

1 DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
STATE OF MISSOURI

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RIVERVIEW GARDENS SCHOOL DISTRICT

8

PUBLIC HEARING

9

DECEMBER 16, 2013

10

11

Family Community Resource Center

St. Cyr Road

12

St. Louis, Missouri 63137

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(Starting time of hearing: 6:30 p.m.)

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1	A P P E A R A N C E S
2	Present for the Department of Elementary and Secondary
3	Education:
4	Dr. Chris Nicastro, Commissioner of Education
5	Margie Vandeven, Deputy Commissioner
6	Ronald Lankford, Deputy Commissioner
7	Dr. Tim Ricker, Area Supervisor
8	
9	
10	Also Present:
11	Dr. Scott Spurgeon, Superintendent of Riverview
12	Gardens Schools
13	Melanie Powell-Robinson, Director of Communications
14	for Riverview Gardens Schools
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. VANDEVEN: Good evening. We really appreciate and thank you all for being here this evening with us to really talk more about the Riverview Gardens School District and your students. Again, thank you, for being here.

I'd like to start by introducing some key people tonight. First of all, you'll hear -- we have Commissioner Nicastro. We also have our deputy commissioner Ron Lankford. We have our assistant commissioner Dennis Cooper. Our state supervisor, area supervisor in your region, Tim Ricker. And our state board member Vic Lenz is with us this evening.

I would really like to also give a gracious thanks to Dr. Spurgeon. As he said, whenever we come to Riverview Gardens you say you'll take good care of us and you certainly do, so we thank you very much for your hospitality and for having everything arranged for us this evening.

I would just like to run through a couple of the components so we can have the meeting run as smoothly as possible this evening. It is scheduled from 6:30 until 8:00 p.m. And we will begin with a few remarks from the department. And next we will move to the public comment period.

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And there are a number of ways for you to provide public comment. You may either submit a speaker card -- and so if you do not have a speaker card and you wish to speak make sure you complete that and we'll be happy to come around and collect them for you.

You may also fill out a comment card, which is the blue card. We will take those back with us to the department or you may submit public comment through an email address that is dedicated specifically to this and that's at Riverview Gardens comments at DESE dot mo dot gov.

With that, I would like to hand things over to Dr. Ron Lankford who will begin our evening.

DR. LANKFORD: Thank you, Margie. When I came in Dr. Spurgeon said you can have a lapel mic so I don't have to stand up there and with you being close I think this works out well. Maybe we can stand down here and just have a dialogue very briefly before we go into the discussion as far as question and answers are concerned.

So I do have some cheat sheets that I'm going to refer to from time to time. And for those of you who may have been at Normandy last week, you're going to hear virtually the same thing I said over

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1 there.
 2 What we're trying to do is contextualize
 3 where we are with the situation that you're dealing
 4 with at Riverview Gardens School District at the
 5 present time.
 6 This is my 41st year in public education. I
 7 started as a teacher and a counselor and then I
 8 moved to assistant principalship and to junior high
 9 principalship in a district where I ultimately spent
 10 33 years in southwest Missouri. And so over the
 11 period of time that I was there, I observed many
 12 things that happened that in some way are directly
 13 related to our being here this evening.
 14 I was a young high school principal 30 years
 15 ago in 1983 and the National Council -- actually the
 16 National Commission on Excellence in Education
 17 issued the infamous "Nation At Risk" report.
 18 And the "Nation at Risk" report was a pretty
 19 strong indictment of the quality of education of the
 20 school-age youth of this country. And, in it, it
 21 had a statement in there. It said if an unfriendly
 22 foreign power had attempted to impose on America the
 23 mediocre education performance that exists today, we
 24 might well have viewed it as an act of war. And
 25 that really caught the attention and since that time

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1 education has been a very -- very much a political
 2 issue on the scene in this country.
 3 As a reaction to that, the State of Missouri
 4 put together in 1985 the Missouri Excellence in
 5 Education Act. And it was a direct result of the
 6 1983 "Nation At Risk" report. And it was one of the
 7 first things that Governor Ashcroft did when he was
 8 elected into governorship, was to sign into law the
 9 Excellence in -- the Missouri Excellence in
 10 Education Act.
 11 From that act there were certain things that
 12 came about and one of those was Career Ladder, the
 13 idea that you could start having extra pay for
 14 teachers to do the extra things. It was pointed
 15 toward improving the performance of Missouri
 16 school-age youth.
 17 As we worked through it, it was determined
 18 that there needed to be a new law and that new law
 19 would assure that all students would have an
 20 opportunity to outstanding schools an excellent
 21 education.
 22 I was in the gallery of the Missouri State
 23 Capitol building in the final days of the session in
 24 1993, when the Missouri House of Representatives
 25 after they had voted it down had a revote and

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1 revived the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. That
 2 afternoon it passed, went to the Senate and it was
 3 passed.
 4 And it was predicated upon additional funding
 5 in the State of Missouri for public schools and also
 6 predicated upon what we might do to assure that all
 7 schools would be outstanding in the State of
 8 Missouri. And unlike the pre-accreditation programs
 9 we had been under where they literally counted your
 10 resources, if you met minimum resources you were
 11 classified, this was predicated upon student
 12 achievement that evolved through the Missouri School
 13 Improvement Program under the direction and
 14 authority of the Outstanding Schools Act.
 15 The problem that we ran into finally came to
 16 reality with the accreditation of the St. Louis
 17 Public School District a few years ago. And there
 18 was a provision in that law that indicated that if
 19 you were an unaccredited school district that your
 20 students could go to any school in that county or in
 21 an adjacent county or adjoining county and you would
 22 have the right to opt to do that, Section 167.131 of
 23 that particular law.
 24 There was a challenge to that. As a result
 25 of the challenge, that was never imposed until this

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1 summer when the Missouri Supreme Court ruled that
 2 the right of transfer did comply with Missouri
 3 statute. And, as a result of that, in June both
 4 Normandy and Riverview Gardens were faced with some
 5 of their students leaving the school district.
 6 Receiving school districts were faced with receiving
 7 school districts after the actual year had closed,
 8 plans had been made for both sending and receiving
 9 school districts.
 10 In October of -- on October 1st, this past
 11 two months ago, the department made a presentation
 12 to a joint committee -- not a joint committee but an
 13 interim committee on education in the House. And
 14 one of the major concerns that was sited by the
 15 school districts in the St. Louis area and spoken
 16 and brought to us by the cooperating school district
 17 that is now Educational Plus, I believe is what it's
 18 called, was this is a tremendous financial drain on
 19 the sending school districts. And you understand
 20 that it is and we understand that it is.
 21 And, so as result of that, we have
 22 recommended -- we recommended on October 1st an
 23 alternative methodology for tuition, which would
 24 soften the cost of transferring students to help
 25 Riverview Gardens and Normandy. This would make a

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1 statutory change and we do not yet know what is
 2 going to happen.
 3 Then on December 10th there was another event
 4 that transpired on the western side of the state.
 5 The Missouri Supreme Court again upheld its decision
 6 and said that the Kansas City School District failed
 7 to meet the state category.
 8 We did a few things in the summertime to help
 9 with the transfer or we thought. We had no
 10 statutory power to do this. It's non-binding
 11 guidance. You can go online and see the guidance
 12 that was issued to sending and receiving school
 13 districts relative to how many students they might
 14 have to take, relative to the process to make that
 15 determination, transportation, tuition calculation
 16 and so forth.
 17 And we would have to commend both the sending
 18 school districts and the receiving school districts
 19 for what you have done at this point for making a
 20 very difficult situation work as well as it can.
 21 But we're still asking: What do we do going
 22 forward?
 23 Both Normandy and Riverview Gardens in this
 24 first session there was a lot of discussion and we
 25 do want to clarify why the department could not have

