of my
11 stenographic notes taken on April 8, 2019,
12 in the above-captioned matter.

13 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto
14 set my hand and seal this 8th day of April,
15 2019, at Wilmington, Delaware.

16
17
18 

19 _____
20 Robert Wayne Wilcox, Jr., RPR



A	adjourned (1) 43:22	19:21	application (7) 2:24 3:8 4:14,19 5:15,21 43:20
ability (1) 10:7	adjust (1) 14:9	already (5) 23:22 24:1 31:21 42:3,3	appointed (1) 2:8
able (15) 4:5 7:20 15:19 16:9 19:12,16 29:8,18 31:5 32:14 33:9,13 35:21 36:4,13	administration (1) 17:21	also (23) 7:23 8:13 10:19 11:12 16:21 18:1 22:24 27:19 28:11,13, 22,23 29:9 30:20 31:2, 10 34:18 35:24 39:15 41:16 43:3,7,10	approach (2) 40:18,19
abroad (3) 21:24,24 37:7	adults (1) 33:3	always (3) 19:18 30:16 31:7	appropriate (1) 36:5
Absolutely (4) 20:15 21:7,9 38:11	advance (1) 42:21	amazing (12) 19:2 21:9,19,20 22:6,8 28:9,19 29:20 30:23 34:7 37:22	approval (3) 5:16 11:2 18:7
abuse (1) 42:12	advanced (1) 42:3	America (1) 6:19	approve (1) 5:21
academic (4) 34:11,11,19 36:11	advancement (1) 8:21	american (2) 33:6,6	approximately (1) 43:23
Academy (5) 2:19,24 11:12 14:2 27:19	advisor (2) 25:13 27:8	Americas (3) 2:18,23 11:11	ARAGON (2) 24:3,4
accept (2) 5:9 6:8	afraid (1) 27:18	another (6) 8:2,2 17:13 19:18 24:10 30:7	area (1) 22:15
acceptance (1) 26:3	after (6) 13:20 31:18,20,21, 22 37:5	anxious (1) 23:24	areas (1) 32:22
accepted (2) 26:23 36:9	afternoon (1) 24:4	anybody (5) 16:14 18:9,10 19:24 23:13	Aside (1) 43:8
Accountability (2) 3:3,15	afterwards (1) 14:18	anything (2) 38:21 42:13	ASPIRA (60) 2:19,24 6:16 7:12, 19 8:12,18,24 9:5,9 10:2,5 11:2,12,13,14 14:1 15:2,3,13,15,21 16:11,21 17:1,17 18:22 20:6,14 22:12 24:5,7,9,12,13,19,23 25:5 27:19 30:19 31:9, 15 32:7,8,19,23 34:13 35:4,5 36:14 37:2,8, 13,14 39:9,10 42:5,5, 21 43:8
achieve (1) 13:11	age (1) 23:16	apologize (1) 18:13	associate (1) 2:5
acquisition (1) 10:20	ago (2) 11:14 18:18	applicant (1) 3:20	astounds (1) 11:22
activities (1) 31:23	Alison (1) 33:15		
actually (6) 9:20 11:11 19:8 20:4,13 34:10	allow (1) 10:19		
addition (1) 3:13	allowing (1) 10:13		
	allows (1) 8:15		
	almost (3) 21:4,17 37:15		
	along (1)		

atmosphere (1) 12:18	13:17	bonds (1) 10:18	31:11
attacks (1) 42:11	being (9) 3:5 5:24 19:16 33:9 34:2 36:13 37:14	border (1) 29:2	candidate (1) 17:23
attend (2) 6:16 14:1	38:24 39:5	born (1) 24:15	cannot (1) 25:20
attended (1) 14:6	believe (1) 13:11	both (6) 6:16 21:18 26:5 31:8 33:13 40:6	capacity (1) 11:21
audience (1) 23:2	believes (1) 33:1	bouncing (1) 20:11	care (4) 31:18,21,22 40:20
autistic (1) 16:24	beneficial (1) 36:15	brains (1) 35:22	career (1) 7:2
away (5) 6:1 20:15,15 22:22 39:14	benefit (2) 9:16 43:11	bring (1) 12:15	careers (1) 20:11
B	besides (1) 7:8	broken (1) 10:19	caregiver (1) 16:7
	best (4) 34:4 36:11 40:10 41:2	brought (3) 13:20 20:6 40:13	Center (1) 34:13
back (3) 20:11 21:3,10	better (5) 8:16 15:18 20:10 27:5 37:4	building (1) 26:1	challenge (2) 9:10 36:3
BANDA (1) 25:4	beyond (2) 10:22 34:24	bullying (2) 42:11,24	challenging (1) 37:9
Bank (1) 6:19	big (2) 16:12 28:4	business (1) 3:16	chance (1) 5:4
barriers (1) 10:22	bigger (1) 9:23	C	charming (1) 16:23
beautiful (2) 39:9 40:21	bilingual (7) 24:21 29:8 30:6 39:18 40:2 41:4 43:12	Calendar (1) 3:18	Charter (25) 2:6 3:1,3,14 4:17 8:14,21,24 9:8,13,22 11:12 12:6,8 24:10 26:12 29:11 33:20 35:1 36:6 38:1 40:8,9, 24 41:14
become (2) 8:24 25:18	bit (5) 22:4,5 25:7 30:15, 22	California (2) 28:14 29:10	child (8) 13:15 30:3,4,14,24 34:3,5 36:23
becoming (1) 9:23	blessing (1) 35:20	call (3) 6:9 36:18 39:24	Childhood (1) 34:12
before (8) 4:3 6:11 7:1 9:18 25:1,6 38:21 41:8	blown (3) 20:14,15 22:21	camaraderie (1) 11:24	children (17) 6:16 7:7 10:7,13 11:19 12:1,19,20 15:9
begin (1) 6:11	Board (7) 2:16 3:7 4:11 5:18, 20 16:20 38:18	came (6) 13:20 14:18 18:14, 17,18 20:19	
beginning (2) 4:4 26:18		camp (1)	
behind (1)			

