

1 THE BALTIMORE CITY BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS

2 BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

3
4
5 PUBLIC COMAR HEARING

6
7 200 NORTH AVENUE

8
9 BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21202

10
11 NOVEMBER 29, 2016

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13 6:00 P.M.

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20 REPORTED BY:

21 W. BODENSTEIN

1 BOARD MEMBERS:

2 MARNELL COOPER, BOARD CHAIR

3 SONJA SANTELISES, CEO

4 MARTHA JAMES-HASSAN

5 CHERYL CASCIANI

6 TINA HIKE-HUBBARD

7 PETER KANNAM

8 LINDA CHINNIA

9 MURIEL BERKLEY

10 ANDREW FRANK

11 MICHELLE BONDIMA

12 STUDENT COMMISSIONER

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: All right. Thank
3 you all for your patience on that. So, this is
4 the second of two scheduled public hearings for
5 the community to provide public comment regarding
6 the portfolio recommendations that we have seen.

7 This hearing is being held in compliance
8 with COMAR to receive public comment on the
9 annual portfolio recommendations.

10 We have 32 people signed up today with a
11 maximum time of five minutes each, that's two and
12 a half hours. I'm sure people 25 and 30 would
13 like those ahead of them to be respectful so they
14 can get to speak before we get too late in the

1 hour. So, I ask that everyone please hold to
2 your five-minute time limit. We'll do our best
3 to hear from every individual here tonight.

4 In addition, members of the public can
5 provide written comment via email at
6 portfoliorecommendations@bcps.k-12.md.us, or by
7 US mail. Additional details can be found on the
8 district website, baltimorecityschools.org. The
9 Board will vote on all portfolio recommendations
10 at its regularly scheduled Board meeting on
11 Tuesday, December 13, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. At this
12 time, I'll turn it over to Dr. Santelises.

13 DR. SANTELISES: My apologies to
14 everyone. I would like to take a minute to
15 recognize the passing of several city schools
16 employees. Each of these individuals was
17 committed to supporting our students through
18 their work. They will be remembered fondly by
19 the greater city schools community. Tonight, we
20 send our deepest condolences to their friends and
21 families.

1 It is with our deepest regrets that we
2 inform you of the passing of Sharon
3 Maxine-Sappington. She was a para-educator at
4 Thomas Jefferson Elementary with 14 years of
5 service after 11 years of voluntary service to
6 city schools in the capacity of an active parent
7 and grandparent. Sharon was educated in the
8 Baltimore City Public School system where she was
9 honored in the State of Maryland for never
10 missing one day of school from Kindergarten to
11 graduation from Edmondson-Westside High School.

12 Ms. Sappington had a great devotion to
13 Thomas Jefferson and the surrounding community
14 and became an essential presence on the school
15 grounds. She passed away on November 13, 2016
16 and will be missed for her steadfast devotion and
17 her love for the children of Baltimore City.

18 It is always with great sadness that we
19 inform you of the passing of Concetta Josephine
20 Fanton, affectionately known to many of her
21 colleagues as Connie. Ms. Fanton passed away

1 suddenly on Saturday, November 26, 2016 in the
2 company of her family.

3 Connie Fanton was the Director of
4 Non-Public Placement Services and Citywide
5 programs for the last four years with a total of
6 41 years of service. Within her current role,
7 she was responsible for overseeing the academic
8 success of students with severe disabilities
9 placed into separate public day schools, as well
10 as specified citywide programs built around
11 serving this population.

12 Ms. Fanton was passionately determined to
13 provide fair and appropriate opportunities for
14 these students. Connie has been a valued member
15 of our school district, serving in her most
16 recent role since August of 2012 to present, and
17 previously as Coordinator of Special Education
18 and Non-Public Placement Services.

19 Connie was a devoted wife and mother of
20 three and will be missed by many staff and
21 families. She has worked fervently to support,

1 within her lifelong commitment to city schools.

2 Thank you.

3 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. At this
4 time, I'd like to bring up Councilman Brandon
5 Scott, please.

6 COUNCILMAN SCOTT: Good evening, Mr.
7 Chair, Madame CEO. I'll be very brief. I am
8 here tonight, of course, on behalf of the
9 residents of Northeast Baltimore, but in
10 particular, around three school buildings, Furley
11 Elementary, the Northeast Middle building, and
12 the building affectionately known as the Thurgood
13 Marshall building.

14 I've come to say thank you to the Board
15 and your staff, particularly Ms. Alvarez and Mr.
16 Mural and Ms. Perkins-Cohen, who worked with us.
17 When we started with these discussions, we were
18 about this far apart. But we were able to come
19 up with something that is not perfect, none of us
20 want for us to have to move a school for this
21 period of time but we have to do what we have to

1 do. I'm very grateful that we were able to come
2 to some compromise that we think is best for all
3 of us, it's best for the students so that we
4 don't have vacant buildings in a neighborhood
5 that is so heavily populated. I look forward to
6 working with the staff to continue the discussion
7 throughout the summer to work out the other kinks
8 around transportation and all the other issues
9 that we'll be faced with in moving an elementary
10 school and having young people that will have to
11 cross a major thoroughfare.

12 So, thank you. We know that we're not
13 always going to agree. But we can always figure
14 out some way to compromise and I just want to say
15 thank you for that on behalf of myself, my
16 neighborhoods and my delegation who could not be
17 here tonight. Thank you.

18 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you,
19 Councilman Scott. Dr. Santelises?

20 DR. SANTELISES: Thank you very much.
21 I'd like to give a quick reminder to all of our

1 families that our middle and high school choice
2 guide are now available online and this year's
3 choice fair will be held on Saturday, December
4 10th from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Baltimore
5 Convention Center. You can get full information
6 on our website. Your choice matters. So, make
7 sure you choose the school that is right for your
8 student.

9 Without further ado, that is a lovely
10 transition to why we are here this evening. I
11 would like to invite Angela Alvarez to the table.
12 Angela is our Executive Director for the Office
13 of New Initiatives. Again, I would just remind
14 the public that the thrust of this year's
15 portfolio recommendations are connected to a
16 commitment to provide high quality choices for
17 all families and all young people within
18 Baltimore City Public Schools. Without further
19 ado, I'll turn it over to Ms. Alvarez.

20 MS. ALVAREZ: Hello, everyone. Just so
21 we're all on the same page, I'm just going to go

1 through the recommendations very quickly. The
2 more detailed presentation is on BoardDocs on the
3 public website. So, if you want to see the laid
4 out rationales for each school, as well as any
5 backup data, that is available on the website.

6 So, we have a few grade reconfiguration
7 recommendations. For schools in Cherry Hill,
8 we're recommending that Arundel Elementary change
9 from a PreK-8 to an early learning through 2nd
10 grade school, and that Cherry Hill Elementary
11 changes from a PreK-8 to a grades three through 8
12 school.

13 Lyndhurst Elementary, we're recommending
14 that the Board approve the school's request to
15 add 5th grade in `17-`18, and in school year
16 `18-`19, the school will have a full middle
17 grades complement when it wants to receive
18 students from Lyndhurst.

19 We're recommending that the Board close
20 Northwestern High School in the summer of 2017
21 and that the building be surplus back to the

1 city in 2019 after swing space usage is complete.

2 For Samuel F. B. Morse Elementary School,
3 we recommend that the program close in the summer
4 of 2017 and that the building be surplusd to the
5 city in 2017. The Board accepts this proposal.

6 Additionally, we're recommending that the Samuel
7 F. B. Morse zone be included in the new Frederick
8 expanded zone.

9 Recommendations for new closures. For
10 Baltimore IT Academy, we're recommending that the
11 Board close the program in the summer of 2017 and
12 surplus the Chinguapin building in the summer of
13 2021 after swing space usage is complete.

14 For Grove Park Elementary/Middle School,
15 we're recommending that the Board close the
16 program in the summer of 2018. So, not the end
17 of this school year, but next year and that
18 Calvin Rodwell Elementary School's zone be
19 expanded to include the Grove Park
20 Elementary/Middle School zone.

21 For Renaissance Academy, this is a

1 tentative recommendation. The original
2 recommendation on November 9th was that the Board
3 close the program in the summer of 2017. I want
4 to underline that we're seriously considering
5 alternatives including a relocation of the school
6 program to another facility. We've been doing a
7 lot of meetings around this, so we're really
8 trying to figure that out. So, this
9 recommendation is subject to change when the
10 Board votes on December 13th.

11 We have a few buildings that we're
12 recommending to be surplus. The Chinquapin
13 building in the summer of 2021, Northwestern in
14 the summer of 2019, and the Samuel F. B. Morse
15 building in the summer of 2017.

16 Augusta Fells Savage is in the 21st
17 Century plan for consideration of closure. We're
18 recommending the Board delay such a vote as we
19 still need seats in the area. For Guilford
20 Elementary/Middle, we want the Board to vote to
21 amend the plan and add Guilford Elementary

1 building to Exhibit 6. Exhibit 6 is a list of
2 buildings that we are required to surplus to the
3 city. Once it no longer has educational use,
4 we're recommending that it be surplus in the
5 summer of 2019. This school is already in the
6 list as a recommended closure in the future.

7 We're recommending that we remove Joseph
8 C. Briscoe from Exhibit 6 and that we maintain it
9 in our portfolio. It is a building that we need.
10 It houses our New Hope Academy and we still need
11 that facility for our young people.

12 We're also recommending that we keep
13 Westside Skills Center in our portfolio and,
14 thus, it is removed from Exhibit 6. This
15 building houses the CTE programming for Edmondson
16 High School. Thus, we still need it in the
17 portfolio.

18 For Vanguard Collegiate Middle School, we
19 recommend the Board delay relocation of the
20 program to the Northeast building. We need about
21 two and a half years to complete some needed

1 repairs and renovation to ready the facility for
2 the Vanguard Middle School program.

3 We have one temporary relocation. This
4 does not require a Board vote. This is a CEO
5 decision. We're recommending that the CEO take
6 action to temporarily relocate Furley Elementary
7 to the Thurgood Marshall building in the summer
8 of 2017 due to some serious facility concerns and
9 challenges.

10 We have three schools that are up for
11 renewal this year. City Neighbors-Hamilton, we
12 are recommending giving a five-year renewal.
13 NACA II: Freedom and Democracy, we're
14 recommending a three-year renewal, REACH
15 Partnership School, we're recommending a
16 three-year renewal.

17 If the public has questions, you can send
18 questions to staff at
19 annualportfolioreviewquestions@bcps.k12.md.us.
20 For questions to the Board, you can send to
21 portfoliorecommendations@bcps.k12.md.us. Thank

1 you.

2 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Ms.
3 Alvarez. The first person signed up for public
4 comment is Barbara Jackson.

5 MS. JACKSON: Good evening and greetings
6 to each and every one who came out tonight. I
7 especially greet and congratulate Madame CEO, her
8 dedicated staff and all Board of Commissioners of
9 our Baltimore City Public Schools.

10 We, the Frankford Coalition of
11 Communities, realize that the Commissioners are
12 volunteers serving a mammoth task with tremendous
13 responsibility for the citizens, both children
14 and adults, of our Baltimore City. FIA members
15 are volunteers for the communities with the
16 Frankford Improvement Association, Inc. Within
17 the Frankford Improvement Association boundaries.

18 We, too, would like our time, ideas,
19 community involvement, also respected and
20 appreciated while serving the best interests of
21 our communities.

1 The word inspire is the slogan used in
2 planning our city for its growth and future. We
3 know that Baltimore City schools is deeply
4 invested in the slogan if there is any urgency to
5 move the 21st Century agenda. That agenda is both
6 the community and economic development which
7 addresses investing in neighborhoods and schools
8 to promote improvement, revitalization and
9 excellence.