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1 done some things. That in June, one of the
 2 reasons -- the statute relative to the transfer of
 3 students, the statute relative to how we deal with
 4 unaccredited schools, the period of time that the
 5 warden might come in and act. In the past general
 6 session there was a law passed called Senate Bill
 7 125. And 125 gave the state Board of Education
 8 power to act sooner than two years, which the old
 9 law said the state board could not do anything for
 10 two years. That will remain in effect until
 11 August 28 and school started, you know,
 12 August 13th and 14th in some of the receiving
 13 districts, it was well started by then.
 14 The things we could have done prior to August
 15 29th, we could have replaced the elective board. In
 16 Riverview Gardens that was done. We have a special
 17 administrative board sitting here to my left and who
 18 have worked hard with Dr. Spurgeon. And we
 19 maintained close communication with Dr. Spurgeon and
 20 his staff. They've worked hard to make this
 21 difficult situation work.
 22 We could have unilaterally made the decision
 23 to merge the school district. We could have made
 24 the decision to combine the school district into
 25 parts and attach them to other school districts.

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1 But 125 had the intriguing provision that allowed us
 2 to do "other" and sometimes we need to say it
 3 allowed us to do something else.
 4 And so what we have been trying to do was
 5 to -- one of the things we had to do was have
 6 hearings like this, a minimum of two, before we made
 7 any kind of decision. We did get set back because
 8 of the Supreme Court ruling. So we were unable to
 9 start to implement the other but what we're wanting
 10 to do is put together a plan for struggling school
 11 districts, whether it's Normandy, Riverview Gardens,
 12 Kansas City or southwest Missouri, that we have a
 13 plan that would help school districts in an
 14 improvement process long before they ever become to
 15 the situation where they might lapse or have to
 16 shift the students out. But we could not do any of
 17 that prior to August 29th and, at that particular
 18 time, we had our hands full, as did you, with
 19 dealing with the transfer situation.
 20 We will tell you tonight that it is the goal
 21 of the state Board of Education and we believe it is
 22 the goal of the people sitting in this room this
 23 evening and I know it's the goal of your
 24 administrative -- special administrative board and
 25 of your superintendent, that we provide quality

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1 educational access to every child in every
 2 community. We believe that.
 3 We also know that we have to initiate
 4 effective plans to make this work and it's going to
 5 take the commitment of lots of people to make this
 6 work. We take a look at the principles of what
 7 we're trying to do. We have to focus on the needs
 8 of the children and families.
 9 We know that putting a child on a bus, busing
 10 them 25 or 30 miles so they might have an option to
 11 attend school locally, may not be the best plan.
 12 But we have to make sure that local option assures
 13 quality educational program for the students served.
 14 Access, therefore, should be preferable, delivered
 15 preferably, delivered in your own neighborhoods.
 16 It has to be a collective responsibility. We
 17 can't ask someone else to do the job for us. It's
 18 going to require each local community -- and this is
 19 the planning that we're trying to achieve, each
 20 local community, each parent and caregiver, each
 21 patron, each civic and faith-based organization,
 22 each business, each political subdivision as far as
 23 the community in which the school exists, we all
 24 have to have shared commitment toward the improving
 25 of our schools.

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1 There is no doubt that the time has come,
 2 that it has been 20 years since the Outstanding
 3 Schools Act was passed, but the time has come to
 4 assure that goal is reached through the planning
 5 process that we hope to have in place. We believe
 6 this process must embrace conditions that foster
 7 great schools.
 8 I have seven grandchildren and the youngest
 9 -- the oldest one is ten and the youngest one is
 10 one. I don't know what their future is going to be
 11 but I will tell you this: I want them to have an
 12 opportunity. Each time that I've come to the
 13 Riverview Gardens School District we've always told
 14 the staff here we want to visit a school. We never
 15 tell them which one we want to visit because then
 16 that way we can't say you have set up a good show
 17 for us.
 18 We go to school, I walk in the classroom and
 19 I see your teachers working with their students.
 20 And, at your high school, you had a math teacher
 21 that we walked in that I will tell you today if I
 22 was sitting in the school and that lady wanted a
 23 job, I would hire her in a heartbeat. She was an
 24 outstanding math teacher.
 25 We go into an elementary school and in the

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1 second and third grades -- and I say those kids
 2 because that's the age of my grandchildren and I see
 3 those kids being served in that school building,
 4 coming from homes that care about them.
 5 Well-groomed, well-cared-for. And I see on their
 6 faces the hopes and dreams that I see on the faces
 7 of my kids or my grandkids.
 8 So we have got to embrace the conditions that
 9 foster great schools for them. Hope is not a
 10 strategy. It has to be a plan that will achieve
 11 that and it has to be based upon strategies that
 12 work. You know, it's not really to hard to figure
 13 out. When somebody is doing something very well
 14 it's generally because they do it day in and day out
 15 correctly. They work hard at it. It's not a
 16 haphazard effort.
 17 My father lived to be 93 years old and had an
 18 eighth grade education. Never made much money. We
 19 didn't have a lot. I never heard him complain about
 20 what he didn't have. We had a few tools. We lived
 21 on a farm. He knew what he had and he could do what
 22 he could do with what he had and every day he went
 23 to work with that. Never complained. He used to
 24 say it's not what you have, it's what you do with
 25 what you have.

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1 And I think if you look at the research out
 2 there, it is the focus on every child, knowing where
 3 they are, what they're doing and making adjustments
 4 so they are successful. So it means we draw on best
 5 practices.
 6 There may be schools in this region that you
 7 might be able to draw some things from them. There
 8 are schools across the state that you might be able
 9 to draw from, across the country, around the world.
 10 And, yes, even quality teachers within your own
 11 district, who are proven successful, that we can
 12 draw from.
 13 It has to include community input, but more
 14 importantly, demonstrated commitment by each
 15 community.
 16 We have to implement a statewide system that
 17 provides the necessary support and intervention for
 18 all students beginning with quality early childhood
 19 education programs. We can't wait until their 5
 20 years old. You and I might be able to run exactly
 21 the same speed but if you get a head start I'll
 22 never catch you. Early childhood education is key
 23 and we have to look at that.
 24 But, moreover, we have to implement a plan
 25 that results in improved student performance. And

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1 that's what we really would like to hear about
 2 tonight. As you make your suggestions, we know what
 3 your frustrations are and we share many of those
 4 same frustrations. But what we got to be talking
 5 about, the plan going forward, what we can do.
 6 I will tell you that the state Board of
 7 Education, if it could just simply flip a switch and
 8 do something different with the transfer program, it
 9 would probably do that but we have a statutory
 10 barrier that we have. We can amend our own rules.
 11 We can make our own rules but we cannot set aside
 12 state statute.
 13 We're very hopeful that the general assembly
 14 this year can work with the department and work with
 15 the communities, work with all of us to solve this
 16 problem, that we might be able to deal with the
 17 transfer situation and the outflow of money but in
 18 the end we have a quality school in every community
 19 in the State of Missouri and one of those being
 20 Riverview Gardens.
 21 So we want to talk about -- we want to hear a
 22 little bit more from you tonight and I'm going to
 23 turn it back to deputy commissioner Vandeven and
 24 she's going to kind of lead the discussion and we
 25 have -- we'll have plenty of time to make comments.