18:4 28:4,7 29:7 33:12 37:1 42:2,10 choice (7) 8:17 10:3 15:16,18 20:22 26:2,24 choices (1) 27:1 citizens (6) 11:3 13:6,7,8 33:6,7 class (1) 35:19 classes (5) 21:12,13,14,15 30:5 classroom (1) 10:22 clearly (1) 4:3 Clissita (1) 14:21 close (1) 29:1 closed (1) 43:21 closely (1) 25:14 college (2) 20:10 37:7 collegiate (1) 30:5 come (7) 4:6 6:20 16:3 20:6 28:7 33:3,4 comes (2) 25:1 27:2 comfort (3) 16:9 42:20 43:2 comfortable (3) 23:17 31:16 37:20 coming (2) 5:13 34:15	comment (3) 4:18 5:7 41:10 comments (11) 2:20 3:8 4:13,19 5:10,17 6:2,8,11 41:12 43:18 commitment (1) 13:5 Committee (1) 3:4 Committee's (1) 3:15 common (1) 17:12 communicate (4) 30:24 31:5 37:4 38:14 community (8) 2:19 6:22 29:3,4 35:7,11 40:10,16 compare (1) 34:24 comparing (1) 34:18 compassion (1) 13:9 compelled (2) 25:12 27:7 concluded (1) 9:12 conclusion (1) 43:19 conduct (1) 2:9 confidence (1) 31:5 confident (1) 39:14 congeniality (1) 12:18	connection (1) 23:18 consider (4) 8:5 11:1 40:21 43:18 considered (1) 43:14 considering (1) 9:18 constraint (1) 41:11 construction (1) 42:6 continue (20) 7:13,21 10:7 11:3 13:14 15:19,21 16:10 17:19 23:21 26:2,22, 22 27:9,12,13 29:21 35:8,8 43:12 Continued (3) 8:14 15:14 25:10 continuing (3) 18:5 23:10 38:10 continuously (2) 9:7 10:14 coordinator (1) 36:1 correct (2) 7:11 38:3 correctly (1) 12:8 co-teaching (2) 34:22 35:18 could (9) 7:23 11:20 21:5 29:21 32:9,11 37:19, 20 39:2 couldn't (2) 21:1 40:15 countries (4)	7:4 31:4,6 33:4 country (3) 30:7 31:1 33:4 counts (2) 13:15,16 couple (1) 20:5 course (2) 4:13 17:12 court (2) 3:24 4:4 cousins (1) 7:16 create (1) 42:22 crossed (1) 39:2 Cruz (3) 6:13,14,15 cry (1) 38:13 cultural (1) 40:18 culture (2) 7:8 40:18 cultures (1) 31:6 cumulative (1) 5:8 currently (3) 7:14 27:4 42:16
D			
DANKEL (2) 33:14,15 date (2) 3:10,21 daughter (4) 18:23 24:11,15			

34:10 daughters (5) 24:8,14,14,20 27:21 day (8) 11:23 20:21 21:18 23:15,24 25:6 42:7 43:23 deal (2) 28:4 39:4 dear (1) 28:24 decades (1) 40:11 decide (2) 5:21 36:22 decided (1) 38:7 decision (1) 43:19 declare (1) 2:2 decrease (1) 9:5 dedicated (1) 10:11 definitely (2) 2:17 27:18 Delaware (12) 2:6 3:6,16 8:4 11:13,15 13:7 20:3 27:1 33:18 35:2 38:1 delivered (1) 9:10 demand (2) 39:10 41:4 demolish (1) 10:21 Department (4) 2:7 3:6,16 10:24 depending (1)	27:3 design (2) 20:16,16 desire (4) 4:23 6:9 11:18 31:22 desires (2) 4:20 5:3 determine (1) 36:11 detrimental (1) 26:6 development (1) 10:20 difference (2) 16:12 30:19 different (12) 7:4 10:3 12:15 20:22 23:9,12 28:15, 15,16 32:22 33:4 34:18 director (2) 33:24 37:24 discrimination (1) 33:8 discussion (1) 15:12 disproportionately (1) 9:17 district (2) 33:19 34:24 district/feeder (1) 9:4 districts (1) 36:6 diverse (2) 12:5,10 dominate (1) 33:13 done (1)	39:4 doors (2) 19:19 31:2 down (1) 22:15 drama (1) 40:19 dream (2) 11:15,16 Drive (1) 22:16 driven (2) 22:15 27:20 dropping (1) 16:5 dual (3) 9:20 10:8 32:8 Due (1) 10:23 during (2) 4:13 37:16 duties (1) 32:22	4:10,11 5:19,20 9:24 10:8 11:1 13:1 16:10 19:13 23:11 25:23 34:13 36:2 38:19 39:15 40:24 43:9,10, 12 educational (2) 8:17 35:9 educationally (2) 8:19 26:6 Education's (1) 3:17 educator (1) 33:18 educators (1) 10:10 eight (2) 36:24 37:6 eighth (9) 7:16 12:20 13:1 25:13 26:17 27:8 35:17 36:1,14 either (1) 27:17 electronic (1) 4:12 eleventh (1) 24:9 else (8) 4:20 14:17 16:15 18:10 19:24 25:3 38:22 42:13 emotional (1) 25:18 end (2) 10:23 18:3 ended (1) 6:20 endless (1) 19:20
		E	
		each (2) 4:2 34:1 Early (1) 34:12 ease (1) 42:9 easier (3) 8:1 19:14 36:17 ECDC (2) 27:21,23 educated (1) 43:8 education (26) 2:5,7,8,17 3:6,7	