10 Our Baltimore City Planning Department
11 currently focus on the quarter mile surrounding
12 each school to leverage the investment in each
13 school and enhance the connection between the
14 school and the neighborhood's plans are to
15 articulate the community's vision for guiding
16 investment as well as identify specific
17 implementation of public improvements that affect
18 housing, open spaces, transportation and improve
19 the surrounding neighborhoods so that it can
20 better support the school.

21 Frankford communities do not see this

1 happening with, we didn't see it happening, at
2 least when we heard the suggestion of having our
3 schools close. This conversation must be ongoing
4 for all to work in concert for inspired success
5 in Baltimore City Public Schools.

6 First of all, the portfolio suggested
7 actions in our immediate community but did not
8 even come to our community of Frankford
9 Improvement and that was the closing of Furley
10 Elementary School.

11 There are major questions and
12 reservations still regarding the Baltimore City
13 Public Schools portfolio. For the temporary
14 relocation of Furley Elementary School's staff
15 and students to the former Herring Run building,
16 this building of 6 or more decades, has served
17 Canton Middle School, Thurgood Marshall Middle
18 School, Samuel Banks High School, Maritime
19 Institute Academy, and it currently serves
20 Vanguard Collegiate Middle School with some
21 former Northeast Middle School students and

1 staff.

2 The building is not design for elementary
3 level students, we know. The location of the
4 former Herring Run Junior High School building is
5 located at the corner of Moravia Road and
6 Sinclair Lane which are both major gateways with
7 Moravia Road extending from Interstates 95 and
8 895, and the newly designed expressway from
9 Baltimore City to White Marsh.

10 Moravia Road also serves as a connector
11 gateway from Route 40 East. Sinclair Lane also
12 serves as a major east-west gateway from Rosedale
13 and those coming to and from the east-west part
14 of the city.

15 Both gateways are four to five-lane roads
16 which are of major concern for our community
17 where young school-aged children would have to
18 travel. Many of these children are refugees from
19 countries and camps who see wonders and amazement
20 within our accepted surroundings. Many are from
21 Asia and African countries.

1 Matter of fact, there has been more than
2 5,000 refugees within our Frankford communities.
3 There is a lot more that you can read about our
4 community in the papers that were written by the
5 members. We thank you for giving us an
6 opportunity to at least voice our concerns. And,
7 thank you for continuing to work well for our
8 schools, children and our neighborhoods.

9 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Ms.
10 Jackson. Next up is Anthony Stewart.

11 MR. STEWART: Good evening. Thank you
12 for allowing the opportunity to address this
13 body. As a resident of the Frankford community
14 for over 27 years, and as Chairman of the
15 Frankford Improvement Association's Land Use
16 Committee, and as a business owner, I am outraged
17 at what this body is attempting to do to our
18 community.

19 We all know schools are the one main
20 consideration when young parents are purchasing
21 homes. What you have proposed in the portfolio

1 document, and your failed promises of the past,
2 reinforces the mistrust and suspicions that
3 community members have of this Board and of this
4 school system.

5 We are being treated like cheap sales
6 techniques, which Baltimore City Public Schools'
7 bait and switch tactics, we can only go by your
8 track record of making promises and then reneging
9 on them. We see it in the failed maintenance and
10 health problems in our schools. We saw it in the
11 21st Century school promise, and now the
12 portfolio, which does not address the basic needs
13 for health, security and safety for our kids.

14 Therefore, these are the things that we
15 want you to answer. What is the comprehensive
16 plan for improving Furley Elementary? We want
17 dates, times of the propose move and guaranteed
18 budget approved steps that parents and the
19 community can review and approve.

20 Two, what measures are being considered
21 for the safety of our elementary school students

1 on two major highways? We want detailed
2 explanations.

3 Three, what are your intentions for
4 Northeast Middle School? Northeast Middle is the
5 newest of our schools in the Frankford community
6 and it is 50 years old. It has been vacant now
7 for over two years and vandals have destroyed it.
8 We want a comprehensive plan for your intentions
9 for Northeast Middle School.

10 Four, what is your intention for the
11 overcrowded conditions at Moravia Park
12 Elementary?

13 Therefore, we want you to reconsider your
14 portfolio suggestions concerning Furley
15 Elementary, Northeast Middle and Vanguard Middle
16 School. We want public meetings to be in our
17 neighborhood, not outside of our boundaries, with
18 ample time given to parents and community to
19 respond. Thank you very much.

20 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Mr.
21 Stewart. Next up is Dan Midviddy.

1 MR. MIDVIDDY: Good evening. My name is
2 Dan Midviddy. Just before I introduce myself in
3 greater detail, I just ask those that are here
4 tonight, as I am, for the Renaissance Academy,
5 just to briefly stand, if that's okay. Thank
6 you.

7 I'm a Board member of the Historic Marble
8 Hill Community Association. I've been a
9 developer exclusively on the west side of
10 Baltimore. We've been involved in numerous
11 full-gut renovations in Historic Marble Hill.
12 Recently, our work was recognize by Baltimore
13 Heritage.

14 As a member of the Marble Hill Community
15 Association, and I serve on its Board, later this
16 evening our President will be here to speak. He
17 participates as a mentor with the high school.
18 The Historic Marble Hill Community Association
19 has been active with Renaissance Academy since
20 its inception.

21 We are currently building a property that

1 has been vacant for many years directly across
2 from the high school. So, needless to say, we're
3 very connected to the community, to Upton as a
4 whole, Marble Hill in particular. We're
5 investing all the time in Marble Hill because we
6 see Marble Hill and Larger Upton moving in the
7 right direction. The idea of moving or even
8 closing the academy strikes the members of the
9 Historic Marble Hill Community Association as a
10 grave mistake and, indeed, an injustice.

11 There's three points that I would like to
12 make in my effort to be brief. The first is the
13 enrollment decline from 319 to 284 students
14 represents a decline of approximately 10 percent.
15 I think in light of the tragedy of last year, 10
16 percent is a very small number. Instead of
17 interpreting the 10 percent as a negative, we
18 ought to be surprised by the relative small
19 decline and understand that to be a testimony to
20 the underlying fundamentals of what is behind the
21 Renaissance Academy.

1 My second point is the Renaissance
2 Academy does not, in particular, by its very
3 nature, lend itself to being readily measured by
4 metrics that are, perhaps, cookie-cutter. To the
5 extent, however, that we must measure the
6 Renaissance Academy by such metrics, I would
7 point to the 82 percent graduation rate and that
8 is despite the fact that the principal has higher
9 criteria at its school than at other schools.
10 Kids cannot graduate without being able to read.

11 Finally, the additional metric that I
12 would point to is this 82 percent exceeds the
13 city average. My final point is that the
14 Renaissance Academy has the support of city,
15 state and federal partners and has committed
16 funding. I think that we would be bucking the
17 trend and going in the wrong direction if we were
18 to abandon the academy, either by forcing it to
19 move away from its roots where it has succeeded,
20 or even worse, by closing it. Thank you for your
21 time.

1 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Next up
2 is Andre Robinson.

3 MR. ROBINSON: Good evening, everyone.
4 My name is Andre Robinson and I'm the Executive
5 Director of Innovation Village and the Mount
6 Royal Community Development Corporation. I will
7 start by saying I do not have a child in
8 Baltimore City Public Schools. But, I do have an
9 interest in all the students of all of
10 Baltimore's public schools.

11 Primarily, the restoration that we're
12 planning to do with Innovation Village relies on
13 three main things. Talent, capital and real
14 estate. So if, in fact, you are going to launch
15 a 21st Century economy in these neighborhoods, you
16 absolutely have to be concerned with every school
17 that might be trending upwards even if they've
18 had a tragedy, a tragedy that is easily
19 understood if you look at the neighborhoods that
20 surround that academy. Of course, that trauma is
21 going to, by nature, come into the school and go

1 back out.

2 But, if you also look at other trends
3 right here in Baltimore, there's a lot of things
4 that are going right in these neighborhoods even
5 if they're in flux at the moment. Its proximity
6 to downtown will not change. Its proximity to
7 other innovation centers that are happening in
8 and around these neighborhoods is not going to
9 change. But, if that capital doesn't meet the
10 talent that you are developing in those schools,
11 then at some point those, about a million jobs in
12 technology will go to someone else and people
13 will move here from all over the world to get
14 those jobs.

15 So, I am not in a position to say whether
16 this school should move from that location. You
17 have lots of vacant properties in and around
18 there and I'm not sure you should co-locate a
19 high school with an elementary or a middle
20 school. But, I know that you have lots of
21 property in that neighborhood that could be

1 repurposed for a school that has, by all good
2 measures, is trending up. That's number one.

3 So, if you recognize the students in that
4 academy as part of your talent pipeline, because
5 we certainly do. We are already looking five and
6 6 years out about who is going to fill these
7 positions that we're planning on bringing to this
8 neighborhood? It's about 5,000 acres. So, if
9 you accept that Port Covington, by different
10 measures, is worth \$27 billion, then what is
11 5,000 acres of real estate worth in West
12 Baltimore? Who will occupy the jobs that fill up
13 those positions in those neighborhoods if we are
14 only concentrating on closing schools?

15 Now, I fully recommend and recognize that
16 the job you are trying to do is extremely
17 difficult. Putting 10 pounds of crap in a
18 five-pound bag is not easy. If you don't have
19 the money to do all this stuff, magically, you
20 have to make that money get generated from some
21 other place.

1 I recommend that you think at this point
2 about the talent pool being an extraordinary
3 resource that people would come from all over if,
4 in fact, you are turning out students who are
5 actually prepared for those jobs in this new
6 economy. If they cannot read, I cannot hire
7 them. If they can't do anything beyond
8 elementary math when they are graduating from
9 high school, your graduation rates don't matter.
10 Comprehension matters.

11 So, the decisions that you have to make
12 about where people are going to be located in a
13 neighborhood that is emerging. That neighborhood
14 is not in crisis as it is emerging and it's going
15 to emerge from that crisis into something else
16 that's going to actually be pretty powerful over
17 the next couple of years if all of us work
18 together to get it right.

19 Renaissance Academy has a lot of support
20 in the neighborhood. We're prepared to do what
21 we need to do to make sure the students and the

1 parents in that neighborhood get support and that
2 you get support for the difficult decisions that
3 you have to make. Closing it and disappearing
4 the academy is not an option for us.

5 So, I leave you with that and thank you
6 all very much for your time and I really do
7 appreciate what you are trying to do. Thank you.
8 (Applause.)

9 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Next up
10 is Karen Thompson-Brade?

11 MS. BRADE: Good evening to the Board,
12 to the CEO and to everyone here this evening. As
13 America tries to heal from tragedies, this is not
14 what I thought I was going to be discussing at
15 the dinner table for Thanksgiving. No longer
16 will I straddle the fence in deciding on what we
17 should do.

18 We are, and I am, fighting to keep Grove
19 Park Elementary/Middle School open. Initially, I
20 thought we do not have enough finances, not
21 enough time to come up with resources to figure

1 out how we will do something to help keep the
2 school open.

3 We tried to think about cooperating with
4 the CEO and the Board to the best of our ability.
5 But, once I heard the people, the voices, once I
6 heard the variables that would greatly affect our
7 community, I thought this will not happen on my
8 watch. This will not happen to our community.

9 Historically, Grove Park sits in the
10 midst of preserved reservation land. It's
11 historically how Powder Mill Stream runs from
12 Liberty Heights, Liberty Road, to Northern
13 Parkway to Rogers Avenue, surrounding and within
14 our community. This land was preserved. It
15 serves to provide gunpowder during the war of
16 1812, that reflects our Maryland legacy.

17 Many applauded the Baltimore Sun in the
18 last couple of years when the late Michael
19 Olesker wrote a special report featuring his
20 roots within the Grove Park community. So many
21 more have done the same. We continue to watch

1 over and even protect the Jewish cemetery,
2 Arlington, that sits on Rogers and Wabash.