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1 MS. VANDEVEN: Thank you, Dr. Lankford.
 2 Yes, as Dr. Lankford mentioned, we will now be
 3 moving to the public comment period. Again, this is
 4 also, aside from an opportunity to provide any kind
 5 of feedback you would like to provide, it is an
 6 opportunity for us to learn more about community
 7 resources that are available, that are needed to
 8 move your schools back to full accreditation. So we
 9 do welcome those comments this evening.
 10 If you wish to speak, please make sure you
 11 have submitted a speaker card. If your name is
 12 called we ask that you proceed immediately to either
 13 of the two microphones. They are both ready for you
 14 to go. Each speaker will be limited to five minutes
 15 and our timekeepers will keep track by providing a
 16 one-minute warning. And when the one-minute warning
 17 sign is raised, we ask that you please move to your
 18 concluding remarks.
 19 Audience members are asked to permit each
 20 speaker to present without interruption. Applause
 21 and other distractions during the speaker's
 22 presentation will be counted as part of the
 23 speaker's time. Any speaker who runs out of time
 24 will be invited to discontinue and submit comments
 25 in writing or email. And the final speaker will be

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1 called no later than 7:50 to allow for a full five
 2 minutes of comment or closing remarks.
 3 All comments, verbal and written, become part
 4 of the public record and may be posted on the
 5 department's website verbatim.
 6 So, with that, we'll go ahead and get started
 7 and Dr. Cooper will be pulling out our first two
 8 speakers this evening.
 9 MR. COOPER: Do we have any speaker
 10 cards that have not been turned in?
 11 Our first speaker will be Brad Busby followed
 12 by Peg Warnusz.
 13 MR. BUSBY: I would like to make my
 14 remarks brief. I am Brad Busby. I am a school
 15 counselor in this school district for the past 14
 16 years. I was hired by Dr. Chris Wright and
 17 Dr. Maureen Clancy-May to first work at Highland
 18 Elementary. I have been through this entire process
 19 and we have been under supervision by the state for
 20 several years now.
 21 There is not one person on this special
 22 administrative board that has any ax to grind with
 23 us. They are supportive. However, a curious act
 24 has come to mind. I think that most of you know as
 25 educators that any credible researcher will tell you

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1 that real systemic change, especially in a school
 2 district or other organization, takes three to five
 3 years of implementation, provided that you are
 4 implementing a specific plan with fidelity.
 5 I have to contend that in -- since the state
 6 takeover, that has failed in Riverview Gardens.
 7 There has been no consistent plan that has actually
 8 been put in place. We have had a large number of
 9 initiatives and other types of insufficient
 10 comprehensive PD to support them.
 11 And, another thing that comes to mind, is
 12 that we've also had more than one shuffling of
 13 administrators in this district, several times. I
 14 don't call that consistent three to five years of
 15 implementation with fidelity.
 16 I would like to point out that we now have a
 17 new superintendent. We have somebody who has a plan
 18 and is here to support this district and make a
 19 difference. I would like to contend that he be
 20 given the opportunity to make that change. I
 21 believe that our special administrative board will
 22 support him in anything he chooses to do because
 23 they want to see this district succeed.
 24 I will close my remarks now and I will ask
 25 the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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1 to step up to the plate and make sure that we are
 2 given the opportunity to make a real systemic change
 3 in this district. Thank you.
 4 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Our next
 5 speaker is Peg Warnusz and she will be followed by
 6 Richard Thies.
 7 MS. WARNUSZ: My name is Peg Warnusz and
 8 I am an educator who is now retired from 41 years in
 9 education. I have -- my husband and I have lived in
 10 this community for 25 years and we have no children.
 11 So my experience with education in this community
 12 has been through my neighborhood and through the
 13 kids who live in my neighborhood.
 14 I hate to say that when the transfer went
 15 into effect not one child who lives on my street
 16 currently goes to Riverview Gardens Schools. And
 17 for four or five years prior to the transfer those
 18 kids were at my house doing homework, their parents
 19 would be coming to my house because they knew I was
 20 a teacher and they knew I understood things they
 21 didn't understand.
 22 I knew parents who really cared about their
 23 children but could not read the report card and did
 24 not understand what "meets expectations" means or
 25 "needs improvement." They came from a system with

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1 A, B, C, D, E, and F -- not E, but F. And they
 2 don't understand. They don't understand -- many
 3 times they don't understand -- we get testing
 4 results. Well, what is this telling? What is my
 5 kid doing? Is my kid learning? Is my kid not
 6 learning?
 7 And I discovered that one of the things that
 8 we have to do in terms of the community is help our
 9 parents understand what the -- school is not like
 10 school when they went to school and that this is how
 11 they can best support their children.
 12 Every morning I see the kids when I go out
 13 for the newspaper, to get the newspaper and they're
 14 walking to their bus stops. Some as early as
 15 six o'clock in the morning. And I always yell to
 16 them have the best day and be the smartest kid you
 17 can possibly be today. And when I see them after
 18 school I say how was your day? Were you smart
 19 today? Tell me how your were smart today. It's all
 20 about relationships.
 21 I heard our opening speaker say he went into
 22 a math classroom at the high school. And he said I
 23 would want that teacher as my grandchildren's
 24 teacher. How long were you in that classroom? And
 25 for the teachers that's -- it's wonderful for a

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1 five- or ten-minute visit but then you're holding
 2 teachers accountable when you have testing and their
 3 scores don't match or don't meet the expectation.
 4 Well, to me, you're judging and saying you're a
 5 wonderful teacher and at the same time you're saying
 6 the kids didn't meet the score. It can't be both
 7 ways.
 8 What a teacher does in a classroom is build
 9 relationships with the kids. And when those
 10 relationships are there then the learning takes
 11 place. Nothing warmed my heart more than to see
 12 that child on the front page of today's paper at
 13 Moline Elementary School with the biggest smile on
 14 his face because he was reading. That's what
 15 learning is about and that's where we have to come
 16 as a community to learn. It's about children in
 17 every single decision.
 18 I urge you, every single decision you make
 19 needs to be child-centered. If you don't know where
 20 the child fits in the picture then maybe you need to
 21 rethink the decision. Thank you.
 22 MR. COOPER: Richard Thies will be
 23 followed by Carnell Jones.
 24 MR. THIES: Good evening, to our DESE
 25 visitors tonight and all the stakeholders of

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1 Riverview Gardens School District. My name is
 2 Richard Thies and I am a 27-year veteran teacher in
 3 the Riverview Gardens School District and I have
 4 been a school teacher for over 30 years. I am also
 5 the local President of the Riverview Gardens NEA.
 6 After we heard about the impending takeover
 7 back in the spring of 2010, the Missouri NEA and the
 8 local Riverview Gardens NEA were proactive in
 9 putting together a plan that would involve every
 10 stakeholder of the district and lead the groundwork
 11 for a total collaboration.
 12 These NEA state and local leaders got
 13 together and developed a collaboration plan. They
 14 laid out ideas to work collaboratively in all
 15 aspects of the district to present DESE and
 16 Riverview Gardens administration to ease the
 17 transition and guide the future of this district.
 18 The goal is to present all of the
 19 stakeholders and gain the buy-in of DESE, community,
 20 administrators, teachers, staff, and even students
 21 and work to develop that plan to fit Riverview
 22 Gardens.
 23 Administration and the community, through the
 24 district parent group and to our surprise and shock,
 25 it was just tossed aside by both DESE and Riverview

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1 Gardens administration. Three and a half years
 2 later there continues to be no collaboration between
 3 any of the stakeholders of the district. Avenues to
 4 get all the parties talking to each other have
 5 continually been met with roadblocks. DESE
 6 continues to throwout unproven ideas about how they
 7 think the district needs to be run and, as we have
 8 seen, with results that have shown less than a
 9 desired success rate.
 10 Since Dr. Spurgeon has become the
 11 superintendent of our district he has begun to
 12 involve the RGNEA and staff and having some
 13 collaboration talks between the RGNEA and
 14 administration. Even with that said, there still
 15 seems to be roadblocks from the state that prevent
 16 him from working together with staff and making
 17 truly collaborative decisions.
 18 All of our attempts over the last three years
 19 to talk to Chris Nicastro and DESE have been met
 20 with zero communication. Success will come when the
 21 goal is not to impose supreme power of a job title
 22 or a state agency such as DESE, when all the parties
 23 begin working together and making decisions
 24 together.
 25 I am asking that DESE give Riverview Gardens

1 the time and the opportunity to work in a way that
2 the RGNEA originally proposed back in 2010. There
3 needs to be open communication to mold the direction
4 together and to express concerns that prevent
5 achieving these goals. The successful districts
6 that have come back from the position we are in,
7 have used the plan of total collaboration.