engage (3) 12:2,11,12	30:1 33:14 41:23	26:19	few (4) 12:4 17:4 30:8 36:3
engagement (2) 11:22 12:11	ever (1) 42:5	faces (1) 11:23	fifth (1) 7:14
English (17) 18:19 19:10 22:2 24:21 28:23 30:9,12, 13,17 32:9,11,15 33:5, 9 34:22 35:19 39:13	every (8) 9:24 11:23 13:15, 16 18:2 20:21 21:18 33:22	fact (1) 23:2	filed (1) 2:24
enjoys (1) 32:2	everybody (2) 5:13 39:8	faculty (1) 34:6	filling (1) 39:24
enough (1) 7:10	everyone (5) 2:2,14 22:10 41:24 43:17	familiar (2) 31:12,14	final (1) 5:16
enrichment (4) 33:16,23 34:23 35:15	everything (2) 6:17 38:16	families (5) 10:1 11:19 12:2,10 40:15	find (3) 25:20 27:5 36:5
enroll (1) 34:12	excellent (1) 43:13	family (16) 11:22 12:12 13:16 15:4,5,7 16:10,12 17:16 25:23 28:1,3,22 30:9 31:1,12	fingers (1) 39:2
enrolled (1) 31:10	excited (1) 35:5	family-oriented (1) 10:9	First (14) 4:16 6:12 12:16 14:6 17:8 18:24 22:12, 13 23:1,24 25:6 27:22 29:16 42:6
ensure (3) 10:16 11:18 34:1	executive (1) 37:24	fantastic (1) 28:21	fit (3) 26:20 34:5,6
entered (3) 24:19 30:18,19	expanding (2) 9:11 10:5	FASSANO (2) 22:10,11	fits (1) 25:20
entrepreneurial (1) 9:9	expansion (1) 8:15	father (1) 30:8	five (4) 12:8 15:10 16:2 28:15
environment (4) 9:21 10:9 14:5 28:2	expectation (1) 21:18	father's (1) 30:9	fluent (1) 22:4
Erika (1) 39:8	experience (2) 21:21 28:17	feeder (1) 26:12	fluid (1) 36:17
especially (2) 8:17 23:15	explain (1) 38:3	feel (14) 15:1 16:9 23:9,17, 20 26:4,9 27:24 31:14, 15 32:3,4 33:7 42:9	follow (2) 14:23 36:13
Estoy (1) 38:4	expressed (2) 6:9 31:22	feeling (1) 26:2	following (1) 4:16
even (13) 7:10 17:6,7,11,13 21:23 22:5 25:7 31:17, 17 32:20 33:5 35:22	extremely (2) 22:2 34:20	feels (3) 31:11,16,16	FORBES (2) 27:16,17
evening (7) 2:1,14 5:14 11:9	F	felt (4) 6:21 25:12 27:7 42:14	force (1) 26:8
	fabulous (1) 37:10		forced (1) 26:11
	faced (1)		

formal (1) 40:19	future (1) 23:5	38:5,17,18,19 39:6,16 40:1,3,4 41:6,9	growing (2) 26:5 32:13
forty-something (1) 40:14	G	Good (11) 2:1,14 6:19 11:9 21:12 24:3 26:20 28:19 30:1 33:14 41:23	grown (3) 9:1 16:4,24
forward (2) 2:20 41:16	gains (1) 34:13		growth (5) 7:21 8:3,15,21 9:14
foster (1) 10:17	games (1) 31:24	gosh (1) 12:17	guess (1) 19:14
found (1) 17:17	gathered (1) 36:21	grade (27) 7:15,17 12:21 13:1 14:2,7 15:24 16:1,21 20:24 22:12 23:1 24:9, 11 25:13 26:17 27:8, 22 29:14 30:3 33:16 35:17,18 36:1,14 37:13 42:4	GUTTIEREZ (2) 39:7,8
founded (1) 11:15	gave (1) 32:23		guys (1) 23:3
founding (1) 11:11	Geisa (1) 16:16		H
four (6) 20:24 24:16 27:24 28:14,16 37:15	G-e-i-s-a (1) 16:17		hallways (1) 12:13
fourth (4) 8:13 16:20 33:16 37:2	general (1) 8:4	grader (5) 8:13 18:24 26:17 29:17 37:2	hand (1) 4:22
four-year-old (1) 34:17	gets (1) 21:16	graduate (1) 20:9	hands (1) 25:2
fresh (1) 23:12	getting (2) 19:13 39:15	graduated (2) 15:11 42:14	happen (3) 25:17 39:3,4
Friday (1) 17:4	girl (1) 22:20	graduating (1) 25:15	happy (14) 19:15,21 20:17 21:20 30:21,23 31:8, 15 32:2,3 37:16,21 42:7,16
Fridays (1) 32:2	give (5) 18:7 33:11 40:22 41:15,17	grandchildren (2) 43:6,7	hard (2) 18:20 25:19
friends (3) 29:13 32:10,14	given (2) 13:12 26:10	grandmother (1) 14:22	hear (4) 4:16 5:23 38:18,19
friendship (1) 19:20	gives (1) 31:3	great (7) 7:2,9 14:12 17:17 18:6 28:18 43:10	heard (1) 30:6
front (1) 16:19	glad (1) 5:17	grew (3) 28:13 29:1,9	hearing (10) 2:2,9,20 3:5,11,22 4:1,9 43:21,22
full (1) 26:13	goes (1) 19:21	group (1) 32:24	heart (2) 17:10 27:13
further (1) 41:12	going (23) 5:1,19 8:3 13:2,4 18:5 23:23 25:17 26:17 27:17 28:5 30:4	grow (6) 7:13,22 13:14 17:15 26:23 27:9	held (1)
Furthermore (1) 3:20			