3 Our community, with so many people, it's
4 unfortunate that we're here. Grove Park is the
5 hallmark school. At one point, we were concerned
6 over the years and lacked an overwhelming
7 presence with the children, partnerships with the
8 community and leadership didn't seek grants or
9 financial support from outsiders that we knew of.

10 Until recently, when the association was
11 asked to contribute to provide paper towels and
12 toiler paper funds, we thought what is going on?
13 We were puzzled. The community association
14 provided the school with the funds, as we have
15 over the years, for chairs in the library, carpet
16 in the Kindergarten class, yearly funds for the
17 Christmas season to the custodial staff. We will
18 not stop. We will not stop.

19 We partner with principals. We do what
20 we have to do. We were hoping that you all would
21 have a buddy system set up so that we can

1 continue to help. As President of the Grove Park
2 Improvement Association, I am a native of
3 Baltimore because, who am I? I've lived in San
4 Antonio, Texas, I've lived in Central America for
5 three years, and Millington, Memphis, Tennessee,
6 I was down there with Dr. Hooks and his wife.
7 The late Dr. Hooks.

8 I attended his church and I remember what
9 he taught me. Always fight back. Never give up.

10 I spoke at several programs when I
11 attended Grove Park because that's our
12 neighborhood school. It's right beside my house.
13 My sister attended that school as well. She's
14 older than I am. My children attended that
15 school as well.

16 We've all tried to make a difference. I
17 came back to my community to make a difference.
18 As I graduated from Fallstaff Middle School, I
19 was the first pilot group to go there. We were
20 not sent to Pimlico. It made a difference.

21 The attendance was overwhelming at

1 Pimlico so we went on and we went to Fallstaff
2 and we did well. Then, I attended Western High
3 School and graduated from Hampton and all this
4 great stuff. But, it's like, who am I? I am
5 just one person out of an entire community. I
6 cannot speak on behalf of just myself. I have to
7 represent the entire community and have an entire
8 background. I mean, one that I sat before
9 Jeremiah Wright, the Reverend who, unfortunately,
10 the President had to denounce and reject. I
11 heard him down at Hampton speak so many times.
12 Stokely Carmichael came down. He's known as
13 Quami Terret.

14 All these people I was exposed to because
15 I had a good background and a good education and
16 I understood, on November 22nd when I sat here,
17 the Renaissance Academy, the provided testimony
18 and graduates who came back and mentored. They
19 just were taking us a different way. They made
20 us cry, they made us think.

21 It wasn't just emotional, especially when

1 the grandmother sat there and talked about losing
2 a grandson. It wasn't just emotional. It made a
3 difference. I hope that you all consider that
4 Grove Park can make a difference if you keep our
5 school open, if you keep our community safe as we
6 have maintained it.

7 If you're with me, if you're with GP, GP
8 are you with me? (Applause.) Thank you.

9 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Ms.
10 Brade. Next up is Davon Neverdon.

11 MR. NEVERDON: How you doing? My name
12 is Davon Neverdon, A.K.A. PFK Boom. I'm an
13 activist throughout Baltimore City in reference
14 to education, as well as legislation reform for
15 ex-offenders and things like that.

16 I'm also a strong supporter of
17 Renaissance Academy. That was one of the very
18 few schools that allowed the community to do what
19 it needed to do. With me running a movement
20 called 300 Gangsters, we deal with some of the
21 most vulnerable men that Baltimore has ever seen.

1 But, those men have been able to transform
2 themselves and go into some of these schools to
3 talk to the young men, some of the young women,
4 walk the halls and really see some of the biggest
5 future and probably some of you all have never
6 met those kids at their school.

7 As I walked in today and I was real hurt
8 because I looked in here and seen that this
9 building looks better than some of the schools I
10 walk in and that's sad. I cannot believe that I
11 walked in here and seen these big screens on the
12 walls and I'm waiting for five minutes and
13 teachers are bringing kids toilet paper from home
14 to the schools.

15 After Renaissance, tomorrow it's going to
16 be the next school and the next school and the
17 next school. The way we going right now, I've
18 been in Baltimore 42 years. I see your next
19 uprising in the next year or two.

20 We cannot move kids to the money. We've
21 got to move the money to the kids. You can't

1 take the Renaissance kids and put them in
2 Douglass and think your problem going to be taken
3 care of. It don't work like that.

4 You're dealing with a war on the grounds
5 of these schools. You're mixing kids in the
6 schools that don't even like each other. Let's
7 keep it 100. So, you're going to play with brick
8 and mortar but I'm going to be dealing with the
9 bloodshed.

10 Can each and every one of you all look
11 you all's selves in the eye tomorrow and say that
12 you all going to play with brick and mortar and
13 dollars and I'm going to be picking up the blood
14 the next day. It's not going to be three bodies,
15 it's going to be four and five when you mix all
16 these kids, east, west, north and south, when we
17 just started. April has only allowed us to get
18 this east-west and north-south thing together
19 right now.

20 Please do not do what you all about to do
21 without the decisions, first of all, you all

1 probably never see me a day in you all life and I
2 probably know most of those kids at Renaissance
3 and whatever problem we think we have, it is not
4 in the curriculum. You dealing with the school
5 to prison pipeline and I haven't heard anything
6 about that at this table right now. So, some of
7 the problems that we have in our schools, the
8 legislative teams at these tables caused them.

9 You've got to be from Baltimore to really
10 understand about the area. So, (Inaudible) say I
11 know Mr. So-and-So and the church at the corner
12 of Renaissance to know that area, but I'm not
13 from that area. Even, I know Belmont, they got
14 lead in their water. But, we're talking about
15 these schools. The kids got roaches coming out
16 of the sinks, drinking out of water fountains, I
17 ain't never even seen a school up there yet. I
18 guess they cook the books real good over there.

19 You got to be from these areas when you
20 telling these kids you taking them from their
21 school. They already been took from Africa, now

1 you taking them from their girlfriends and
2 friends in school. See, you get a high school
3 ring. These kids are getting shipped around to
4 four and five schools. How many rings they going
5 to get with a poor education behind it? Let's
6 stop playing. The education is a mess. But,
7 it'll be brick and mortar. It's going to be a
8 nice school and I love the Douglass football
9 field. Real nice.

10 But, if it wasn't for the riots, they
11 wouldn't have got it. We only here because of
12 the riots. Because, we could have kept the same
13 book and I see the same play book being done
14 right now and I'm going to tell you right now,
15 put on your hard hat. What school they going to
16 pick now for the staging to get more money
17 because another riot is on you all's hands
18 because you all ain't solving no problems at this
19 table and I ask you all to hear from PFK Boom,
20 300 Gangsters. I deal with the kids from
21 Edmondson Avenue all the way over to Dutch

1 Village. I'm looking to you all in you all face.
2 You all not going to make it up 83 when
3 the fire come out so go over there with Sheila
4 Dixon and all them under the ground because,
5 right? What I'm listening to, and I'm telling
6 you again, you all got problems. Do not do what
7 you all about to do without involving the real
8 truth to this problem and Renaissance is not you
9 all's problem. Renaissance is about to take
10 their hit for the good things that really is in
11 that school. For real. For real. They the
12 sacrifice. I don't even want that one minute. I
13 want you all to think about it. (Applause.)

14 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, sir.
15 Next up is Noel Walker.

16 MR. WALKER: Good evening, everyone. I
17 must say, that's a hard act to follow. I spoke
18 last week, again, my name is Noel Walker. I'm a
19 current PreK teacher at Furley Elementary. I've
20 taught everything from PreK to 3rd at Furley.
21 I've taught in classrooms with large cracks in

1 the walls. I've taught in classrooms where you
2 can look at a window and see outside. Not
3 through the window because the glass itself is
4 opaque, but through the crack between the window
5 and the wall.

6 Leaking roofs. My classroom of two years
7 now has had a constant leak since I've been in
8 that classroom. It's either too hot or too cold,
9 regardless of the season. Right now, most of the
10 school is too hot and it's freezing cold outside.

11 Non-functioning internet cables, no
12 wireless, the environment alone is prohibitive of
13 positive learning and that is the idea of 21st
14 Century. We need to modernize our schools, we
15 need dramatically more than a new roof. More
16 than a fixed foundation. We need the roof, the
17 foundation, we need windows, a playground, we
18 need plumbing, we need wiring. That entire
19 school needs more than just that roof and just
20 that foundation.

21 Just to do those two things and then put

1 us back in there, that's not a 21st Century
2 school. That's a 1980s school.

3 Again, I'm here to represent the Furley
4 family. The staff, the students, the parents,
5 the teachers and the community. We call
6 ourselves a community school and that's what we
7 do. We have so many programs that try to reach
8 our community that come in and try to help our
9 program, help our staff, help our students.

10 Again, we just have many concerns. I
11 talked a lot about the transportation issues, but
12 when we move, and I'm not trying to say we should
13 not move. Our building needs a lot of work.
14 But, we're supposed to split a gym with Vanguard.
15 That's going to be 900 students, a full-time
16 physical education teacher at our school
17 splitting a gym. Four hundred plus students in
18 our school alone.

19 Library usage. That is a middle school
20 library. That is not at all developmentally
21 appropriate for our four-year olds all the way up

1 to our 5th graders.

2 The bathrooms in the facility are not
3 designed for little people. I know they say they
4 are going to retrofit it, they're going to make
5 things appropriate for us but that's a lot of
6 work for just our little people.

7 Some other concerns we have are, are we
8 going to be paid to pack? The school year is
9 going to end, what's going to happen? Are we
10 going to have to pack all of our stuff ourselves?
11 Do we have to move ourselves? Are there
12 resources for us to use to move all of our
13 technology and then install it over there at
14 Thurgood Marshall?

15 We have a lot of technology and the
16 technology capacity over there, I've been told,
17 is poor. So, how are we supposed to use that?
18 Are we expected to rigidly live up to the same
19 standards under these extraordinary
20 circumstances?

21 The fix that you're trying to put on

1 Furley is a band-aid on a broken bone. A new
2 roof and a fixed foundation will not be enough.
3 I'm not here to argue against the move. I just
4 want our students represented. I want our
5 students to have the best possible situation for
6 them. A move like this could be traumatic for
7 them and I want that trauma, that extraordinary
8 circumstance, to be as easy as possible for all
9 these little people.

10 Last, there's been discussion between the
11 Board and Councilman Scott, why has nobody from
12 Furley been involved? Or, the rest of the
13 community? As a member of the school community,
14 a member of that community, we need to be a part
15 of the conversations, we need to know. We need
16 information. Giving us the information the day
17 before some people are coming to represent us is
18 not enough.

19 We need more information. We need to be
20 at that table where people will talk. What you
21 talk about is directly going to affect what

1 happens at our school and if we have no say on
2 it, decisions are being made for us. Thank you.

3 (Applause.)

4 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Mr.
5 Walker. Next up is Corey Witherspoon.

6 MR. WITHERSPOON: How is everyone today?
7 The first time I spoke, I spoke about the
8 percentages of what the kids go through at
9 Renaissance Academy. I want to reinstate it, I
10 want to further expound on it.

11 We have 80 percent poverty. A third of
12 the school is special ed and on 3rd grade levels
13 as far as IEP intervention plans. Okay? These
14 students, a lot of them have cognitive issues and
15 emotional issues and not taking meds.

16 There are students in Renaissance Academy
17 are through DJS and this is a second chance for
18 the students at the school. Ninety percent,
19 again, single parent and several students,
20 they're not selected to the school upon going
21 from middle school to high school. But, what

1 happens is, because their grades are so low, they
2 come to Renaissance Academy.