8 I will, again, leave you the collaboration
9 plan, as we presented it back in 2010, as the
10 template for working together and guiding the
11 district into the future. Having the state making
12 the decisions for our district has not proven the
13 operable conditions for achieving accreditation.
14 DESE managed to handcuff and eliminate the
15 possibility of once again achieving our
16 accreditation.

17 Give Riverview Gardens and Dr. Spurgeon the
18 opportunity to do what is needed to gain control of
19 every aspect of the school district to once again
20 put our district back on track for full
21 accreditation without the in your face type of
22 control. Thank you.

23 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Carnell?
24 Carnell will be followed by Lloyd Gardner.

25 MR. JONES: Good evening. We find

1 is good. We don't always have that in the public
2 sector.

3 And even though I paid there, I never did
4 advocate to dismantle the public school sector
5 because when that child had no place to go, the
6 public school has to take them.

7 We are teetering on the possibility if they
8 close down this district, the possibility that we'll
9 be looking at charter. Those are the things that --
10 what about the children that have to stay here?
11 It's unfortunate we don't see many more parents out
12 here.

13 I attended the meeting over at the library
14 and there was over five to six hundred parents
15 there. If they had supported our district at the
16 time it was undergoing all the problems that it had,
17 things would have been better because when you hold
18 those accountable with their feet to the fire, you
19 get better results.

20 I was present at the service here in 2001 in
21 the district. At the time I still had my three sons
22 in school. The district was merging from going to
23 an all white board to a mixture of black and white.
24 This was right after Dr. Wright had left and
25 Dr. William came. Matter of fact, his tenure and my

1 ourselves disheartening with the sense of amazement
2 that we find our school district at this time. We
3 are constantly reminded if you don't pay attention
4 to history it will repeat itself. I started school
5 in the year of the Brown versus Board of Education
6 in the most heinous state in '48. And to finally
7 see some of the same things prevailing now, which
8 means we did not pay attention to those details.

9 I came to Riverview in 1978. I brought my
10 children here. My whole first ten years in the
11 school district in Mississippi I did not ever have a
12 new book. I moved to Missouri and I got my new
13 books because I had to purchase them myself. But in
14 spite of all that, we kept our eye on the prize.

15 I tell you, as I said, I brought three sons
16 here and they are all Riverview graduates. I
17 specifically kept my finger on the cusp of their
18 education. There are things that happened in this
19 district that will shutter you but I did not lose
20 sight of what was needed for them. At times I had
21 to pull them out of Riverview because things were
22 not going on educationally -- what needed to be
23 received. And at that time I put them in parochial
24 school and one of the prerequisites there is as
25 parents you must participate with all aspects, which

1 tenure on the board was less than a week apart. At
2 the time the board had two white district members
3 who had moved out of the district but would not ever
4 take their seat. So the board was not able to hold
5 a quorum. So I was appointed to the board in order
6 that we get the business of the district done, so we
7 can see.

8 When I came to the first meeting at Normandy
9 and I saw this place card my heart jumped because I
10 had just recently been dealing with these. I was
11 successfully working with the Organizing for
12 America, the Normandy, Jennings branch and for over
13 18 months we placed these in over hundreds of
14 thousands homes throughout the metropolitan area and
15 the key is accountability, to see where the support
16 is.

17 So that's what I would like to do with these,
18 is to work and get these out and when we go back to
19 the district and see it in all the windows. It's
20 one thing for lip service to say -- and, also, with
21 this I have a mechanism in order to get this
22 accomplished. I will leave my number with the
23 superintendent for those who want to contact me
24 because I have a 501(c)(3) organization that will
25 provide monetary resources and jobs for those that

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1 are 17 down to 14. Those that are 18 and above, we
 2 would be able to provide earning because what we
 3 need to do, we have to give our kids something to
 4 do.
 5 So I will be outside with sign-up sheets. If
 6 you don't get a chance to see me there then call the
 7 district and I will leave my number with the
 8 superintendent because we must take our hands-on
 9 approach to help solve this because money is the key
 10 and right now our money is going out to Mehlville
 11 and that's not helping Riverview. Thank you.
 12 MR. COOPER: Lloyd will be followed by
 13 Niketia Coleman.
 14 MR. GARDNER: Good evening. That's
 15 loud. Where the timekeeper at? I just want to know
 16 where to look at because I will talk. My name is
 17 Lloyd Gardner and some of you may have heard of me.
 18 I run Lloyd Gardner's Karate School. It has been in
 19 existence for 16 years. I am a husband. I have
 20 been married for 15 years to the same woman and
 21 she's not here. She's working tonight.
 22 I am a father. I have four children that
 23 have all come up in the Dellwood -- we lived over on
 24 Hudson. We come up within Dellwood, so I'm not
 25 talking from the outside. I'm talking from the

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1 inside. I am a 15-year resident of Dellwood. I
 2 have education. I have a bachelor's degree in
 3 education. I'm a former school teacher. I taught
 4 for about four years and I didn't make the fifth
 5 year. I stopped. And I'll tell you that story
 6 later.
 7 What do I do? As I said, I'm a martial arts
 8 entrepreneur, certified teacher. I'm also a pastor
 9 of a church. So I do quite a few things. My life
 10 is built around children for the last 15 years. But
 11 what is my story? My story is a story of pain and
 12 brokenness.
 13 I have three kids who experienced Riverview
 14 Gardens education. I have one, my youngest daughter
 15 who never experienced Riverview. My oldest son, he
 16 spent seven years in the Riverview School District
 17 from the fourth through the tenth grade. It was
 18 full of trouble. Constant behavior problems,
 19 constant academic problems, constantly being called
 20 by the teachers and constantly going up to the
 21 school. He did not graduate out of the tenth grade.
 22 He dropped out. He has a criminal record.
 23 My oldest daughter, she spent ten years at
 24 Riverview. She got to her sophomore year in
 25 Riverview High School. She couldn't take it

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1 anymore. We transferred her into Tech. She
 2 graduated. She got to college, to Florissant Valley
 3 but she couldn't cope. She was not properly
 4 prepared for college. She flunked out and she got
 5 pregnant.
 6 My youngest son, after going through two real
 7 bad situations with the first two, I said well, I
 8 need to do a little bit better job. Me, as a
 9 parent, being an entrepreneur, I was pretty busy
 10 trying to raise a new family. So by the time I got
 11 to my youngest son I said I was going to do better.
 12 I was going to be there at every parent/teacher
 13 conference. I'm going to do everything I can to
 14 help the school. The school they all went to
 15 elementary was Lemasters. I thought Lemasters was a
 16 great school.
 17 Mrs. Turlick (ph) was the principal. I
 18 partnered with her. I offered my karate services,
 19 my business services to her because it taught kids
 20 discipline. I have a thing with trying to help
 21 young boys because I know at the bottom of every
 22 list is African American boys. In every -- in every
 23 academic list they are at the bottom. If they don't
 24 succeed in school, they will turn to a life of
 25 crime. That's a pretty high statistic when you go