3:5	42:24	20:7,12	22:22
Hello (4)	hold (1)	identify (2)	institutions (2)
6:14 8:10 24:3 39:7	9:2	4:3 6:10	39:19,23
help (5)	home (7)	immersion (1)	interested (1)
6:23 20:7 39:20	19:2 25:20 27:14	40:24	31:7
40:4 41:2	28:7 31:17 34:15 43:9	importance (3)	interpreter (3)
helped (3)	honest (1)	7:5,9 27:11	29:24 32:17 41:22
14:10,10 39:11	22:13	important (4)	interruption (1)
helping (2)	honestly (1)	5:22 17:14,24 24:6	10:16
25:15 28:3	21:10	impress (1)	interview (1)
helps (1)	honored (3)	19:5	22:18
37:17	34:8 35:3,4	impressed (1)	introduce (1)
herself (1)	hope (1)	22:7	2:11
4:3	8:5	improve (1)	invested (1)
Hi (5)	Hopefully (1)	27:10	23:4
16:16 20:1 22:10	7:21	inclined (1)	investigation (1)
27:16 35:13	hoping (2)	41:17	3:4
hid (1)	26:21 29:6	includes (1)	invite (1)
17:13	hospitals (1)	15:5	40:21
high (49)	39:19	including (1)	invited (1)
5:15 7:22 8:6 9:5	hostage (1)	8:20	36:9
10:1,5 11:2 12:24	9:3	inclusive (1)	issues (1)
13:4,12 14:12,13	house (1)	15:7	40:8
15:11,13,15,16 18:5	27:5	inclusivity (2)	Italian (4)
19:22 20:7,9,14,19	However (3)	11:17 12:2	20:23 21:2,12,13
21:10 23:21 24:6,7,12,	9:2 10:24 15:2	income (1)	
13,23 25:16,21 26:21	huge (3)	9:16	J
27:2 29:19,21 32:12	36:10 39:5,21	incredible (1)	
33:1,10 35:7 36:12,15,	hugs (1)	34:15	January (3)
22 37:6,18 38:10	26:10	indicate (1)	3:13,19,23
39:10 42:22 43:1,13	Humanities (1)	5:4	jealous (1)
higher (3)	35:19	individuals (3)	21:22
9:14 36:4,7	humans (1)	10:12 13:6,8	Jessie (1)
highly (1)	26:7	information (2)	27:16
40:4	hundreds (1)	36:21 42:23	job (3)
himself (1)	10:6	informational (1)	6:19,19,20
2:11	I	8:20	jobs (1)
his- (1)		innovative (2)	39:24
4:3	ideas (2)	20:8,16	job-wise (1)
history (1)		inside (1)	19:19