3 We can go ahead and discuss Manslow's
4 Hierarchy and it basically goes from
5 self-actualization all the way down to basic
6 needs. The students at Renaissance Academy, a
7 lot of them are not getting their basic needs.

8 So, when you don't have the basic needs
9 required to be a productive person in society,
10 you will not be able to function in a classroom.
11 So, what's basic needs? We're talking about
12 lights, food, water, you talking about all these
13 things and these students coming to school every
14 day without their basic needs. So, if you don't
15 have the basic needs, that means you cannot
16 function.

17 Ms. Superintendent, you talk so much
18 about poverty, but yet we have continued to give
19 kids in poverty impoverished money experiences
20 and then we blame them and their families for why
21 we can't teach them.

1 So, we have a verbal and we're going to
2 use this Algebra. So, we have X plus three
3 equals five. But, we don't know what X is.
4 Renaissance Academy has identified what X is and,
5 through Renaissance Academy, promise heights,
6 seize a promise, Ms. Rollo's schedule, a great
7 manner in which we solved the solutions of so
8 many students, that so many students are having.

9 So, that's going to eliminate the
10 students who will come out to the well without a
11 quality education. Renaissance Academy also
12 graduated 82 percent of their students last year.
13 Through the tragedy that we had last year, we
14 still produced 82 percent of graduates.

15 (Applause.)

16 That's why we should stay open. So, Ms.
17 Rollo, she does not suspend. When I first came
18 to the Academy, I said, what in the world? But,
19 she knows that if these kids are suspended,
20 they're back in their communities. They're back
21 to messing up. They're back to getting in

1 trouble. They're back to DJS.

2 So, we talk about recidivism, these kids

3 are back and we've got to set them forward.

4 That's why Renaissance Academy should be open.

5 We set them forward. Through restorative

6 practices circles, when the students do get in

7 trouble and they have issues, we all sit down.

8 We have restorative practices circles. Whereas,

9 a young man is here, another young man is over

10 here, you have two mentors on the sides, you have

11 the administrator. Then, we all come together

12 and we have a resolve.

13 But, you won't know unless you

14 experience. That's why I'm asking. You all

15 have to really just come up and see how we handle

16 these youth. You will hear many stories about

17 how we, as Renaissance Academy, seize a promise,

18 blooms a promise as well, how we all reach and

19 receive.

20 I just want you all to take that to

21 heart. We changed the outcome, that unknown

1 variable. We are the solution. We're solving
2 that. That's how we're playing it. We're
3 solving that. Thank you. (Applause.)

4 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Mr.
5 Witherspoon. The Board actually has a visit date
6 scheduled for December 6th. Next up is
7 Christopher Streeter.

8 MR. STREETER: Good evening. How you
9 all doing today? My name is Christopher Streeter
10 and I represent Seize a Promise, located at 1301
11 McCullough Street, Renaissance Academy.

12 My school needs to stay open because the
13 administration at my school goes to great lengths
14 to ensure we have everything we need on and off
15 school campus. Like, Witherspoon said, food,
16 clothes, etc.

17 Ms. Rowe has installed a foundation at
18 this school that is unbreakable. Students bear
19 the burden of the events that might occur outside
20 the school premises. Students look forward to
21 coming to school for the love and attention that

1 they desperately desire at home.

2 The unruly behavior that a few selective
3 students show is because they don't know how to
4 express their feelings on paper. Some students
5 don't read above their grade level or even on
6 their grade level. Many will say this is
7 preposterous. I say someone wasn't there to
8 address the problem. Now, this person became a
9 victim of the school to prison pipeline.

10 At my school, we do not judge about what
11 someone can't do. We always try to help with
12 what you can't do. We cannot use the word can't,
13 we try not to let it be in our vocabulary.

14 That's what I came to say, but I want to
15 say another thing. We recently had a outbreak of
16 bed bugs at our school. Everybody, all the kids
17 running around contemplating on if it's true or
18 not. A lot of parents called up the school to
19 get their children out of the school.

20 But, what North Avenue did was tell them
21 that there wasn't no bed bugs. But, we were

1 already scheduled to have a spring that Saturday.

2 But, we had to do finals, mid-terms, you know.

3 So, why would they tell the parents that it's not

4 there but it is? That's all I wanted to say.

5 (Applause.)

6 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Mr.

7 Streeter. Next up is Mykia Pinkney. Ms.

8 Pinkney? No? Next up is Lord Mason Beck.

9 MR. BECK: Hello. You shouldn't close
10 the school because Renaissance Academy gives you
11 chance after chance. After I was stabbed at
12 Bluford, I went to a different school. I didn't
13 get all my credits when I transferred over.

14 But, nobody cared. Like, nobody cared.
15 Like, I'm in the basement of Bluford Drew Jemison
16 bleeding and they didn't call the police, they
17 didn't take me to an ambulance. One of my
18 friends came out of the gym and I asked him to
19 call my mother and that's how I ended up getting
20 home. That's how I ended up staying alive.

21 So, me leaving here, me leaving Bluford,

1 still alive and still functioning, going to
2 Renaissance, I was cutting up and every other
3 school I went to. I came to Renaissance and I
4 did a 180. I got my grades in order. I started
5 changing my behavior.

6 I used to be, I don't know how to explain
7 it, I used to be a real bad kid. So, me now, I'd
8 rather be called a nerd. I like that now. Like,
9 I wish I was like this when I was coming up
10 because then a lot of stuff would have been
11 different.

12 He helped me get over a lot of struggles
13 I've been through. Ms. Atwater, Mr. Cooper, the
14 other mentors. Chris, he's a smart kid.
15 Renaissance is underrated. Like, a lot of the
16 people who go to Renaissance, they're smart. If
17 you come and you may not see it but you don't
18 know the kids. So, if you're not in the class
19 while they're learning and participating and you
20 just see them outside cutting up, then all you
21 see is them outside cutting up. You don't see

1 them while they're in school. They don't see
2 their potential.

3 Him, Ms. Rowe, the staff, the principals,
4 they really kind of pushing you to your
5 potential. That's something that you're not
6 going to get at another high school. You all
7 talking about you all going to move us to another
8 high school. I've been to three. This is my
9 third one. They don't, a lot of high schools,
10 they don't care. It's like, every man for
11 himself. The teachers don't care about the
12 students. The staff, they don't care.

13 So, if you get into a fight and you right
14 outside of the gym, you laying on the ground and
15 you bleeding, you can't get up, you can't move,
16 you in shock and you just laying there bleeding
17 and for a student to be the one to help you and
18 the teachers just pass by. I mean, at the end of
19 the day, Renaissance is a place where, it's like
20 a meal. It's like a whole entree. Going to
21 Renaissance is like you found a whole entree

1 instead of an appetizer. You'd rather have a
2 meal than an appetizer.

3 So, if they're pushing you to your full
4 potential and other schools are only pushing you
5 to halfway, which one would you rather be at?
6 Renaissance or another school? Renaissance,
7 where people actually care, or another school
8 where nobody cares? Thank you. (Applause.)

9 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Last
10 name is R-O-B-C-A-T-E?

11 MS. ROBERTS: Hello. My name is Ajuria
12 Roberts and I've been a student at Renaissance
13 for four years. Renaissance, I think Baltimore
14 City needs a school like Renaissance. All
15 schools should be like Renaissance. Renaissance
16 is a family.

17 If you go in there mad, they notice it
18 straight off the bat. They sit you down before
19 you enter that door because they don't want you
20 to blast out and like go off on people.

21 They help you with anything. Like,

1 there's more to it.

2 We've got mentors. They pick five or 6
3 individual students, they get two groups or
4 something. They have one-on-one talks with you.
5 Personal problems, family problems, school
6 problems. They just sit down and talk with you
7 about anything. Like, that could be your own
8 therapist.

9 I have Courtney Scribling here with me,
10 and Lania Whittiter. Do you all want to say
11 something? I'm done. Thank you. (Applause.)

12 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Next up
13 is Courtney Scribner.

14 MS. SCRIBNER: Good evening. I'm
15 Courtney Scribner from Renaissance Academy. I'm
16 in the 12th grade and I wrote something down. So,
17 I said I love my school and the people in it.
18 But, you can't use trauma as a reason to shut it
19 down because we got through it. We got through
20 the situation and still managed to learn.

21 Trauma occurs everywhere. Closing the

1 school does not stop us from being exposed to
2 trauma. The students at Sandy Hook and Perry
3 Hall also experienced a terrible trauma and yet
4 their schools are still open and the students are
5 healing.

6 Removing kids from a school they like to
7 attend will only make things worse. Closing the
8 school will leave Renaissance students at a
9 higher risk for drop-out. We might not be a good
10 fit in the environment we're sent to which can
11 cause us to have to fight. We will lose the
12 benefit of programs like Seeds and Blooms of
13 Promise. They help us with personal problems and
14 treat us like a family.

15 The staff at Renaissance Academy helps us
16 with many of our educational and personal needs.
17 I know that I have their support 100 percent and
18 not every school gets you there. If this
19 building has to close, we just as that you don't
20 break us. We would like to move as a collective
21 into our own space with a cafeteria, gym, sports

1 and a library. That would be less confusing.

2 Right now, we share everything with
3 Booker T. For example, by having more space, we
4 could have our own basketball team and keep a lot
5 of kids out of trouble. We are here to advocate
6 for a better place to learn or to demand
7 improvements to the one we have. That's it.

8 (Applause.)

9 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Lania
10 Wittington.

11 MS. WITTINGTON: Hello. My name is
12 Lania Wittington and I feel like we should keep
13 my school open because, for one, that school
14 means a lot to me. I've been going there since I
15 was in 9th grade. I grew a lot from that school.
16 I learned so much from that school. It helped me
17 with a lot of stuff.

18 When I was going through stuff recently,
19 Ms. Atwater was there for me. The school,
20 period, was there for me. Everybody.

21 This school really means a lot to a lot

1 of students there because that school really
2 helps with grades and stuff. I know my ability
3 at school, like what I can do. But, they push me
4 further to do more. That's why I think that
5 school should stay open.

6 I really feel like it is a bad idea to
7 close it down. It's not no school out there, no
8 matter where you send them, that's like
9 Renaissance Academy. It's like we start from the
10 bottom and you end up at the top.

11 I know some kids that come to that school
12 probably thinking they won't even graduate. But,
13 Renaissance Academy gives you that opportunity.
14 That's all I have to say. (Applause.)

15 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Antoine
16 Baker? He left? All right. Bernard Young, Sr.?

17 MR. YOUNG: Hello. Good evening to
18 everybody. My name is Bernard Young from
19 Renaissance Academy. I'm in the group Seeds of
20 Promise for the school. My mentor is right here
21 next to me.

1 What can I say? Our school has been
2 through a lot in the last year. Us losing three
3 soldiers of ours and just seeing it was a shock
4 to me. It was my first time ever seeing
5 something like that. For real. Ever since that,
6 the school has been trying to get better and
7 better.

8 This school, I never though the school
9 would ever be how it is now. The people, the
10 mentors, whenever you need help, they are always
11 there. Our principal is so special to us. She's
12 like a mother to every student in there. We love
13 her so much. We love her for everything.

14 I just hope that this school don't get
15 closed at all because it's going to break kids'
16 hearts. For real. It's going to break mine
17 because I really love going to that school. I
18 like being with the people I like hanging out
19 with. I don't know what else to say. This has
20 really shocked everybody in the school and nobody
21 wants the school to close. I don't either.

1 My old mentors there have helped us
2 through so much. My mentor, Mr. Witherspoon,
3 helped me when my lights was off for like a whole
4 month and I was scared to even ask for anybody or
5 tell anybody because I was embarrassed. He came
6 out of his pocket and tried to help my family,
7 even Ms. Atwater tried to help my family out to
8 try to get the lights back on and some food in
9 the house and stuff like that.