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1 and check it.
 2 My oldest son, he struggled academically and
 3 behaviorally -- or my youngest son rather. By the
 4 fifth grade I decided enough is enough. Now I
 5 offered the program that was helping the people at
 6 the school and helping the kids and was teaching
 7 self-discipline but my own son was struggling.
 8 So I don't understand what was happening but
 9 I said enough is enough and we decided we're going
 10 to pull him and we're going to put him in private
 11 school. So we took him and my daughter and put them
 12 in private school. And, guess what, he went to the
 13 private school and tried to act up and you know what
 14 the kids said, we don't do that here. His behavior
 15 changed.
 16 I've come to this conclusion: You either
 17 have to change the environment or change the
 18 environment. You either have to change what they're
 19 in or put them in something different.
 20 I have taught in three different school
 21 districts. I taught in Logos. I taught at Imagine
 22 and I taught at Ferguson Florissant.
 23 At Imagine we were told to cover up
 24 write-ups. When kids acted up, they want to hide
 25 things. That's why I was a little concerned when I

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1 saw that referrals had dropped. As a parent I'm
 2 questioning that to make sure that's really true or
 3 are they just being told by the principals don't
 4 write the kids up so it will look good on paper?
 5 I would like to help Riverview however I can.
 6 I will help them any way that I can because I do not
 7 want our kids -- if they don't become educated, I
 8 don't want them to turn to a life of crime. Thank
 9 you.
 10 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Niketia will be
 11 followed by Brian Jones.
 12 MS. COLEMAN: Good evening, everyone.
 13 Well, first of all, before I start let me give you
 14 an update on one of my four children of Riverview
 15 Gardens. My son Joshua graduated from Lindenwood
 16 University on Friday night with a master's in public
 17 administration.
 18 Now, with that said, I've heard bits and
 19 pieces of this proposed plan to form a large
 20 conglomerate of failing schools. So my questions
 21 are this: What is the purpose? What is your
 22 objective? Where is your research-based proof that
 23 this works? Where has it worked before? Show me.
 24 I remember about 19 years ago meeting with
 25 the principal and we were discussing retaining

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1 students. The principal began explaining to us the
 2 process of retention and she had three very poignant
 3 questions. What will you do differently for this
 4 student next year? What supports will you provide?
 5 What is your plan for educating these students to
 6 ensure success?
 7 Now I ask these same questions of you. What
 8 will you do differently? What supports will you
 9 provide? And what is your plan for ensuring
 10 success? What does this conglomerate look like and
 11 how will it work?
 12 I've heard from those who have been on the
 13 learning walks that they see in the classrooms --
 14 what they see looks much like what we see in
 15 Riverview Gardens. So I said, yeah, but what's
 16 different? Oh, they said support. Support, oh,
 17 yes, we used to have that.
 18 When we were successful and driving we had
 19 reading specialists, math specialists, reading and
 20 math coaches. We had new century reading and math
 21 programs and an aide in the computer lab to assist
 22 in this program that gave immediate feedback, that
 23 prescribed lessons to meet the students' learning
 24 needs.
 25 We had certified math and reading

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1 interventionists and we had core instructional
 2 teachers. I can remember that because I think
 3 that's how I got hired. And, in addition to
 4 providing those supports, we had smaller classrooms
 5 because when those students were able to go out for
 6 the new century reading or to go out with an
 7 interventionist, that lessened the class size. So
 8 we had smaller classes in reading and smaller
 9 classes in math with that core instructional teacher
 10 inside, that certified core instructional teacher
 11 inside the classroom assisting those students and
 12 that teacher.
 13 We once had the district writing focus. We
 14 participated in vertical teaming. We used a
 15 six-minute reading solution program and we
 16 participated in content mapping across the district.
 17 However, we have had now six superintendents in the
 18 past 14 years and with each new shift, we, the
 19 district, is tossed to and fro.
 20 Now, I don't want to imply that Dr. Spurgeon
 21 has had any part in the shifting of the tides
 22 because, unfortunately, this is the hand that he has
 23 been dealt. But, I will say this, there was a time
 24 that we were the blue ribbon winning pie of the
 25 county fair. I can use that analogy. So what

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1 happened? Why did we change our winning recipe?
 2 Why did we shift too far to the left or too far to
 3 the right? We must find our way back to the middle.
 4 We must find our center.
 5 We must go back to the quality products that
 6 we have cut from our recipe. Now, I like to cook
 7 and anybody that knows me knows that I'm a stickler
 8 for quality ingredients because you cannot create a
 9 quality product with substandard ingredients.
 10 There's a difference between milk and water.
 11 Please give us back our quality supports and
 12 we will produce a quality product.
 13 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Brian Jones
 14 will be followed by Pearl Clair.
 15 MR. JONES: Good evening, everyone. My
 16 name is Brian Jones. I'm currently the only speech
 17 drama debate teacher in the district but I've been
 18 teaching about 27 years. And one of the things that
 19 I have a question about regards our programs that
 20 have started in the district that have been
 21 successful such as mine.
 22 Back in 2006, I became the speech drama
 23 debate teacher and we made it to state in 2010,
 24 after Riverview not having gone to state since 1963.
 25 Then we repeated that in 2012.

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1 So my question becomes and my comment
 2 becomes: What happens to all the internal audits
 3 that go with our district? You know, we have a lot
 4 of audits with our principals and Dr. Spurgeon and
 5 all of the leadership that does that kind of
 6 internal audit but I'm asking you all, as the state
 7 people, what internal audits are you all doing to
 8 kind of judge the program that is being successful,
 9 that are causing literacy in our district such as my
 10 program?
 11 The kids have to use subtext where they take
 12 the language and they have to interpret and
 13 understand it with meaning and then they use that
 14 for reading comprehension and things like that.
 15 So I'm really, really excited about what we
 16 do here but I'm also having a question about the
 17 internal audits that need to be done from you guys
 18 to get with us to make the connections. And one of
 19 the questions I asked Dr. Nicastro when she first
 20 came on board here, is what's being done for the
 21 struggling district such as urban districts like
 22 ours, that have so many issues?
 23 So I would like to see those kind of plans
 24 continue to be worked on. I know you all have done
 25 some things but I would like to see more of those

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1 things because there's a lot of us here that are
 2 working with this constituency and these type of
 3 kids that really, really have -- are having
 4 successful kids that everybody says they can't be.
 5 Now, I'm the only black coach in the only
 6 black school that does speech and drama. They have
 7 black kids in white -- on white teams but I'm the
 8 only black coach with black kids and a few white
 9 kids. So I'm doing pretty good and our school
 10 district is doing pretty good, so I want to ensure
 11 those kinds of things continue to be successful.
 12 God bless.
 13 MR. COOPER: Thank you, Brian. Pearl
 14 Clair will be followed by Ayrrica Earl.
 15 MS. CLAIR: First of all, good evening,
 16 everyone. I'm Pearl Clair and I'm from Highland
 17 Elementary School. I am not a teacher. I am a
 18 grandmother and a great grandmother and I volunteer
 19 at Highland Elementary Tuesday through Friday, three
 20 hours a day. Glasgow wants me but I have to stay at
 21 Highland.
 22 But I'm here to let you know that I have two
 23 young ladies with me. One just graduated Friday
 24 from UAPB, University of Arkansas Pine Bluff. She
 25 did go to school here at Riverview. And my other