<p>joint (1) 3:5 Jose (1) 32:18 Journal (1) 3:12</p>	<p>13:10 knows (4) 23:14 34:17 37:3 42:18</p>	<p>learned (5) 19:1 20:21,23 30:11 37:4 learners (1) 34:21 learning (6) 10:18 11:24 18:20 19:7,9 28:6 learnings (1) 14:15 leave (4) 7:12,19 38:21 42:15 left (3) 2:11 4:22 13:17 Leroy (1) 2:4 letter (2) 14:24 17:21 letters (1) 40:14 level (2) 10:6 33:8 levels (2) 9:14 35:19 life (1) 22:15 lifelong (1) 10:17 likes (1) 31:23 limit (2) 5:7 6:2 limited (2) 10:23 27:2 limiting (1) 22:3 literally (1) 21:2 little (10) 16:23 18:14 21:5</p>	<p>22:5,7 25:7 28:12 30:13,15,22 live (1) 27:3 lived (1) 22:14 long (1) 18:17 longer (1) 35:23 look (3) 2:19 18:12 40:15 looking (3) 21:3,24 34:4 loop (1) 35:16 LOPEZ (2) 32:18,19 Lopez-Waite (3) 4:7 5:12 41:16 lost (2) 21:13 24:17 lot (15) 7:3 12:15 15:3,15 16:24 23:3,15,19,19 29:4 31:2 32:3 33:3 37:17 40:8 love (5) 6:17 10:17 14:3 26:3 40:11 loved (1) 23:17 loves (1) 24:15 low (1) 9:16</p>
<p>K</p>	<p>L</p>		
<p>keep (6) 8:2 13:3 14:13 19:2 32:13 41:3 keeps (1) 8:18 Kellie (2) 6:12,14 Kendall (1) 37:23 key (1) 12:11 kids (9) 6:22 20:9,18 21:5 39:9,10,15,23 41:3 kids' (1) 40:2 Kim (2) 8:9,11 kind (4) 14:7 25:12,20 26:7 kinder (1) 24:2 kindergarten (4) 19:4 29:13 30:5 36:14 knew (1) 22:14 knowing (4) 7:5 10:11 28:17 35:22 knowledge (1)</p>	<p>LA (1) 25:4 LaBanda (1) 25:5 language (17) 7:6,9,18 8:1 9:20 10:8,21 11:17 17:8,13 19:18 20:22 21:15 22:2 24:18 32:8 40:17 languages (8) 7:5,24 14:14 21:19 28:7 31:8 33:13 40:6 large (1) 12:9 Las (3) 2:18,23 11:11 last (6) 5:4 16:19 17:4 36:3 40:13 41:9 late (1) 18:14 Latino (1) 40:10 Laura (1) 18:15 law (1) 3:2 lead (1) 2:5 learn (9) 8:1 14:4 15:21 17:15 21:16 29:5 31:8 32:9,11</p>		<p>M made (3)</p>

4:1 16:12 38:13	maybe (1)	41:2	N
Maggie (1)	24:16	modification (4)	
22:11	mean (3)	3:1 4:14,18 43:20	
major (1)	32:12 37:14,17	mom (2)	
3:1	meant (2)	24:5 39:9	
make (8)	11:17 15:3	moment (2)	
4:23 9:11 15:17	measures (1)	4:8 5:2	
20:8 36:16 39:2,4,11	33:24	months (1)	
makes (1)	meat (1)	27:24	
37:15	13:3	more (17)	
making (2)	MEDINA (2)	7:6,22 8:15 9:1,17	
34:14 43:19	18:13,15	13:12 15:1,5 19:18,21	
manager (1)	meet (1)	22:4,5 31:4 35:22	
11:22	34:21	36:17 37:3,20	
manner (1)	Meeting (2)	most (1)	
4:16	3:18 40:13	32:5	
Many (9)	member (5)	mother (9)	
11:14 15:8 22:16	8:12 11:11,13	16:22 24:18,22	
25:22 26:10,10 35:10	13:16 32:19	26:16 30:10 32:5 42:9,	
36:18 39:18	members (4)	21 43:2	
Margie (2)	2:16 4:11 5:19 31:1	move (1)	
11:8,10	memory (1)	27:4	
MARIA (2)	12:7	moved (2)	
41:23,24	met (1)	25:12 42:3	
Masset (8)	34:2	moving (1)	
4:22 16:14 18:9	Mexico (1)	23:10	
19:24 37:23,23 41:11,	18:18	much (21)	
18	middle (1)	2:22 5:24 6:18 7:4,	
M-a-s-s-e-t-t (1)	35:14	6 10:2 13:11 15:6	
37:24	might (1)	16:4 17:10,18 19:1,5,	
MASTROIANNI (2)	29:15	14 20:6 26:21 33:22	
20:1,2	MILLA (2)	34:9 36:16 39:13 41:7	
math (2)	30:1,2	multiple (1)	
9:15 16:21	minds (1)	7:24	
matter (2)	11:4	muy (1)	
3:2 38:23	minority (2)	38:4	
matters (4)	9:2,16	myself (1)	
32:4,5 38:24,24	missions (1)	19:15	
may (1)	22:1		
38:20	model (1)		

nobody (1) 23:13	12:8 13:16 15:10 17:3, 3 18:23,23 21:1,2	27:22 37:5	participation (1) 43:17
normally (1) 38:2	23:8,11 24:9 27:21,23 30:10 40:9,10 42:2,4,	out (5) 5:13 17:17 20:24 25:21 26:8	parts (1) 11:3
note (1) 4:5	14	outside (1) 29:3	pass (1) 6:3
notice (2) 3:10,13	ones (1) 22:7	outspeaking (1) 7:15	PATRICK (2) 14:20,21
notices (1) 30:19	one-size-fits-all (1) 10:4	over (6) 16:23 23:8,14 29:19 36:3 38:9	pause (1) 5:1
notified (1) 3:21	only (12) 5:22 6:22 8:3,12 9:13 10:16 18:3,18	overall (2) 8:15 9:8	peers (1) 20:5
numbers (1) 34:7	open (1) 2:3	overshadowed (1) 21:17	people (4) 11:5 27:18 39:18 41:4
nurtured (1) 43:7	opened (1) 25:6	overshadows (1) 21:14	percentage (1) 12:9
O	opens (2) 19:18 31:2	P	perfect (1) 24:20
occurring (1) 9:7	opportunities (1) 35:10	PADILLA (4) 16:16,17,17 17:5	perfectly (1) 17:7
off (2) 6:3 25:7	opportunity (17) 7:2 10:14 11:18	P-a-d-i-l-l-a (1) 16:18	perform (1) 32:22
offer (3) 7:18 10:2 35:10	12:4,14 13:12 18:6 26:14,22 27:12 29:16	paint (1) 11:4	performing (1) 32:21
offers (1) 16:11	31:3 32:23 33:10,11 35:6,16	parent (8) 6:15 8:13 14:21 16:8 25:8,9 33:17 35:5	period (2) 20:21 35:23
Office (2) 2:6 41:14	opposition (1) 9:1	parents (3) 9:3 23:4 36:18	periods (1) 21:3
official (3) 3:15,17,19	option (1) 27:5	parent's (1) 36:24	permit (1) 5:2
old (3) 22:19 24:17 27:24	options (1) 29:10	part (8) 7:8 9:23 12:3 17:14 31:12 34:8 35:4 42:8	person (1) 2:10
oldest (2) 7:14 42:6	orgullosa (1) 38:4	participant (1) 32:24	personally (5) 3:21 14:3,11 26:5, 18
once (4) 7:12 8:1 20:21 36:21	other (13) 6:5 7:4 14:14,15 20:5 21:14 22:1 31:4, 6,6 36:6 42:15 43:1	participating (1) 32:1	perspective (1) 36:24
one (24) 2:16 5:18 7:6 8:1	others (2)		Peru (1) 24:14