10 I mean, that's a blessing. We had people
11 like him and the principal and the rest of the
12 mentors inside our school. Without them, who can
13 we depend on? When we're not with our mothers
14 and fathers at home. They're like a father and
15 mother to all of us in the school and I wish that
16 you all should never close the school. Please
17 don't. Thank you. (Applause.)

18 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Attiba?

19 VOICE: Good evening and thank you for
20 allowing me this opportunity to speak. I am the
21 President of the Marble Hill Community

1 Association of Upton. We are the community that
2 is right around the school. I have a 34-year
3 relationship with the school in terms of being a
4 neighbor in the 1400 block. I have come to know
5 children over that time who were part of the
6 previous set up. I've come to know the kids at
7 this time who are part of the Renaissance
8 Academy.

9 I came on board as a volunteer last year
10 and I have been volunteering since that time,
11 getting to know the young students including the
12 staff. I have never seen a staff as dedicated
13 and as warm as the staff is to the children.
14 There is a sense of tough love that these
15 students need.

16 I know that the school is considered a
17 community school and it truly is. One of the
18 things that troubled us in our community at a
19 pretty recent meeting was the fact that no one
20 had come to inform our community, our
21 neighborhood, through the Upton Planning

1 Committee or our community association, of the
2 pending closure, to ask what the school meant to
3 us.

4 As a community, the school has always
5 meant a lot to us. We think that to take an
6 institution that is a community institution out
7 of our midst, simply leaves another whole in our
8 community.

9 We suffer from vacancies and now we see
10 the opportunity for a vacant building, not in
11 terms of the building itself but in terms of the
12 program that will leave our midst, and we feel
13 that that is simply another opportunity to take
14 something from our community to further create a
15 situation in our community where have a void that
16 can't be filled.

17 I have become acquainted with a number of
18 the kids in the school. I watch how they are
19 nurtured. There is a strong sense of nurturing
20 that you don't see in most high schools. The
21 children who come to these schools don't come

1 from ideal situations. They come from situations
2 where there is great need, great need of
3 nurturing. In this school, they find it.

4 I realize that a lot of them come with
5 the sense of they want to be something at this
6 Renaissance Academy. They come with the sense
7 that they can put in some time here and go on to
8 a better life. Although, they're challenged all
9 the time by the nature of the community, we
10 realize that there is no better place for them to
11 be outside of that school.

12 We realize that, as a community school,
13 the school actually supports our community. The
14 school has a program, a food pantry, that they
15 operate every Thursday that feeds, on average,
16 100 residents of our community. Where would they
17 go if they didn't have that?

18 They have a chance to interact with the
19 students there who volunteer to pass out the food
20 and organize the pantry every week. We see these
21 kids come to a church in our community as kids

1 who are really responsible and not irresponsible.
2 They get a chance to have an impact on our
3 community that we would not have if we did not
4 have that school in our midst.

5 There are kids who live right in the
6 community who do not go to school. But, the
7 after school programs, they go and participate in
8 and they are welcomed. It's not like because
9 they don't go to the school that they can't come
10 into the school. That's the kind of school our
11 community needs.

12 We have been given hope at the school.
13 We saw last year that they said that we would not
14 close the school. That was hope for us. Now it
15 appears that hope is getting snatched away.

16 We realize that all these children who
17 come here with that sense of hope, sense of new
18 purpose and new opportunity, now stand on the
19 precipice of having that snatched away from them.
20 I ask you to consider that. Do not take hope
21 from these children. Do not take hope from this

1 program. We need this program in our community.

2 Do not take hope from our community. Thank you.

3 (Applause.)

4 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, sir.

5 Next is Greta Goodwin.

6 MS. GOODWIN: Good evening. I wanted to

7 show you my uniform. I'm Greta Goodwin and I

8 proudly serve at Renaissance Academy High School.

9 I've been an employee of Baltimore City

10 Public Schools since I was a kid, I would say, a

11 young adult. For 17 years. This school has

12 given me so much purpose.

13 I am thankful for being able to work with

14 my children of Baltimore in West Baltimore, where

15 I am not from, and be able to serve in this

16 school. I just hope, I had a whole lot to say

17 but, as I listen to many of my team, I just hope

18 that you are listening to the children.

19 This is a school system that must always

20 put kids first. As I have learned as a teacher

21 and as an administrator, that when you put

1 children first, you always make the right
2 decision. (Applause.) Our children heal at
3 Renaissance because we know that Baltimore is an
4 ill city. There are many social ills here. They
5 bring them. They bring them from the community.
6 They bring them from the home. They bring them
7 from previous schools. They come to Renaissance
8 because we love them.

9 Every afternoon, quite honestly, I hear
10 my principal say that never in the history of the
11 world has it been a principal to love a group of
12 children the way that I love you. It is true. I
13 know you feel it from the kids as they talk to
14 you. That it is real.

15 They've been oppressed. This city is
16 oppressed. I recognize my privilege, I grew up
17 here, my mother was educated. I went to
18 Baltimore City Public Schools and I educated
19 myself. I've been exposed and I've had
20 experiences.

21 But, I recognize the oppression that has

1 happened in our city. To close a school
2 oppresses a group of kids. It oppresses a
3 community that is now awake. This community is
4 awake. Community members are speaking on behalf
5 of the school. We feed the community. They are
6 welcome in the school. They serve in the school.
7 They are awake. We are conscious and we want our
8 students to have an opportunity.

9 As I look at kids that are in their first
10 year of high school or their second year, or even
11 third year of high school, it troubles me to know
12 that they may not be able to finish with their
13 Renaissance family who they know love them. We
14 love them and we tell them. Don't we?

15 SPEAKERS FROM AUDIENCE: Yes!

16 MS. GOODWIN: I just ask that, as you
17 listen and as you make this decision, that you
18 think about and keep our kids first and not
19 further traumatize children by closing their
20 school. Thank you. (Applause.)

21 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Next is Kenneth

1 Brown.

2 MR. BROWN: Good evening and thank you
3 for giving me the opportunity to share my
4 thoughts with you this evening. I come to you as
5 a concerned staff member of Grove Park
6 Elementary/Middle School with student safety
7 being my top priority.

8 With the proposed changes, students would
9 have to travel up to 2.3 miles to school across
10 several dangerous highways, including Liberty
11 Heights. When questioned as to whether this
12 serious concern has been considered, we were told
13 that a traffic study would be completed if the
14 decision was made. Which means that these issues
15 haven't been adequately looked at.

16 Additionally, it is important to consider
17 parents who do not drive. How do children get to
18 school during inclement weather? What happens
19 when schools close early with little notice? Or,
20 as children get sick or when the bus does not
21 come? How will these children be safe? How will

1 these parents get to the school to pick them up?

2 We have discussed the opportunities that
3 cannot be granted to students because we are a
4 small school.

5 We need the opportunity at Calvin Rodwell
6 to help students when they cannot stay because
7 they can't be safe to get home. Please allow us
8 the opportunity to provide our children with the
9 opportunities they deserve while keeping them
10 safe at home at Grove Park. Thank you.

11 (Applause.)

12 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Next is
13 Jennifer McCarty.

14 MS. MCCARTY: Good evening. Thank you
15 for the opportunity to speak tonight. I am a
16 member of the Grove Park family. I teach
17 PreKindergarten. I've been there since 2005.

18 Grove Park is a family. Many of us, the
19 staff there, have worked there for years. We've
20 been able to watch them grow from children to
21 young adults.

1 By staying at the same school, we can
2 keep an eye on our students and they know they
3 always have the support of their teachers. The
4 students constantly turn back to their previous
5 years' teachers in order to check in, and even
6 teachers they haven't had before, to stop by and
7 to feel safe and feel comfortable.

8 By closing Grove Park, we're taking away
9 a sense of family, belonging and safety. The
10 staff, the parents and the community all look out
11 for each other and for the kids. We have a stack
12 of letters from the students that weren't able to
13 be here. They wrote letters saying why they want
14 Grove Park to stay open.

15 Our school is a community school. Most
16 of our students live within walking distance and
17 they do not have to cross any dangerous streets.
18 The students will have to get up even earlier to
19 be able to allow for the time to travel to a
20 different school.

21 I've been fortunate to teach at Grove

1 Park for so long, and while I could teach
2 anywhere in the city, I want to stay at Grove
3 Park to teach with the community of my students
4 and continue to watch them learn and grow. I
5 hope that you consider not breaking up our Grove
6 Park family. It is in the best interests of our
7 community for Grove Park to stay open. Thank
8 you. (Applause.)

9 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Ellen
10 Bonney.

11 MS. BONNEY: Good evening. I would
12 first like to thank the Board for allowing me the
13 opportunity to speak with you this evening. As a
14 member of the Grove Park family for over 15
15 years, I come to you with the following concerns.

16 In 2013-14, the Board recommended that
17 Grove Park close. At that time, the community
18 stood up, firmly stating that they did not want
19 that to happen. In fact, stakeholders expressed
20 at that time that they preferred a smaller school
21 for their students.

1 The decision was made that Grove Park
2 would revert back to an elementary only in
3 2019-20. As an elementary school, Grove Park
4 was, indeed, a hallmark school with enrollment
5 numbers well above the 350-400 mark. By changing
6 the recommendation at this time and proposing to
7 close the school, the district is reneging on
8 their original promise without giving Grove Park
9 the opportunity to reinvent itself as an exemplar
10 elementary school. It is only right to allow us
11 the opportunity to realize our full potential by
12 adhering to the Board approved recommendations
13 from 2013-14.

14 Furthermore, when taking into
15 consideration the renovations at Calvin Rodwell,
16 it was stated in `13-`14 that if the decision was
17 made to keep Grove Park open, then Calvin Rodwell
18 would not be built to a size that would
19 accommodate our students.

20 Again, it was decided at that time that
21 Grove Park would remain open as an elementary

1 school and our middle school students would
2 transition to Calvin Rodwell. Therefore, it
3 should already be in place to accommodate our
4 middle school children. If the Board sticks to
5 the original plan, no additional consideration
6 needs to be made. But yet and still, the same
7 topic has been brought up today making one
8 question whether or not the Board intended to
9 hold up their promise in `13-`14.

10 It is, of course, hoped that the Board's
11 word holds true and that Grove Park is given the
12 opportunity to shine again as an elementary
13 school. Thank you. (Applause.)

14 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Next up
15 is Davon Love.

16 MR. LOVE: Good evening. My name is
17 Davon Love, Director of Public Policy of Leaders
18 of a Beautiful Struggle. I'm also a product of
19 Baltimore City Public Schools and I stand in
20 solidarity with the community of Renaissance High
21 School. I'm hoping you rescind the

1 recommendation to close Renaissance High School.

2 I want to start by just giving some
3 context that will give some greater understanding
4 as to why I think Renaissance needs to stay open.
5 The way that racism operates in the collective
6 imagination of people in our society is that
7 people attribute a lack of value to communities
8 that are predominantly black, particularly
9 working class and poor black communities.

10 So, that often manifests itself as people
11 seeing folks in our community as inherently
12 pathological, seeing people in our communities as
13 just objects of other people's thought
14 experiments, that you need people to fly in, come
15 into our communities and fix them.

16 If we're serious about what it means to
17 build upon a community, we understand that the
18 community is the solution to its own problems and
19 that what you do is build from the strength of a
20 community and follow its leadership in the
21 development of an institution that serves the

1 community.

2 One of the things that is really
3 troubling is if you think about this in a larger
4 context, it is this logic that animates the move
5 towards gentrification, it's happening around the
6 country and that move is being made here in
7 Baltimore.

8 So, really the idea of closing
9 Renaissance falls in line with a set of policies
10 that are going to set in motion a project of
11 gentrification which we all know has a negative
12 impact on black communities.