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1 young lady -- that's Brittney McBride (ph), I'm
 2 sorry -- my other young lady is my granddaughter.
 3 She graduated from -- she went to Glasgow, Danforth
 4 and she graduated from Riverview High School with a
 5 scholarship.
 6 So -- and they have no accreditation so you
 7 cannot tell me that our children cannot learn.
 8 Learning starts at home, folks. If you don't teach
 9 your children the proper way of learning, they are
 10 not going to learn and this is serious. You know, I
 11 went to Soldan. I didn't go to the county schools.
 12 I went to Soldan High School and I graduated. A
 13 little bit of college, but I have common sense. I
 14 raised -- my daughter Monique teaches up at Glasgow.
 15 And the other things I wanted to say here is
 16 I'm proud of my school district. I get up in the
 17 morning sometimes and I will pick up the kids and
 18 take them to school because I wanted our
 19 accreditation to get up.
 20 First of all, you got to stop letting your
 21 kids look at TV all night. Make them go to bed.
 22 When they get through with their homework, feed them
 23 dinner, tell them to go to bed, so they can get up
 24 in the morning. They come to school, they got an
 25 attitude because they're tired. But if you let them

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1 look at the TV all night they're supposed to be
 2 tired. Okay.
 3 Next thing is you put -- like I said, you put
 4 into your children what they are to learn. I have a
 5 list here. It's kind of raggedy because I was
 6 taking notes. At our school, at Highland,
 7 Dr. Roberts keeps a record of all of our A's,
 8 90 percent or more. She puts it on the calendar.
 9 Not 90 percent, I want to say it's like 95 and up.
 10 So that's good.
 11 We keep our children from fighting. We try
 12 to let them know misunderstandings. We try to
 13 straighten it out. We give them a little quiet
 14 time.
 15 And the other thing I want to say is I'm
 16 buying a house here at Riverview. You take our
 17 schools away, me, myself, I will give my home back
 18 to the mortgage people because I'm not going to pay
 19 for your children to go to another district and give
 20 them our money. I am retired, a hardworking person.
 21 I've worked all these years and now I got to give my
 22 money to another district. I'm not going to have
 23 it. I will give the house back to the mortgage
 24 company.
 25 The school district is not going to get my

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1 money to transport them kids out of the district.
 2 They need to be here in our district, where our
 3 money is, instead of giving it to the other
 4 district.
 5 I want you all to have a good evening, a
 6 Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.
 7 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Ayrrica will be
 8 followed by Brunette Watson.
 9 MS. EARL: Hello, my name is Ayrrica
 10 Earl and I am a mother to a 15-year-old son and I
 11 have an 8-year-old daughter. My issue is a little
 12 different because my first hurdle with my daughter
 13 is she is a Type I diabetic. I'm kind of having a
 14 hard time understanding how do you get to the
 15 learning part of Riverview when you can't get them
 16 to understand what they need to do for the diabetic.
 17 They still look at the fact of, well, she's acting
 18 out, write her up. I'm kind of confused when I'm
 19 giving you what you need and I also tell you at any
 20 time you need me, call me.
 21 I'm having a harder time trying to go back to
 22 work because every day the phone rings I'm kind of
 23 wondering is something going on with my daughter.
 24 She's being wrote up. She's being suspended. She's
 25 sick. What is the issue?

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1 I have taken sick myself last year -- I mean,
 2 this year and I still had to take care of my
 3 daughter from a hospital bed. Calls coming from the
 4 school. I have no problem with that. That's my
 5 child. That's my job. But since she has been in
 6 Riverview it's like about this tall now with
 7 problems. Before then you get people where they
 8 understand this child is diabetic, do you have what
 9 we need? Let me see what I can do to help her so
 10 she can learn.
 11 I'm kind of confused. I don't know where to
 12 turn. Who to look for. Who to ask for help because
 13 when you talk to someone at Riverview nobody knows
 14 anything about a child with Type I diabetes. I
 15 don't know anything about a child with Type I
 16 diabetes myself but I had to learn because she's my
 17 child. So, as an educator, where do you come from,
 18 where do you come in to help her so she can learn
 19 and be able to succeed in life? She can't succeed
 20 if the people that are supposed to educate her in
 21 this school does not do what their part is.
 22 Don't get me wrong, you have people that say
 23 I'm here, let me help, but if you can't start from
 24 scratch with the part of you are at least opening up
 25 that computer, getting the pamphlets, doing the

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1 training or whatever you need to do to learn how to
 2 help that child, how can she succeed?
 3 If you have me to where I'm going to help you
 4 but I can only help you so much because I need to be
 5 able to provide at home and if I can't do that, then
 6 where am I? If she doesn't have that stable ground
 7 within me, she can't make it. If you're going to
 8 break her down everywhere she turns -- because now
 9 she's eight. Don't get me wrong, she's sassy, yes,
 10 she is, but I love that part because if she wasn't
 11 what she is right now, she would have broke.
 12 I've already heard of children that is older
 13 than eight that find out they're Type I diabetic
 14 trying to commit suicide. They're telling me don't
 15 give her too much because we don't want to push her
 16 but then you come to Riverview and she's being
 17 pushed and pushed. I'm an adult. You're pushing me
 18 and I'm about to break down. But I can't, because
 19 that's my child.
 20 When my son went to Riverview I had no
 21 problems. I love the fact that he's in Riverview
 22 and even Mr. Gardner, he came in as the karate
 23 teacher. The principal, Dr. White, was like oh,
 24 your son got energy he needs to burn off. The
 25 karate teacher came in. They had already did

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1 sign-ups. I'm like, well, I'm late, I didn't know
 2 anything about it. She put him in. Get him in
 3 there. He got with Mr. Gardner, he loved it.
 4 And, like he said, respect was his number one
 5 priority. Gave him a creed to learn and my son was
 6 on it. He ended up being his teacher at Imagine. I
 7 was like look at this. We went to Imagine, I had no
 8 problems. Loved the nurse. She came to Riverview
 9 but now she is gone. But when do you get a nurse
 10 that can help that Type I diabetic child? When do
 11 you get that education? I'm being told, oh, they
 12 get the training but only to find out last week the
 13 teacher still doesn't know. She didn't get the
 14 training. So don't tell me you're training them
 15 when you're really not.
 16 All I want to know is who's going to step up
 17 and learn what I had to learn, at least as far as
 18 the education part, so she can be in class at all
 19 times and not sitting in the nurse's office all day.
 20 Thank you.
 21 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Following
 22 Brunette will be Carolyn Randazzo.
 23 MS. WATSON: Good evening. It's going
 24 to be very short. I have lived in this district for
 25 many, many years. Had three grandkids that did

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1 attend this district but I had pulled them out
 2 because of behavior in this district. The kids --
 3 no way I can see my grandkids going to the high
 4 school. Impossible.
 5 So my oldest grandchild graduated from
 6 eighth grade and went on to Academy High School.
 7 It's her third year at the high school. Then the
 8 next one graduated also eighth grade. She went on
 9 also to the same high school. This is her second
 10 year. My youngest grandchild was having a lot of
 11 problems. Went to Central Middle School. Horrible.
 12 Behavior was off the chain. Pulled her out and put
 13 her in Catholic school.
 14 Riverview Gardens has some really great
 15 teachers. I know. My grandkids over at the high
 16 school excel. Honor classes. The one who is a
 17 sophomore, she's taking geometry and algebra II at
 18 the same time. Honor classes. The other one is
 19 doing well.
 20 I mean, this is a good school district, it
 21 really is, but we have behavior problems. A lot.
 22 We need to focus on why some kids succeed in this
 23 district and why some do not. Think about it. Why?
 24 This is a good school district. Ain't no way my
 25 money -- I don't want my money going somewhere else.