phase (1) 5:16	25:16 39:23 prepared (1)	26:7 30:22 project (1)	quo (1) 9:10
philosophy (1) 13:14	20:10 preschool (1)	40:22 proud (4)	R
phonetic (1) 42:1	34:11 present (2)	8:12 24:22,22 38:4 proven (2)	
pick (2) 7:23 8:2	3:24 16:22 pretty (5)	7:24 10:21 provide (2)	raise (1) 28:3
picks (1) 31:19	17:20 18:4 20:6 prince (1)	9:13 25:22 provided (2)	raising (1) 4:22
picture (1) 11:4	39:10,13 probability (1)	4:10 9:9 provides (2)	reach (1) 11:20
place (4) 3:11,15,22 23:16	16:23 probably (1)	10:6,9 providing (1)	read (2) 30:20 39:12
placements (1) 36:5	9:6 problem (1)	39:22 public (11)	reading (2) 9:15 34:19
planned (1) 25:11	12:7 proceed (1)	2:2,9 3:5,8,11,18, 22 7:17 10:4 20:19 41:1	ready (1) 39:12
please (6) 4:6,23 5:6 6:10 7:11 43:15	36:10 process (5)	published (1) 3:12	real (1) 19:7
pleasure (2) 2:17 12:14	4:14 5:16 12:3 professional (2)	pulled (1) 34:10	realize (2) 7:3 39:17
pm (1) 43:23	17:23 43:20 professionals (1)	purely (1) 5:7	really (14) 5:22 8:5 12:24 15:20 16:6,8,11 21:15, 19 22:6 26:7 28:4 31:19 37:15
point (2) 5:9 37:3	32:20,21 proficient (1)	push (3) 17:10 26:8 40:23	receive (1) 3:7
popular (1) 9:1	40:5 proficiently (1)	put (2) 17:10 38:22	received (2) 4:13 42:23
population (2) 12:5 39:21	40:4 program (9)	puts (1) 33:22	receiving (2) 43:9,10
poses (1) 36:10	39:12 programs (1)	Q	Recently (1) 9:12
possibilities (3) 9:19,19 22:3	29:8 32:8,13,15 33:23,24 34:20 37:8 40:17 programming (1)		questions (1) 36:19
posted (1) 3:14	35:9 progress (2)	quit (1) 6:18	recommends (1) 43:3
prefer (1) 23:16	34:19 programs (1)	quitting (1) 6:20	record (6) 2:12 3:9 4:1,9 38:8,
prepare (2)			