13 The reason why I put that forward as a
14 larger context is because I think it is pretty
15 clear, based on the testimony that you've heard
16 for the past couple of weeks that there is a
17 strong level of community support, a strong level
18 of support at the community level in terms of the
19 ability of Renaissance to properly serve its
20 students.

21 To me, the idea that the school system

1 would recommend the closure of Renaissance High
2 School says something about the nature of the
3 metrics that the institution is using to say that
4 it should close. It's interesting to me that if
5 we think about those who are often in positions
6 to make decisions about policies, about our
7 community, often times the folks who are making
8 these policies are not socialized by people that
9 are others from the community that have an
10 expertise in understanding the methodologies that
11 folks have been using in the community to address
12 the problems.

13 So, what you've seen so far, it's not
14 just an emphasis of individual people that do
15 good things with individual students. You have a
16 methodology that has been effective in improving
17 the quality of life of students, and you have
18 something that has the potential to be something
19 that is remarkable and that could benefit the
20 entire city.

21 I don't know that there is a better

1 principal in the City of Baltimore given the
2 level and the nature of the testimony that you've
3 seen in front of you.

4 So, the thing that I want to leave you
5 with, in addition to recommending that you
6 rescind the recommendation to close Renaissance
7 High School, there's a difference between
8 community engagement and community empowerment.

9 So, community engagement is like you
10 decide to build a bridge and we get to pick the
11 color. Unfortunately, too often, that is the
12 method that is often used when we say community
13 input. Right? As if we have nothing to say
14 about whether the bridge should be built, how to
15 build it, who should build it. These are things
16 that, as people invested in their community, we
17 have a right and responsibility to be in charge
18 of how these institutions are constructed.

19 So, for me, the idea that there will be a
20 recommendation to close the school this year
21 without giving the community an opportunity to be

1 meaningfully involved and how you even make
2 decisions about which schools close or what
3 metrics you use to determine what qualifies as a
4 school that is successful, to me, just flies in
5 the face of what community empowerment actually
6 is.

7 So, if we're serious about wanting to
8 make sure we improve the quality of life for our
9 students, and to get the elephant in the room,
10 something else folks don't want to talk about, is
11 the notion of institutional racism that has
12 operated in our communities in a way that
13 undermines the leadership of folks of colors and
14 institutions that are lead by folks of color, by
15 black people, in an attempt to think there are
16 institutions that know better about how we fix
17 our communities.

18 We should follow the leadership of the
19 Renaissance community if we're really interested
20 in empowering the community at large.

21 (Applause.)

1 So, I would hope that the result of the
2 testimony that you'll continue to hear is not
3 just to rescind the recommendation to close
4 Renaissance High School, but as instructive as to
5 the kind of models you should be looking to in
6 terms of how to improve the quality of education
7 in Baltimore City. Thank you. (Applause.)

8 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Next is
9 Bronwyn Mayden.

10 MS. MAYDEN: Good evening. My name is
11 Bronwyn Mayden. I'm an assistant dean at the
12 University of Maryland-Baltimore School of Social
13 Work. I'm also the Executive Director of Promise
14 Heights. You've been hearing about that a lot
15 because we are the lead agency for Renaissance
16 Academy High School.

17 Let me just take a second to let you know
18 what we're doing in the neighborhood of
19 Upton-Druid Heights. We are working with all
20 five of the public schools in that neighborhood.
21 All five of those schools have either been on

1 lists to be closed, or either to be changed in
2 some area.

3 We have started a pipeline of services
4 that begin at the very beginning of life with our
5 B-more for Health Babies program. You probably
6 have heard about the program because we have had
7 no infant deaths in that neighborhood in over 30
8 months. (Applause.)

9 We have an infant mortality rate that is
10 at zero at this point for that particular
11 neighborhood. You already heard about the
12 statistics in terms of the poverty that we are
13 facing in that neighborhood. We will not rest
14 until we make sure that we have developed a
15 pipeline of services to help get children from
16 the very beginning of life all the way through to
17 graduate high school and go to college and
18 career.

19 Today, it was very interesting that you
20 have a packet from us and the Washington Post had
21 a headline in today's paper that said, People See

1 Me as a Threat. Also, if you read that article
2 which is about Renaissance and the great work
3 that is going on there, other young people,
4 students, were interviewed and said I'm seen as a
5 living problem. Society assumes we are animals.
6 They think that we are a negative life form and
7 should be subtracted from society.

8 Now, while many people might view young
9 African American students as what was just
10 described and is in the article that you have in
11 the packet, I have to tell you that I've gotten
12 to know the students of Renaissance extremely
13 well. I have to tell you, when you talk about
14 what happened there a year ago, when I looked
15 around, it was my staff that was there serving
16 the students. I'm not paid by Baltimore City
17 schools. It's my staff that they come to when
18 the lights go out. It's my staff that provided
19 the substitute teacher that was placed by
20 Baltimore City schools in that classroom where
21 Mr. Jolly was stabbed with mental health

1 counseling and services. When we question the
2 Baltimore City schools about it, why she couldn't
3 get any support, it was because she was a
4 substitute. That's not how you treat family and
5 I think you all know better.

6 So, I'm here to say to you that you need
7 to listen to the stories of the young people.
8 The students who have come before you. I want to
9 end with one story that could have ended in a
10 tragic way.

11 You might have seen an article that
12 appeared on the front page of the Sunday
13 Washington Post in June of this past year, June
14 16. It showed the strength of Khalil Bridges who
15 goes to Renaissance High School. From that
16 article, it talked about his family, or perhaps I
17 have to say his lack of real family life in terms
18 of his mother who is now in a hospital and then
19 she was placed in a nursing home where she will
20 remain until the end of her life.

21 Khalil lived in a house with no water or

1 electricity for well over a month until he
2 revealed to Mr. Cooper, who is here with us
3 tonight, his mentor, what was going on. Then, he
4 tied him into working with us.

5 We were able to help him in terms of
6 linking and moving in with someone else who
7 helped him and, along with making sure he had
8 bedding and all the other things that he needed
9 to go to school on a regular basis.

10 The story doesn't end there for us and
11 Khalil. He graduated. He went with us to New
12 Mexico. We are showing him and giving him
13 experiences and opportunities that all of you
14 sitting around this table, and I as a mother with
15 two young men, I gave to my children. That's
16 what we've got to do for the kids at Renaissance.
17 That's what your role is to do for every child in
18 Baltimore City Public Schools.

19 I'm going to end by telling you that his
20 story is not over yet. We're not finished
21 writing that book on Khalil. Khalil is now going

1 to Baltimore County Community College. He has a
2 college fund of over \$50,000. Money that poured
3 in from readers of the Washington Post who were
4 saying to Khalil, and to all students in
5 Baltimore City schools, you can do it.

6 So, I ask you tonight to think about this
7 decision and I know that you will make the right
8 decision for our students. Thank you.

9 (Applause.)

10 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Next is
11 Franklin Lee. Franklin Lee? Next is Cynthia
12 Tinsley.

13 MS. TINSLEY: Dr. Santelises, Mr. Cooper
14 and Ms. Hike-Hubbard and Board members, as you
15 know, my name is Cynthia Tinsley, I'm the acting
16 President of the Carrollton Ridge Community
17 Association.

18 First, I'd like to make a correction.
19 When we were last before you this summer, we
20 reported that the enrollment for Samuel Morse was
21 439 or somewhere in that ballpark. That was

1 based on a printout they received from the
2 school. We've since learned that it's actually
3 353. So, our apologies for that error. But,
4 that was the information that was provided to us.

5 As it's already been said repeatedly,
6 neighborhood schools are more than places of
7 learning. Like many others, Samuel F. B. Morse
8 is our community hub that seems to be the one
9 main thing that unites our residents, provides a
10 food pantry and is where those of us that still
11 believe it makes a difference, vote.

12 Too many of our residents have lost faith
13 in the systems that are supposed to be working in
14 their interests. Alternatives were not
15 aggressively pursued for Samuel Morse in the
16 Carrollton Ridge Community. It was suggested by
17 one of our Councilmen that capacity could have
18 been reached by keeping our 6th graders or
19 possibly including Head Start. Six classrooms
20 could have been added by taking advantage of
21 11,000 square feet of usable space on the south

1 Smallwood side of the building which has
2 potential for supporting a three-story addition.

3 The first floor could roughly add 2,800
4 square feet, and the second and third floors,
5 possibly 4,000 square feet. It still seems as if
6 we were being sacrificed for other communities.

7 Again, the expansion at Frederick could
8 be used as a small pilot therapeutic middle
9 school to include Frederick's PreK through five
10 to address the 21st Century culture of violence
11 experienced by our children, many of whom I
12 believe, no doubt, are experiencing post
13 traumatic stress.

14 We have to do something different, as I
15 said before. New schools but the same children
16 with unaddressed problems. When we have 3rd and
17 4th graders walking out of class and are
18 disrespectful, and we already see what happens in
19 middle school to the students and to the teachers
20 who attempt to educate them.

21 We realize it's about the money and

1 accountability. But, if we lose our school there
2 will be an economic loss. Perhaps not felt by
3 Baltimore City Public Schools, but by other city
4 government departments, businesses, churches, our
5 families and other residents in Carrollton Ridge,
6 and eventually, surrounding communities.

7 This is a real threat and, with the
8 Lord's help, we're fighting for our lives. This
9 is not an exaggeration.

10 I know what can be done when rather than
11 working at odds or across purposes, so much more
12 can be achieved by working together. From June
13 of '91 to March of '95, I had the honor of being
14 the first family care coordinator and contract
15 monitor in Baltimore City for what was called the
16 Family Preservation Initiative. Now, it's called
17 Family League.

18 The concept and practice of wrap-around
19 services similar in concept of community school
20 and schoolwide positive behavior support was
21 dollar driven. To bring back the out-of-state

1 monies to children, along with the children who
2 were placed out of state for services.

3 It was successful because we thought
4 outside the box to keep families intact and our
5 children in their home state. That same drive
6 could be utilized when we think outside the box,
7 pool our resources and dollars, to prevent the
8 dismantling and further decline of another
9 struggling, under-represented, low income,
10 predominantly African American community.

11 Carrollton Ridge will pursue
12 redevelopment and be successful. Our location is
13 ideal given our proximity to Interstate 95, 295
14 and 695, both stadiums, Bon Secours, St. Agnes
15 and the University of Maryland hospitals. We ask
16 that you please reconsider the closure of Samuel
17 F. B. Morse and the demise of our community.

18 We also propose that Frederick be used as
19 a swing space for Lockerman Bundy in 2017-18
20 rather than Samuel F. B. Morse. I also have two
21 sets of petitions. One, when the parents started

1 getting the petitions, they didn't realize they
2 needed addresses. So, they went out and got
3 others with the addresses. So, I'm giving you
4 two sets of petitions. Thank you so much for
5 your time. (Applause.)

6 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, Ms.
7 Tinsley. Next is Helena Hicks.

8 MS. HICKS: I want to say thank you to
9 the Board members for being tolerant and
10 listening to the citizens that you represent tell
11 you what hardships you may bring them if you
12 close schools.

13 I'm here to talk to you about Grove Park
14 Elementary School that you have planned to close.
15 And also to give you a warning, because I am Dr.
16 Helena Hicks. I have a doctorate in public
17 policy. I just won a suit against the city on
18 the water sewage in December of 2015. So, I am
19 well prepared to give you some advice that you're
20 not asking for. But, I'm going to give it to you
21 anyway so you can't say you didn't know.

1 Grove Park alumni association asked me to
2 come because they have organized, it's an
3 elementary school, probably don't have another
4 one. Not even in private schools. It has an
5 alumni association that's over 50 years old that
6 numbers almost 600 members. They will be sending
7 you emails and letters next week because they
8 have a deadline to let you know how they feel
9 about this school. These folks are old, they're
10 in their 50s. Yeah, I should say that since, I
11 can say that at my age.