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1 No way. Impossible. No. I like this district and
 2 I will support this district. Thank you.
 3 MR. COOPER: Carolyn will be followed by
 4 Jammie Johnson.
 5 MS. RANDAZZO: Good evening. I'm
 6 Carolyn Randazzo. I'm a citizen in Ferguson,
 7 Missouri and a retired school teacher of 32 years
 8 from parochial schools and from the Ferguson
 9 Florissant School District and I would like to make
 10 the state board aware of the Principles That Unite
 11 Us.
 12 They were developed over this past year by a
 13 variety of groups, by the National Education
 14 Association, the American Federation of Teachers,
 15 the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the
 16 Gamaliel Network, the Schott Foundation and many
 17 other organizations across our country dedicated to
 18 the success of our children.
 19 They grew out of town hall meetings that were
 20 held across our country including in Kansas City.
 21 They grew out of the grave concern about the
 22 corporate reform model of education, with its
 23 emphasis on testing, privatization and devaluing
 24 teachers.
 25 In adopting these principles, community and

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1 labor groups came together for educational and
 2 social justice for our children, their families and
 3 our communities. They were introduced to the
 4 country over the period of last week, specifically
 5 with a national day of action for education.
 6 And I'd like to share the principles with
 7 you. I know that from the years I taught that
 8 educators are really good at making plans and so I
 9 hope the state will consider these principles as
 10 they make plans for unaccredited school districts.
 11 The first principle is: Public schools are
 12 public institutions. The next principle: Our
 13 voices matter. Those closest to the education
 14 process, the educator, the administrators, school
 15 staff, students and their parents must have a voice
 16 in education policy and practice. Stronger schools
 17 create stronger communities. Assessments should be
 18 used to improve instruction. Quality teaching must
 19 be delivered by committed, respected and supportive
 20 educators. Schools must be welcoming and respectful
 21 places for all and our schools must be fully-funded
 22 for success and equity.
 23 So I hope that the state board -- and I ask
 24 the state board and the commissioner to consider
 25 these principles as they make plans for unaccredited

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1 districts. Thank you very much.
 2 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Jammie will be
 3 followed by a speaker who has asked to remain
 4 anonymous and that is the last one that has turned
 5 in a card tonight.
 6 MS. JOHNSON: Good evening. My name is
 7 Jammie Johnson and I am, first of all, a graduate of
 8 Riverview Gardens Class of '95. The question was
 9 asked -- the question was asked in the Bible what
 10 good could come out of Nazareth. And the question
 11 is also being asked what good can come out of
 12 Riverview Gardens.
 13 Some of the people who have graduated with me
 14 are people like Leslie Tolliver who is now circuit
 15 court judge or Dr. Candace Wakefield who now has her
 16 own dentist office. I'm saying that to say if we
 17 put in the work as parents and support the teachers
 18 and the principals, I don't think the problem is
 19 with the special district -- or the special
 20 administrators. I don't think the problem is with
 21 the teachers because Riverview has amazing teachers.
 22 My oldest son is getting ready to graduate
 23 from high school. He was the quarterback this year,
 24 No. 8, Marlon Smith. I have -- both of them are
 25 honor roll students. I have a middle son who has

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1 behavior issues but I am the parent who will knock
 2 on the door and sit in class from the time the class
 3 starts until the time class ends to see what my
 4 child is doing.
 5 And I fix my problems at home. I don't wait
 6 on you to tell me what I need to do. I can already
 7 tell you every time you call me and say he did this,
 8 he did do that, and I'm on my way. The same thing
 9 with all my kids.
 10 It's a sad thing that the majority of the
 11 people in this room are not parents. All the people
 12 that we have in this district, all the children that
 13 still remain here in this district, the parents
 14 should be here. I don't want you making decisions
 15 for my children and I'm not here.
 16 So do I have a problem with the
 17 administrative board? No, I do not. Do I have a
 18 problem with the principals and the teachers? No, I
 19 do not. I commend you because when I'm at the
 20 school I see how hard it must be to corral all these
 21 children.
 22 Some of the children -- some of the things I
 23 hear come out children's mouths is like if your
 24 mother knew you were saying this, what would she do?
 25 But the other question is: Did you get this from

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1 your mother?
 2 So I'm saying all that to say I support you.
 3 I bought a house in the district. I wanted my kids
 4 to be raised in the district that I was raised in
 5 because something good can come out of Riverview
 6 Gardens and I believe this. Goodnight.
 7 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Our next
 8 speaker has asked to remain anonymous and will be
 9 followed by DeAnne Toussaint.
 10 ANONYMOUS: Good evening. I was last
 11 week at Rockwood School District and I saw a mother
 12 who brought her two children from the city and she
 13 had driven all the way out to Rockwood with her two
 14 children. She's a transfer with those two students
 15 from the city to give these two children a better
 16 education and they're doing a great job.
 17 But, anyway, why was she out there? She had
 18 read in the newspaper where they're dumbing down the
 19 curriculum. No longer do students have to turn in
 20 homework. No longer can students be graded by their
 21 homework. Why? Because the state pays them by,
 22 what, retention. Not by why what they learn.
 23 That's how they get their money, retention and
 24 graduation. So I really respected her.
 25 And then I see this little boy here. With a

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1 pre-k book, greatest smile on his face.
 2 Eighty percent of my people in these school
 3 districts, they don't have money. They don't have
 4 resources to buy. Eighty percent. There's not a
 5 book in the home. I am here to propose that we do
 6 something about pre-education. Maybe ages three,
 7 four, five. My mom was able to stay at home with
 8 me. She read to me during these years.
 9 Now these poor children, they have no control
 10 over it. It's not the parents fault. Family
 11 break-ups, both parents having to work, watching
 12 television all day in pre-kindergarten whatever,
 13 whatever. These are the formative years. These
 14 kids are coming into kindergarten two years behind
 15 and they never catch up. It's not the parents
 16 fault. The state should put some resource into
 17 this. You know, who is responsible?
 18 Well, you know, I can show you mapping
 19 decline. Well, you know, it has been by design that
 20 the blacks go into the ghettos. The whites move out
 21 to the suburbs. This has been going on for 50
 22 years. I've seen it. I've seen it. All of those
 23 others being crushed down 10 years out.
 24 The white flight. The black pushed into the
 25 ghettos. It's by design. That's a political

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1 problem. That's not our problem, the educators'
 2 problem. That's someone else's. That's a political
 3 issue but we have to be equal and give all of these
 4 children the same resources. There is no great
 5 amount of revenue from earnings tax, state revenue
 6 the same as Ladue or the expensive.
 7 And, you know, this law has been on the -- 30
 8 years, I guess, somebody said 30 years, this child
 9 choice. Why hasn't education -- or who precipitated
 10 the Supreme Court that enforced this, I don't know
 11 but here we are 30 years later. And why wasn't the
 12 education department smart enough to stay this isn't
 13 going to work by taking money away from these poor
 14 districts and giving it to the receiving schools?
 15 It's not working.
 16 But my most important thing, I think we're
 17 just going to be kicking the can down the road
 18 again. You know, here this is concerning of me,
 19 Peter Herschend, the President of the Missouri Board
 20 of Education, all of the recommendations for school
 21 system transformation will be debated by teachers,
 22 parents, you, students and community leaders. I
 23 hope this is true. I hope this is true.
 24 And, you know, Dr. Nicasro, I don't care how
 25 much input she gets. The more input she gets into