17	Rivera (4)	9:6	seeing (1)
referred (1)	11:8,9,10 15:4	School (112)	18:24
3:2	running (1)	2:6,21 3:3,14 4:17	select (1)
reflect (1)	41:10	5:11,15 6:5,17,18,21	17:23
3:10	RUSHDAN (2)	7:17,22 8:6,14,18,20,	send (2)
regards (1)	2:13,15	22 9:5 10:2,4,6 11:2,	26:19 36:23
33:8	Ruthar (1)	12 12:6,16,23,24 13:4,	senior (1)
related (1)	22:16	13 14:3,6,12,13 15:6,	20:2
8:19	S	11,14,15,17 16:3 18:5,	Senora (1)
remain (1)		17,21 19:22 20:8,9,14,	15:4
33:12	Sabrina (1)	17,20,24 21:8,11,21	sensitive (1)
remember (2)		22:23 23:13,22,24	40:19
5:6 6:10	20:2	24:6,7,10,13,13,23	sentence (1)
repetitive (1)	sad (3)	25:14 26:1,12,21 27:2,	21:1
5:8	7:20 42:14,18	6,9 28:6,20 29:2,13,	seriously (1)
report (1)	safe (1)	19,21 31:20 32:3,13	21:9
3:4	28:5	33:1,10,12,21 34:9,9	served (1)
reporter (2)	said (6)	35:1,7,14 36:12,14,15	8:16
3:24 4:5	15:23 22:21 28:21	37:6,18,22 38:10,10	serves (1)
representatives (3)	35:3 38:16 41:11	39:11 40:1,7,9,11,12,	12:7
4:17 5:10 6:5	same (5)	12,17,20 41:2,14 42:8,	setting (1)
required (1)	19:13 32:10,15	22 43:4,11,13	36:12
3:2	42:18 43:23	schools (24)	settings (1)
reserve (1)	Sara (1)	8:24 9:4,8,13,22	40:3
5:6	35:14	12:4,9 25:16,21 26:13	seventh (7)
resources (2)	satisfied (1)	28:15 33:20,20 36:7,9,	7:16 14:2 15:24
8:20 12:15	31:15	22 38:1 39:17,18,22	20:23 26:16 35:17
respond (2)	sauce (1)	40:9 41:1,1 43:1	42:4
30:16,17	13:2	second (7)	shall (1)
responsibility (1)	Sava (1)	5:2 10:21 14:7 16:1	10:18
17:22	41:24	24:11,15 30:3	share (2)
results (1)	saying (1)	Secondly (1)	17:2 18:16
9:11	28:8	40:7	sheets (2)
right (5)	scaffolded (1)	secret (1)	4:21 13:21
5:7 7:11 29:17 30:5	34:21	8:23	short (1)
39:14	scared (1)	Secretary (4)	42:19
rigorous (3)	14:8	2:8 4:10 38:18	shortness (1)
34:20 35:9 37:9	scares (1)	43:18	40:5
rigorously (1)	29:15	secure (1)	shots (1)
34:11	scenario (1)	32:4	32:1

shout-out (1) 23:1	31:16,19 38:14 42:6, 15	staff (1) 33:22	still (4) 25:8 33:7 42:17,17
show (1) 25:2	sorry (2) 22:20 25:17	stand (2) 4:6 38:6	stop (4) 7:19 12:20 13:1,13
side (1) 30:10	Southern (1) 28:14	standard (1) 20:20	straight (2) 21:11 37:19
sign (2) 4:24 5:3	Spanish (30) 7:15,23 14:14 17:6, 11 19:2,6,8 21:6	standards (2) 16:6 17:12	strategies (1) 10:15
sign- (1) 13:20	24:17,20,21 28:9,10, 23 29:4,5 30:11,15,21	standing (1) 23:8	stretch (1) 35:22
significantly (1) 9:14	32:9,11,15 34:23 37:1, 3,5 39:13,20 40:3	Stanford (1) 9:12	strongly (1) 11:1
sign-up (1) 4:21	speak (25) 4:4,20,23 5:3,5 6:6, 9 13:21 14:19 18:11	stars (1) 11:20	struggle (1) 18:20
single (1) 11:23	21:5 24:21 25:3,11 27:10,17,20 28:10	start (7) 23:12,14 24:17,19 29:19 30:4 41:8	stuck (1) 29:6
sit (1) 4:7	30:12,14 32:14 33:5,9 38:2,13	started (14) 7:1 13:15 15:24 16:3,3 19:3 25:7,8,9 27:23 30:7 38:5 42:5,7	STUDENT (7) 13:24 32:6,7 37:12, 13 42:16,17
situation (2) 28:18,19	speaker (4) 4:2 29:23 32:16 41:21	starts (1) 13:2	students (27) 8:16 9:3,15,16 10:11 12:10,12 15:9 16:6 17:19 23:1,19,20 25:15,19,24 26:1,11 27:3,11 35:6,16 36:2, 4,8 37:11 42:22
six (3) 15:9 24:16,16	Speakers (1) 13:23	State (13) 2:16 3:7,18 4:11 5:18,20 13:7 35:2 38:17 39:16,21 40:23 41:5	students' (1) 34:2
sixth (2) 24:11 35:17	speaking (5) 14:14 19:18 33:17 37:5 40:6	States (2) 9:23 28:16	student's (1) 33:22
skills (2) 10:15 40:2	speaks (4) 16:7 30:8,11,22	State's (1) 3:19	studies (1) 32:21
snowflakes (1) 34:16	special (1) 36:1	status (1) 9:10	study (4) 9:12 21:24 24:8 37:7
soccer (2) 32:1,1	speed (1) 8:19	stay (3) 31:18,21,22	studying (1) 21:16
solid (1) 37:9	spirit (1) 13:10	staying (1) 24:12	styles (1) 11:24
someone (2) 21:4 27:8	spoke (9) 4:6 15:1,4,15 22:21 29:23 30:13 32:16 41:21	stems (1) 33:2	submit (2)
something (4) 17:3 28:9,22,24			
somewhere (1) 26:9			
son (8) 7:14 26:20 30:11			