12 It's an unusual community because there's
13 nothing in Grove Park except residences, single
14 family homes mostly, some semi-detached
15 apartments, and the elementary school. We have a
16 cemetery, too. Two churches. Nothing else. We
17 don't even have a traffic light in Grove Park.
18 It is so serene and peaceful, surrounded three
19 sides by woods.

20 Our kids walk down the middle of the
21 street to go to school. They don't know anything

1 about, we say get on the sidewalk. They don't
2 even care. They don't even worry about it.
3 Nobody bothers them.

4 We have had one murder on the outskirts
5 of Grove Park in the 54 years I have lived there.
6 So, it is a safe community.

7 Now, you want to send these children, who
8 have had this very sheltered, believe it or not,
9 city life, you want to send them to Calvin
10 Rodwell which is over a mile. The children walk
11 to school in our neighborhood. You want to send
12 them there, you're going to have to bus them
13 because there's no other way for them to get
14 there. Many parents in the community work. They
15 don't have transportation. You're going to
16 provide all those busses for over 300 kids to go
17 into a commercialized area which has the infamous
18 bar in it where, since 1980, every major drug
19 dealer bringing in drugs from Nigeria and
20 Pakistan, has resided and still has problems.
21 The last, just a week ago, it's so much crime

1 down there, they killed a young man on the steps
2 of Calvin Rodwell School.

3 Our kids have never been exposed to
4 anything like that. They aren't going to do well
5 and parents aren't going to tolerate it. You
6 have, you're under, the school is and the area
7 around the school, under the federal consent
8 decree signed December 15, 2015 which Grove Park
9 lead because of the water. So much building,
10 hadn't done anything with the water pipes since
11 1918. They're corroded terra cotta.

12 We took you all the way through the court
13 system to the federal courts and the federal
14 courts said find the city a million dollars and
15 said you will put no more people, buildings,
16 anything, until you do something about correcting
17 the sewerage system.

18 So, now you tell me that you're going to
19 bring in, we have our own apartments which we
20 have some new ones going up. We have about 8
21 homes for sale. We have our own increase in

1 population and school population isn't static.

2 It's going up and down.

3 So, you're going to tell me you're going
4 to bring up Calvin Rodwell school while you work
5 on Grove Park? You have in here something that
6 says, and I'm going to send this to the EPA,
7 where you are thinking about maybe building four
8 additional classrooms up there? You can't build
9 anything on that stream. Nothing. Absolutely
10 nothing.

11 If you move all those kids up there, I'm
12 going to say to them that we are now ready to go
13 back to court and hold you accountable for,
14 again, bringing more sewage into our homes
15 because the city refuses to do anything about the
16 pipes. (Applause.)

17 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Next is Walter
18 Boyd.

19 MR. BOYD: Good evening. My name is
20 Walter Boyd. I'm here actually to represent my
21 9-year old who attends Samuel F. B. Morse school.

1 I imagine if he could be here, it would be past
2 his bedtime but he really wants to keep Samuel
3 Morse open.

4 We done been through some times, we're
5 trying to help him to get into a school that he
6 would adapt to and be able to do his school work
7 and get his grades up and he finally, Samuel
8 Morse is one of the schools that he really likes
9 and his progress in it. It seems like when he
10 come home, that's what he be talking about when
11 he gets home and he's just in 3rd grade.

12 But, we went to Frederick, the school
13 that Samuel is being closed and the students
14 supposed to be going there. That school there,
15 it's not equipped. He has so much problems with,
16 they had to bus him from (Inaudible) Baltimore
17 Street to the school out west, North Bend. He
18 had problems on the bus, bullying and a lot of
19 stuff that I'm quite sure the principal at the
20 school know about. He just don't want to go back
21 to that school and we moved down to the area of

1 Samuel F. B. Morse, he's making so much progress,
2 if you are ashamed to have to bus him back to the
3 school he already been through and experienced.

4 I am low income. I can't afford to keep
5 moving or trying to get to a school that would
6 help him with his education and that's just the
7 way it is. I don't have that kind of money or
8 whatever. I'm struggling myself.

9 But, anyway, that's what I'm here for.
10 Hopefully, you all can reconsider that decision
11 because right there at that location, it's a lot
12 of vacant houses that can be done away with to
13 broaden the school, if that's what the problem
14 is, more space or whatever.

15 I mean, it's so much room with the empty
16 houses that you could probably make a better
17 community by broadening the school right there in
18 that area instead of moving the kids out of the
19 area. You know, to that area where they talking
20 about. Frederick Elementary.

21 Basically, that's what I'm here for. My

1 son. Thank you. (Applause.)

2 MS. HANBER: Hello, hi. My name is
3 Shannon Hanber and I'm a parent of a child at
4 Samuel F. B. Morse Elementary School #98 and I am
5 here to tell you all that I am against the
6 proposal of closing our school. I ask that you
7 reconsider the 21st Century Building plan which
8 includes the proposal to close Samuel F. B. Morse
9 Elementary School.

10 If you close Samuel Morse Elementary, you
11 take away a resource that brings our community
12 together. It's also a central place of
13 activities for many families. Children would no
14 longer be able to go to their neighborhood
15 school. They would have to go to a new school
16 which would be upsetting to many children. Many
17 parents choose not to move so that their children
18 can remain in the same school that they are
19 familiar with. But, this is not the parents
20 moving and the children suffering the
21 consequences. This is the whole school moving

1 and the children suffering the consequences.

2 There is increase chances of violence,
3 bullying and gangs in different neighborhoods.
4 The children of Samuel Morse will have to go to
5 somebody else's school. Considering the
6 increased part one crime rate of Frederick Road
7 near the Frederick Elementary School, part one
8 crime includes homicide, rape, aggressive
9 assault, arson, robbery, burglary, larceny and
10 also grand theft auto.

11 This crime rate is much higher near
12 Frederick than near Samuel Morse. There is also
13 a danger for children who will have to go through
14 or around Westside Shopping Center where,
15 recently, a person had got shot down Westside
16 Shopping Center. So, it would be a hardship on
17 so many families who can walk their children to
18 Samuel F. B. Morse. But, if it closes, they will
19 have to walk much further to Frederick Elementary
20 where 42 percent of residents don't own vehicles
21 and which my son, my grandmother has him and

1 she's an elderly person. So, she can't walk him
2 and I have to walk him. And then, I have his
3 brother and I'm trying to get him into the school
4 as well starting next year.

5 Just basically, if you all close the
6 schools, the kids are more familiar with Samuel
7 Morse teachers. There's a program called Hope.
8 The Hope Program, they've been dealing with the
9 kids since they were in PreK or whatever and now
10 they're in 3rd or 4th grade. If they go to
11 Frederick Elementary, they're going to have to
12 get familiar with some other people and it's
13 going to be hard for them to open up to somebody
14 else because they done been with this person for
15 so long.

16 Just, basically, it's all about the kids.
17 Then, they have to walk through Westside Shopping
18 Center. They have to worry about predators and
19 stuff like that that's in the neighborhood. We
20 have to worry about our kids. Somebody snatching
21 them or whatever the case may be.

1 We just been fighting. We didn't even
2 really know that the school was closing up until
3 this year, this school year. They said they were
4 sending letters home and we haven't gotten any
5 letters saying they were going to close the
6 school.

7 So, since we found out, we've been doing
8 the petitions and we went around the neighborhood
9 trying to talk to different people and trying to
10 get them to come out to our meetings, get
11 different Board members and everything to come
12 out to the meetings and talk to us and see if
13 there is anything else that we can do.

14 Next up was, what I was thinking was to
15 protest to see if we can get some people from the
16 community to show that they wouldn't, you know,
17 close down the school because the kids, they need
18 it. I'm a graduate from Samuel F. B. Morse. It
19 helped me out a whole lot because there's
20 programs that they had there and it's other
21 programs that they can get and if they do try to

1 close it or whatever, and there's a lot of
2 parents that volunteer. The parents are more
3 familiar with the teachers and the teachers
4 listen to the parents and stuff like that.

5 I just think that you all shouldn't close
6 it. Thank you. (Applause.)

7 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Douglas
8 Mylander.

9 MR. MYLANDER: I'm Douglas Mylander,
10 Pastor of St. Thomas Lutheran Church across the
11 street from Samuel F. B. Morse School. I'm
12 proposing or asking you that you rescind the
13 recommendation to close Samuel F. B. Morse
14 School.

15 There are several reasons to keep it open
16 and not move the students to the Frederick
17 School. First, keeping the Morse school open
18 will enable the children to continue their
19 education at a neighborhood school.

20 There are reasons that the school
21 officials have for closing Morse, but it all

1 depends on the values that you would have and the
2 priorities of those values.

3 The 21st Century Buildings plan, on their
4 website it says, students learn best and achieve
5 their fullest potential when their school
6 facilities provide areas for learning that
7 support innovative, high-quality instruction
8 using current technology and ensuring safety and
9 security.

10 I don't disagree with that. But, they
11 don't speak about the value of the neighborhood
12 school that elementary students need. Especially
13 high risk students. They learn best in their
14 neighborhood school.

15 The cost to renovate the Frederick school
16 is estimated to be \$30 million. If a
17 neighborhood school were a priority for the
18 administration, for the school officials, why not
19 split \$30 million, give half to Frederick and
20 give half to Samuel Morse which has significantly
21 higher enrollment than Frederick has. That's the

1 first thing.

2 Secondly, the well being of students will
3 be enhanced by staying at Morse school. They
4 will continue to have children who are familiar
5 and will be in familiar surroundings in a
6 neighborhood school. Staying at Morse will
7 remove the threat of violence or bullying or
8 gangs which students would be susceptible to if
9 they went to a different neighborhood school.
10 Our students would be on someone else's home
11 turf.

12 Keeping Morse school open will help to
13 ensure the safety of our children. They won't
14 have to travel an extra half mile. I just drove
15 it today. They won't have to go through or
16 around Westgate Shopping Center. There's a lot
17 of parents who don't even let their kids go to
18 Westgate Shopping Center.

19 They will not have to enter a much higher
20 crime rate area, as Shannon just mentioned.
21 According to the Inspire report, the tremendously

1 high rate of crime on Frederick Road, the third
2 thing.

3 Imagine that you have a 7-year old child
4 and you're a single parent. You don't have
5 private transportation. Forty-two percent of
6 people in our community do not have. They don't
7 have a car to drive. Now, you have an extra half
8 a mile to walk your child to school.

9 One of the major things that I read in
10 research by Dr. Steven Sheldon at Johns Hopkins
11 University School of Education, saying that
12 parent involvement is crucial in the education of
13 a child. Now, instead of removing obstacles to
14 parent involvement, this going to Frederick
15 school for people in our area, it adds an
16 obstacle. It makes it just that much harder for
17 parents to go to a meeting with a teacher or open
18 house or anything like that.

19 Also, keeping Samuel Morse open will help
20 our community because the school is an anchor in
21 our neighborhood. It helps families and others

1 who live here where, with 35.9 percent of the
2 homes are vacant, to move this school out is
3 going to increase the vacancy rate.

4 Right now, there is a drug-free zone
5 around that school, 100 foot perimeter around the
6 school that is policed at a higher level.

7 The 21st Century Buildings plan was
8 introduced in January 2013. Four years ago.
9 Prior to that date, officials of Baltimore City
10 Public Schools had done their planning. Most of
11 the parents are frustrated because, as Shannon
12 just said, they didn't know about it this whole
13 time until April of this year. They didn't have
14 a voice in this decision.

15 So, we ask you to make a neighborhood
16 school a priority in your decision-making. Just
17 imagine that you are the parent of that 7-year
18 old, so that your child could actually go to a
19 school that you can go to also. We believe that
20 you want to do the best for the education for the
21 students of Samuel F. B. Morse. That is our

1 desire as well. Keep our school open.
2 Neighborhood school for neighborhood children.