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1 this thing, I just know we're not going to change
 2 the Supreme Court to do away with this child has the
 3 ability, the parent has the ability to put the child
 4 in a better performing school. That's -- the better
 5 the input the better, but we need to be giving some
 6 input into this too. And I don't care if it's a low
 7 bid or a high bid. It didn't cost me anything. It
 8 didn't cost you anything. These were grants that
 9 were supporting this.
 10 So, you know, and here, Teaching for America.
 11 Well, I don't have any NEA affiliation or anything.
 12 And, here, St. Louis City. This makes me cry. The
 13 North St. Louis area, that is where these kids are
 14 coming from. Why are they behind? Here, stole all
 15 the siding off her house. That's not educators'
 16 problems. That's a political problem.
 17 But anyway, anyway, I just hope that you
 18 consider these local school districts. We have the
 19 legislators traveling around in the great big bus
 20 here a month ago or two ago. I saw your principal
 21 there at one of these meetings. I saw Dr. McCoy at
 22 one of those, or a couple of them. I got to shut
 23 up. They're going to kick me out of here.
 24 MR. COOPER: Thank you. DeAnne
 25 Toussaint. Do we have another card?

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1 MS. TOUSSAINT: Good evening, department
 2 of Education. My name is DeAnne Toussaint and I've
 3 had the pleasure -- you have had the pleasure of
 4 hearing my story from the last meeting on
 5 November 20th.
 6 Today I am here to tell you a success story.
 7 Since transferring my children out of Riverview
 8 Gardens School District my children are happy, safe,
 9 and a part of a community that have welcomed them
 10 with open arms.
 11 Last meeting some people wanted to know how
 12 the transfer students are doing academically. Well,
 13 I'm here to tell you my daughter and my son are both
 14 doing well. I met with my daughter's teacher and
 15 was told that she will -- that when she takes the
 16 MAP test in the spring she will place advanced and
 17 my son will place proficient. Both of my children
 18 love their school. My daughter participates in Girl
 19 Scouts and my son has friends. If you ask any staff
 20 member in their new school, except the principal and
 21 their teachers, if they knew they were transfer
 22 students, they would tell you no, they had no idea.
 23 As far as class size, there is an average of
 24 22 to 23 students in both third grade classrooms
 25 and, yes, the children are capable of learning and

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1 there are no major discipline problems in either
 2 classrooms. It's not tolerated.
 3 My children play on the playground like
 4 children should and I don't have a fear that they
 5 are being attacked. They both are on honor roll and
 6 they both have perfect attendance. Yes, the single
 7 mother of four, grandmother of three, who works two
 8 jobs and goes to school full-time manages to get up
 9 every morning, get them dressed, sign their binders
 10 and get them to school every morning on time.
 11 So please hear me when I say the transfer
 12 program is the best thing to have ever happened for
 13 students in failing school districts. So please
 14 continue the program.
 15 And I also want to say that, yes, there are
 16 some good teachers in this district and,
 17 Mr. Superintendent, you came into something really
 18 bad and I pray that you get it on track.
 19 I have no problems supporting this district
 20 but this district, the past district, failed my
 21 children twice. How many chances do I have to
 22 continue to give a district that has failed me? I
 23 don't mind supporting you and I pray that you do
 24 what you need to do. You have good teachers and I
 25 hope that you support them. Thank you.

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1 MR. COOPER: Thank you. Final speaker
 2 of the evening will be Natasha Dupee.
 3 MS. DUPEE: Hi, everybody. I'm Natasha
 4 Dupee. I'm a biology teacher at the high school.
 5 This is my second year in the district and my second
 6 year as an educator and I looped with my students
 7 last year when I taught them physical and life
 8 science also at the high school.
 9 I want to let you know that I feel we have
 10 great -- no, I know we have great students at our
 11 school. Every day I learn from my kids and I call
 12 them mine. I listen to them. I stay after school
 13 with them. I eat lunch with my kids. Okay.
 14 I show them my interests, my passions and my
 15 past experience and I feel like as an educator my
 16 students have high demands on them. Every day we
 17 have homework, projects. They know what's coming
 18 but why? We know the what. We know the how. But I
 19 question the why. People say student-centered but
 20 what does that mean?
 21 I have my thesis, this is part of my thesis
 22 for UMSL in front of me. I'm going to read one
 23 paragraph because I think it's very explicit as to
 24 what I'm thinking about for education.
 25 It says liberation-minded education will

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1 project the idea that you don't tell people what to
 2 do. You let them tell you what they want done and
 3 then you have to have in your mind certain things
 4 that you feel they need to do and so you get their
 5 thoughts and wiser thoughts around it. Okay.
 6 Children must see themselves a positive
 7 example of who they want to be at school and then
 8 explore how skills obtained through exploring
 9 content will benefit them as intentional learners
 10 and active citizens. Again, this is verbatim from
 11 what I'm studying and implementing as action
 12 research at Riverview Gardens High School.
 13 What does this look like? In November, on
 14 the 14th, me and eight other teachers and
 15 administrators took students to St. Louis Florissant
 16 Valley College to work with them about what do they
 17 see themselves as. Right.
 18 We talked about apples. We compared them to
 19 others. What are you being compared for? No, you
 20 should not be doing the same thing as Ladue,
 21 Clayton, because you are not the same demographical
 22 makeup. You don't have the same experiences. You
 23 don't have the same wisdom.
 24 I also want to let you know you have access
 25 by being able to navigate different systems of our

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1 country and of our education. Liberation-minded
 2 education is what we need here. We hear responsive
 3 teaching. We hear buzzwords. How are we realizing
 4 that in our school districts? What is the why that
 5 we are focused on? Are we conforming? Stop
 6 comparing us to Ladue, Clayton. I didn't sign up to
 7 work with students in Ladue and Clayton. I live
 8 where I live and I work where I work for a reason.
 9 Okay.
 10 So I'm here asking us to revisit the why.
 11 Are we liberating our students or are we conforming
 12 our students? I am sending you to Mehlville so that
 13 you can act like, dress like, conform like, the
 14 students there and ignore where you come from? Or
 15 am I asking you to embrace who you are, embrace your
 16 ancestry, embrace what people want so you navigate
 17 what you want, how you want and in a respectful
 18 manner? Right. That is my statement to you. God
 19 bless.
 20 MS. VANDEVEN: Okay. Thank you. That
 21 does conclude our evening. We would like to really
 22 thank you for, again, braving the cold and coming
 23 out and sharing your very, very thoughtful comments
 24 this evening.
 25 I would like to remind you that there are

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1 still ways that you can continue to comment to the
 2 department. One is if you would like to fill out
 3 those blue cards and turn them in tonight or send
 4 your comments later this week or into the month to
 5 Riverview Gardens comments at DESE dot mo dot gov.
 6 Thank you all very much and have safe travels home.
 7 (Whereupon, the record ended at 7:50 p.m.)
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1 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER
 2 I, Suzanne Zes, within and for the State
 3 of Missouri, do hereby certify that the witness
 4 whose testimony appears in the foregoing deposition
 5 was duly sworn by me; the testimony of said witness
 6 was taken by me to the best of my ability and
 7 thereafter reduced to typewriting under my
 8 direction; that I am neither counsel for, related
 9 to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action
 10 in which this deposition was taken, and further that
 11 I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or
 12 counsel employed by the parties thereto, nor
 13 financially or otherwise interested in the outcome
 14 of the action.
 15
 16
 17 _____
 18 Court Reporter
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25