14:24 41:12 success (3) 10:17 33:23 37:17 succinct (1) 36:17 suffer (1) 42:11 suffered (1) 42:10 summer (1) 31:11 super (1) 20:8 support (10) 5:23,24 17:18 18:1 25:23 35:8 38:9 40:12, 22 41:3 supporting (1) 41:3 Sure (5) 2:13 4:23 17:20 18:4 39:11 SWIFT (2) 35:13,14 system (2) 9:24 29:12	16:21 17:9,24 22:12 27:19 33:16,17 34:1 35:15 42:13 teachers (8) 14:4 17:18 31:13, 13 34:22,23,24 40:5 teaching (4) 17:6 19:6,8 34:3 team (2) 8:12 35:4 teaming (1) 12:18 tears (1) 26:10 telling (1) 34:15 test (1) 21:16 thankful (3) 18:16,21 19:10 their (18) 3:1 7:8 10:8,10,11 20:7,10 25:16 26:7 27:13 31:11 32:24 34:2 35:22 36:16,21, 23 43:12 There (34) 4:21 6:4 7:13 10:24 12:1,3 13:19 15:13,22 16:2,14,22,23 18:9,10 19:3 22:13 23:8,9,14 24:1 25:9,10,21,22 26:24 29:2,11,11 33:2, 7 37:18 38:9 40:8 they (55) 5:22,23 7:12,13,17, 19,20,23 10:15 12:16 13:9,9,10 14:9,10 15:22 17:5,11,12,18, 22 18:1 19:17 20:9	21:6,17 23:5,20,22,23 24:1,21 25:19,21 26:3, 4,4,4,9,13,14 27:11 28:11,11 29:7,15 31:23 33:7 36:20,21 39:12 42:4,10,11 43:10 thing (1) 12:16 things (4) 8:19 19:6,20 23:7 think (12) 12:17 13:4 14:11 23:18,19 24:5 25:24 26:6,24 29:20 37:8 40:1 third (1) 37:13 though (4) 17:6 28:13 32:20 33:6 thought (1) 23:7 thousands (1) 10:6 three (1) 35:18 throughout (2) 14:8 32:12 times (1) 22:16 today (1) 43:17 today's (2) 3:11,22 together (2) 4:12 11:6 told (4) 15:12 17:4,5 21:5 tonight (3)	2:18,21 23:2 took (1) 37:6 top (1) 12:8 tour (1) 20:13 transfer (1) 40:2 transition (2) 35:24 36:16 translucent (2) 34:16,17 travel (2) 7:2 31:4 traveling (1) 7:3 travels (1) 19:20 TRIVERS (13) 2:1,4,23 6:4 8:8 11:8 13:19 14:17 19:23 25:1 38:20 41:8 43:16 tried (1) 29:5 trips (1) 22:1 true (2) 8:18 9:17 truly (1) 35:20 try (2) 19:2 28:10 trying (3) 27:4 36:11,22 twelfth (2) 20:23 29:14 two (9) 23:6,9 24:8,20
T			
taking (1) 34:1 talk (2) 16:20 24:19 talking (2) 28:11 38:7 taught (1) 10:15 teach (1) 17:11 teacher (10)			

<p>27:21 28:6 39:9,10 42:2 type (1) 42:12</p>	V	<p>18:10 31:17 warehouse (2)</p>	<p>word (1) 34:17</p>
U	<p>value (1) 7:4 versa (1) 12:13 vice (1) 12:12 vision (4) 11:16,16 12:22,23 visiting (1) 41:14 voice (1) 38:23 volumes (1) 16:7 vo-tech (1) 36:9</p>	<p>22:17,19 waste (1) 21:4 watching (1) 27:9 way (12) 7:13 14:4,9,10 16:10 18:2 19:3,22 21:7 23:11,20 29:14 ways (1) 23:9 website (3) 3:17,19 41:15 welcome (1) 26:9 weren't (1) 38:6 whole (8) 8:22 15:1,5,7 22:15 30:9 34:3,4 who's (1) 42:15 Whyte (3) 8:9,10,11 wide (1) 17:23 wiped (1) 26:10 wish (3) 4:18 5:5 19:12 within (4) 28:1,15 29:2 36:6 without (2) 10:16 16:5 Wolves (1) 34:19 wonderful (1) 38:11</p>	<p>words (1) 38:23 work (9) 7:1 11:5,21 17:10 21:24 25:10,14,19 28:1 worked (4) 33:19,20,21 35:1 working (1) 25:9 world (3) 10:22 11:5 13:9 worries (1) 29:16 worry (1) 29:17 worth (1) 9:11 write (1) 30:20 writing (2) 38:23 41:13 written (1) 4:12 wrong (2) 7:12 38:4</p>
<p>under (2) 42:5 43:8 underperforming (1) 9:4 understand (3) 17:7 30:15 33:9 unfair (1) 9:2 unfortunately (1) 36:8 uninterrupted (1) 10:20 United (1) 9:23 University (1) 20:3 until (1) 19:4 up (18) 4:6,24 5:3,20 6:20 7:23 8:2,18 13:20,21 14:23 20:6 25:2 28:13 29:1,9 31:19 38:6 urging (1) 10:24 use (3) 29:24 32:17 41:22 used (2) 6:15 25:24 utilize (1) 10:14</p>	W		Y
			<p>year (5) 9:24 22:13 26:18 34:10 35:20 years (13) 11:14 14:8 16:2 20:24 24:16,16 30:8 33:19 36:3 37:1,6,15, 16 Yelina (1)</p>

30:2 Yolanda (1) 41:24	7th (1) 3:19		
York (2) 20:4,4	8		
young (1) 11:4	8 (2) 12:23 13:13		
yourself (1) 6:11	80 (1) 38:9		
1			
1,000 (1) 10:1			
11 (1) 18:18			
15 (1) 33:19			
17 (1) 3:23			
2			
2019 (3) 3:13,20,23			
28th (1) 3:13			
5			
5 (1) 12:23			
6			
6:05 (1) 43:23			
7			