3 As speakers said earlier from
4 Renaissance, put children first, put children
5 first and you will always make the right
6 decision. Thank you. (Applause.)

7 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you. Next is
8 Dion Ball.

9 MR. BALL: Good evening. Before I
10 begin, every one of you all at that table on the
11 front side, do me a favor. You all stand up for
12 me. I want you all to take a look at these kids.
13 Don't think about the parents. Just think about
14 all of them and think about what they are all
15 going through now and the decision that you all
16 have to make as far as their future.

17 I sat there and I watched and I know,
18 okay, I'm a prodigy of Baltimore, period. I
19 graduated from four different schools here.
20 Samuel F. B. Morse, Chinquapin Middle,
21 Southwestern and I'm also a college student at

1 BCCC.

2 Now, I'm not going through what they're
3 going through. I've never had to go through it.
4 But, see, the thing about it is if you all expect
5 these kids to meet the goals that we all
6 achieved, they should be sitting where you all
7 are sitting in a couple of years. You all are
8 not going to be sitting there for the rest of
9 your life. You all will retire. Would you want
10 these kids to be sitting up there making
11 decisions that are going to benefit their kids
12 and your grandkids?

13 The decision you all are making doesn't
14 depend on the kids that are sitting here now. It
15 depends your grandkids, their kids after them.
16 The crime rate is high. Why is it high? Because
17 decisions that our school systems make is what
18 makes the kids decide if they want to continue
19 school or they want to drop out.

20 You've got a high drop-out rate. Why is
21 that? Because while you all are sitting behind

1 you all's desks and saying, well, we want to
2 close this school or the other, you're not taking
3 the time to sit and actually think. Okay, visit
4 the schools. Have orientations with the kids.
5 Find out what can make the community better for
6 the kids.

7 You want to close down these young kids'
8 school here, Samuel F. B. Morse. You want to
9 adjust all these other schools. But, the
10 question is, if you've never asked yourself this,
11 ask yourselves, what is it going to benefit you
12 all? Nothing. What is it going to benefit the
13 kids if you close down one school and send them
14 to another? More drama, more crime, an even
15 higher drop-out rate, a higher chance of
16 pregnancies. No offense, young ladies.

17 But, it's basically the truth. You've
18 got to think about those kinds of consequences.
19 Because, with every consequence, there's a
20 reaction to it. You want to send a positive note
21 to a kid, the first thing you do is you tell them

1 you're not going to close down their school.

2 You're going to help them build the school up.

3 Samuel F. B. Morse, it's a milestone for
4 me. I returned back to my old neighborhood where
5 I started out, 1903 Wilkins Avenue, walking to
6 school, Samuel F. B. Morse. I had friends,
7 brothers, cousins, all of them. I even got
8 family right now that's attending Samuel F. B.
9 Morse. My daughter is there. I know the Pastor
10 across the street from the school, I know just
11 about everybody in that community. They welcomed
12 me back home like I never left. Now, you're
13 talking about taking it somewhere where I started
14 out at and I came back home to, and taking it
15 away from these kids. It shouldn't happen.

16 You all got kids. Would you all take a
17 school that your kid goes to and send them to
18 another school? You need to ask yourself that
19 question. I know that we all would love to say
20 you all are not going to do it, why should we?
21 Think about that.

1 Then, on the 13th when you decide all
2 these schools' fates, make sure you all decide
3 the right one. Don't close none of the schools
4 down. Just think about what you all can do to
5 help these schools get better. So, when you're
6 done, you all can go home and say you all have
7 achieved a good goal and that is to make sure
8 these kids get the proper education that they
9 need. Thank you very much. That's all I have to
10 say. (Applause.)

11 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Next up is John
12 Comer.

13 MR. COMER: Good evening. What I'm
14 going to say, pretty much, has mostly already
15 been said. I've been sitting in the back of the
16 room and, for the most part, what I've been
17 looking at are the children of Renaissance. So,
18 let me say that my name is John Comer. I'm the
19 Co-Executive Director of Maryland Communities
20 United. We support the community school
21 platform.

1 We have a classroom within Renaissance
2 High School and we have been there since the
3 beginning of last year. We also walk the kids to
4 school every first Thursday of the month in
5 Gilmore Homes to Gilmore Elementary, as well as
6 William Pinderhughes Elementary.

7 What else could teenagers be doing on a
8 Tuesday night aside from sitting in a boring
9 School Board meeting? Not to say you all are not
10 entertaining, but what else could they be doing?
11 Right?

12 So, pretty much, I liken this to almost a
13 hospital visit. That grandmother, that auntie,
14 that person in the family that always told you
15 what you were, who always spoke to you and said
16 what you could be, and then you started to
17 believe it. She kept encouraging you to push on
18 to be the greatest person that you could ever be
19 and you kept believing it. Then, you ended up
20 really turning into that person that, at one
21 point in time, you weren't sure that you were

1 because you didn't see it in yourself. But, you
2 believed those words that were given to you.
3 That person made you feel special.

4 That's what Renaissance High School is
5 doing for these kids. Renaissance High School is
6 making these kids believe. Renaissance High
7 School is meeting these kids exactly where they
8 are. Tonight, we're in the hospital room and
9 we're all looking at you guys as the doctors, the
10 surgeons, maybe in the process, we hope that you
11 can save the school.

12 But, really it's not even about saving
13 the school. It's all in your hands. It's not
14 that the school is sick. The school isn't dying.
15 The school is living. The school is breathing.
16 There's no reason to even be on this table right
17 now. No reason at all.

18 So, we ask that you keep the school open.
19 You don't amputate any parts on the body because
20 it's healthy. It has its aches, it has its
21 pains, but we are dealing with those. We are

1 treating those. As a community school, a
2 community school is meant to address the problems
3 of the community, not run from them.

4 These kids are actually obeying the
5 process, being a part of the process in a way
6 that I think many of you would approve of.
7 They're here late at night and you can't look
8 them in the eye and say that, yeah, you came and
9 obeyed the process like we try to teach you in
10 social studies. You came and spoke your mind.
11 You came out. But, we're still going to shut
12 your school down.

13 What does that say to them? Is that the
14 status quo that these kids have come to learn?
15 That people don't really care about them? Are we
16 going to continue to operate in that vein? Are
17 we going to continue to carry out a form of
18 capital punishment? I thought we did away with
19 the death penalty in 2013. But, this would be
20 killing a living and breathing body that is
21 capable of being great. It's in the process of

1 rising and I advise you not to stunt the growth,
2 the greatness or the process of what is taking
3 place in this school. (Applause.)

4 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, sir.
5 Next up is Shawn Stennet.

6 MR. STENNET: Good evening, Chairman,
7 CEO Santelises and Board of Commissioners. My
8 name is Shawn Stennet. I am a proud graduate of
9 Grove Park Elementary School and the current
10 neighborhood President of West Arlington.

11 For those that don't know, the community
12 of West Arlington sits in the middle of our
13 neighboring communities of Grove Park and Howard
14 Park. Howard Park is the community which houses
15 Calvin Rodwell Elementary School.

16 I have a number of great memories during
17 my time at Grove Park. However, there are two
18 significant experiences from the school that I
19 will cherish for a lifetime.

20 First, during 3rd grade, my music teacher
21 introduced me to the trumpet. Playing the

1 trumpet lead me to Ms. Betty McCloud at West
2 Baltimore Middle School, and eventually, the
3 Baltimore School for the Arts.

4 My second significant experience was
5 during my 4th grade year when I was selected to
6 give a guided tour of the school to Curt Schmoke
7 who was then the State's Attorney for Baltimore
8 City. These two experiences may seem minimal to
9 some but it means a whole lot to myself and
10 that's why it's important for the school to stay
11 open. Not because of my personal experience.
12 But, we, as a community, are in the business to
13 provide lifelong experiences of education and
14 personal enrichment to all of our students.

15 Which brings me to my opposition on the
16 recommendation of closing Grove Park Elementary
17 for the following three reasons. First, I would
18 like to see greater discussion and engagement
19 with the community when the school first shows
20 signs of facing closure, rather than when closure
21 is deemed inevitable by the district.

1 Second, I fear that any proposed school
2 receiving students were not properly prepared to
3 serve the additional students. It is a
4 disservice, both to the students of the receiving
5 school and to the incoming students, to place
6 additional strains on schools who may already
7 have their challenges in meeting the needs of
8 their own students.

9 Third, most of all, I worry about the
10 personal cost of this closure to students and
11 families. There is no question that transferring
12 school adds instability and disruption to the
13 lives of students which brings me to many
14 challenges we face in the West Arlington
15 community.

16 As I said before, we're in the middle of
17 Grove Park and Howard Park where the students are
18 going to have to travel as far as getting from
19 one school to the other school.

20 Now, within the West Arlington community,
21 we're facing different challenges that, since I

1 have become President of the association, I've
2 had to face including one when I had initially
3 moved to the neighborhood about five or 6 months
4 ago, our community had faced a 19-year old kid
5 who got shot and killed right in front of my
6 home.

7 Another issue, there has been various
8 shoot-outs as far as within the Bengies store
9 that's been vacant for over 10-12 years, there's
10 been several shoot-outs in that area. Now, keep
11 in mind we're talking about allowing students to
12 walk through these particular areas.

13 Another issue that we're facing as far as
14 within the community is a high rate of
15 prostitution. Now, I really believe, in my eyes,
16 as far as I think we have a high rate of
17 prostitution because we have a number of assisted
18 living and group homes in that area. And, not
19 dealing with assisted living homes that's taking
20 care of older adults, there are assisted living
21 homes that are dealing with former drug users.

1 Now, don't get me wrong. I believe those
2 businesses are definitely useful and I commend.
3 But, in the community of West Arlington, in just
4 one block alone, the 4300 block of Belleview
5 which these kids have to walk through in order to
6 get to Calvin Rodwell and in order to get to
7 Grove Park, we have five assisted living homes in
8 just that one block. To me, that's unacceptable.

9 So, I urge you to pull the recommendation
10 to close Grove Park immediately with the
11 understanding that our community asked for
12 greater transparency and collaboration and a
13 sensitive process that affect our children.
14 Thank you for your leadership. (Applause.)

15 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Thank you, sir.
16 This concludes the second of our two scheduled
17 public hearings with respect to the portfolio
18 recommendations. The Board will vote on these
19 recommendations on December 13, 2016.

20 You can continue to send your comments to
21 portfoliorecommendations@bcps.k12.md.us. Or, you

1 can mail them to our office by US mail. Any
2 additional details can be found on the Baltimore
3 City Schools.org website. Can I have a motion to
4 close the meeting?

5 COMMISSIONER HIKE-HUBBARD: So moved.

6 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: So moved by
7 Commissioner Hike-Hubbard. Can I have a second?

8 COMMISSIONER CASCIANI: Second.

9 BOARD CHAIR COOPER: Seconded by
10 Commissioner Casciani. All those in favor, say
11 aye?

12 SPEAKERS: Aye.

13 (PROCEEDINGS CONCLUDED.)

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1 STATE OF MARYLAND

2 SS:

3 I, Dawn L. Brown, a Notary Public of the
4 State of Maryland, do hereby certify that the
5 aforegoing transcript of a Baltimore City Board
6 of School Commissioners proceeding was
7 transcribed under my supervision as herein
8 appears and is an accurate transcript of what is
9 recorded and audible on the recording.

10 I further certify that I am not of
11 counsel to any of the parties, nor an employee of
12 counsel, nor in any way interested in the outcome
13 of this action.

14 As witness my hand and notarial seal this
15 5th day of December, 2016.

16

17

18

Notary Public

19

20

21 My commission expires September 21, 2018

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